**MARZIEH GAIL**

**DAWN OVER MOUNT HIRA**

**AND OTHER ESSAYS**

GR

GEORGE RONALD

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George Ronald

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Contents

FOREWORD vii

I

Paradise Brought Near

Dawn Over Mount Hira 1

From Sa‘dí’s Garden of Roses 9

‘Alí 12

From the Sayings of ‘Alí 14

II

Take the Gentle Path

There Was Wine 19

‘For Love of Me …’ 29

Notes on Persian Love Poems 33

Current Mythology 43

III

Headlines Tomorrow

The Carmel Monks 49

Headlines Tomorrow 50

IV

Bright Day of the Soul

That Day in Tabríz 57

Bright Day of the Soul 62

The White Silk Dress 80

The Poet Laureate 91

Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl in America 105

V

Age of All Truth

The Goal of a Liberated Mind 117

This Handful of Dust 121

The Rise of Women 128

Till Death Do Us Part 137

Atomic Mandate 145

VI

The Divine Encounter

Echoes of the Heroic Age 153

Millennium 165

Easter Sunday 170

Bahá’u’lláh’s *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 176

‘Abdu’l-Bahá in America 184

‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Portrayals from East and West 194

VII

Where’er You Walk

In the High Sierras 219

Midnight Oil 222

Will and Testament 226

Where’er You Walk 232

NOTES AND REFERENCES 237

## Foreword

THE UNION OF EAST AND WEST has been and is the dream of

many. Visionaries, statesmen, artists, philosophers, poets and

scientists have believed in it and worked for its realization. But it

did not become an essential principle of religion until, in the 19th

century, Bahá’u’lláh proclaimed the principles of world order. To

the unity of mankind, which is the social aim of the Bahá’í Faith,

the marriage of East and West is a *sine qua non*.

Marzieh Gail, child of a Persian father and American mother,

inherits and successfully combines in her own person, both cultures.

She has been able, as demonstrated in her book *Persia and the*

*Victorians*, to interpret each to the other. But, as other devotees of

this union have found, the most realistic, powerful and hopeful

programme lies in the promotion of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings on the

unity of the world. Most of Mrs. Gail’s literary activity has been

in support of this aim, and the essays in this collection have

appeared, over the years, in the chief publications of the Bahá’ís.

Their variety is remarkable. Whether presenting Muḥammad

and Islám attractively to Western readers, or relating heroic epi-

sodes in that most heroic of all epics, ‘The Episode of the Báb’, or

reflecting on the Persian mystical poets, the emancipation of

women, human evolution or the world of tomorrow, she conveys a

sense of ever present drama, a heightened awareness of the great-

ness of the day in which we live, its crisis and its portent. She

makes the martyrs and heroes of the Báb’s dispensation—the

Dawn-Breakers—real and believable to western readers. Above all

her portrayal of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Mystery of God, both in these

essays and elsewhere, ensures the enduring value of her writing.

DAVID HOFMAN

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# I

# Paradise Brought Near

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## Dawn Over Mount Hira

‘BY THE NOON-DAY BRIGHTNESS, and by the night when it

darkeneth! Thy Lord hath not forsaken Thee, neither hath He

been displeased. And surely the future shall be better for Thee than

the past. Did He not find Thee an orphan and give Thee a home?

And found Thee erring and guided Thee, and found Thee needy

and enriched Thee?’ … For some days before this, the voice had

been silent; now again the comforting spirit enfolded Muḥam-

mad, under the stars on Mount Hira. He remembered how the

voice had broken through His thoughts, before, and terrified Him.

He had heard on the mountain the word: ‘Read!’—and had

answered: ‘I do not know how to read.’ ‘Read!’ ‘What shall I

read?’ ‘Read: In the name of Thy Lord who created, Created man

from clots of blood: Read! by Thy most beneficent Lord, who

hath taught the use of the pen; Hath taught man that which He

knoweth not …’ He remembered His struggle against the voice;

how He had gone from the mountain, thinking Himself possessed.

And Khadíjih had believed in Him, and Varaqa, a man old and

blind, and versed in the Scripture, had cried, ‘Holy, holy, verily

this is the Voice that came to Moses. Tell Him—bid Him be of

brave heart.’ Then for some time the voice had been silent, and

now it had come to Him again. And Muḥammad looked down

over Mecca, and He thought of His city, and He began to preach

against the things men loved.

‘Not a blade of grass to rest the eye … no hunting … instead,

only merchants, that most contemptible of all professions …’

wrote a black poet, of Mecca. No trees, gardens, orchards. Only a

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few spiny bushes. And the black flagstones around the Ka‘bih had

to be sprinkled to cool them for the barefoot processions, and the

wells were irregular and brackish. Caravans came, with jewels and

spices, with skins and metals, and the whole town turned out to

meet them; caravans of two or three thousand camels, of several

hundred men. And men speculated, winning a fortune in a day,

and lending it out for usury, and hoarding, and counting it over;

and Muḥammad said to them: ‘The emulous desire of multiplying

riches employeth you, until ye visit the graves … Hereafter

shall ye know your folly … Again, hereafter shall ye know your

folly.’ Then He bade them give alms, telling them: ‘What good ye

have sent before for your souls, ye shall find it with God.’ The

wealthy merchants lived in the central part of Mecca; they swelled

with pride, but Muḥammad urged them to walk not proudly in the

earth, because all men are brothers. The common people lived

farther off from the Ka‘bih, in the slanting streets, and the rabble

beyond them; and away from the town were the desert Arabs, in

their goat-skin tents. There was wine and gambling, and Muḥam-

mad forbade them; there were singing girls, and He was chaste.

There were brawls and blood feuds and feastings; women playing

upon lutes, to welcome such things as the birth of a boy, the coming

to light of a poet, or the foaling of a mare. Over this reigned a vague

Being, a supreme Alláh, and his three daughters; yet Muḥammad

said: ‘He begetteth not, neither is He begotten.’ And closer to

earth, a crowd of idols, who lived in and about the Ka‘bih, with

their leader, a bearded old man of cornelian, with one hand made

of gold; and his name was Hubal. And Muḥammad laughed at the

Ka‘bih gods: ‘Is this wondrous world, the sun and moon, the drops

of rain, the ships that move across the waters—are these the work of

your stone and wooden gods?’ Then He spoke of the true God,

saying: ‘The seven heavens praise Him, and the earth, and all who

are therein; neither is there anything which doth not celebrate

His praise; but ye understand not.’ Here too, set in the Ka‘bih,

was the Black Stone; men said it was the only thing from Paradise

to be found on earth, and that it had once been white, till it was

blackened by human sins. There were other gods to worship in

Arabia, and stars and planets, but the Ka‘bih drew all men from

near and far on pilgrimage.

Muḥammad’s kinsmen were chieftains in Mecca, and they lived

by the things which He now arose to destroy. He summoned them

together, told them of His mission; and they laughed Him to

scorn. ‘May you be cursed for the rest of your life,’ cried Abú

Lahab; ‘why gather us together for trifles like this?’ And when He

walked abroad, the wife of Abú Lahab strewed thorns before Him

to wound His feet.

And Muḥammad preached to the tribes, when they flocked to

Mecca and the neighbouring fairs, during the pilgrimage seasons;

then His uncle, Abú Lahab, would follow, and shout: ‘He is an

impostor who seeketh to draw you from the faith of your fathers

…’; and the tribesmen would laugh at Him, saying: ‘Thine own

people and kindred know Thee best: then wherefore do they not

believe?’ One day as He prayed at the Ka‘bih, men turned upon

Him, and mocked Him, saying: ‘It is you who pretend that our

fathers were in the wrong! It is you who call our gods impotent!’

‘Yes, it is I who say that.’ And they struck Him, and would have

put Him to death. And once He went back to His dwelling without

having met that day ‘a single man, a single woman, a single child, a

single slave, who did not insult Him on His way, calling Him

madman and liar …’

And as men do in every age, the Meccans called for signs and

wonders, bidding Him turn their hills to gold, or bring them a well

of pure water, or prophesy the coming price of goods. ‘Cannot

your God disclose which merchandise will rise in price?’ He

answered, saying, ‘The miracle that I bring you is the Qur’án, a

Book revealed to an illiterate man, a Book no other man can equal.’

Then He taught them of the life after death; and one, who owed

money to a Muslim, said that he would repay him in the next

world. Then He warned them of the terrors of the ‘Last Day,’ and

said strange things about the coming of ‘The Hour’: ‘Whosoever

can find a refuge, let him hide … On that day humble herders of

camels will sprawl about in palaces; people will be set to work

building houses of extraordinary height … The Hour will come

upon us so quickly that two men having unfolded some goods,

shall not have time to conclude their bargain or fold up the goods

again … ‘And they reviled Him, saying, ‘Know this, O Muḥam-

mad, we shall never cease to stop Thee from preaching till either

Thou or we shall perish.’

To kill Him, member of a ruling clan, would have meant a civil

war; so they put to death His followers, the weak and poor, or

tortured them. Among them was Balál, the African slave, who lay

many days in the Meccan sun, stretched out with a rock on his

breast; they told him to forsake Muḥammad or die, and leaned

down to hear him whisper: ‘There is only one God—one.’ He

lived, and was the first muezzin. Of him Bahá’u’lláh has written:

‘Consider how Balál, the Ethiopian, unlettered though he was,

ascended into the heaven of faith and certitude.’ And Muḥammad

sorrowed over the wrong that was done His disciples, and He cried

out: ‘I fly for refuge unto the Lord of the Daybreak, that He may

deliver Me from the mischief of those things which He hath

created … I fly for refuge unto the Lord of men, the King of

men, the God of men …’[1]

And He sent His followers into Ethiopia, to the pious Christian

king. The Negus questioned them, and bade them speak, and they

answered: ‘O King, we adored idols, we lived in unchastity, we ate

dead bodies, we spoke abominations … when God raised up

among us a Man … and He called us to the unity of God, to fly

vices and to shun evil.’ And the Negus traced a line on the ground

with his stick, and he said: ‘Truly, between your faith and ours

there is not more than this little stroke.’

Then the Meccans gathered to plot against Muḥammad: ‘Would

you say He is a sorcerer?’ ‘No, He hath not the emphatic tone, the

jerky language.’ ‘A madman then?’ ‘He hath not the bearing.’ ‘A

poet inspired by a jinn?’ ‘He doth not speak in classic verse.’

‘A magician?’ ‘He doth not perform wonders.’ And since great con-

verts had now been made, they bargained with the Prophet, offering

gold and honours in exchange for silence, saying, ‘We shall make

Thee our chieftain and our king.’ He answered them, ‘I am only a

man like you. It is revealed to Me that your God is one God: go

straight then to Him, and implore His pardon … Do ye indeed

disbelieve in Him? … Do ye assign Him peers? The Lord of the

worlds is He!’ So they shut Muḥammad and His people out of

Mecca into the mountains, and forbade that any buy or sell with

him. And after three years were passed and Muḥammad and His

disciples had hungered and suffered, the ban was lifted. Then the

black days came, when the Prophet lost the two whom He loved

dearest, His chief defender and His wife. ‘When I was poor she

enriched Me. When all the world abandoned Me, she comforted

Me.’ They had lived together over a score of years, and contrary to

the way of His times He had married no other. And yet He taught

and none listened, and He put His agony into the words of the

Prophet Noah: ‘My cry only maketh them flee me the more.’

He spoke with the tribes, who came into Mecca for trade and to

circle around the Ka‘bih. And once He went to the beautiful

mountain town of Ṭa’if, where the fruit trees grow, and the people

stoned Him, shouting, ‘If God had wanted to send a Prophet,

could He not have chosen a better one than Thee?’ But later in

vision He journeyed by night to where the Lote-Tree flowers

beside God’s invisible throne; and He found thousands of choirs of

angels, bowed down and motionless, in utter quiet, and then He

felt Himself in the light of His Lord. He beheld God with His

soul’s eyes, and He saw what the tongue cannot express.

Now at last the men of Yathrib asked of Him to come and rule

among them, so that He sent His disciples ahead, out of Mecca.

And the Meccans gathered around His house in the dark to kill

Him, but when the dawn showed white, they saw that He had

gone. And Yathrib became Medina, which means ‘The City of the

Prophet.’

Muḥammad never first withdrew His hand out of another man’s

palm, nor turned away before the other had turned. He visited the

sick, He followed any bier He met, He accepted the invitation of a

slave to dinner. His food was dates and water, or barley bread; the

people of His house ‘did not eat their fill of barley bread, two days

successively, as long as He lived.’ He mended His own clothing

and sandals, and milked the goats, and wiped sweat from His

horse with His sleeve. He gave alms when He had anything to give.

Once a woman brought Him a cloak, which He needed sorely, but

they came and asked for it to make a shroud, and He gave it up,

‘for He could refuse nothing.’ He loved perfumes, and dyed His

fingernails with henna, and was immaculate. Men said He was

more modest than a virgin behind her curtain. Those who came

near to Him loved Him. His countenance shone ‘with a majestic

radiance at the same time impressive and gentle.’ A follower said of

Him: ‘I never saw anything more beautiful than Lord Muḥam-

mad; you might say the sun was moving in His face.’

Medina was an oasis, rich in palm groves, an agricultural centre,

not a place of trade like Mecca. (Its malarial fever was notorious,

its water tainted so that even the camels sickened of it.) And now

the Prophet became a temporal as well as a spiritual Lord. And

Arabia rose against Him, to kill belief in the one true God, so that

Muḥammad prayed: ‘O Lord, forget not Thy promise of help. O

Lord, if this little band were to perish, there will be none to offer

Thee pure worship.’ He who had never wielded a weapon, who

wept at the sight of pain, whose heart was so tender that His

enemies called Him womanish, had now to drive back Arabia by

force of arms. Mecca and her idols marched against Islám, and her

women too came singing to battle, their skirts tucked up, the

bangles flashing on their legs, and they tore and mangled the

Muslim dead. But at last Hubal, the old man of red agate, lost to

the Prophet of God, and ‘Arabia that had never before obeyed one

prince, submitted to Him … His word created one nation out of

hundreds of warring tribes.’

At Medina, Muḥammad built a mosque of brick and earth, and

He preached in it, leaning against a tree. One day they asked,

‘What is the greatest vice of man?’ He answered, ‘You must not

ask Me about vice, but about virtue;’ and He repeated this three

times, after which He said, ‘Know ye! The worst of men is a bad

learned man, and a good learned man is the best.’ Again He said,

‘If the unbeliever knew of the extent of the Lord’s mercy, even He

would not despair of Paradise.’ And at other times: ‘Death is a

bridge that uniteth friend with friend … Misfortune is always

with the Muslim and his wife, either in their persons or their

property or children; either death or sickness; until they die, when

there is no fault in them … Act, as regards this world, as if you

were going to live forever; and as regards the other world, as if you

were going to die tomorrow … You will not enter Paradise until

you have faith; and you will not complete your faith till you love

one another … Trust in God, but tie your camel …’ One day

as He walked with His disciples He said, ‘The Garden (Paradise) is

nearer to you than the thongs of your sandals; and the Fire like-

wise.’ They came to a woman suckling her child, and He said, ‘Do

you think this woman will cast her own child into the fire? Verily

God is more compassionate to His creatures than this woman to

her child.’ Once on a journey, when His companions were praying

with loud voices, Muḥammad told them: ‘Be easy on yourselves

… Verily you do not call to One deaf or absent, but verily to One

who heareth and seeth … and He to whom you pray is nearer to

you than the neck of your camel.’ He said these things and many

others, and He talked to His disciples of kindness to the Jews and

Christians and other ‘People of the Book’; of the rights of women;

of gentleness to animals; of the Last Day; and of the life beyond

this.

Now the Prophet, clothed as a pilgrim and wearing a black

turban, rode into Mecca. He circled the Ka‘bih, and entered, and

He wiped away the frescoes from the walls—the pictures of

Abraham and Ishmael, and the female angels; and He struck

Hubal from his place, and tore down a wooden dove that hung

from the roof. Then He prayed in the Ka‘bih to His Lord; and

leaving He touched with His stick each of the three hundred and

sixty stones surrounding the holy place, and said: ‘Truth is come

and error is gone.’ He drank from the well of Zamzam out of a

goblet that men have kept, and He prayed at Khadíjih’s tomb.

Then He sent His disciples abroad to break every idol and to teach

Islám.

One day while Abú Bakr sat in the mosque at Medina, Muḥam-

mad suddenly appeared before him; and Abú Bakr said, ‘Ah, Thou

for whom I would sacrifice father and mother, white hairs are

hastening upon Thee!’ And the Prophet raised up His beard with

His hand and gazed at it; and Abú Bakr’s eyes filled with tears …

Long years now Muḥammad had suffered and struggled, been

hunted and stoned, been wounded in battle, and He carried as well

the mark of the poisoned feast they had spread Him at Khaybar.

And Muḥammad wrote to the rulers of the earth, proclaiming His

mission. Many replied with gifts: silk and honey; a white mule;

from the Negus a pair of black boots, which He wore several times

while praying. But Khusraw, the Persian emperor, seeing Muḥam-

mad’s name ahead of his own on the missive, tore it to shreds;

‘God will tear up Khusraw’s kingdom in the same way,’ said

Muḥammad. And He had men pitch a tent of red leather, and here

He received the deputations who flocked from all over the land to

pledge Him allegiance.

Then for the last time Muḥammad stood on the hills over

Mecca, and His voice rang out and the multitude listened: ‘I do

not know whether I shall ever see you again as today … but I

have made it possible for you to continue on the straight Path …

This day and month shall be held sacred … ye shall have to give

account for your actions before your Lord … Ye have rights over

your wives and your wives have rights over you … Feed your

slaves with such food as ye eat yourselves, and clothe them with the

stuff ye wear … All Muslims are brothers—nothing which

belongeth to another is lawful unto his brother.’ Then He cried,

‘O Lord, have I fulfilled My mission?’ And the multitude answered,

‘Yea, verily Thou hast!’ And the prophet concluded, ‘O Lord, I

beseech Thee, bear Thou witness to it!’

On the long way home, He stopped the caravan, and taking the

hand of ‘Alí, husband of his dearest child, He said: ‘Whoever hath

Me as his Master hath ‘Alí as his master … God be a friend to

his friends and a foe to his foes.’ Then He told them of two

treasures He was leaving them: ‘The greatest is the Book of God

… The other is the line of My descendants.’

And He went one midnight to the graves of His old companions

who lay at Medina, and He prayed for them. The last time He

entered the mosque, He was supported by two of His kinsmen; and

after the service, He said: ‘If I have wronged any one of you, here

I am to answer for it; if I owe aught to anyone, all I possess belongs

to you.’ A man in the crowd claimed three dirhems which Muḥam-

mad had once bidden him give to a beggar. The Prophet paid him,

saying, ‘Better to blush in this world than the next.’

As Muḥammad lay dying, He called for writing materials to

appoint His successor again; but ‘Umar said, ‘Pain is deluding

God’s Messenger; we have God’s book, which is enough.’ And

they wrangled at His bedside, whether to bring the materials or no.

And the Prophet sent them from Him. He was praying in a

whisper, when He ascended.

Bahá’u’lláh says of Him: ‘How abundant the thorns and briars

which they have strewn over His path! The … divines of that

age … pronounced Him a lunatic and a calumniator. Such sore

accusations they brought against Him that in recounting them God

forbiddeth the ink to flow, Our pen to move, or the page to bear

them … For this reason did Muḥammad cry out: “No Prophet

of God hath suffered such harm as I have suffered.”’[2]

## From Sa‘dí’s Garden of Roses

A KING WAS SAILING IN A SHIP with his Persian slave. The

slave had never been on the sea before; he began to weep and cry

out and to shudder with fear, and however much they sought to

quiet him he would not be still. The king’s excursion was in a fair

way to be spoiled and none knew what to do. Then a wise man who

was on the ship said to the king, ‘If thou wish, I shall quiet him.’

The king answered, ‘Truly this were a gracious deed.’

The wise man bade them throw the slave into the sea. After he

had choked down some water they seized him by the hair and drew

him toward the ship. He clung to the ship with both hands, and

once out of the water he sat in a corner and was still. The king was

astonished, and asked, ‘What wisdom lay in this?’ The wise man

answered: ‘The slave did not know what it is to drown, and thus

he did not value the safety of the ship. Even so doth a man value

security who hath known calamity.’

A THIEF CREPT INTO THE HOUSE of a holy man, but wherever

he sought, he found nothing to steal. The holy man woke. He rose

from his mat, and threw it to the thief, lest the latter’s heart be

saddened.

I REMEMBER ONE NIGHT that my beloved came into my house,

and I leapt up so swift that my sleeve brushed the lamp and put

it out.

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and no. 12 (March 1938), 454

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He sat and chid me, saying, ‘Why didst thou put out the light

when thou sawest me come?’

I said, ‘Because I thought the dawn had broken.’

I HAD NEVER COMPLAINED of the ways of the world, nor had I

drawn together my brows over the accidents of life, until once when

I found myself barefoot, with no money to buy shoes.

I went into the mosque at Kúfih, bewailing my lot. And then I

saw a man who had no feet. And I thanked God for my blessings,

and I went barefoot.

I SAW AN ARAB AMONGST the jewellers of Basra and he was

saying: ‘There was a time when I had lost my way in the desert,

and my provisions were gone, and my mind was fixed on death.

Then I found a bag full of pearls. I shall never forget my joy when

I thought the bag was full of roasted wheat, nor my despair when

I saw it was pearls.’

THEY ASKED OF ḤÁṬIM-I-ṬÁ’Í, ‘Hast thou ever seen or yet

heard of any man nobler than thyself?’

He answered, ‘Yea. There was a day when I sacrificed forty

camels and summoned the chieftains of the Arabs to a feast. Then

it chanced that I went out to the desert’s edge, and I saw a thorn-

gatherer bearing a bundle of thorns. I said, “Why goest thou not

to the feast of Ḥáṭim, since many have gathered at his banquet-

cloth?” He answered, “Whoso earneth his bread by his own hand

hath no need of bounty from Ḥáṭim-i-Ṭá’í.”’

IN FULFILMENT OF HIS VOW, a king gave a purse of dirhems to

his slave, and bade him divide the sum amongst all the holy

men … Each day the slave would set out with the purse, each

night he would return and kiss the purse and lay it (still full of

gold) before his master; then he would say: ‘No matter where I

sought, I found no holy men.’ At last the king said: ‘How can such

a thing be? To my knowledge there are four hundred holy men in

this city.’ The slave replied: ‘O Lord of the world, those who are

holy will not take the dirhems, and those who will take them are

not holy.’

A MAN CAME UNTO NAWSHÍRAVÁN the Just, and he brought

glad-tidings, saying: ‘Almighty God hath taken thine enemy from

off the earth.’ The king answered: ‘Hast thou heard any rumour

that He will leave me upon it?’

A DISCIPLE ASKED OF HIS MASTER: ‘What shall I do? For the

people flock to my dwelling and leave me no peace.’ His master

replied: ‘When the poor come, lend them something; when the

rich come, ask them for something. Neither will visit thee again.’

## ‘Alí

HIS BED, THEY SAY, WAS A RAM skin, and his tunic was too thin to

protect him from the cold. When his day’s work as Caliph was

over, he would blow out the candle that was paid for by the State,

and sit in darkness. In prayer he would say to his Lord: ‘How then

can ‘Alí lay him to rest, if there be yet a soul who suffereth injustice

in any Muslim land?’

He was only a boy when he came to believe in the one true God,

and he had never bowed himself before an idol; for this, men called

him ‘Him whose face was never sullied.’ He was cousin to the

Prophet, but he was son-in-law as well (for his wife was Fáṭimih,

who is known as ‘The Lady of Paradise’ and ‘Our Lady of Light.’)

The deeds he did, the words he wrote, have lasted thirteen hundred

years.

When the Meccans gathered, that white dawn, to kill the Pro-

phet, it was ‘Alí they found, wrapped in the Prophet’s cloak. He

was with Muḥammad at the Battle of Badr, he received sixteen

wounds at Uḥud, he fought single-handed at the War of the

Trench, when Arabia and her idols rose against God. He carried

away the banner at the storming of Khaybar.

He was with Muḥammad on that last loving pilgrimage to

Mecca. And on the long way back, Muḥammad stopped the cara-

van, and stood up on a pulpit of pack-saddles, while the multitude

gathered in the thorn trees’ shade; and He spoke, and said: ‘Who-

ever hath Me as his Master, hath ‘Alí as his Master … God be a

friend to his friends and a foe to his foes.’ Then Muḥammad said,

‘I have been summoned to the gate of God, and I shall soon depart

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to God, to be concealed from you;’ and He told them of two trea-

sures He was leaving them: ‘The greatest treasure is the Book of

God … Hold fast to it and do not lose it and do not change it.

The other treasure is the line of My descendants …’

And so it was that ‘Alí became the first Imám, the ‘Guardian of

God,’ the divinely ordained, divinely inspired, Interpreter of the

Faith, the ‘Commander of the Faithful;’ and through him ‘the eye

of God’s mercy shone upon men.’

But when the Prophet lay dying, men wrangled at His bedside,

and when He called for materials to write His will, they said He

wandered; and in the confusion following the death, another was

made Caliph. And ‘Alí stood aside, to protect the Faith from schism.

The years went by. Three Caliphs reigned. Then ‘Alí was ap-

pointed to his rightful place.

His wife had gone long since of a sorrowing heart; the shadow of

martyrdom lay over his sons, for one was to die by poison, one to be

hacked asunder on the plains of Karbilá—on days so harsh that

men still wear mourning for them. Now enemies stood against him,

and masses seethed around him, and he rode to battle again; ahead

of his troops again, with his flashing black eyes, his long white

beard, his high, white Egyptian hat for the enemy to see.

And his men left him, and betrayed him. And there came a

Friday when he went to the mosque at Kúfih, to summon the

people to prayer, and a man stood hidden, with a drawn sword,

and the man stabbed him.

He lingered till the Sunday night, gasping that his murderer be

killed without torture, with but a single stroke.

Men say he left only a few dirhems, a Qur’án and a sword.

## From the Sayings of ‘Alí

A wise man trusts in his work, a fool in his dreams.

Books are the gardens of the wise.

Knowledge is a tree that grows in the heart and flowers from the

tongue.

The covetous is poor though he own the earth.

Thrift is half thy store.

Jealousy is the soul’s jail.

The wise liveth, even after death; the ignorant dieth, even before.

The tongue is a wild beast: loose it—it bites.

The learned seeth with his mind and heart, the ignorant only with

his eyes.

The hypocrite hath a sweet tongue and a bitter heart.

He who preacheth what he doth not practise is a bow without a

string.

Beware of anger for it beginneth in folly and endeth in remorse.

The cloak thou givest to another lasteth longer than thine own.

You are the game that death stalketh; stand and he seizeth you, fly

and he followeth.

The stalwart is he who overcometh himself.

The depth of the earth is peopled with dead, and its rim with sick.

The slightest of foes is he who showeth his hate.

It is better not to sin than to seek absolution.

Be not the friend of him who blameth men, for how shall his friend

escape his censure?

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This life and the next are as a bigamist’s two wives; when one doth

smile the other sulketh.

He who knows mankind withdraws into himself.

To a fool, the best answer is no answer at all.

To praise the sinner is the worst of sins.

Gaze upon the world as a hermit does, not as a lover does.

Beware lest you injure him whose only defender is God.

The wise man knoweth the ignorant, for he came out of ignorance

himself; but the ignorant knoweth not the wise, for he came not

out of ignorance.

Ask not, who is the speaker; ask what is the speech.

Script is the tongue of the hand.

Fortune turns her back as she approaches; life breaks the limb it

binds.

Better a lame tongue than a false.

The miser is the banker of his heirs.

The world is a poison, drunk by the unaware.

Seek knowledge, to be your ornament if you are rich, your bread

if you are poor.

The wise man’s guess is more to be relied on than the fool’s

conviction.

The wise seeks to perfect, the ignorant to enrich himself.

Whoso digs a pit for his brother shall fall into it himself.

He who spendeth not his wealth storeth it for his widow’s spouse.

Better loneliness, than an evil companion.

Man’s every breath: another step toward death.

O world! Delude some other than I! I need thee not. I have

divorced thee thrice, I shall never wed thee again.

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# II

# Take the Gentle Path

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## There Was Wine

SOME MEN LOVE WOMEN, AND SOME love money, and some love

fame. One can judge a man by what he loves. There is one type of

man who loves a certain presence moving in his heart; a presence

which he calls God; this type of man has always enriched his

fellows, and when he dies, the flowers are a little fresher over him,

and other men come, and sit by his grave, and remember what he

was.

There was once a young Englishman named George Herbert; a

young man more or less like any other; a well-dressed young man,

slightly aloof because of some pride of birth, who wrote home

regularly from Cambridge University to ask for more money, who

had ambitions, who hoped that through his ability and his powerful

connections he would some day become Secretary of State. A

favourite of King James, he used to read the royal literary efforts

to his classes at the University, and to demonstrate w herein both

Cicero and Demosthenes were inferior; so that James, naturally

enough, pronounced him the jewel of Cambridge. There was a

careless, early-in-the-morning joy about him; he could see his life

ahead, full and splendid.

And then one day King James died. Then Herbert’s other

patrons fell away, and his health broke and death jostled him; and

he found himself racked by an imperious passion for this world and

a quiet, half-starved agony for the next; until gradually he began

to listen to some voice in his heart, and to turn away from all but

the most spiritual of worldly things. A nobleman, he turned priest,

a calling then in disfavour. He forgot old hopes and desires, and

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spent the days in guiding his congregation toward religious beauty;

in savouring the countryside around his church at Bemerton, in

listening sometimes to the music in Salisbury Cathedral. And so it

was that he became one of the company of the lovers of God, more

favoured than many lovers, perhaps, because he could handle

words, and he knew how to shape them till they meant what he felt.

Love made a saint of him, till he must have worn a halo—not a

painted one but the kind that shines around one’s shadow on

bright grass, when the sun has just come up. He grew from a some-

what usual brilliant young man, furnished with neat, verbal

virtues, to an incarnation of priestliness, but his path was the way

of the cross; he grew in pain, he had to struggle every step, to beat

down his passion for worldly things, to master conflicting desires

and doubts, to govern his reluctant, consumptive body. He has left

us his books, to show us the way he went.

In the beginning, he wrote *The Church Porch*, and reading it we

find a man who is still outside the Temple. He has some thought of

mounting heavenward, but on red velvet carpet. He is here a

courtier and scholar, admired of King James and Francis Bacon, a

gay young man cleverly denouncing a great number of sins which

seem only objectively realized. Only buds of qualities here, later to

be forced open by suffering or blighted by prosperity, one cannot

tell which. For example, he speaks of temperance:

*Drink not the third glasse, which thou canst not tame*

*When once it is within thee …*

Here is his feeling on mirth:

*Pick out of tales the mirth, but not the sinne …*

And here, his pride:

*Do all things like a man, not sneakingly …*

*Towards great persons use respective boldnesse*

His detachment:

*Envie not greatnesse …*

*Be not thine own worm*

His consciousness of fine clothes:

*Kneeling ne’er spoiled silk stockings*

His ecclesiastical method:

*Resort to sermons, but to prayers most*

And his tact:

*draw the card*

*That suites him best of whom thy speech is heard.*

These views and attitudes are typical of Herbert and of many

another; they present a man who thought heaven was as easy to

win as a mistress—that only hope and a few bright lines were

requisite. They do not set us trembling with the agony of Herbert

later on when he was older and tired of fighting, longing for the

presence of his Lord.

People said the labourers would leave their ploughs to come and

hear him preach; he has left us his ideals of priestliness in a book,

*The Country Parson*—a study which ranks in a way with the world’s

utopias, the *Nouvelle Héloïses* and the *Atlantises*, but it rings truer

than they, perhaps because Herbert was living the saintly life he

described—his ideal community had at least one real inhabitant.

The Country Parson regards as ‘the two highest points of life …

Patience and Mortification’. He is forever aware of his parishioners,

and constantly adapting himself to their needs—‘he hath thoroughly

canvassed all the particulars of humane actions …’ He is tem-

perate, ‘For sins make all equall whom they finde together; and

then they are worst who ought to be best’. This last he emphasized

because of his crusader’s wish to uplift the priesthood and re-

establish its honour, having said, ‘I will labour to be like my saviour

by making humility lovely in the eyes of all men’. The Country

Parson is ‘full of all knowledge … even tillage and pastorage’, but

as for the Scriptures, ‘there he sucks and lives’. He is never fanati-

cal, and accepts the culture of other nations: ‘Neither hath God

opened or will open all to one, that there may be a traffic in know-

ledge …’ Herbert includes even stage-craft and church-setting

in his directions for the Parson, and advocates the use of ‘gestures

… that being first affected himself, he may also affect his people’;

but he adds that ‘The Parson is not witty, or learned, or eloquent,

but Holy’ and says that every word of the sermon must be ‘hart-

deep’. Moreover the duty of training the congregation is under-

taken with all seriousness; they are to learn not as ‘parrats’, but

reasonably; their responses are to be given ‘not in a huddling, or

slubbering fashion, gaping, or scratching the head, or spitting …

but gently and pausably’. If unmarried, the Parson ‘never talks

with any woman alone, and that seldom, and never jestfully or

sportfully’. If circumstances decree his marriage, ‘the choice of a

wife was made rather by his eare than by his eye …’ In his home,

‘even the wals are not idle’, and cleanliness and thrift, fasting and

prayer, predominate. The Parson, then, is father and doctor, com-

forter and judge, and has his being in a diurnal round of model

activity. So much for the Herbert of *The Country Parson*. Here we

find him accessible, easy to set forth on paper: the gentle heart un-

torn by struggle; the confident, directing will; the alert mind sensi-

tive to every need of well-lived life. But this is not the Herbert of

the love lyrics, the one whom posterity has cherished, the one with

the nails through his hands.

Today’s readers who subscribe by preference to publications

dealing with women who ‘have a right to their happiness’, with

men who ‘make good’, will fail, perhaps, to understand why Her-

bert chose as his main literary theme the love he felt for his

Creator:

*My God…*

Why *are not Sonnets made of Thee, and layes*

*Upon Thine altar burnt …*

*Will not a* verse run smooth that bears Thy name?

If we remember him, it is because he revolted against contem-

porary poetry, which he felt to be conventionalized and fabricated

and low in aim; because he redirected the love lyric, addressed it

to his Lord:

*shall I write*

*And not of thee through whom my fingers bend*

*To hold my quill?*

And again,

*Who sayes that fiction onely and false hair*

*Become a verse? Is there in truth no beautie? …*

*I envie no man’s nightingale or spring,*

*Nor let them punish me with losse of ryme*

*Who plainly say*, ‘My God, My King …’

And further,

*Farewell, sweet phrases, lovely metaphors:*

*… when ye before*

*Of stews and brothels onely knew the doores,*

*Then did I wash you with my tears, and more*

*Brought* you to church well drest and clad.

Herbert’s life, like many another’s, was a transition from young

joys through torturing hopes and doubts, to weary trust. In

Affliction, he writes,

*At first thou gav’st me milk and sweetnesses …*

*There was no moneth but May.*

*But with my years sorrow did twist and grow …*

In reference to his desire for worldly glory, strengthened by en-

vironment and high lineage, he says:

*Whereas my birth and spirit rather took*

*The way that takes the town,*

*Thou didst betray me to a lingering book*

*And wrap me in a gown* …

And his autobiographical *The Pilgrimage* is still hard to read calmly,

though the pain it embodies was quieted three centuries ago:

*And so I came to phansie’s meadow strowed*

*With many a flower*

*Fain would I here have made abode,*

*But I was quicken’d by my houre …*

*… to the Wilde of passion which some call the wold;*

*A wasted place but sometimes rich …*

*At length I got unto the gladsome hill …*

*And climbing still …*

*A lake of brackish waters on the ground*

*Was all I found …*

*My hill was further. So I flung away*

*Yet heard a crie*

*… ‘none goes that way*

*And lives!’ If that be all, said I,*

*After so foul a journey death is fair*

*And but a chair*.

His verse shows us all the phases of his change from a man of

this world to a man of the next. Studying him, one gathers that at

death there should be only the merest tracing of the personality

left, like the empty gold hoop which is all that shows of the full

moon when the moon is crescent; that death should find men emp-

tied of this life, and already one with eternity. If we still read him,

it is because millions of us shall change as he changed.

He began to believe that

*Man’s joy and pleasure*

*Rather hereafter than at present is.*

And to speak of earth-delights as

*Foolish night-fires, women’s and children’s wishes*

*Chases in arras …*

He upbraids his love of life:

*Poore silly soul …*

*To whom the starres shine not so fair as eyes*

*Nor solid work as false embroyderies.*

And says, with some bravado, of women:

*What is this woman-kinde, which I can wink*

*Into a blacknesse and distaste?*

He seems gradually to have shut out of his life all but the most

objective of pleasures, and to have felt that even they kept him from

heaven. Perhaps he would have been greater as a poet if he could

have lingered with Spenser in the bowers of earthly delight, or

stoppped as Milton did to watch Eve glowing among the rose-

bushes, or loved God with the buoyancy of an Emily Dickinson—

but he was too ill for mental temperance, and lived with the fevered

concentration of the consumptive:

*Joy, I did lock thee up, but some bad man*

Hath let thee out again …

Considering him as priest, we find that if he won his battle, he

knew the value of desires he had killed; he did not bring to the

priesthood qualities that were unmarketable elsewhere; he had been

a success in the outside world, had tasted what the world can give:

*I know the wayes of learning, both the head*

*And pipes that feed the presse, and make it runne …*

*I know the wayes of honour, what maintains*

*The quick returns of courtesie and wit …*

*I know the wayes of pleasure, the sweet strains,*

*The tunings and the relishes of it …*

*Yet I love thee.*

And though he felt himself constantly unworthy,

*… both foul and brittle, much unfit*

*To deal in holy writ, …*

he was an ideal priest, evanescent, compassionate, tolerant. He was

much more concerned with spirit than with theology, perhaps

because he felt that his life was too short for argument; he turns

ironical at theologians:

*As men, for fear the starres should sleep and nod*

*And trip at night, have spheres suppli’d …*

*just so the other heaven they also serve …*

*‘Love God and love your neighbour.*

*Watch and pray*

*Do as ye would be done unto.’*

*O dark instructions! Ev’n as dark as day!*

*Who can these Gordian* knots undo?

He had a generous affection for other religionists, writing for

example to the Jews:

*Oh that …*

*… your sweet sap might come again!*

Moreover he never thought himself free of the human burden of

wrongdoing:

*Lord, let the Angels praise thy name.*

*Man is a foolish thing, a foolish thing …*

*A lump of flesh, without a foot or wing …*

*My God, I mean myself.*

But it is Herbert as lover that we still remember. His passion for

God was not an unwavering light, but a wilderness of emotions

from agony to joy, from revolt to submission; an adoration still

flaming after the lapse of centuries. Sometimes this relationship

was intimate, conversational:

*My God, a verse is not a crown …*

*But it is that which while I use*

*I am with thee …*

Again the emotion is intensified:

*How sweetly doth ‘My Master’ sound! ‘My Master!’*

or rises into more fiercely happy expression:

*My Joy, my life, my crown!*

*My heart was meaning all the day*

*Somewhat it fain would say;*

*And still it runneth mutt’ ring up and down*

*With onely this, ‘My joy, my life, my crown.’*

Until the love is so jubilant that we know mourning must follow:

*Rise, heart, thy Lord is risen. Sing his praise …*

*Consort both heart and lute, and twist a song*

*Pleasant and long …*

*I got me flowers to strew thy way*

*I got me boughs off many a tree;*

*But thou wast up by break of day*

*And brought’st thy sweets along with thee.*

And then he is steeped in pain; he loses his Beloved:

*Whither, O whither, art thou fled*

*My Lord, my Love?*

He feels that sin has thrust him away:

*I know it is my sinne which locks thine eares …*

Sins like the following:

*Yesterday*

*I did behave me carelessly*

*When I did pray.*

He festers with self-condemnation—

*Sorrie I am, my God, sorrie I am*

*That my offences course it in a ring*

and even poetry cannot relieve his agony:

*Verses, ye are too fine a thing, too wise …*

*Give up your feet and running to mine eyes*

*And keep your measures for some lover’s lute*

*Whose grief allows him musick and a ryme.*

*For mine excludes both measure, tune and time.*

*Alas, my God!*

Until finally he flings himself down and begs forgiveness:

*O do not use me*

*After my sinnes! Look not on my desert*

*But on thy glorie! …*

*O do not bruise me!*

*Dulnesse and Denial*’ have their share:

*My soul lay out of sight, untuned, unstrung.*

Then rebellion, as an inevitable variation of such a love. He writes

in Longing:

*Thou tarriest, while I die*

*And fall to nothing. Thou dost reigne …*

*While I remain*

*In bitter grief. Yet am I stil’d*

*Thy childe.*

And in a poem called *The Collar* he summarizes the whole story of

his adoration. He revolted here against the yoke he bore; said that

his bonds were ‘pettie thoughts’, wondered with a layman’s

wonder at his self-forged cage, beat against his love, until ex-

hausted with anger and at the climax of passion, a single word from

the Master draws him to sainthood again. We can hear yet his

abrupt and laboured breathing—

*I struck the board and cry’ d, ‘No more:*

*I will abroad!’*

*What, shall I ever sigh and pine?*

*My lines and life are free; free as the road,*

*Loose as the winde, as large as store …*

Then the dry sobs of

*Sure there was wine*

*Before my sighs did drie it; there was corn*

*Before my tears did drown it;*

*Is the year onely lost to me?*

*Have I no bayes to crown it?*

*No flowers, no garlands gay? All blasted?*

*All wasted?*

And the war-like ring of

*Not so, my heart! But there is fruit,*

*And thou hast hands.*

*Recover all thy sigh-blown age*

*On double pleasures; leave thy cold dispute*

*Of what is fit and not. Forsake thy cage …*

And the galloping thoughts of escape—to the bowed, hushed

reverence of the last line:

*But as I rav’d, and grew more fierce and wild*

*At every word,*

*Methought I heard one calling, ‘Child’;*

*And I reply’d, ‘My Lord’.*

Herbert is dust now under the altar of his church at Bemerton.

We like to think of this man who forsook a seventeenth century

world for a seventeenth century heaven; who could leave a court

for a village, to see, in his dying years, that his church was ‘stuck

with boughs and perfumed with incense,’ and that his farm-

labourers made their responses during service; who was lacerated

by the love of God, until death healed him. We could address him

with the words of another man who also loved beyond this world’s

horizons; of Thomas à Kempis, saying, ‘Thou shalt rest in the

Lord always, for He Himself is the everlasting rest of the saints.’

## ‘For Love of Me…

IN THE OLD DAYS, A PAGE carried one’s red velvet cushion and

another page carried one’s book; and one knelt devoutly in the

heliotrope fog of some cathedral. A king wore his favourite saints

pinned to his hat, and bowed to them when times were bad. The

poor could worship Mary the Madonna when she came to them in

dreams, and day and night the cloister bells tolled regiments of

cowled figures to their prayers. Prayer was as usual as bread.

Perhaps today muezzins lean from minarets and priests still bless

the holy wafers and the wine, but prayer has lost its savour and the

majority of people pray because it is a habit or else do not pray at all.

Our intelligentsia assure us that prayer is an aberration, some-

thing on the order of talking to oneself; and our fashionables remem-

ber that they did not get their little slam when they prayed for it at

bridge; and if sorrow forces men to pray, they pray in doubt, and

desperately, and they take Providence with a grain of salt.

To Bahá’ís, however, prayer is ‘indispensable and obligatory’,

and no one is excused therefrom ‘unless he be mentally unsound,

or an insurmountable obstacle prevent him’.[1] This law is great

glad tidings—it is one of the most fruitful blessings ever conferred

on humanity; and an investigation of even a handful of the wisdoms

of prayer can only increase our amazement.

The secret of life is detachment from everything except God.

This is because there is a quality in human nature which imper-

iously demands something permanent to love and work for, and

only God is permanent.

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We go through life hitching our wagons to stars that fall; where-

upon we are miserable, and lasso the next ones. Our leaves shrivel,

our moons wane, the marbles we build our statues of are crumbled.

Only God is always strong, always there, always permanent. Only

God is worthy to be worked for.

And to achieve this detachment from everything except God we

require prayer. His Holiness Bahá’u’lláh says:

*O Son of Light! Forget all save Me and commune with My spirit.*

*This is of the essence of My command, therefore turn unto it*.[2]

Again, the desire to be understood is common to us all. And yet no

one understands us. We do not understand ourselves. We all know

what we mean by being ‘understood’ but the term is hard to define.

In fact, it means just the opposite of what it says, because certainly

none of us wish to be seen through.

A noted writer has said that human beings are each on individual

islands, shouting to each other across seas of misunderstandings.

But prayer is a great simplifying factor and a dispeller of confusion.

Through our communion with God we become explained to our-

selves and enabled to express our best and truest selves to others.

There are, too, a great many people who have no courage to keep

on living, because they are weighted with the consciousness of

having sinned. Their life becomes a retrogression, and they stay at

home with their sorrow—why should they attempt anything, when

everything they touch is tainted? They are afraid of the justice of

God, and they have forgotten the ocean of His mercy (an infinite,

sunlit, peaceful ocean). They have not read the glad tidings of

Bahá’u’lláh, and the prayer which He has revealed for those who

have sinned.

Here again the vital importance of prayer is demonstrated

because it is primarily through prayer that human beings may

recover from wrong-doing. And as for avoiding wrong-doing, mere

discipline is not enough; we need the courage and faith engendered

by prayer. This is true because although we know right from wrong

we often drift into sin and repent at leisure, unless we are held in

check by daily prayer; also because it is impossible and indeed

undesirable for us to be forever spying on ourselves—people are as

mistaken in their mental hair-shirts as any fanatics of the Middle

Ages, and we therefore need the guidance of God, which is obtain-

able in proportion to our prayerful receptiveness.

Benjamin Franklin kept a notebook with all his sins in it, but

Confucius said, ‘I can do as my heart lusteth and never swerve from

right’. That is, we should learn to do right naturally, as rain falls or

dew forms, and such spontaneity becomes possible only after a life

inspired by prayer and supplication.

Then there is the question, ‘To Whom shall we pray?’ Nations

have prayed to the souls of their ancestors, to stones or stars or

sacred cattle. Many of our modern thinkers pray to some exalted

figment of their own imaginations, which, however grandiose in

appearance, is obviously no more God the Creator than is the

church artist’s depiction of some middle-aged gentleman in a pink

robe. Who God is eludes our finite minds. We must therefore pray

to the attributes of God in their fullest and most clearly repre-

sented form—we must seek them in His highest creation—man.

And among men, we must turn, if we seek God, to the most perfect

man—His Manifestation.

It is undeniable that the beauties of God appear in every phase

of creation—in comets or fishes or little hairy palm trees. But

Nature only mumbles—Man speaks. And so, although we may

announce that we have found God in a twig or in the curve of the

horizon, it is only in His great World Teachers that we see Him

clearly and indisputably mirrored. Without His Manifestations,

God is lost to us,—‘And idle is the rumour of the rose.’

The desire to pray is, like everything else, strengthened with prac-

tice and atrophied through disuse. In the latter case, people are for-

ever restless and longing for something and dissatisfied with every

new possession. But if one prays, one is always refreshed and re-

interested. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, ‘When a man turns his face to God

he finds sunshine everywhere.’[3]

And yet people inquire why they should pray, why God does not

come to them—remarks as logical as sitting in a darkened room and

wondering why all the sweep and glitter of the summer sunlight

does not penetrate.

And if, as often happens, people are longing for God, trying to

pray and yet not succeeding, they will easily find Him through

service in accordance with the dictates of His Manifestations.

It is not surprising that a prayerless people are driven to drugs

and stimulants and a hundred forms of useless activity. They have

no antidote for life, and no effective means of achieving the ‘respite

and nepenthe’ for which they long. It is not surprising that people

cheat one another, desert one another, kill one another, because

only universal prayer can make the world safe for us to live in.

No doubt future generations will look back at this prayerless age

with the same uneasiness with which we contemplate the unwashed

courtiers of Queen Elizabeth.

## Notes on Persian Love Poems

ARTHUR GUY TELLS US THAT Ḥáfiẓ, Persia’s great fourteenth

century poet known as the ‘Tongue of the Invisible World,’ found

his way into Latin in 1680: Meninsky got out the translation in that

year. A hundred more years went by and European versions ap-

peared, mostly fragmentary. A number were, Guy says, ‘beautiful

but unfaithful’—but at least that of von Hammer in 1812 attracted

the attention of Goethe, who wrote:

*If you call the words a ‘bride’,*

*And for the groom,’ say soul,*

*You have a wedding known to those,*

*Who this Ḥáfiẓ extol.*

‘Great is the divergence,’ continues Guy, ‘between the purest

mysticism with its symbols, predicated on a transcendental solution

to the problem of existence, which some find there—and the cynical

epicureanism strongly tainted with pessimism, which others do not

hesitate to take literally in his verses. Is Ḥáfiẓ the poet of sensual

love—of woman, wine, nature, unbelief? Or rather of Divine Love,

of the joys of contemplation, of self-surrender, and a purified

faith ?’[1]

Showing the wit with which Ḥáfiẓ manipulates his symbols, Guy

then repeats the often-described confrontation between Tamerlane

the earth-shaker and Ḥáfiẓ the poet. The reason for the interview,

which, if it happened at all, took place in 1387 when Tamerlane

first entered Shíráz, was the poet’s having written these lines:

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*If but that lovely Shíráz maid*

*Would take my heart in her fair hand,*

*For that black mole of hers I’d trade*

Bukhárá *town and Samarqand.*

The king summoned the poet and roared at him: ‘What! With

my sword I have conquered most of the inhabited world. With the

plundered spoils of a thousand realms I have adorned my two

capitals of Samarqand and Bukhárá. And was all this so that a

miserable insect like you should offer my cities up for a single mole

on the cheek of a girl?’

‘Sire,’ answered Ḥáfiẓ, ‘it is this very prodigality that has re-

duced me to my present straits.’

‘A lower degree cannot comprehend a higher although all are in the

same world of creation … Degree is the barrier …’[2] ‘Abdu’l-

Bahá says. The animal is at our side but his degree of existence

keeps him out of our world. A child’s degree keeps him from under-

standing what constitutes an adult mind: you need make no effort

to hide the nature of adulthood from him, his degree of conscious-

ness automatically keeps this a well-guarded secret. No need, for

example, to hide private documents from an infant. In the same

way many things all about us are secret simply because of our own

limitations. The afterlife is one of them. The love of God as pas-

sionately felt by the mystics is another. The secret itself is visible

everywhere, to every eye: ‘Every eye,’ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá once said,

speaking of the promise that every eye should see the returned

Christ: ‘But not the blind.’[3]

Since degree is the barrier, those who have progressed farther

than others in God’s love are hard put to it to initiate the rest. This

seems to be what the mystics, the ṣúfís, the lovers of God, mean by

their eternal symbols and cryptic pronouncements. They try, this

way and that, to communicate (while yet hiding) what they see

mirrored in their hearts, and feel running in their veins. They write,

even monotonously, about ‘the secret’. They hopelessly try to

embody their knowledge in the vocabulary of human love, since

none other will serve: ‘Often the same ode,’ R. A. Nicholson says,

‘will entrance the sinner and evoke sublime raptures in the saint.’[4]

Typical of countless other verses, this fragment from the great

Jalál-i-Dín Rúmí explains itself:

*Our desert has no end, our heart no bed.*

*World within world is with Form’s image sealed;*

*Which of the images to us is wed?*

*If on the path you see a severed head,*

*Rolling along its way to our wide field,*

*Ask it, Oh ask it what we never said,*

*And let it tell the secret we concealed.*

Rúmí’s own love for God pours out in his verses to Shams-i-

Tabríz, ‘weird figure, wrapped in coarse black felt, who flits across

the stage for a moment and disappears …’ This man was a Persian,

so often on the wing that they nicknamed him *Parandih*, the Flier.

Shams, who is likened by Nicholson to Socrates, felt he was the

chosen mouthpiece of the Lord—for the mystic’s love makes him

identify with the Divine, and his insights make him seem arrogant.

He used to call his learned disciples ‘oxen and asses.’ His theme was

ecstasy and rapture, and he spread everywhere ‘the enchanted

circle of his power’.

Nicholson goes on to quote Von Kremer: ‘The real basis of their

[the ṣúfís’] poetry is a loftily inculcated ethical system, which

recognizes in purity of heart, charity, self-renunciation, and brid-

ling of the passions, the necessary conditions of eternal happiness

… a pantheistic theory of the emanation of all things from God,

and their ultimate reunion with Him … and frequently the

thought … that all religions and revelations are only the rays of a

single eternal sun; that all Prophets have only delivered and pro-

claimed in different tongues the same principles of eternal goodness

and eternal truth which flow from the divine Soul of the world.’

One night when Rúmí and Shams were seated together, there

was a knocking at the door and a voice calling. Shams rose and said,

‘I am called to my death’. He left Rúmí, and walked out to the

darkness, where seven murderers fell on him with their knives.

It was in memory of him that Rúmí founded the order of dancing

dervishes who spin and spin down the centuries, copying the

motions of the planets and listening to music sung by the stars—all

because of that long dead love.

Browne explains that to the ṣúfís the doctrine of Divine Oneness

(tawḥíd) means not only, as Islám has it, that ‘There is no god but

God’—but that ‘there is nothing but God.’ God ‘is Pure Being, and

what is “other than God” … only exists in so far as His Being is

infused into it, or mirrored in it. He is also Pure Good … and

Absolute Beauty: whence He is often called by the mystics in their

pseudo-erotic poems, “the Real Beloved.”’ Beauty desires to be

known, Browne continues, and a thing can be known only by its

opposite. Thus Evil ‘is a necessary consequence of this manifesta-

tion [of Eternal Beauty] so that the Mystery of Evil is really identical

with the Mystery of Creation, and inseparable therefrom. But Evil

is merely the Not-Good, or … the Non-Existent.’[6]

About here in a commentary of this type the usual procedure is

to mention John of the Cross, but for a change we shall remind the

reader of Catherine of Siena or any number of others resembling

those saints. George Herbert, in England’s seventeenth century,

was still another mystic to whom God was a lover, seeking and

being sought; he writes:

*My God, what is a heart,*

*That Thou shouldst it so eye, and wooe,*

*Powring upon it all Thy art,*

*As if that Thou hadst nothing els to do?*

Or this:

*How sweetly doth ‘My Master’ sound!*

*‘My Master!’*

*As amber Breese leaves a rich scent*

*Unto the taster:*

*So do these words a sweet content,*

*An orientall fragrancie, ‘My Master.’*

Or again:

*When first Thy sweet and gracious eye*

*Vouchsaf’d ev’n in the midst of youth and night*

*To look upon me, who before did lie*

*Weltring in sinne;*

*I felt a sugred strange delight,*

*Passing all cordials made by any art,*

*Bedew, embalme, and overrunne my heart,*

*And take it in.*

Manifestations of God are not as the mystics—for Manifestations

in the Bahá’í context are ‘something not ourselves’ and differ from

us in kind, the mystics only in degree—but Their writings do take

on a mystical cast, and whatever Divine love is, They are ‘the

supreme embodiment of all that is lovable.’ The Báb exchanged

this love with Bahá’u’lláh, Whom He never met. Nabíl, Their

chronicler, says: ‘Such love no eye has ever beheld, nor has mortal

heart conceived such mutual devotion. If the branches of every tree

were turned into pens, and all the seas into ink, and earth and heaven

rolled into one parchment, the immensity of that love would still

remain unexplored, and the depths of that devotion unfathomed.’?

This kind of ecstasy and single-minded love has determined

many a believer’s life and death. ‘Many a chilled heart, O my God,’

writes Bahá’u’lláh, ‘hath been set ablaze with the fire of Thy

Cause …’[8] Among the Persians, one who caught on fire was a

young thug, the refuse of the streets. He was standing in a crowd,

watching some believers being pushed and mocked and tortured

along to their graves. What he saw in their faces we do not know;

only that he broke from the crowd, ran to the executioner and

shouted, ‘Take me with them—I am a Bábí too!’ Another was the

son of a high-ranking officer. He embraced the new Faith, saying

that to him the world was carrion. He is the one who, to drums and

trumpets, walked through a screaming mob with lighted candles

burning in his wounds. Passing there he chanted from Persian odes.

When they heard him sing, the executioners laughed. One of them

said, ‘Why not dance?’ And so as he died he danced, raising his

arms, snapping his fingers, moving his red body to a song that

Rúmí had written for Shams-i-Tabríz

*In one hand the winecup, in one the Loved One’s tress,*

*So would I dance across the market place!*

It was such martyrdom that years afterward ‘Abdu;l-Bahá des-

cribed, almost re-enacted it for Juliet Thompson (who wrote about

it in her diary) and other Bahá’ís on a veranda in Montclair. As He

spoke He was transfigured for an instant; and lifting His arms,

‘With that godlike head erect, snapping His fingers high in the air,

beating out a drum-like rhythm with His foot,’ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

danced a wonderful brief dance and ‘triumphantly’ sang the mar-

tyr’s song. Then He sank back into His chair. ‘Tears swelled in my

eyes,’ Juliet says, ‘blurring everything. When they cleared I saw a

still stranger look on His face. His eyes were unmistakably fixed on

the Invisible. They were filled with delight and as brilliant as

jewels … This was what the Cause meant … This was what it

meant to “live near Him”! … So low that it sounded like an echo

He hummed the Martyr’s Song. “See”, He exclaimed, “the effect

that the death of a martyr has in the world. It has changed my con-

dition.”’[9]

There was another among thousands changed by this love. He was

born in Káshán, Persia, about 1879. His family moved to the

capital—Ṭihrán—and his father became Mayor of that city. The

boy received a good schooling which included French and English.

Because of some inward prompting he used to trot after his English

teacher on the street, asking him words and carefully writing them

down. When the boy was fourteen, however, his father died. This

was a disaster in the Persia of that day; a widowed mother, an older

brother and various other relatives, some influential, could not

compensate the loss. More studies, and working as a tutor in his

uncle’s home, and becoming aware of the condition his country

was in, increased his restlessness. His father had prophesied that

one day the boy would become a Bahá’í; at this time, however,

seeing what the Islamic hierarchy had done to Muslim Persia, he

believed religion was only for the ignorant mass. When some of his

sophisticated young friends began attending secret meetings, held

late at night in rooms giving onto the back alleys of Ṭihrán, the

young man came along to expose the Bahá’í teachers, to show how

wrong they were and win his friends back to more mundane

pursuits. As the months passed, he found himself listening. Some

were travellers, with current news of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, far away in the

prison city of ‘Akká on the Mediterranean Sea. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s own

Father, still a prisoner and exile, had very recently died, left a

world which had scorned and rejected Him. But He had made a

compact with His followers that they should turn to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

as the Centre of His Covenant with them. Here was the Master,

with strength and love and a world vision of hope. Here now was a

Cause to live and die for; a point toward which a youth could direct

his heart.

The young man, who had gone on a journey by then and was in

the town of Senna, capital of Persian Kurdistán, wrote a poem in

which he offered his life to the great Son of Bahá’u’lláh and begged

permission to be there with Him in the prison city. The lines of

this ode show his familiarity with Persian mystic poetry and also

his ecstatic love. Students of this poetry will recognize the classical

style and terminology, will note the Joseph story from the Qur’án,

the lover’s madness and ill-repute, the lover’s disregard of reason,

the Zoroastrians’ secret drinking place (wine was forbidden to

Muslims), the symbolic wine, the Majnún story, the Beloved’s

tangled hair, the Beloved’s likeness to a cypress tree, the author’s

pen-name in the closing lines. The present writer (translator of the

ode and daughter of the poet) would like to call particular attention

to the Sun of Truth stanza which refers to the youth’s recognition

of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s station, then recently conferred by Bahá’u’lláh.

*Now that I am tied and tangled in Thy floating hair,*

*Am become Thy half-crazed lover, with peace of mind at war,*

*Life in hand I stray and wander, looking for Thee everywhere.*

*Thou art Egypt’s beauteous Joseph, I the wife of Potiphar;*

*Like that grayhair who bought Joseph, I would suffer for Thy face.*

*When the pangs of longing for Thee struck the knocker on my door,*

*From within me faith and reason fled their home.*

*Then in the wineshop of Thy love I drank my own heart’s core.*

*All for Thee, O spirit’s guide, I emptied out this room—*

*Now behold me mocked and mad and half seas over for Thy face.*

*In the Magians’ secret tavern, O sweet the brimming glass,*

*O sweet it is to seize Thy snaring hair.*

*O sweet for me to weep out my blood as along love’s way I pass,*

*Sweet to receive this cup from Thee with no outsiders there,*

*And my eyes athirst since time began, drinking in Thy face.*

*Except for Thee, for neither world have I a care,*

*From any words save Thine, from all desire free,*

*A distracted lover I—of men’s lives I’ve no share,*

*I but the dust beneath Thy feet, O swaying cypress tree,*

*For me there is no place of flowers except Thy face.*

*O good is this tossing and turning on the sickbed of love,*

*Sickness that never will heal, but by love’s crying.*

*Though reason warn me as to the perils of love,*

*Against the anguish of love I am not one to be sighing—*

*I, bound from time’s dawning to the hyacinth hair that frames Thy*

*face.*

*When like Majnún I fled to the desert of the mad,*

*I set the sand on fire with my burning sighs.*

*I put all men out of my heart but Thee, and was glad,*

*And my cupped hands brimmed with tears from my weeping eyes,*

*And I thought, let all men know that I love Thy wondrous face.*

*The day I filled my glass with Thy love’s wine,*

*This tavern-corner gloried over Heaven’s dome.*

*Yes, the envy of Heaven would be this ruined heart of mine*

*Should Thy bright brow but shed its rays into my lowly room—*

*Therefore my soul’s eye never leaves Thy matchless face.*

*As the Sun of Truth rose out of this earthly world of His,*

*He opened up before Thee His secret treasure-store.*

*The effulgence of Thy beauty flashed from that world into this,*

*And from nothingness, the Divine Decree stood humbly at Thy*

*door,*

*And said: ‘Obedient to Thy wish and will, I bow before Thy face.’*

*O people of Bahá, the Covenant hath come, be glad!.*

*He is the balm for every aching heart,*

*And now is the earth in His Father’s splendour clad.*

*When He unto my soul a welcome did impart,*

*It answered: ‘Save me! for I drown in the ocean of Thy face.’*

*Save me, great Mystery of God, I faint and fall.*

*Save me, without Thee I only burn and sigh.*

*Save me, I am as nothing in the eyes of all,*

*Save me, in every city: ‘He is mad!’ they cry,*

*Of this lost, distracted wanderer in the desert of Thy face.*

*O Thou, O Thou from whose sunbright brow the moon hath drawn*

*her rays,*

*The thought of whom illumines many a weary lover’s soul,*

*But to behold Thy face I have no dream in all my days.*

*Then fulfil my hopes, in grace, grant me leave to reach my goal,*

*A desert wanderer I, and yearning for the garden of Thy face.*

*Without Thee, only a prison to me is Heaven and its flowers,*

*Without Thee, only a place of thorns, the blissful bowers.*

*O Thou whose brow so moonlight fair is the envy of spring hours,*

*In his love for Thee,*

*He is torn free,*

*Is Ishti‘al, from all that be,*

*And again and again,*

*Cries this refrain:*

*I am lost in the glory of Thy face.*

‘Abdu’l-Bahá understood. He did not turn the youth away. His

answer, the original of which, illuminated by a Persian artist, now

hangs on a wall in New Hampshire, said to praise not ‘Abdu’l-

Bahá but Bahá’u’lláh, the Manifestation of God. This is the text:

*He is the All-Glorious of the All-Glorious!*

*O thou who art drunk with the wine of the Covenant!*

*Thy verses were full of savour; they were running waters, a fount of*

*learning, and most sweetly eloquent. Reading them cheered and re-*

*freshed us. From the consuming blaze of that yearning heart a flame*

*was kindled in ours and our whole being responded and caught fire.*

*Light up Love’s fire,*

*Throw on the pyre*

*All things that be.*

*Then with one step (it is not far)*

*Enter the place where the lovers are.*

*The way to praise this servant is to adore the Holy Threshold, to*

*worship humbly at the doorstep of the one Lord. This is perpetual*

*grace; this is heavenly bestowal; this is achieving the uttermost goal;*

*this is ‘the Sadrah tree that marks the boundary’ (i.e., the Manifesta-*

*tion of God). Speak thou of this almighty Height, this wondrous*

*Station, open thy lips in praise of Him. Pluck thy strings on the*

*theme of servitude to Him, and with the song of this bondage awaken*

*thou a world.*

*… These are the cleansing waters; this is the flaming up of splendour;*

*this is the laudable grace; this is the paradise of all delights; this is*

*bounty pressed down and running over; this is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s most*

*burning wish—the supreme desire of this embodiment of indigence, of*

*nothingness … Al-Bahá be upon thee.*[10]

He signed it with His initials, Ayn-Ayn, and affixed His seal,

that reads: ‘O my companion, the prison.’ An older person was

present, when the youth’s Tablet was read. ‘It is too great a

Tablet for him,’ this person commented. ‘There must be some

mistake.’ Yet the name, Ishti‘ál Ibn-i-Kalántar, was on it, in

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s own unerring hand. And although the young man

was unaware of it then, he would in after years indeed help mightily

to awaken a faraway world to the message of Bahá’u’lláh. (He

would be known in that world as Ali-Kuli Khan. His other name,

Nabílu’d-Dawlih, was a title given him, for services to his country,

by the Sháh. But his pen name was Ishti‘ál—Aflame.)

Many a time, before he finally did get to ‘Akká, he must—being

literary-minded—have remembered these lines from Ḥáfiẓ:

*There’ll be no end to longing till I find my heart’s desire*

*Either I’ll win my own Heart’s Life or lose my life entire.*

*But this I know, though I be dead, my body will burn on*

*Open my grave when I am gone*

*And see my shroud on fire.*

Such thoughts must have moved him when he set out, one snowy

afternoon, left his home with no good-byes and walked away

through the city gates. Part of his journey was on foot to the

Caspian, by ship to Bákú, then steerage from some Caucasian port

to Constantinople, and finally at long last, to the prison of ‘Abdu’l-

Bahá. It is a long time ago now, and he and Those he sought have

left this earth, but the letters and verses are still here; the love is

still alive.

## Current Mythology

A POPULAR MODERN BELIEF, AND one which characterizes the

present in every age, is to the effect that our ancestors were be-

nighted people. This idea is paralleled in individual experience—we

look back pityingly at our last year’s self and wonder how we could

have been so inferior to our present exalted condition; and the

faults of our present status come to light only in the retrospect of

another year. Now it is true that our ancestors were, in comparison

with us, benighted, and that their ignorance expressed itself in

superstition: they burned witches and before that they practised

black magic, and before that they sat on pillars for years at a time.

Whereas we, benefiting from the encroachments of science on the

unknown, realize that life on a pillar is unhealthful, and that even if

we did conjure up mountains of gold, they could not solve our

economic problem. Speaking from a materialistic standpoint, the

average educated man of today, who is not afraid of goblins and

does not wear asafoetida around his neck, can look patronizingly

on the past and call it benighted, superstitious; scientists have

cleared the world of figments, so that roosters can crow now with-

out sending ghosts to their graves again, and the lights that flit over

marshy cemeteries are only phosphorus.

And yet, we of the present have our superstitions too, and are

bound to fictions infinitely more harmful than those of past ages,

because these are mental fictions, rationalizations, supposedly ap-

proved by modern wisdom, and therefore not to be sprinkled away

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337–8

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with drops of holy water. For example, many educated people

imagine that members of other races or communities are inferior,

that war is necessary, that individuals may sin without hurting the

group, that progress is an illusion; they believe that man is an

animal, the universe self-made, and religion a means of quieting the

masses; that immortality is only perpetuation in the race, and

prayer only an expression of fear, or a demand for a timely violation

of natural law; and the basis of their thought is this—that God is a

collectively fashioned Goodness, which has evolved from a tree or

a star into a depersonalized Idea.

The love of God, which is the mainspring of the Bahá’í life,

and which constitutes that love for humanity whereby the old

world is to be made new again, is not a love built up on theories or

grown out of fears; it is not a synthetic philosophy or a refur-

bished superstition; it is the adoration which haloes knowledge.

This earth today is holy ground, fragrant with the footsteps of One

Who has proved for all men to see that God is near us—‘Nearer

than the jugular vein’—that our lives are His, our deeds account-

able to Him, our growth through all His worlds by His permis-

sion.

If our ancestors worshipped through faith alone, their faith col-

lapsed with the coming of the new science—their faith which had

long since changed to imitation, and functioned only with the

impetus of time. The nineteenth century shows us two groups of

thinkers: those who, terrified by biological discoveries, withdrew

into hermetic orthodoxy; and those who studied the sciences, lost

God, lost immortality, but went down bravely, ‘with unreluctant

tread … into the darkness’. These two survive today, except that

the glamour has gone from some, and others, like the Phoenician

dead, are feeding on dust in a sorrowful city. But this new love of

God which has broken into life surrounds the farthest reaches of

men’s thoughts; it is a foreshadowing of this which made Bacon

feel that he did ‘but tinkle a little bell …’ and Newton that he was

only playing with pebbles on a shore, and Pupin that ‘Sound is the

voice of God’. It is the love born of the Manifestation of God among

men, the perfect human being who reflects to humanity the omni-

science, the tenderness, the justice of God.

The love of God through His Manifestation is not to be lightly

assumed and lightly laid aside. It is not a human love, withering to

old flowers and faded ribbons. It is the life blood of the soul, with-

out which we cannot develop the higher consciousness which is our

existence when the body has died. Those of us who do not strive,

through service in the love of God, to form this consciousness,

cannot live fully beyond death. As Emerson says in the *Journals*, we

know already whether we are to be immortal; if our life is centred

about materialisms, it must cease with death. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

*This stone and this man both exist; but the stone in relation to the*

*existence of man is non-existent … in the same way, the souls*

*who are veiled from God, although they exist in this world and in*

*the world after death, are in comparison with the holy existence of*

*the children of the Kingdom of God, non-existing and separated*

*from God.*[1]

Certainly, if our interests are not earthly, they are turned toward

reality; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us that the farther we go from one, the

nearer we are to the other.

Our modern world is orphaned by its superstition. We must go

back to the love of God, to the love that flowers in the world’s

springtimes when God walks with us again. We must learn that

what men have always hoped is not a makeshift of the human ego,

but reality; that God leads us by the hand, and earth is a road to

heaven; that our hungering is not in vain, our dreams not the mere

wrack of the centuries. We must unite again in the love of our

God—

*For, lo, the winter is past;*

*The rain is over and gone.*

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# III

# Headlines Tomorrow

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## The Carmel Monks

A waxen Virgin hovers in the gloom

Lit with red gems and candles, and the fume

Of agate clouds of incense; heavy sighs

Hang listless in the air, and upturned eyes

Are straining for the brazen trump of doom.

The monks are waiting yet for Christ to come.

On Carmel mountain they have made their home,

Over the shore where the wan ocean dies.

To beautify His coming roses bloom,

And tuberoses, and yellow Spanish broom,

And in the chapel singing voices rise;

But Christ has come, and gone again, and wise

Were they who kissed His feet and saw Him home.

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## Headlines Tomorrow

A COLUMNIST ONCE SAID THAT the biggest scoop of all time

would be the news of the return of Christ. He was mistaken. The

return of Christ would never make the front page. The reason is

this:

When a man appears calling himself the Messiah, he does not

look as people expect him to look. There is no light around his

head—the light is added by painters, long after he has died. He

eats, walks, talks. He comes from a community where he has been

known for years. And when he suddenly announces himself as a

prophet, as one with a new message from God, his community

laughs at him. Everybody knows, people say, that the Messiah will

come seated on a throne, or riding on a cloud, and will preach the

same religion that the priests are already preaching in the temples.

They laugh. The man continues to say he is the agent of a

spirit that he cannot resist. The laughter grows to anger. Why is he

so obstinate in his claim, this man they have known since he was a

child? A few listen to him, and bear the hatred of the rest. The

laughter stops. The hatred rises. The prophet is shut away—

chained—perhaps killed.

But his voice goes on. People far away listen to it. Then painters

draw the circle of light back of the head that is now earth, and men

and women in countries across the world build temples in the

name of the man whose own people put him to death.

This drama is played all over again, every once in a while in

human history. It has been played again, almost in our time. It did

not make the headlines.

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1.

Shíráz is in southern Írán. It is a city of mosque domes and flower

gardens, of nightingales and singers, of streams slipping over blue

tiles into blue pools.

On a May evening in 1844, two men, one a merchant of Shíráz

and the other a traveller, were talking together in a white-washed

room above a courtyard. The words spoken by the young merchant

to his guest are now over a hundred years old. They have already

changed the course of the world’s life.

He said that He was the Báb, the Gate. That he was the Prophet

of God, and the Herald of ‘Him Whom God Shall Manifest—the

Well-Beloved One’. For six years, following that evening, the Báb

spread His teachings throughout the East. By then, thousands were

waiting for ‘Him Whom God Shall Manifest’. Terrified, the priests

and nobles conspired against the Báb. He was arrested. He was

tortured. On July 9, 1850, He was bound and publicly shot. The

Persians have never forgotten that the first volley of shots, from

seven hundred and fifty rifles, did not touch Him.

2.

There is a garden in Baghdád where the trees grow tall and hun-

dreds of doves flutter in the branches, so that all day the place is

clamorous with the noise of the doves. In this garden, on April 21,

1863, a Persian nobleman gathered His followers around Him. He

had come to Baghdád as an exile of the Persian Government. His

crime had been that He was a follower of the Báb; His punishment,

that He was chained underground in the Black Pit of Ṭihrán, that

His home and lands were seized, that He and His wife and young

children were finally sent out of the country, over the desert in mid-

winter, here to Baghdád. Now He was to be exiled still farther

away, no one knew where.

He called His followers to Him here in the garden, and told them

that He was the Promised One of the Báb, that He was ‘Him

Whom God Shall Manifest’.

Almost thirty years more of exile and prison lay ahead for

Bahá’u’lláh, as He stood under the trees that day with His disciples.

Years of humiliation and anguish. The martyrdom of His fol-

lowers; the treachery of His half-brother. The thick walls of the

prison at ‘Akká, Palestine,—with Napoleon’s cannon balls still

embedded in them—were to close around Him and those He loved.

But before He was to leave the world, in 1892, He was to establish

His Faith. He was to address the then custodians of society—the

Pope, Queen Victoria, the Kaiser, the French Emperor, the Sháh,

the Czar and the rest—calling them to world peace, and proclaim-

ing His mission as the Manifestation of God for our day. He,

Bahá’u’lláh, the Glory of God, the Well-Beloved One.

3.

If you pass through Wilmette, Illinois, along the shore of Lake

Michigan, you will come to a great House of Worship that has been

built there. There are no priests in this House, and the nine

entrances are open to followers of all religions and of no religion,

to black and white, to well-dressed and shabby alike. It looks like a

white rainbow, curving over the town, and you remember that the

rainbow is the sign of the Covenant that God made with man, long

ago.

In 1912, a man who had come out of a prison in Palestine laid

the cornerstone of this Temple. This man was the centre of the

Covenant that Bahá’u’lláh made with His followers. He was

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Son of Bahá’u’lláh, appointed by His Father as the

interpreter of the Bahá’í Faith, and as the Exemplar of the Bahá’í

way of life. Some Americans who later became Bahá’ís remember

having seen ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, as He walked in His white turban and

shining robe, through the streets of American cities.

We think we are alone in the universe, that we are born to live a

few years in the daylight, and disappear. But the Prophet of God

says no. He says that there is love in store for us, and everlasting

life. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was the living sign of these things.

4.

Mount Carmel stands over Haifa, and juts into the Mediterranean

Sea. There are cypresses down its slopes, and pomegranate and

olive trees. Here, in the landscaped terraces, are Bahá’í holy places:

the tomb-shrines of the Báb and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá; of Bahá’u’lláh’s

wife; of His son who died in prison; of His daughter, Bahíyyih.

The tomb-shrine of Bahá’u’lláh Himself lies across the bay, near

‘Akká.

It was an autumn day in 1921 when they carried the body of

‘Abdu’l-Bahá up the mountain and laid it to rest in the Shrine of

the Báb. They wept, both for Him Who was gone, and for the fate

of His Cause. How could they, left alone in the world, establish the

World Faith of Bahá’u’lláh. How could they form the Assemblies,

build the Houses of Worship, spread the teachings around the

earth.

Perhaps, they thought, the Báb faced the firing squad in vain;

perhaps the body of Bahá’u’lláh was scarred by chains to no pur-

pose, the blood of the martyrs spilt for nothing, the life of ‘Abdu’l-

Bahá lived only for memory. Perhaps this Faith, too, would

scatter into sects, like the Faiths before it, and its power run out

and be lost.

Then they opened the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and

read: ‘O my loving friends! After the passing away of this wronged

one … turn unto Shoghi Effendi … as he is the sign of God, the

chosen branch, the guardian of the Cause of God …’[1]

And under the guidance of Shoghi Effendi, great-grandson of

Bahá’u’lláh, the Bahá’í Faith has circled the planet. It has won to

itself Jew and Buddhist; Christian and Muslim; occidental and

oriental; black and white; rich and poor; old and young; academic

and unlettered.

These Bahá’í communities are a way of saying that the past,

with its local hatreds, its regional prejudices, its distrust of peoples

from across a line, is gone. Today we live in a new world, the world

of airplanes and radio and television, the world of the good neigh-

bour, the world that is on its way to becoming one commonwealth.

Bahá’í communities are a way of repeating, now and forever, the

words of Bahá’u’lláh: ‘O well-beloved ones! regard ye not one

another as strangers …[2] The earth is but one country, and man-

kind its citizens.’[3]

These things have not made the front page today. But they will

be in the headlines tomorrow.

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# IV

# Bright Day of the Soul

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## That Day in Tabríz

A PERSIAN WILL SIT FOR HOURS under a tree by a stream,

watching the water flow by. The Chinese, they say, like glassy

water, flat and pale; but a Persian likes the struggle of a narrow

white stream.

He may have a clay jug of wine cooling in the water. He sits on a

rug, slanting on the hill: out of perspective, like the Persians now

dead, who sit in the miniatures. He has a dish before him, lined

with mulberry leaves, piled with apricots. He sings to himself, a

verse from Ḥáfiẓ perhaps, who lived long ago in Shíráz, and whom

they call ‘The Tongue of the Invisible’: ‘I have hooded my eyes

like a falcon from all in the earth, That my eyes may be fixed on

naught else but the light of Thy Face.’ Around him the yellow

desert; and he under a blossoming cherry tree, or perhaps a willow,

because this is away from the town; and behind him, miles, away,

the bare, shining, Venetian-glass mountains.

His eyes are drugged by the wine and the verse, or more likely

by the pull of the stream. He can touch the pale green down that

rims its edge; this last is what ‘Umar-i-Khayyám refers to in the

quatrain:

*And that delightful herb whose tender green*

*Fledges the river-lip on which we lean—*

*Ah, lean upon it lightly! for who knows*

*From what once lovely lip it springs unseen!*

This green, poets tell us, is like the first down over an adolescent

mouth.

Persians like to leave the city, because in the city one sees only

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walls; honey-coloured walls of sun-baked mud. Within the walls

are pools, and sweet-lemon trees, and jasmine bushes; mud houses

with flat roofs. In winter the roofs are shovelled free of snow, and

rolled; in summer nights they blossom with mosquito-nets. Inside

the houses, white-washed walls; rugs glowing like cathedral-

windows, and woven from the ninth combing of the wool. There

are women, too, with henna on their finger-nails and pearls in their

hair. In the streets, dust. Nobles on Arab horses; the royal horses

white, with their tails dyed a bright purple. And there are beggars,

their faces eaten away with sores, gathered at the gateway of a

noble’s garden. These beggars are often used in Bahá’í prayers, to

describe the poverty of human beings, standing at the Gateway of

the Invisible.

This is Persia sometime between the last century and ours. The

Báb must have seen it, something like this; He must have watched

the moon come up through the acacias, as we watch it now. He

must have heard the Hag bird crying, the bird that cries ‘God!

God!’ all through the night, till—legend says—it bursts its throat

at dawn.

Of the eighteenth century in Europe, William Bolitho has writ-

ten: ‘Europe had locked itself in and lost the key … Imagine an

explosion in a locked room …’. That would be a fair description

of the coming of the Báb in Persia. Persia then was a spiritual

prison, blacker than a Bastille, but men were looking for release

and light. Traditions had been handed down, telling them not to

lose hope, because a great day was in store. There was a verse in

the Qur’án, in the Chapter of Adoration, and it said:

*It is God who hath created the heavens and earth … Ye have not*

*patron or intercessor besides Him. Will ye not therefore consider?*

*He governeth all things from heaven even unto the earth; hereafter*

*shall they return unto Him, on the day whose length shall be a*

*thousand years …*

The Muslims knew that the last Imám had disappeared in the year

260 a.h.; they felt that in 1260, their thousand years of waiting

would be over.

Certain men were teaching these things to the people, just as in

western countries such men as William Miller were teaching them,

though using different prophecies and another Book. One day the

Báb walked into the classroom where these prophecies were being

explained. He sat down and a ray of sunlight slanted across Him.

The teacher stopped. He looked at the Báb. He said, ‘Lo, the Truth

is more manifest than the ray of light that has fallen upon that lap.’[1]

A mosque is much busier, more lived-in than a cathedral. There

are people there, praying, any day of the week. There are fountains

running, for the ablutions—real water, not a shallow inch of holy

water, dwindled to a symbol. The floors burn with rugs. There are

men kneeling, rising, bowing down, and no statues or pictures to

impede the mind in its upward search. The Báb went often to the

mosque, and tears would flow from Him, and He would say, ‘O

God, My God, my Beloved, My heart’s Desire!’[2] He was a mer-

chant by profession. On Fridays when His shop was closed, He

would go up to the flat roof of His house, and stand and kneel in the

white sunlight, worshipping as the Muslims worshipped.

He was good to look upon. Fair for a Persian; rather short, with

a memorable voice. We think here of the fourth Imám, the half-

Persian Zaynu’l-‘Ábidín, who would pray and chant on the roof of

his house at night; it is said that even men carrying heavy water

skins in the street below would stop to listen. His walk, too, was

memorable. Virgil tells us that the gods were known by their gait;

the same is true of the few great human beings who come amongst

us. Once when a stranger was seeking out the Báb, and a disciple

barred the way, the man saw Him as He passed and said: ‘Why do

you seek to hide Him from me? I know Him by His walk.’ The

Báb was a descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad and must have

looked like Him, of whom a companion has said, ‘I never saw any-

thing more beautiful than Muḥammad; you might say the sun

was moving in His face.’

The Báb married. A child was born to Him. The child died.

The Father dedicated His child to His Lord: ‘O My God, grant

that the sacrifice of My son … may be acceptable unto Thee.

Grant that it be a prelude to the sacrifice of My … self, in the

path of Thy good pleasure.’[3]

Then a handful of men were drawn to Him. He did not sum-

mon them—they came to find Him, over the desert wastes. Some

rode on donkeys—white donkeys, perhaps, stamped with henna-

coloured hands, and wearing turquoise beads; there are still such

donkeys left in Persian streets—the automobiles and the trains

have not yet driven them out. These men came because they had

had visions and dreamed dreams; indeed, many Americans have

become Bahá’ís in the same way. Such things are for scientists to

investigate, for we do not understand them in laboratory terms.

We do know that at the time of the coming of a Prophet, certain

disciples are waiting for Him. We know, too, that there are true

prophets, as distinguished from the hundreds of ‘incredible

messiahs’ who recur through the ages—that there is a source-Being,

a type of Being who reinspires every phase of human life. Carlyle

says of Him, writing on Muḥammad:

*Such a man is what we call an original man; he comes to us at*

*first-hand … We may call him Poet, Prophet, God;—in one way*

*or other, we all feel that the words he utters are as no other man’s*

*words. Direct from the Inner Fact of things;—he lives, and has to*

*live, in daily communion with that … It is from the heart of the*

*world that he comes; he is portion of the primal reality of things*.[4]

The Báb sent these disciples out and they awakened the East,

and left their bodies charred and mangled in a hundred cities.

They gave their Master’s message, and no bullets stopped their

lips. They gave glad tidings of the corning of a great world Saviour.

The Báb said, ‘I Myself am, verily, but a ring upon the hand of

Him Whom God shall make manifest.’ Then He journeyed to

Mecca, the holiest city of Islám, and proclaimed His mission

before the sacred Black Stone of the Ka‘bih, fulfilling prophecy.

And He sacrificed nineteen lambs of the finest breed, as is the

custom; lambs carefully decked, with sugar in their mouths, per-

haps, and collyrium in their eyes. A great blessing to the poor, this

sacrifice, for the meat is distributed to them. The Báb refused to

partake of this meat Himself, which recalls the story of how a goat

had been sacrificed in the house of Muḥammad, where usually

there was little to eat. The carcass was being distributed to the

poor, and ‘Áyishih, wife of the Prophet, came and lamented,

because all the meat was being given away. She said, ‘Nothing but

the shoulder remaineth.’ He answered: ‘The whole goat remaineth

save only the shoulder.’

In Persia again, the Báb preached in the mosques. When He

entered, men crowded around Him. It was as Sa‘dí said, long ago

by the water in Shíráz: ‘Wheresoever be a spring of sweetest water,

there will men and birds and insects crowd together.’ When He

stood on the pulpit, they were quiet while He spoke.

And there, in the heart of Islám, He rose, and struck. He called

out as men call who know they are going to die. He cried out against

the clergy, the lords of all men. The mullás, who knew the Qur’án

by heart, the Book which no Persian can read in his own tongue.

The mullás who knew what was lawful and not; who even knew

when a medicine should be taken, and a journey be made, and a

daughter be given in marriage. Who knew all truth, where other

men are blind. And He denounced them; just as His ancestor,

Muḥammad, had denounced Arabia’s gods: ‘Ye rub them with

oil and wax, and the flies stick on them,—these are wood, I tell

you!’ Just as Jesus had called the men of His time: Hypocrites—

dogs—generation of vipers—adulterous.

All Persia was talking of Him now. They shut Him in a fortress

on a mountain, where He wrote: ‘There is no one even to bring Me

a lamp at night. The fruit of Islám is to accept the Báb, yet they

imprison Him.’ Then He wrote: ‘All the atoms of this place cry

out, “There is no God but God!”’[6] And he began to dictate the

greatest of His works, heralding the coming of Bahá’u’lláh. His

voice echoed down the mountain and across the valley as He

chanted. He suffered cruelly from the winter cold. The water He

used for His ablutions froze on His face.

And men loved Him, and sought Him out. They came, even

from India, travelling on foot. He was taken away to another

prison. His followers were being killed in the streets.

Then they summoned Him before the Crown Prince and the

clergy, assembled in Tabriz. There was only one chair left in

the Assembly Hall; one chair, reserved for the Crown Prince. The

Báb took this chair, and such power shone from Him that the

assembly fell silent. Then one of the clergy said, ‘Who do you

claim to be?’ He answered: ‘I am the one whose name you have for

a thousand years invoked, whose advent you have longed to wit-

ness … and the hour of whose Revelation you have prayed God

to hasten. Verily I say, it is incumbent upon the peoples of both

the East and the West to obey My word …’[7]

We know the rest. But these are the days of His triumph. We do

not want to remember how He was hanged to a wall and shot, that

morning in Tabríz. We see Him living today, around the world.

## Bright Day of the Soul

AT A TIME WHEN THE VAULTS OF the United States Treasury

contained ‘only a pitiful surplus of $394,000,000,’ it was neverthe-

less, by Act of Congress, decreed that an American Legation should

be set up in the capital of Persia. Accordingly, President Arthur

selected and dispatched to Ṭihrán a diplomat who, with his wife,

remained in Persia from 1882 to 1885, at which time the Demo-

crats returned to power and the Minister gracefully resumed

private life. His book,[1] brought out by Ticknor and Co. in Boston

in 1887, contains perhaps the second public mention of the Faith of

the Báb in the United States—the first was a letter published in the

*New York Sun* on December 10, 1883.

The Minister’s account also includes what can only be an oblique

reference to Bahá’u’lláh, whom the Báb called ‘Him Whom God

Shall Manifest.’ He speaks, too, of Azal, that nominee of the Báb,

who as readers of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s *A Traveller’s Narrative* are

aware, was chosen as a provisional figurehead to distract attention

from the Promised One. So inconsiderable was the nominee that

his name does not appear in the royal edict that banished Bahá’u’lláh

from Persia. He was always hiding, and it is, interestingly enough,

this secretiveness of his which the Minister emphasized: ‘As his

belief in the Báb is a secret,’ the text, naming him, says, ‘his name

is not mentioned in this connection.’

Of the new Faith in general the diplomat states: ‘The Bâbees

present one of the most important religious phenomena of the

age … their activity does not cease, and their numbers are

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increasing rapidly …. They are found among all conditions of

society, and, strange to say, adherents are gained among the priest-

hood as well as the laity.’

It was the old, long-dreaming Persia of another age which the

first American Minister noted down in his book. He told of fairy

gardens, unsuspected back of blind mud walls—walls without

windows, so that none could spy out should the Sháh, his Court

and his ladies come driving by. You entered such a garden from a

lane through a shabby door, came into a dark passage, and suddenly

there you were in a great court, where, reflected in a vast pool, you

found a palace richly ornamented with mouldings of brick, and

stucco and carved wood, about it waving cypresses and pines, beds

of fragrant herbs, jasmine bushes and sweet-lemon trees. Here was

only the bird-broken, water-broken quiet, so that the great city

around you was blotted from your mind. You knew, too, that the

palace was double, that beyond a second wall was another garden,

another pavilion, a place of secluded mystery, barred to all men

but the man of the house, where the women decked in their

diaphanous costumes lived out their secret days.

He told of floor-to-ceiling windows intricately filled with small

panes of coloured glass; of lavish, stucco ornamentation painted in

green, scarlet and gold; of shimmering-diamond walls covered with

hundreds of bits of mirrors, like ‘crystal and burnished silver,’ set

in floral and geometrical designs; of down-soft, almost flying

carpets, of ceilings with carved and tinted crossbeams, the deep

panels between them blue, and spangled with golden stars; of wall

niches and silver hubble-bubble pipes, of high verandas floating

over beds of roses. Of wind towers on the roofs, to circulate a cool

current of air. Of pomegranate trees, the fruit scarlet sparks in the

dark green leaves. Of thirty-four underground courses of mountain

\\rater, marked by hillocks of upthrown earth where vertical shafts

had been dug to guide them, all down the long miles to the city; of

the lavender sunset stain on Damávand’s high, white cone to the

northeast.

And always, he said, the silence. No clangour of traffic and

church bells as in the West. Only the floating cry of the muezzin

at his stated times, or street vendors’ calls, or the clink of camel

bells. And at night, under closely-gathered stars, wind washing

through the trees, or the nightingale’s intermittent, tremulous airs,

or maybe a boy singing his high soprano as he passed, or maybe

from some ruin the guessed-at hoot of an owl.

He went to the Sháh’s grand audience chamber, ‘one of the

most imposing in the world,’ floored with priceless glazed tiles, in

its centre a vast table overlaid with beaten gold. At the end of the

great hall, streaming with gold, quivering with the lights of a

thousand jewels, stood the Peacock Throne. In a glass case the

Sháh kept ‘a large heap of pearls dense as a pile of sand on the

seashore.’ He saw a globe of the world turning on a frame of solid

gold, its oceans all turquoise, its countries varied jewels, and Persia

‘a compact mosaic of diamonds.’ He knew, too, that locked here in

a double iron chest was the ‘Sea of Light,’ the second diamond on

the planet. ‘One ruby there is in that mine of splendour,’ he added,

‘which, on being placed in water, radiates a red light that colors

the water like the blood of the vine of Burgundy.’

In his wanderings he came, as well, on a deserted pavilion built

by a Sháh of other years, lapsing into oblivion now, where he found

a circular pool in a subterranean hall. Here, from an upper storey,

was a steep slide of polished marble leading into the pool. At its

foot, His Majesty was wont to stand in the water, while down from

the upper story would slide one of his wives, into the royal arms.

‘No more,’ the diplomat wrote, ‘no more are peals of laughter

heard there, nor the song warbled by ruby lips. All are gone …

The livelong summer-day the nightingale trills in the rose-bush,

and the turtle-dove coos in the plane trees, and the murmuring

water dashes down its marble channels, but no one dwells there

now…’

He saw much, this American Minister, but he missed more, for

he was there in Persia only three decades after the climactic events

of early Bahá’í history. Clearer was the vision of France’s Count de

Gobineau, who was there from 1855 to 1858, again from 1862 to

1864, and made that country ‘one of his fairest intellectual con-

quests’; clearer that of Cambridge University’s E. G. Browne who,

inspired by Gobineau, went to Persia for a year in 1887, and later

even saw Bahá’u’lláh. And most enlightened of them all was the

French Consul at Tabríz, A. L. M. Nicolas, who began his Bábí

studies in 1889, and ultimately accepted both the Báb and

Bahá’u’lláh as the two Revelators of this age.

Turning old pages, looking at drawings and rare photos, you

can get yourself back into mid-19th century Persia again, feel your-

self under that tender sky, sheathed in that very silence, breathing

the warm smell of summer roses, setting your lips to tea with the

lime juice and sugar, and since it was in a holder of silver filigree,

not burning your fingers on the glass. You can look off across the

gold plains of Ṭihrán, that were studded with green garden clusters,

and in season webbed with purple Judas trees, to the almost

19,000-foot, eternally white cone of Damávand. In those days it

could be seen from every open point of the city.

Less than four decades before the American would come to that

country, a young Persian, Mullá Ḥusayn-i-Bushrú’í, at first quite

alone, played there a strange, predestined role. Of all those around

the world who then awaited the Lord’s corning, he would be the

first to find the Promised One—not in New England, not in

the Holy Land as had been expected by some, but far away in the

heart of Persia, deep in Shíráz, ‘the home of Persian culture, the

mother of Persian genius.’

Meanwhile in the United States, William Miller got the year

right—1844—roused the country and even in apologizing later on,

when he had been derided and condemned, would write: ‘Were I

to live my life over again, with the same evidence that I then had,

to be honest with God and man I should have to do as I have done.

*I confess my error, and acknowledge my disappointment*; yet I still

believe that the day of the Lord is near, even at the door.’

It was in lost, forgotten Persia that this Door—this Báb—would

swing wide to the new age at the touch of Mullá Ḥusayn.

Persian names of the last century were, you might say, a sum-

ming-up of the individual, of his birthplace or work, and his

station in life. The actual name, in this case Ḥusayn (for he was

named after the Imám Ḥusayn, the grandson of Muḥammad,

which shows he was a Muslim of the Shí‘ih branch) was only a part

of his designation. ‘Mullá’ meant he was a scholar, particularly a

religious teacher, cleric or theologian; and the last part of the title

referred to his birthplace, a town called Bushrúyih in the province

Khurásán.

He was slender, even delicate, and there was a tremor in his

hands. He had until this time lived only the life of books, and it was

through books of holy Islamic traditions that he had found the

signs which drew him to Shíráz. Shíráz, its title ‘the Abode of

Divine Knowledge’; founded or else rebuilt in the 7th century,

sacked by Tamerlane, beautified again, then under the Qájár

Dynasty brought low once more.

Which is how he came, on that immortal evening, in that small

upper room over the low, star-silvered roofs of the town, while the

orange tree sent up incense from the courtyard, and from a minaret,

across the silence, floated the muezzin’s call to prayer—to gaze on

the Báb, to listen to Him, to be His first disciple.

In any case this young intellectual saw and knew that the

Advent had taken place, and he was enrolled by the Báb as the

first ‘Letter of the Living.’ His fellow-adventists soon followed

him, for such an explosion of light could not be hidden, and there

would be eighteen of these Letters in all—twenty, counting the

two Manifestations of God, the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh: Letters

making up the Word, and all generated, as when you write, from

the First Point made as you set pen to page.

After his first ecstasy of discovery, Mullá Ḥusayn was soon

dealt a terrible blow. He had thought the Báb would choose him

as a fellow-pilgrim to Mecca—where, in fulfilment of age-old

prophecy, the Báb had to betake Himself to declare His Advent

before the holiest shrine in the Muslim world—the Ka‘bih set

with its Black Stone. But no, it now turned out that it would be

someone else, the Omega of the Eighteen Letters—not himself,

Mullá Ḥusayn, the Alpha—whom the Báb would choose as His

companion on that journey.

But the Báb gave Mullá Ḥusayn a special mission, and instructed

him so lovingly as to the path they all had chosen, the way to their

own certain death, that his heart was comforted.

‘My Covenant with you is now accomplished,’ the Báb told

him … ‘Be not dismayed at the sight of the degeneracy and per-

versity of this generation, for the Lord of the Covenant shall

assuredly assist you … and shall lead you from victory to victory.

Even as the cloud that rains its bounty upon the earth, traverse the

land from end to end, and shower upon its people the blessings

which the Almighty, in His mercy, has deigned to confer upon you.

Forbear with the ‘ulamás (divines), and resign yourself to the will

of God. Raise the cry: “Awake, awake, for lo! the Gate of God is

open, and the morning Light is shedding its radiance upon all

mankind”!’[2]

As if looking at him from across the tomb, the Báb continued,

‘We have left you behind to face the onslaught of a fierce, relentless

enemy. Rest assured, however, that a bounty unspeakably glorious

shall be conferred upon you. Follow the course of your journey

towards the north, and visit on your way Iṣfáhán, Káshán, Qum

and Ṭihrán. Beseech almighty Providence that He may graciously

enable you to attain, in that capital … the mansion of the Be-

loved. A secret lies hidden in that city. When made manifest it

shall turn the earth into paradise.’

There had been more as to his perilous mission, which the Báb

promised he would accomplish, until which time, the Báb said,

should the whole world arise against him no one would be able to

harm a hair of his head. There had been the hope held out that he,

Mullá Ḥusayn, would look upon the Báb in this world again. And

almost at the very last hour of their being together, the Báb had

said: ‘Grieve not that you have not been chosen to accompany Me

on My pilgrimage to Ḥijáz. I shall, instead, direct your steps to that

city which enshrines a Mystery of such transcendent holiness as

neither Ḥijáz nor Shíráz can hope to rival … The essence of

power is now dwelling in you, and the company of His chosen

angels revolves around you. His almighty arms will surround you,

and His unfailing Spirit will ever continue to guide your steps.’ 3

And that is how Mullá Ḥusayn came to be standing high on the

pass here, looking backward across Shíráz, ‘The Green City of

Solomon,’ to him the jewel box that still held, he knew, the price-

less treasure he of all on earth had been the first to find. The road

he had travelled ran broad and straight, under the great arch down

there in which was preserved ‘the Qur’án that weighs seventeen

maunds,’ down to that bridge over the dry river, and through the

Iṣfáhán Gate.

This point where he stood on the road is called the Pass of ‘God

is Most Great!’ because here after long journeying the beauty of

Shíráz, through a wide break in the mountains, bursts on your sight

and you have to cry out, ‘Alláh-u-Akbar!’

He could see the grassy plain, the far grape-blue mountains still

under snow, and nearer the cypresses, rounded domes and thread-

ing minarets of the vast city below him, drifting up to him in per-

fumed silence. Way to his left was the silver water of Lake Mahálú,

and to his right lay vineyards and gardens, while below the Arch

under which he had come was the ghost of the ‘rose-walks’ of

Ḥáfiẓ, Persia’s 14th century ‘Tongue of the Invisible World,’

buried down there in a white-walled enclosure amid the black

cypresses; lying under an oblong stone engraved with his verses,

some of which might well have passed through the mind of Mullá

Ḥusayn in his exalted state—this one, perhaps, who knows? ‘Be a

slave, 0 heart, to the King of the world, and be a King!’ Or this, from

the great Sa‘dí, also at rest in the dust of the city down there, for it

too would have a subtle meaning for Mullá Ḥusayn at that hour and

till the close of his brief life: ‘Shíráz,’ Sa‘dí had written, ‘Shíráz that

wrenches the traveller’s heart from his native home.’

What was it his Lord, his Beloved, had said at the end, not to

him only but to the Letters of the Living as He sent them out

across Persia to teach and die? Not to them only, but to all the

people who would, throughout all the years of the future, not in

Persia alone but throughout all the Seven Regions of the earth,

come to know and love the Báb as the Eighteen now knew and

loved Him? He had gathered them before Him and told them:

*O My beloved friends! You are the bearers of the name of God in*

*this Day. You have been chosen as the repositories of His mystery.*

*It behoves each one of you to manifest the attributes of God, and to*

*exemplify by your deeds and words the signs of His righteousness,*

*His power and glory. The very members of your body must bear*

*witness to the loftiness of your purpose, the integrity of your life, the*

*reality of your faith, and the exalted character of your devotion.*

*For verily I say, this is the Day spoken of by God in His Book: ‘On*

*that day will We set a seal upon their mouths; yet shall their hands*

*speak unto Us, and their feet shall bear witness to that which they*

*shall have done.’*[4]

This was the beginning of what the Báb had said. It was time to

obey Him now, to look away from Shíráz, to put even the Báb out

of his mind, if that were possible, because even love could hold him

back, and go on as he had been instructed, to Iṣfáhán. He journeyed

forward, up the stony road.

In those days there was more coming and going on the roads than

we now think, for merchants, envoys, soldiers and pilgrims have

always put the long miles behind them. People usually banded

together in a convoy for greater safety, with armed guards, pack

horses, baggage mules, some travellers on horseback; others, veiled

women perhaps, sat in covered panniers for two, one balanced on

either side of the horse, jolting along, crying out when their animal

lurched or stumbled. The muleteers went on foot. A. V. Williams

Jackson’s muleteers could walk ‘forty miles a day … without

apparent fatigue.’ There were, too, messengers famous for their

endurance, who walked. They had their counterpart in Shaykh

Salmán, Bahá’u’lláh’s courier who, once every year, walked back

and forth between the provinces of Persia and ‘Akká, on the

Mediterranean Sea.

There were regular stopping places where most people stayed

overnight—post houses or caravanserais along the way. One such

caravanserai on this road between Shíráz and Iṣfáhán was a ruined

one of stone. Its central court within the protecting outer walls held

carcasses of camels or horses in various stages of decay, besides live

animals and their bales. Springtime, it was crowded with tribesmen

marching toward summer pastures, driving their donkeys, sheep

and goats, bringing along their black hair tents, their babies and

infirm and all they owned, the rough beauty of their women’s faces

not covered by a veil. The average traveller had, perhaps, a prayer

rug, which he laid down in an empty, arched niche on the broad

platform above the open court. He got out his samovar, made his

tea, ate his lumps of goat cheese and flap of folded bread, wrapped

himself in his cloak and slept on his rug.

His noontime meal, where maybe a blue runnel of pure water

passed, edged with a line of green along the roadside and with a few

trees fanning above, and crested hoopoes darting in the clear air,

provided another break in the endless hours.

They did not seem endless to Mullá Ḥusayn. He ignored neigh-

bouring Persepolis which Alexander burned—including the Scrip-

tures of Zoroaster, written in golden ink on 12,000 oxskins. He

passed uncaring near the ‘Rustam picture’ carvings, where lie

Darius and other Achaemenian Kings. He did not turn aside into

that desolate plain where once rose a royal city, mile on mile, for

the ruined tomb of Cyrus, of him who, 550 years before Jesus

Christ, conquered the Medes and humbled Babylon. He would

have seen there, standing in that emptiness, a rectangular house of

stone on a base of giant steps. ‘Mosque of the Mother of Solomon,’

the muleteers called it. A tree sprouted from its roof, and only

scholars remembered that an inscription there once read: ‘O Man,

I am Cyrus … who founded the Empire of the Persians, and was

King of Asia. Grudge me not therefore this little earth …’

He went on, saw a flock of storks, saw gazelles, came to a shep-

herd in a stiff sheepskin coat, rolled turban and shoes of rough hide,

gathering his fat-tailed sheep. In a village he may have passed

workmen leisurely putting up a wall of sunbaked brick, singing the

builder’s song. Used to these sights and sounds, he paid them no

mind; nor to the camel thorn along the road; nor to occasional,

reptilian caravans that came from another world and passed back

into it again, the camels’ disdainful heads tilting, floating as the

loaded beasts padded purposefully along, a brass bell and tassels at

the neck, also wearing blue beads to ward off the evil eye.

He took, doubtless, the summer road that leads through moun-

tains to the south west of Yazdíkhást, unique boat-city that rises

out of a sunken river bed, went past Qum-i-Sháh—there was a blue

dome here—passed stony plains between raw, black hills, came to a

rugged defile, and found himself in the long plain of Iṣfáhán. The

city lay under pale blue smoke, miles of ruins about it, for it had

shrunk down from former days. He could see pavilions and towers,

giant domes, and bridges of old lace at the river. He knew the

biggest, pear-shaped, turquoise dome of all was the Sháh’s Mosque

at the vast royal square; there, a marble goal post at each end still

showed where the Princes had played polo in now vanished times,

where a golden goblet would be set up on a tall post and shot at for

a prize as the royal marksmen galloped by.

He may have rested briefly at the Farewell Fountain, that place,

marked by a single tree, to which the people of Iṣfáhán come out

with their southward journeying friends, to say goodbye, ‘*Iṣfáhán,*

*nisf-i-jihán*’, he may have repeated to himself: if I rouse this city I

have wakened half the planet, for ‘Iṣfáhán is half the world.’ This

was the dazzling capital of Persia two hundred years gone, under

Sháh ‘Abbás the Great in the days of Elizabeth. As for the city’s

age, who knows? In the second century after Christ, Ptolemy the

Greek geographer called it *Aspadana* (the equivalent of Old

Persian for ‘having horses as a gift’). In the twelfth, Benjamin of

Tudela noted that its Jewish inhabitants numbered 15,000. ‘We

came to a towne called Spaham,’ Josafa Barbaro wrote in 1474.

Long before, in legend’s mists, it was here that Kávih the Black-

smith was born, Kávih, crying out for justice, who stripped off his

leather work apron, fixed it to a spear, and carried it against a tyrant

who had usurped the throne. For centuries thereafter (till the

Arabs took it) this leather apron, set with gold and jewels, was the

royal flag of Persia, the standard held out at the head of Persia’s

armies, and the keeping of this treasured flag was the right of

Iṣfáhán.

Over the bridge, the one with the thirty-three arches, below

which, on the pebbly banks, the dyers spread out their bright, new

cloth, and which was thronged all day till nightfall and the curfew

horn, was a wide Christian Armenian suburb called Julfá.

How often had his Lord referred to Jesus Christ. That part of

the Báb’s farewell to the Letters of the Living came back to him

now:

*Ponder the words of Jesus addressed to His disciples, as He sent*

*them forth to propagate the Cause of God. In words such as these,*

*He bade them arise and fulfil their mission: ‘Ye are even as the fire*

*which in the darkness of the night has been kindled upon the*

*mountain-top. Let your light shine before the eyes of men. Such*

*must be the purity of your character and the degree of your renun-*

*ciation, that the people of the earth may through you recognize and*

*be drawn closer to the heavenly Father who is the Source of purity*

*and grace. For none has seen the Father who is in heaven. You who*

*are His spiritual children must by your deeds exemplify His virtues,*

*and witness to His glory. You are the salt of the earth, but if the*

*salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted?’*[5]

Here in Iṣfáhán Mullá Ḥusayn betook himself to a religious

college, a large, two-storey structure built around a courtyard on

which many rooms looked down through tiled archways. It had a

rectangular pool of water, sycamore trees, protecting outer walls

and a massive gate. The leaders in Iṣfáhán already knew the young

voyager as eloquent and a scholar, but had no inkling that he had

been transformed and that another man now stood before them.

The pulpits roundabout were offered to him, and when he spoke

the masses jammed the mosques. He preached to them the Báb

made manifest, the advent of the Revelator inspired by God with

new words for the new age. Seeing his success the clergy protested

to the lay authorities, saying Mullá Ḥusayn was disrupting Islám.

The wise Governor left it up to the ‘ulamás, maintaining this was

their concern, so for a time at least Mullá Ḥusayn could reach the

people. This governor, the delicate, pale Georgian, who in the

years to come would offer his life and all he possessed to the Báb,

was a man of vast wealth. The story went that the Sháh had sum-

moned him and said: ‘We hear that you live like a King in Isfahan.’

Whereat the governor answered: ‘Yes, Sire, your governors must

live like kings, to justify your title “King of Kings”.’

Tension mounted in the city; under the tongue lashing of the

‘ulamás, the people grew restive. Mullá Ḥusayn was a scholar, not

a soldier, he was frail and not armed, but he was safe. They might

whip up the mobs against him, running men might turn on him,

killers, their lips drawn back, the unseeing glare of hate in their

eyes, but no one could harm him. Till his mission was accomplished,

not a hair of his head could be touched.

When the time came he went out through the city gate, through

the poppy fields, past the high, cylindrical pigeon-towers with their

castellated tops, and continued on toward his next city, Káshán. Up

and over the long mountain pass he laboured, on and down where

the miles wound through stone walls, got to orchards and green

fields, passed the wide, half-natural lake built by the Ṣafaví Kings,

went on by a deep depression in the rock that people called the

hoofprint of ‘Alí’s horse, saw at last the hundred-foot-high minaret

that first breaks the level of Káshán, saw the vaulted roofs of sun-

baked brick.

Eight centuries before Christ, men say, the city of Káshán was

already here. Much as it is now, its summer heat, its collected rain

water and the reservoir at Fín, its melons and figs, its neighbouring

eighteen villages, were described in the 14th century. According to

Odoric of Pordenone (1320), this was the city from which came the

Three Wise Men; and from here these Kings got to Jerusalem,

with God’s help, in thirteen days. A fine royal city, he says, rich in

bread, wine and everything, though ravaged by the Tartars. In the

15th century Josafa Barbaro not only wrote of it but lived here for a

while, speaking of it as the ‘well enhabited citie called Cassan,

wheare for the moste parte they make sylkes and fustian …’

Here were some, including a prominent merchant, who listened

to the new Message. A famed divine, however, a friend of Mullá

Ḥusayn’s, could not give up his rank and power for the new Cause.

And the messenger was saddened, for he had tried to bring his

friend the pearl of inestimable price, and the friend had chosen

frippery instead.

Mullá Ḥusayn went on, out of Káshán. Did he rest, perhaps, by

the roadside and have a white, gondola-shaped slice of melon at

Nasrábád, or stop further on in the splendid, half-ruined caravan-

serai that goes back to the Ṣafaví Kings—glimpse the dimly-vaulted

stables, the empty rooms and vacant stair; or did he taste the

brackish water at Shúráb? Had you asked him afterward, he could,

perhaps, not have told you, in the condition he was in. The Báb

Himself, after their first encounter, had cautioned him: ‘If you

leave in such a state, whoever sees you will assuredly say: “This

poor youth has lost his mind.”’ Always within his heart, he could

hear that voice which had enslaved him. The universe was a handful

of dust in his cupped hands. It was the first morning of creation,

and he was the first that awoke.

He repeated over to himself still more of those parting words of

his Liege Lord:

*O My Letters! Verily I say, immensely exalted is this Day above*

*the days of the Apostles of old. Nay, immeasurable is the difference!*

*You are the witnesses of the dawn of the promised Day of God. You*

*are the partakers of the mystic chalice of His Revelation. Gird up the*

*loins of endeavour, and be mindful of the words of God as revealed*

*in His Book: ‘Lo, the Lord thy God is come, and with Him is the*

*company of His angels arrayed before Him!’*[6]

Here at hand was the desert in earnest, ‘sand, salt and solitude.’

Here was the boundless waste that stretches to the eastern frontier—

turn off the two-foot track and be sucked down with your load and

camel, lost and blotted out forever, sinking, strangling in the salt

swamps. But his road lay flat beneath the hills, along its edge. And

he came on into Qum, the ‘Blue City,’ with its manufacture of blue

tiles and all its blue and greenish domes, dwarfed by a golden one.

Under this rests Fáṭimih, sister of Imám Riḍá, the eighth Imám,

eighth victim of the split that cracked Islám at the Prophet’s death,

so that the Muslim Caliphs murdered the Muslim Imáms down the

long years.

The Báb’s envoy taught some here, but not till later would the

seeds spring up. The earth was not ready for them then. He thought

often of the people muttering words they did not understand,

making gestures no Prophet had ever taught, mimicking, parroting

down the generations, speaking, thinking, doing what other men—

no better than themselves—had decided they should. From all such

man-made forms, his Lord had saved him. Again he returned in

his mind to the Báb’s farewell:

*The days when idle worship was deemed sufficient are ended. The*

*time is come when naught but the purest motive, supported by deeds*

*of stainless purity, can ascend to the throne of the Most High and*

*be acceptable unto Him. ‘The good word riseth up unto Him, and*

*the righteous deed will cause it to be exalted before Him.’ You are*

*the lowly, of whom God has thus spoken in His Book: ‘And We*

*desire to show favour to those who were brought low in the land, and*

*to make them spiritual leaders among men, and to make them Our*

*heirs.’ You have been called to this station; you will attain to it,*

*only if you arise to trample beneath your feet every earthly desire,*

*and endeavour to become those ‘honoured servants of His who speak*

*not till He hath spoken, and who do His bidding.’*[7]

The pull of Ṭihrán was stronger than ever, and he passed through

the blue-tiled gate and over the long bridge across the river bed and

went on, leaving Qum to drop behind him into the salt swamps.

The desert, flecked with salt, lay off on his right, to the east. Bare

black hills jutted up, knife-sharp, and he came to that place they

call the Valley of the Angel of Death, a spot of desolate defiles,

where, the muleteers say, monsters appear in the guise of people

you love and beckon you away from the caravan to a ghastly death.

But he went on unheeding. After a while he could see, like a spark,

the gold-flash of Sháh ‘Abdu’l-‘Aẓím, the shrine which rises on the

edge of ancient Rayy. This was only six miles south of his goal.

This shrine was a refuge city for hunted criminals; the whole

town was a sanctuary. Here not a finger could be laid on a man, no

matter what he had done. The only thing was, the greater the

crime, the closer in to the shrine must the outlaw remain; a mur-

derer could not set foot beyond the courtyard of the golden mosque,

while a debtor could walk free, so long as he kept within the city

walls.

Beyond them the earth is covered with a shrub that is pungent

when crushed underfoot. You could stand here in the fragrant

stillness and look off across the sweep of plains to Ṭihrán and

Damávand, seeming far nearer than they are, through the crystal

air. You could hear from somewhere, like water dripping down on

hollow metal, the rhythmic thunk of camel bells. Beside you rises a

high, circular rampart of white stone—the Tower of Silence, where

the Zoroastrians expose their dead. In troubled times, fearing

molestation, they left no opening in the old tower. They used ropes

and ladders then, to work the corpse up over the side, and laid it

down within, to the vultures and the sky.

Rayy is old, but Ṭihrán, up there to the north, is ‘new.’ It has

been the capital only since 1788, with the advent of the Qájár

Dynasty. Before that, the capital was Iṣfáhán, and before that, in

the 16th century, Qazvín—the Casbeen of *Paradise Lost*. Ṭihrán

began to go up as a modern city about seven hundred years ago,

when Rayy began to go down. The geographer Yáqút, about 1220,

mentioned it only as ‘a stronghold, one farsakh distant from Rayy,’

and said the inhabitants dug their dwellings underground and were

always at war with each other. ‘With the rise of Ṭihrán to power,’

a modern authority has written, ‘Media has been able once more to

reclaim the supremacy she lost to Persia in the time of Cyrus, and

the present capital occupies a site that is almost identical with the

ancient city of Rages (Avestan *Ragha*, Old Persian *Raga*), now

Rayy … which shared with Ecbatana [Hamadán] in antiquity the

honors of supremacy over Iran.’

Up there beyond the roofs and tree tops of the city was the

Alburz mountain wall, bare but many-coloured—amethyst, orange,

jade green—from the mineral deposits within, and strewn with

cloud shadows; and there in the northeast corner rose the cone of

Damávand, Persia’s white eternal symbol of man’s freedom under

justice, for in its heart is chained forever the tyrant Ḍaḥḥák, the

tyrant that Kávih the Blacksmith brought down. What secret would

be disclosed to him in that city, Mullá Ḥusayn wondered. What

holy Mystery that neither Mecca nor Shíráz could hope to rival?

And where was the House of the Beloved?

He listened again to the voice of the Báb in his heart:

*You are the first Letters that haze been generated from the Primal*

*Point, the first Springs that have welled out from the Source of this*

*Revelation. Beseech the Lord your God to grant that no earthly*

*entanglements, no worldly affections, no ephemeral pursuits, may*

*tarnish the purity, or embitter the sweetness, of that grace which*

*flows through you. I am preparing you for the advent of a mighty*

*Day. Exert your utmost endeavour that, in the world to come, I, who*

*am now instructing you, may, before the mercy-seat of God, rejoice*

*in your deeds and glory in your achievements. The secret of the Day*

*that is to come is now concealed. It can neither be divulged nor*

*estimated. The newly born babe of that Day excels the wisest and*

*most venerable men of this time, and the lowliest and most un-*

*learned of that period shall surpass in understanding the most*

*erudite and accomplished divines of this age. Scatter throughout the*

*length and breadth of this land, and, with steadfast feet and sancti-*

*fied hearts, prepare the way for His coming.*[8]

Guided by chance, perhaps, Mullá Ḥusayn went to live in one of

the empty, cell-like rooms of the college of Páy-i-Minár (which

means at the foot of the minaret). He stayed here incognito, did not

go out to preach, but met, quietly, a great many people. Count de

Gobineau says that everybody wanted to see him or to have seen

him, and that the Sháh and the Prime Minister summoned him as

well, heard out his doctrines and saw the newly-written Texts.

(When there was something to copy the Persians sat and copied it,

taking out their pen boxes and writing rapidly with their powdered

ink and reed pens, from right to left, the paper resting in the palm

of their left hand, and many handwritten copies of the Báb’s words

must already have been going the rounds.)

Early every morning he would leave his room and be gone till

after sundown, when he would quietly return and shut the door on

his day. Among the instructors at this college was the chief, for

Ṭihrán, of that Muslim adventist group to which Mullá Ḥusayn

had himself belonged, and among whom he had been so valued that

at the death of its leader, Siyyid Káẓim, they had wished to put

Mullá Ḥusayn in the departed one’s place. By now word of the

young Mullá’s conversion had spread from mouth to mouth, and

his former co-religionists saw him as a Judas, a betrayer of their

cause. They could not believe that the Promised One had indeed

come, they wanted to go on expecting Him forever. Now the

instructor upbraided Mullá Ḥusayn for preaching the Advent, and

said if he kept on this way he would destroy his own former group.

With all the learning and passion at his command, Mullá Ḥusayn

tried to win this man over to the Báb. Noting it was useless, the

convert ended by saying that in any case he would not be long here

in the capital, and that he had not been unfaithful to the founders

of his original belief.

It chanced that from his neighbouring cell a student overheard

all this. He listened in horror to the arrogance and contempt which

was his till then much-respected teacher’s only answer to the

visitor’s obviously sincerely-meant account. At midnight while the

college slept, he crept to Mullá Ḥusayn’s door and knocked. Asked

to enter, he found the Mullá seated there, in the Persian fashion, on

the floor beside his lamp. Wrought up, close to tears, the student

tried to tell him what had happened.

‘I know now why I chose this place,’ the Mullá answered. ‘Where

the master was blind, may the pupil see. What city is your home?’

‘My home is Núr,’ was the reply.

At this a great change came over Mullá Ḥusayn. Eagerly, he

asked the boy after the family of the late Mírzá Buzurg of Núr. Was

there now, he wanted to know, a new and worthy Head to that

illustrious house?

‘Yes,’ was the answer, ‘there is his son. Mírzá Ḥusayn-‘Alí.’

‘And what does He do?’

‘He cheers the disconsolate and feeds the hungry.’

‘What of His rank and position?’

‘He has none—apart from befriending the poor and the stranger.’

‘How does He spend His days?’

‘He roams the woods. He loves the countryside.’

‘How old is He?’

‘About twenty-eight.’

Mullá Ḥusayn radiated joy. He learned that, himself from Núr,

this student often went to pay his respects to Mírzá Ḥusayn-‘A1í.

He got out a scroll wrapped up in a piece of cloth, and urgently

requested the youth to deliver it the very next morning, at dawn—

an hour when many would flock to the door of noblemen’s houses.

And this was the second dazzling night in the life of Mullá

Ḥusayn. He had found the Báb, Revelator and Herald, in Shíráz.

Now in Ṭihrán it would be given him to learn the core of the Báb’s

Message, to discover ‘Him Whom God Shall Manifest,’ Revelator

and Founder of a World Faith, who would assure the dawning of

the universal Day of God. Again it would be he, ‘Mullá Ḥusayn,

unworthy though he felt himself to be, helpless against the massed

power of the world, facing death anyway, to be the first to know.

He must have wept, prayed and exulted that night, and remembered

the Báb’s last promise in His Farewell to the Letters of the Living:

*Heed not your weaknesses and frailty; fix your gaze upon the invin-*

*cible power of the Lord, your God, the Almighty. Has He not, in*

*past days, caused Abraham, in spite of His seeming helplessness, to*

*triumph over the forces of Nimrod? Has He not enabled Moses,*

*whose staff was His only companion, to vanquish Pharaoh and his*

*hosts? Has He not established the ascendancy of Jesus, poor and*

*lowly as He was in the eyes of men, over the combined forces of the*

*Jewish people? Has He not subjected the barbarous and militant*

*tribes of Arabia to the holy and transforming discipline of Muḥam-*

*mad, His Prophet? Arise in His name, put your trust wholly in*

*Him, and be assured of ultimate victory.*[9]

At daybreak the next morning the student left the college and

passed along the shadowy, tortuous lanes between the high mud

walls. Already the water carriers were sprinkling the streets from

their black, hairy goatskin bags, to lay the dust; already, though the

heat was not yet come, the acacia blossoms perfumed the air. He

came to Bahá’u’lláh’s house, to the house of that Mystery which

neither Mecca nor Shíráz, neither Muḥammad nor the Báb, could

hope to rival, and found His brother standing at the gate. The

brother soon returned with a welcome for him, and bowing low the

student was brought in to the Head of the house. He took out the

scroll and handed it to the brother, who laid it before Bahá’u’lláh.

Asking them both to be seated, Bahá’u’lláh unfolded the scroll, and

in vibrant tones, began to read.

He then glanced at His brother and remarked: ‘Músá, what have

you to say?’ He added that if you believed in the Qur’án, and that

it came from God, you would have to believe as much of the words

now in His hands. They saw that to Him this was a new Faith,

come out of Islám as Christianity had come out of Judaism before

it. They knew that the Qur’án teaches belief in the long succession

of Prophets preceding Muḥammad, saw He was telling them that

just as God had addressed mankind a number of times before, He

now had spoken again.

Then He sent the student away with a message and present for

Mullá Ḥusayn: He sent him, besides His appreciation and love, a

loaf of Russian sugar and a package of tea. Tea and that special

sugar were rare in Persia then; they were used as gifts between

friends.

Waiting back at the college, Mullá Ḥusayn, seeing the messenger

return, leapt to his feet. Bowing low, he took Bahá’u’lláh’s gift in

his trembling hands, and raised it to his lips. What could it all

mean, the student wondered. He knew that to Mullá Ḥusayn, even

gold and silver and jewels were children’s playthings, and this was

only sugar and tea.

A few days after this, Mullá Ḥusayn left the city. As he went, he

looked into the student’s eyes. ‘Divulge not His name,’ he said.

‘Pray that the Almighty may protect Him, that, through Him, He

may exalt the downtrodden, enrich the poor, and redeem the

fallen. The secret of things is concealed from our eyes. Ours is the

duty to raise the call of the New Day and to proclaim this Divine

Message unto all people. Many a soul will, in this city, shed his

blood in this path. That blood will water the Tree of God, will

cause it to flourish, and to overshadow all mankind.’[10]

Then he left the boy and went away, along that road from which

there was no turning back.

## The White Silk Dress

THE BODY LIES CRUSHED INTO a well, with rocks over it, some-

where near the centre of Ṭihrán. Buildings have gone up around it,

and traffic passes along the road near where the garden was. Buses

push donkeys to one side, automobiles from across the world

graze the camels’ packs, carriages rock by. Toward sunset men

scoop up water from a stream and fling it into the road to lay the

dust. And the body is there, crushed into the ground, and men

come and go, and think it is hidden and forgotten.

Beauty in women is a relative thing. Take Laylí, for instance,

whose lover Majnún had to go away into the desert when she left

him, because he could no longer bear the faces of others; where-

upon the animals came, and sat around him in a circle, and mourned

with him, as any number of poets and painters will tell you—even

Laylí was not beautiful. Sa‘dí describes how one of the kings of

Arabia reasoned with Majnún in vain, and how finally ‘It came

into the king’s heart to look upon the beauty of Laylí, that he

might see the face that had wrought such ruin. He bade them seek

through the tribes of Arabia and they found her and brought her to

stand in the courtyard before him. The king looked at her; he saw

a woman dark of skin and slight of body, and he thought little of

her, for the meanest servant in his harem was fairer than she.

Majnún read the king’s mind, and he said, “O king, you must look

upon Laylí through the eyes of Majnún, till the inner beauty of her

may be manifest.”’ Beauty depends on the eyes that see it. At all

events we know that Ṭáhirih was beautiful according to the

thought of her time.

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Perhaps she opened her mirror-case one day—the eight-sided

case with a lacquer nightingale singing on it to a lacquer rose—and

looked inside, and thought how no record of her features had been

made to send into the future. She probably knew that age would

never scrawl over the face, to cancel the beauty of it, because she

was one of those who die young. But perhaps, kneeling on the

floor by the long window, her book laid aside, the mirror before

her—she thought how her face would vanish, just as Laylí’s had,

and Shírín’s, and all the others. So that she slid open her pen-case,

and took out the reed pen, and holding the paper in her palm,

wrote the brief self-portrait that we have of her: ‘Small black

mole at the edge of the lip A black lock of hair by either cheek—’

she wrote; and the wooden pen creaked as she drove it over the

paper.

Ṭáhirih loved pretty clothes, and perfumes, and she loved to

eat. She could eat sweets all day long. Once, years after Ṭáhirih

had gone, an American woman travelled to ‘Akká and sat at

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s table; the food was good, and she ate plentifully,

and then asked the Master’s forgiveness for eating so much. He

answered, ‘Virtue and excellence consist in true faith in God,

not in having a small or a large appetite for food… Jináb-i-

Ṭáhirih had a good appetite. When asked concerning it, she

would answer, “It is recorded in the Holy Traditions that one of

the attributes of the people of paradise is ‘partaking of food,

continually’”.’[1]

When she was a child, instead of playing games, she would listen

to the theological discussions of her father and uncle, who were

great ecclesiastics in Qazvín. Soon she could teach Islám down to

the last ḥadíth. Her brother said, ‘We, all of us, her brothers, her

cousins, did not dare to speak in her presence, so much did her

knowledge intimidate us.’ This from a Persian brother, who comes

first in everything, and whose sisters wait upon him. As she grew,

she attended the courses given by her father and uncle; she sat in

the same hall with two or three hundred men students, but hidden

behind a curtain, and more than once refuted what the two old

men were expounding. In time some of the haughtiest ‘ulamás

consented to certain of her views.

Ṭáhirih married her cousin and gave birth to children. It must

have been the usual Persian marriage, where the couple hardly met

before the ceremony, and where indeed the suitor was allowed

only a brief glimpse of the girl’s face unveiled. Love marriages

were thought shameful, and this must have been pre-arranged in

the proper way. No, if she ever cared for anyone with a human love,

we like to think it was Quddús, whom she was to know in later

years; Quddús, who was a descendant of the Imám Ḥasan, grand-

son of the Prophet Muḥammad. People loved him very easily,

they could hardly turn their eyes away from him. He was one of

the first to be persecuted for his Master’s Faith on Persian soil—in

Shíráz, when they tortured him and led him through the streets by

a halter. Later on, it was Quddús who commanded the besieged

men at Shaykh Ṭabarsí, and when the fort had fallen through the

enemy’s treachery, and been demolished, he was given over to

the mob, in his home city of Bárfurúsh. He was led through the

market-place in chains, while the crowds attacked him. They

fouled his clothing and slashed him with knives, and in the end

they hacked his body apart and burned what was left. Quddús had

never married, for years his mother had lived in the hope of seeing

his wedding day; as he walked to his death, he remembered her

and cried out, ‘Would that my mother were with me, and could see

with her own eyes the splendour of my nuptials!’[2]

So Ṭáhirih lived in Qazvín, the honey-coloured city of sun-

baked brick, with her slim, tinkling poplars, and the bands of blue

water along the yellow dust of the roads. She lived in a honey-

coloured house round a courtyard, cool like the inside of an

earthen jar, and there were niches in the white-washed walls of the

rooms, where she set her lamp, and kept her books, wrapped up in

a hand-blocked cotton cloth. But where other women would have

been content with what she had, she could not rest; her mind

harried her; and at last she broke away and went over the mountains

out of Persia, to the domed city of Karbilá, looking for the Truth.

Then one night she had a dream. She saw a young man standing

in the sky; He had a book in His hands and He read verses out of it.

Ṭáhirih wakened and wrote down the verses to remember them,

and later, when she found the same lines again in a commentary

written by the Báb, she believed in Him. At once she spoke out.

She broadcast her conversion to the Faith of the Báb, and the

result was open scandal. Her husband, her father, her brothers,

begged her to give up the madness; in reply she proclaimed her

belief. She denounced her generation, the ways of her people,

polygamy, the veiling of women, the corruption in high places, the

evil of the clergy. She was not one of those who temporize and

walk softly. She spoke out; she cried out for a revolution in all

men’s ways; when at last she died it was by the words of her own

mouth, and she knew it.

Nicolas tells us that she had ‘an ardent temperament, a just,

clear intelligence, remarkable poise, untameable courage.’[3] Gobi-

neau says, ‘The chief characteristic of her speech was an almost

shocking plainness, and yet when she spoke … you were stirred

to the bottom of your soul, and filled with admiration, and tears

came from your eyes.’[4] Nabíl says that ‘None could resist her

charm; few could escape the contagion of her belief. All testified to

the extraordinary traits of her character, marvelled at her amazing

personality, and were convinced of the sincerity of her conviction.’[5]

Most significant is the memory of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. When He was

a child, Ṭáhirih held Him on her lap while she conversed with the

great Siyyid Yaḥyáy-i-Dárábí, who sat outside the door. He was a

man of immense learning. For example, he knew thirty thousand

Islamic traditions by heart; and he knew the depths of the Qur’án,

and would quote from the Holy Text to prove the truth of the

Báb. Ṭáhirih called out to him, ‘Oh Yaḥyá! Let deeds, not words,

testify to thy faith, if thou art a man of true learning.’[6] He listened,

and for the first time he understood; he saw that it was not enough

to prove the claim of the Báb, but that he must sacrifice himself to

spread the Faith. He rose and went out, and travelled and taught,

and in the end he laid down his life in the red streets of Nayríz.

They cut off his head, and stuffed it with straw, and paraded it

from city to city.

Ṭáhirih never saw the Báb. She sent Him a message, telling her

love for Him:

*The effulgence of Thy face flashed forth and the rays of Thy*

*visage arose on high;*

*Then speak the word ‘Am I not your Lord’ and ‘Thou art, Thou*

*art,’ we will all reply.*

*The trumpet-call ‘Am I not’ to greet, how loud the drums of*

*affliction beat!*

*At the gates of my heart there tramp the feet and camp the hosts of*

*calamity …*[7]

She set about translating into Persian the Báb’s Commentary on

the Súrih of Joseph. And He made her one of that undying com-

pany, the Letters of the Living.

We see her there in Karbilá, in the plains where more than a

thousand years before, Imám Ḥusayn, grandson of the Prophet, had

fallen of thirst and wounds. We see her on the anniversary of his

death, when all the town was wailing for him and all had put on

black in his memory, decked out in holiday clothing to celebrate

the birthday of the Báb. This was a new day, she told them; the old

agonies were spent. Then she travelled in her howdah, a sort of

curtained cage balanced on a horse, to Baghdád and continued her

teaching. Here the leaders of the Shí‘ih and Sunní, the Christian

and Jewish communities sought her out to convince her of her

folly; but she astounded them and routed them and in the end she

was ordered out of Turkish territory, and she travelled toward

Persia, gathering disciples for the Báb. Everywhere princes,

‘ulamás, government officials crowded to see her; she was praised

from a number of pulpits; one said, ‘Our highest attainments are

but a drop compared to the immensity of her knowledge.’ This of a

woman, in a country of silent, shadow-women, who lived their

quiet cycle behind the veil: marriage and sickness and childbirth,

stirring the rice and baking the flaps of bread, embroidering a leaf

on a strip of velvet, dying without a name.

Karbilá, Baghdád, Kirmánsháh, Hamadán. Then her father

summoned her home to Qazvín, and once she was back in his

house, her husband, the mujtahid, sent for her to return and live

with him. This was her answer: ‘Say to my presumptuous and

arrogant kinsman … “If your desire had really been to be a faith-

ful mate and companion to me, you would have hastened to meet

me in Karbilá and would on foot have guided my howdah all the

way to Qazvín. I would … have aroused you from your sleep of

heedlessness and would have shown you the way of truth. But this

was not to be … Neither in this world nor in the next can I ever

be associated with you. I have cast you out of my life forever”.’[8]

Then her uncle and her husband pronounced her a heretic, and set

about working against her night and day.

One day a mullá was walking through Qazvín, when he saw a

gang of ruffians dragging a man along the street; they had tied the

man’s turban around his neck for a halter, and were torturing him.

The bystanders said that this man had spoken in praise of two

beings, heralds of the Bab; and for that, Ṭáhirih’s uncle was banish-

ing him. The mullá was troubled in his mind. He was not a Bábí,

but he loved the two heralds of the Báb. He went to the bázár of the

swordmakers, and bought a dagger and a spearhead of the finest

steel, and bided his time. One dawn in the mosque, an old woman

hobbled in and spread down a rug. Then ‘Ṭáhirih’s uncle entered

alone, to pray on it. He was prostrating himself when the mullá ran

up and plunged the spearhead into his neck; he cried out, the

mullá flung him on his back, drove the dagger deep into his mouth

and left him bleeding on the mosque floor.

Qazvín went wild over the murder. Although the mullá con-

fessed, and was identified by his dying victim, many innocent

people were accused and made prisoner. In Ṭihrán, Bahá’u’lláh

suffered His first affliction—some days’ imprisonment—because

He sent them food and money and interceded for them. The heirs

now put to death an innocent man, Shaykh-Ṣáliḥ, an Arab from

Karbilá. This admirer of Ṭáhirih was the first to die on Persian

soil for the Cause of God; they killed him in Ṭihrán; he greeted his

executioner like a well-loved friend, and his last words were, ‘I dis-

carded the hopes and the beliefs of men from the moment I recog-

nized Thee, Thou who art my Hope and my Belief!’[9]

The remaining prisoners were later massacred, and it is said

that no fragments were left of their bodies to bury.

But still the heirs were not content. They accused Ṭáhirih. They

had her shut up in her father’s house and made ready to take her

life; however, her hour was not yet come. It was then that a beggar-

woman stood at the door and whined for bread; but she was no

beggar-woman—she brought word that one sent by Bahá’u’lláh,

was waiting with three horses near the Qazvín gate. Ṭáhirih went

away with the woman, and by daybreak she had ridden to Ṭihrán,

to the house of Bahá’u’lláh. All night long, they searched Qazvín

for her, but she had vanished.

The scene shifts to the gardens of Badasht. Mud walls enclosing

the jade orchards, a stream spread over the desert, and beyond, the

sharp mountains cutting into the sky. The Báb was in His prison

at Chihríq—‘The Grievous Mountain.’ He had two short years to

live.

And now Bahá’u’lláh came to Badasht, with eighty-one leading

Bábís as His companions. His destiny was still unguessed. He, the

Promised One of the Báb—of Muḥammad, of Christ, of Zoroaster,

and beyond Them of prophet after prophet down into the cen-

turies—was still unknown. How could they tell, at Badasht, that

His name would soon be loved around the world? How could they

hear it called upon, in cities across the earth; strange, unheard of

places: San Francisco, Buenos Aires, Adelaide? How could they see

the unguessed men and women that would arise to serve that name?

But Ṭáhirih saw. ‘Behold,’ she wrote, ‘the souls of His lovers

dancing mothlike, in the light that has flashed from His face!’[10]

It was in this village of Badasht that the old laws were broken.

Up to these days, the Bábís had thought that their Master was

come to enforce Islám; but here one by one they saw the old laws

go. And their confusion mounted, and their trouble, and some held

to the old ways and could not go forward into the new.

Then one day, as they sat with Bahá’u’lláh in the garden, an

unbearable thing came to pass. Ṭáhirih suddenly appeared before

them, and she stood in their presence with her face unveiled.

Ṭáhirih so holy; Ṭáhirih, whose very shadow a man would turn

his eyes from; Ṭáhirih, the most venerated woman of her time, had

stripped the veil from her face, and stood before them like a dancing

girl ready for their pleasure. They saw her flashing skin, and the

eyebrows joined together, like two swords, over the blazing eyes.

And they could not look. Some hid their faces in their hands, some

threw their garments over their heads. One cut his throat and fled

shrieking and covered with blood.

Then she spoke out in a loud voice to those who were left, and

they say her speech came like the words of the Qur’án. ‘This day,’

she said, ‘this day is the day on which the fetters of the past are

burst asunder—I am the Word which the Qá’im is to utter, the

Word which shall put to flight the chiefs and nobles of the earth!’

And she told them of the old order yielding to the new, and ended

with a prophetic verse from the Holy Book: ‘Verily, amid gardens

and rivers shall the pious dwell in the seat of truth, in the presence

of the potent King.’[11]

Ṭáhirih was born in the same year as Bahá’u’lláh, and she was

thirty-six when they took her life. European scholars have known

her for a long time, under one of her names, Qurratu’l-‘Ayn, which

means ‘Solace of the Eyes.’ The Persians sing her poems, which are

still waiting for a translator. Women in many countries are hearing

of her, getting courage from her. Men have paid tribute to her.

Gobineau says, after dwelling on her beauty, ‘(but) the mind and

the character of this young woman were much more remarkable.’[12]

And Sir Francis Younghusband: ‘… she gave up wealth, child,

name and position for her Master’s service … And her verses

were among the most stirring in the Persian language.’[13] And T. K.

Cheyne, ‘… one is chiefly struck by her fiery enthusiasm and by

her absolute unworldliness. This world was, in fact, to her, as it

was … to Kuddus, a mere handful of dust.’[14]

We see her now at a wedding in the Mayor’s house in Ṭihrán.

Her curls are short around her forehead, and she wears a flowered

kerchief reaching cape-wise to her shoulders and pinned under her

chin. The tight-waisted dress flows to the ground; it is handwoven,

trimmed with brocade and figured with the tree-of-life design. Her

little slippers curl up at the toes. A soft, perfumed crowd of women

pushes and rustles around her. They have left their tables, with the

pyramids of sweets in silver dishes. They have forgotten the

dancers, hired to stamp and jerk and snap their fingers for the

wedding feast. The guests are listening to Ṭáhirih, she who is a

prisoner here in the Mayor’s house. She is telling them of the new

Faith, of the new way of living it will bring, and they forget the

dancers and the sweets.

This Mayor, Mahmúd Khán, whose house was Ṭáhirih’s prison,

came to a strange end. Gobineau tells us that he was kind to

Ṭáhirih and tried to give her hope, during those days when she

waited in his house for the sentence of death. He adds that she did

not need hope. That whenever Mahmúd Khán would speak of her

imprisonment, she would interrupt, and tell him of her Faith; of

the true and the false; of what was real, and what was illusion.

Then one morning, Mahmúd Khán brought her good news; a

message from the Prime Minister; she had only to deny the Báb,

and although they would not believe her, they would let her go.

‘Do not hope,’ she answered, ‘that I would deny my Faith …

for so feeble a reason as to keep this inconstant, worthless form a

few days longer… You, Mahmoud-Khan, listen now to what I

am saying… The master you serve will not repay your zeal; on

the contrary, you shall perish, cruelly, at his command. Try, before

your death, to raise your soul up to knowledge of the Truth.’[15] He

went from the room, not believing. But her words were fulfilled in

1861, during the famine, when the people of Ṭihrán rioted for

bread.

Here is an eye-witness account of the bread riots of those days;

and of the death of Mahmúd Khán: ‘The distress in Tehran was

now culminating, and, the roads being almost impassable, supplies

of corn could not reach the city … As soon as a European showed

himself in the streets he was surrounded by famishing women,

supplicating assistance … on the 1st of March … the chief

Persian secretary came in, pale and trembling, and said there was

an émeute, and that the Kalántar, or mayor of the city, had just

been put to death, and that they were dragging his body stark naked

through the bazars. Presently we heard a great tumult, and on

going to the windows saw the streets filled with thousands of

people, in a very excited state, surrounding the corpse, which was

being dragged to the place of execution, where it was hung up by

the heels, naked, for three days.

‘On inquiry we learned that on the 28th of February, the Shah,

on coming in from hunting, was surrounded by a mob of several

thousand women, yelling for bread, who gutted the bakers’ shops

of their contents, under the very eyes of the king … Next day, the

1st of March … the Shah had ascended the tower, from which

Hajji Baba’s Zainab was thrown, and was watching the rioters with

a telescope. The Kalántar … splendidly dressed, with a long

retinue of servants, went up the tower and stood by the Shah, who

reproached him for suffering such a tumult to have arisen. On this

the Kalántar declared he would soon put down the riot, and going

amongst the women with his servants, he himself struck several of

them furiously with a large stick … On the women vociferously

calling for justice, and showing their wounds, the Shah summoned

the Kalántar, and said, “If thou art thus cruel to my subjects

before my eyes, what must be thy secret misdeeds!” Then turning

to his attendants, the king said,—“Bastinado him, and cut off his

beard.” And again, while this sentence was being executed, the

Shah uttered that terrible word, *Tanáb!* “Rope! Strangle him!”’[16]

One night Ṭáhirih called the Kalántar’s wife into her room. She

was wearing a dress of shining white silk; her hair gleamed, her

cheeks were delicately whitened. She had put on perfume and the

room was fragrant with it.

‘I am preparing to meet my Beloved,’ she said. ‘… the hour

when I shall be arrested and condemned to suffer martyrdom is fast

approaching.’[17]

After that, she paced in her locked room, and chanted prayers.

The Kalántar’s wife stood at the door, and listened to the voice

rising and falling, and wept. ‘Lord, Lord,’ she cried, ‘turn from

her … the cup which her lips desire to drink.’ We cannot force

the locked door and enter. We can only guess what those last hours

were. Not a time of distributing property, of saying good-bye to

friends, but rather of communion with the Lord of all peoples, the

One alone Beloved of all men. And His chosen ones, His saints and

His Messengers, They all were there; They are present at such

hours; she was already with Them, beyond the flesh.

She was waiting, veiled and ready, when they came to take her.

‘Remember me,’ she said as she went, ‘and rejoice in my gladness.’

She mounted a horse they had brought and rode away through the

Persian night. The starlight was heavy on the trees, and nightin-

gales rustled. Camel-bells tinkled from somewhere. The horses’

hooves thudded in the dust of the road.

And then bursts of laughter from the drunken officers in the

garden. Candles shone on their heavy faces, on the disordered

banquet-cloth, the wine spilling over. When Ṭáhirih stood near

them, their chief hardly raised his head. ‘Leave us!’ he shouted.

‘Strangle her!’ And he went back to his wine.

She had brought a silk handkerchief with her; she had saved it

for this from long ago. Now she gave it to them. They twisted it

round her throat, and wrenched it till the blood spurted. They

waited till her body was quiet, then they took it up and laid it in an

unfinished well in the garden. They covered it over and went away,

their eyes on the earth, afraid to look at each other.

Many seasons have passed over Ṭihrán since that hour. In

winter the mountains to the north have blazed with their snows,

shaken like a million mirrors in the sun. And springs came on, with

pear blossoms crowding the gardens, and blue swallows flashing.

Summertimes, the city lay under a dustcloud, and people went up

to the moist rocks, the green clefts in the hills. And autumns, when

the boughs were stripped, the dizzy space of plains and sky circled

the town again. Much time has passed, almost a hundred years

since that night.

But today there are a thousand voices where there was one voice

then. Words in many tongues, books in many scripts, and temples

rising. The love she died for caught and spread, till there are a

thousand hearts offered now, for one heart then. She is not silent,

there in the earth. Her lips are dust, but they speak.

## The Poet Laureate

NABÍL WAS A SHEPHERD. HE WAS born in the village of Zarand,

July 29, 1831. Since his family could not supply him with teachers

and books, he memorized verses from the Qur’án and chanted

them, walking after his flocks. He liked to be alone in the night, and

look at the stars. Off by himself in the desolate countryside, he

turned his face toward Mecca and prayed for guidance.

When his father took him to Qum he listened to the sermons of

the great mujtahids. He disliked these men. He thought they were

hypocrites. He longed for belief, but he could not have the teachers

and books he needed to prove things for himself.

One day in the village mosque he overheard, quite by accident,

a conversation between two men.

‘The Siyyid-i-Báb is on His way to Ṭihrán,’ said one.

The other did not understand. The first explained: a Man called

the Báb had declared a mission, had won over disciples and done

great deeds, been arrested, been condemned to death in Iṣfáhán,

and was now on His way under guard to the capital.

The shepherd boy’s life was decided from that moment. It was

the 12th day of the New Year’s festival, 1847. All the wanderings,

the suffering, the tests, the dangers, the missions, the collecting of

the history, the setting it forth, and then that last anguish which

was too much to bear, so that he could not live in the world any

more—all those events to come were folded up in that hour.

He went home. He could not eat or sleep. His father wondered

what was wrong. The boy said nothing, because he was afraid his

father would keep him from this new thing that had come into his

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life—take it away somehow. He made friends with a newcomer to

the village and since he had to speak, he confided in the friend. To

his great joy, this man was himself a convert to the Báb.

‘My cousin saw Him at Iṣfáhán,’ the man said. ‘It was at the

High Priest’s. My cousin heard Him revealing a commentary on the

Qur’án.’

This new friend had set out on foot, hurrying after the Báb,

Who was then a captive, riding under escort to Ṭihrán. Along the

way he met a believer stationed by the Báb, with a message for any

friends who might be following; the message was, to go their way

and serve the Cause, until some day His followers might worship

their God in freedom.

After this, Nabíl was more at peace. With his new friend, he read

a work of the Báb. Nabíl had been studying the Qur’án with a man

who he began to see could not teach him; he wanted to learn more

about the Cause and his friend advised him to visit Qum, where

there would come a teacher, Siyyid Ismá‘íl. Nabíl induced his

father to send him to Qum ostensibly to improve his knowledge of

Arabic; he was careful not to give his real reason for leaving,

because the Muslim leaders in the village would have kept him

from going.

The family visited him while he was at Qum—that is, his

mother, sister and brother, and on this visit he taught both mother

and sister of the Faith. Then at last Siyyid Ismá‘íl arrived; Nabíl

questioned him closely and was completely won over. The Siyyid

talked to Nabíl at those faraway meetings in Qum, much as Bahá’í

teachers do now; except that Bahá’ís of today know more of the

story than was then dreamed of: the great Beings who were to

come, were still, except for the First, undisclosed; Nabíl’s own

book was then not imagined; most of the events he describes had

not yet taken place.

Siyyid Ismá‘íl told Nabíl about the continuity of Divine Reve-

lation, that it was never interrupted, but flowed on forever, from

Prophet to Prophet—all of whom were fundamentally one, and

closely bound up with the mission of the Báb. He also told Nabíl

about Shaykh Aḥmad and Siyyid Káẓim, forerunners of the Báb;

the youth, who was later to spread their fame around the world,

had never heard of them before. Then Nabíl asked what he should

do for the Cause. The answer was to go to Mázindarán, to the Fort

in the forest, and join the believers who were starving and dying

there, hemmed in by an army. First, he was to await a summons

from Siyyid Ismá‘íl, himself on his way to the Fort, but destined

elsewhere. It was this man who, in later years, would sweep the

approaches to Bahá’u’lláh’s house in Baghdád with his own

turban, and who at last, on the river bank, gave up his life as a

sacrifice. If Nabíl had accompanied him to the Fort, *The Dawn-*

*Breakers* would probably never have been written.

The message did not come, and Nabíl, impatient, went on to

Ṭihrán. It was 1848 or soon after. The momentous Year 60 was

four years past.

At last he received his summons, and was about to leave when

news came that the defenders of the Fort had been tricked into

surrender and butchered, and the Fort levelled with the ground.

There was no more Shaykh Ṭabarsí—except that it will always be

with us, living in memory; our stronghold, and posterity’s after us,

wherever we and they may be. Only the material pattern was an-

nulled; for who can say that the Fort itself was battered down, or

that its defenders lost the battle, or that they died?

Siyyid Ismá‘íl sent Nabíl back to Zarand. He brought his

brother into the Faith. He pled with his father, and got permission

to go back to Ṭihrán, where he had a cell in the same madrisih,

(school attached to a mosque), as ‘Abdu’l-Karím. From the be-

ginning, he had wanted to meet this man, because of ‘Abdu’l-

Karím’s vision of the white dream-bird that had prophesied the

advent of the Báb. Placed in his charge by Siyyid Ismá‘íl, Nabíl

became so attached to him that thirty-eight years later, he recalls

in the Narrative the love of ‘Abdu’l-Karím, whom Bahá’u’lláh also

called Mírzá Aḥmad, and who worked all day as a public scribe,

and spent his nights copying out the writings of the Báb, which he

then gave away as gifts.

Several times Nabíl carried such copies to a young woman whose

husband had left her. She had a baby named Raḥmán, after one of

the Names of God; I do not know what became of the child, or

whether he lived to grow up, but time has preserved his memory;

because the father had left both mother and child to go to the

defence of Ṭabarsí.

This is the man who appears suddenly in history, rising above

the wall of the Fort. It was in the days when the besieged were

boiling the grass and eating it; when they had made a flour from

grinding up bones; when they ate saddle leather and the scabbards

of their swords: when they had dug up their leader’s horse, dead of

its battle wounds, and shared it together. The man on the wall

embodies all this. His sword was strapped on over his long white

garment; around his head, he had a white band, and the Muslim

who had come with a safe-conduct to take him home was frightened

of his face: it was as flaming and unyielding as his sword. The

Muslim tried to move this man: ‘Come back to your child,’ he said;

‘your little Raḥmán, who longs to see you.’ ‘Tell him,’ said the man

on the wall, ‘that the love of the true Raḥmán has filled my heart; it

has left no place for any love but His.’ When the Muslim saw that

nothing could take this man from his post, he wept. ‘May God

assist you,’ he said. ‘He has indeed assisted me,’ said the man on

the wall. ‘How else could I have come to this exalted stronghold?’

And then he vanished.[1]

The young Nabíl learned that Ṭáhirih had been brought to

Ṭihrán and imprisoned in the mayor’s house. Now he was in the

same city with Bahá’u’lláh, with the Master Who was then a Child

of six, with Navváb, with the future Most Exalted Leaf, and with

Ṭáhirih.

Nabíl had been suffering from an eye disease; the Master’s

mother, Navváb, healed it, preparing an ointment which she sent

him in care of ‘Abdu’l-Karím. One day the latter took him to the

house of Bahá’u’lláh, and the first one they met there was ‘Abdu’l-

Bahá. He stood at His Father’s door, and smiled at Nabíl, who was

led past that room, quite unaware of its Occupant’s station, or his

own future relationship to Him. He was presented to Mírzá

Yaḥyá; seeing and listening to Yaḥyá, Nabíl was astonished at the

divergence between the man and the exalted position claimed for him.

Another time they asked him to take ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to school, as

the servant had not yet returned from market. The Child was very

beautiful; He came out of His Father’s room, dressed for the street

in a lambskin cap and an overcoat, and walked down the steps.

Nabíl reached down to pick Him up. Instead, He took Nabíl’s hand

and said, ‘We shall walk.’ They went out of the gate, hand in hand,

chatting together, the young man and the Child.

Nabíl also met the Báb’s uncle, who had been a second father to

Him, and heard him say that he longed to die for the Faith—that

he would not leave Ṭihrán, no matter what the danger, but would

go to martyrdom as a guest to a banquet. It was not long after this

that the leading merchants of Ṭihrán begged this man to recant his

faith, and offered to pay his ransom. He replied that whatever he

knew of Moses and Jesus and Muḥammad, and all the Prophets of

the past, he had seen in the Báb; and that he therefore craved to be

the first to die for his well-loved Kinsman.

This man became the first of the Seven Martyrs of Ṭihrán. As

he went to his death he called out and reminded the populace that

they had longed for a thousand years to see the Qá’im, and that now

He was come they had imprisoned Him on a mountain in Ádhir-

báyján and were killing His people. Then he prayed for their for-

giveness and the last thing he said was a verse from Rúmí: ‘Cut off

my head that Love may give me a head’—and then the lips closed

and were silent.

Our moderns, and particularly Americans, do not care for martyrs.

This is because they do not know what a martyr is. To them, a

martyr is an individual who could be as happy as the next man, but

who prefers to suffer, probably as a self-inflicted punishment for

uninteresting sins, and to impose a feeling of guilt on his friends

because he suffers. An individual, passively aggressive, who suffers

for spite, because he chooses to.

This is a false conception. There are undoubtedly thousands of

unhappy persons who make martyrs of themselves as a subtle

means of self-chastisement and aggression. But the Dawn-

Breakers were not like this. They were normal people, going about

their business, until the Báb came. Great numbers of them were

successful, leaders in their communities; their American equivalent

would be college presidents, popular ministers of the Gospel, sub-

stantial men of affairs. They died because, after what they had seen

in the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh, nothing else in the world could hold

their attention. They found what is most desirable, and took it.

They wore their lives carelessly after that, and hardly knew whether

it was their headgear or their heads that fell. The Master once said

to a pilgrim that a martyr in relation to this world is like a man

running away from a thief, who strips off his coat and flings it to

him and runs on.

The Arabic and Persian word ‘shahíd’ means the same as the

English ‘martyr’: it means ‘witness.’ We have forgotten the mean-

ing of our word. The martyr has witnessed; his death is a proof of

what he has seen. He is not a wretched, whimpering creature, he is

a lover going to his Beloved. The martyr always appears in the

early days of a Faith; he is not the dregs of humanity, he is the

wine.

One day Nabíl came back to his room and found a package and a

letter. The letter was from ‘Abdu’l-Karím; it said that both he and

Nabíl and others had been denounced as Bábís, that the package

contained all the sacred writings in his possession, that if Nabíl

ever got to his room alive he should deliver the package to a certain

caravanserai and then, if he could, make his way through the city,

now in tumult, and come to the mosque where ‘Abdu’l-Karim had

taken sanctuary. Meanwhile Bahá’u’lláh, ever watchful, had sent

word to the mosque that since the authorities were about to violate

the sanctuary of the building and take the Bábís out, ‘Abdu’l-

Karím should leave in disguise for Qum, and Nabíl should return

to Zarand.

That year Nabíl kept the Naw-Rúz—New Day—with his family.

It was the New Year’s Day that coincided with the day the Báb had

declared His mission, six years before. The Báb in His prison

wrote of this Naw-Rúz that it was the last He would see on earth.

The young Nabíl could not be happy, or enjoy the thirteen days

of feasting, the new clothes, the thin gold coins, the fruits, candies

and saffron rice dishes that go with Naw-Rúz. His heart was with

his friends, back in Ṭihrán. When word finally came from them,

his suspense changed to horror.

Fourteen of them had been imprisoned in the mayor’s house—

all this time Ṭáhirih was a captive on the upper floor—and beaten

and tortured for information. None of them spoke out. One of

them, Muḥammad-Ḥusayn, would not utter even a syllable. His

torturers questioned the man who had converted him to the Faith:

‘Is he dumb?’

‘He is mute, but not dumb,’ was the answer; ‘he is fluent of

speech.’

And indeed, he was eloquent the day they killed him—running

forward and pleading so to die before the rest that he, the seventh

of the Seven Martyrs of Ṭihrán, was beheaded at the same moment

with the fifth and sixth.

For three days, these seven had lain in the streets unburied.

Thousands of devout Muslims during these days circled around

their bodies, kicked them, spit on the dead faces, cursed them,

stoned them, threw refuse on them, mutilated them in shameful

ways. No one protested. At last what was left was gathered up and

buried in one grave, out by the moat.

After this, Nabíl left home, trying to find ‘Abdu’l-Karím. He

went to Qum, having told his parents he was going to visit the

shrine there. Then he went to Káshán, because he heard of a man

there who would know of ‘Abdu’l-Karím’s whereabouts. This man

took him to another, and finally he was directed to Hamadán,

where still another guide sent him to Kirmánsháh, and at last he

found his friend, collecting and transcribing the sacred writings of

the Báb, as directed by Bahá’u’lláh.

‘Abdu’l-Karím had taught the Faith to a prince-governor,

Ildirím Mírzá, who was stationed in the mountains with an army.

Now he wished to send the prince one of the Báb’s writings, the

‘Seven Proofs’. Nabíl was elated to be chosen as the bearer of this

gift. With a Kurdish guide, he went through forests and over

mountains for six days and nights to the camp, delivered the trust

and returned with a letter. He mentions this journey quite casually,

yet judging by contemporary accounts of travels through Persia, it

must have been dangerous and full of hardships. He was young and

willing and tough, used to sleeping on bare ground or a bare floor,

and his life was always in peril anyhow.

When he reached Kirmánsháh, Bahá’u’lláh had arrived there;

with ‘Abdu’l-Karím, Nabíl was taken into His presence; they

found Him reading the Qur’án, since it was the month of the

Ramadán fast. Of the prince’s apparently friendly letter, Bahá’u’lláh

remarked that its writer was not sincere; that the prince sought to

win over the Bábís, because he believed that they would one day

kill the Sháh, and hoped that when that time should come, they

would place him, Ildirím Mírzá, on the throne of Persia. Not long

afterward this very prince tortured and killed a believer, the great,

blind Siyyid of India, come to Persia to find the Perfect Man whose

advent his ancestors had foretold.

Bahá’u’lláh then directed Nabíl to conduct Mírzá Yaḥyá from

Ṭihrán to a fort near Sháhrúd, and remain there with him. ‘Abdu’l-

Karím was to stay at the capital; he was to carry with him a box of

sweets to be forwarded to Mázindarán, where the Master and His

mother were living.

But Mírzá Yaḥyá disobeyed, and forced Nabíl to deliver some

letters for him in Qazvín. Then Nabíl’s relatives again stepped in—

they seem forever to have been interrupting his work for the Faith—

and made him return home. Two months later he was back in

Ṭihrán again, living with ‘Abdu’l-Karím in a caravanserai outside

the city gates. All winter they were there, the older man occupied

in transcribing the writings of the Báb.

By Nabíl’s hand, ‘Abdu’l-Karím then sent a copy of the ‘Seven

Proofs’ to an official, a siyyid; soon afterward this man denounced

the Book at a gathering where the brother of Bahá’u’lláh was

present. He said the teachings were ‘highly dangerous’. From his

description of the youth who had brought the Book, Áqáy-i-Kalím

knew at once that he meant Nabíl. Immediately, he warned Nabíl

to leave for Zarand, and ‘Abdu’l-Karím for Qum; before they left,

Nabíl was able to retrieve the Book from the siyyid, an achievement

that must have required audacity and tact. The two friends now set

out to the South, and when they reached the shrine of Sháh

‘Abdu’l-‘Aẓím, they parted; they were never to meet again in this

life.

The Báb had been martyred in Tabríz. The Prime Minister who

had caused His death had himself been killed by the Sháh, his

veins opened in a public bath. Bahá’u’lláh had left Ṭihrán for

Karbilá and had returned. Then two believers, ignorant, confused,

in despair at all the blood they had seen, stood waiting one morning

along the Sháh’s line of march. When he rode past, they checked

his horse and shot him. The pearl tassel around the horse’s neck

was severed; the Sháh, slightly wounded in the arm and side, was

carried into a garden; for an hour Persia was in chaos: trumpets,

drums, fifes, called up troops; officers shouted commands; couriers

galloped here and there; nobles crowded into the garden.

After that rivers of blood flowed in Persia. Two irresponsible

youths had attempted a crime; therefore, every real or imagined

follower of the Báb in Persia must be rooted out. The clergy saw

their chance, and the Sháh’s mother was insatiable of revenge: life

after life was cut down, in exchange for her son’s slight wound, and

still it was not enough and still she wanted more. Of the great

massacre at Ṭihrán, Renan was to write that it was a day perhaps

without parallel in the history of the world. Clergy, nobles, high

officials, killed the believers with their own hands.

Then Persia trembled, and for those who loved the Báb there

was death, dungeons, the whip, the sword, the candles burning in

jagged wounds, the red-hot screws, the cannon’s mouth. One of the

two youths who attacked the Sháh was murdered on the spot; they

tore his body in two halves, and suspended them at the city gates.

The other, with a third accomplice, was obscenely tortured, and at

last died. It was then that Ṭáhirih was killed, and Ḥájí Sulaymán

Khán, and the amanuensis of the Báb, and a thousand others.

Bahá’u’lláh’s palace in Ṭihrán was despoiled; the lovely house at

Tákur was stripped and ruined, the village itself sacked and burned,

the villagers shot down. Bahá’u’lláh was chained four months

underground in the dark, criminals beside Him, on the earth filth

and vermin. And still the mother of the Sháh was not appeased,

because the prize life, the One she wanted to destroy, the One for

whom all the rest were only substitutes—still lived; and at last,

preserved from death, He was taken from the dungeon, exonerated

from all blame, and banished forever.

Nabíl hastened after Him. When he reached Baghdád, he found

that Bahá’u’lláh had gone away—for this was the period that He

spent alone in the mountains of Kurdistán. The Faith seemed

quenched. Mírzá Yaḥyá, nominee of the Báb, cowered behind

locked doors. Nabíl left for Karbilá and lived there. Bahá’u’lláh

returned, the friends revived, Nabíl hurried to Him and wrote odes

for Him, so that later an Englishman, writing of Nabíl, was to

describe him as the poet laureate of Bahá’u’lláh.

Afterward Nabíl went to Persia and was severely tested by as-

sociation with Siyyid Muḥammad, but he triumphed and returned

to Bahá’u’lláh in Baghdád, and was sent on a mission to Kirmán-

sháh and again returned. When the Manifestation was exiled to

Constantinople, Nabíl put on the dress of a dervish and followed

on foot and caught up with the exiles. From Constantinople he was

directed to return to Persia, teach the Cause and inform the Friends

of what had taken place. His mission fulfilled, he went to Adrian-

ople where the public declaration of Bahá’u’lláh was made. He

taught widely and fervently all this time. Then Bahá’u’lláh was

exiled again, and Nabíl followed Him to the Most Great Prison; he

came through the ‘Akká gate in disguise, dressed as a man of

Bukhárá, but the Covenant-breakers, always on the alert, found

him out and betrayed him to the authorities and they banished him.

Heart broken, he went to Ṣafad; then he went over to Mount

Carmel and lived alone in a cave, weeping and praying. At last the

doors of the prison were opened and Nabíl hurried to the presence

of Bahá’u’lláh and spent his time composing poems for his Beloved.

Here are lines from one of his odes, especially praised by the

Master:

*Though the Night of Parting endless seem as Thy night-black hair,*

*Bahá, Bahá,*

*Yet we meet at last, and the gloom is past in Thy lightning’s glare,*

*Bahá, Bahá!*

*To my heart from Thee was a signal shown that I to all men should*

*make known*

*That they, as the ball to the goal doth fly, should to Thee repair,*

*Bahá, Bahá!*

*At this my call from the quarters four men’s hearts and souls to Thy*

*quarters pour:*

*What, forsooth, could attract them more than that region fair,*

*Bahá, Bahá?*

*The World hath attained to Heaven’s worth, and a Paradise is the*

*face of earth,*

*Since at length thereon a breeze hath blown from Thy nature rare,*

*Bahá, Bahá!*

*Bountiful art Thou, as all men know: at a glance two Worlds*

*Thou would’st e’en bestow*

*On the suppliant hands of Thy direst foe, if he makes his prayer,*

*Bahá, Bahá!*[2]

Nabíl wrote *The Dawn-Breakers* for Bahá’u’lláh. He started the

chronicle in 1888 and finished it in about a year and a half. Mírzá

Músá helped him with it; some parts of the manuscript were re-

viewed by Bahá’u’lláh, and some by the Master.

He lived in ‘Akká then, and when he had brought his narrative

down to the point where the story of the Seven Martyrs was ended,

he submitted the finished portions to Bahá’u’lláh, Who sent for

him on December 11, 1888, a date Nabíl records as one he will

never forget. On that occasion, his Lord gave him an account of

various historical episodes, including the gathering at Badasht.

Nabíl was very exact, always citing references, cautious in his

appraisals, frank as to the degree of his information, hunting for

eye-witnesses and survivors, eagerly questioning: ‘Many, I confess,

are the gaps in this narrative, for which I beg the indulgence of my

readers. It is my earnest hope that these gaps may be filled by those

who will, after me, arise to compile an exhaustive and befitting

account of these stirring events, the significance of which we can

as yet but dimly discern.’[3] He was not omniscient, rhetorical,

boastful, as contemporary Eastern historians were; and he offers

precise detail rather than the rhyming generalizations so often pre-

ferred by them.

It is amazing, the rapidity of his accomplishment, and the care;

and too, the variety of his work—it takes a copious writing vocabu-

lary to range from military campaigns to poetical expression; and

then the skilful timing and pacing, the deploying of events, the

massing of facts.

Especially, we notice the feeling and life in the work; authentic

everywhere, he is particularly sensitive when recording tenderness

and love, which he understood so well that in the end he could not

live with the knowledge of it, could not contain it. There is, for

instance, that passage where he explains the bonds between the

Báb and Bahá’u’lláh, and shows how they matched agony for

agony; then he says: ‘Such love no eye has ever beheld, nor has

mortal heart conceived such mutual devotion. If the branches of

every tree were turned into pens, and all the seas into ink, and

earth and heaven rolled into one parchment, the immensity of that

love would still remain unexplored, and the depths of that devotion

unfathomed.’[4]

These were not to him only Persian words. His life story shows

that he was not like the people who know all the words, none of the

meanings. Nabíl must have been acquainted with the Persian story

of the moths, for he typifies it. It seems that the moths held a

meeting to learn about the flame; they sent out a messenger to

investigate it; he circled around the candle and returned and ex-

plained it most eloquently, but they could not understand. They

sent another moth and this one flew close to the flame, and when he

came back they saw his wings were singed arid they began, dimly,

to know. But they were not yet clear in their minds as to the nature

of the flame. They sent a third moth to the candle; this one flew

straight into the centre of the flame, and he never came back; and

then they understood.

How happy he would be now, if he could see his book; the

admirable English text, enriched with further sources, photo-

graphs, and explanatory data, presenting his story to the West.

Never during life could Nabíl have known that in a few short years

leading public, university and privately-owned libraries in the

faraway American continent would include his work. ‘He who is

associated with a great Cause becomes great,’ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá once

told a pilgrim.[5] Here is the shepherd of Zarand, on the same shelves

with Ṭabarí and Ibn Khaldún and the others who will never die.

And then Bahá’u’lláh fell ill. Once during this sickness, this last

of all the sufferings that life inflicted on the Glory of God, Nabíl

was allowed to enter the room and be there alone with his Lord. He

must have known when, with a lover’s keenness of sight and his

own natural awareness, he looked on the face of Bahá’u’lláh, that

this was the last time. He must have seen, when he came in the

doorway and stood there by the bed, what no one in the Household

would say, that this fever was not like another, and would not pass

and be forgotten. Here was the only thing they had really been

afraid of, during forty years of constant peril, and now it had come.

There must have been a horror over Bahjí in those days. The plains

and mountains, the trees and sky, must have looked fixed and

strange, as if jutting out from a dream.

Nabíl was inarticulate when he tried to tell it. ‘Methinks,’ he

wrote, ‘the spiritual commotion set up in the world of dust had

caused all the worlds of God to tremble …’[6] Trying to explain,

he looked from the Event to its effects, and shows us the villagers

of ‘Akká and other towns, crowding around Bahjí and sobbing and

beating their heads. Life arranges that there shall be universal

mourning when it is due.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, with His own anguish, and with the fate of the

Cause in His hands, and everyone’s burden to carry, was mindful of

Nabíl. It must have been to console him that the Master gave him

something to do for Bahá’u’lláh; he was chosen to select those

passages which constitute the “Tablet of Visitation” now recited in

the Most Holy Tomb.

Surely Nabíl went over and over, in his mind, the wrongs that

the world had inflicted on Bahá’u’lláh. The utter rejection; the

cruelty and mockery and scorn; the spittle and stones; the basti-

nado, the chaining in the Black Pit, the exile, the poison; the stop-

ping of His lips and of His pen, the calumnies, the humiliations, the

prison. He must have felt the wounds and seen the scars again, and

seen how there was nothing he could ever do to make up for it or

atone for it, or cause it not to have been, or bring even some little

joy to his Lord to mean that he was aware of it and that his heart

was broken.

And then he must have gone back in his memory to other days:

perhaps to the times when, returned from a journey, he was per-

mitted to see Bahá’u’lláh; or the evenings, carefully recorded in the

Narrative, when he had come to Him. Or to the long-ago, happy

days in Baghdád, when the self-exiled, impoverished believers

were so drunk with the new Revelation that the outer world meant

nothing any more; palaces looked like spider webs to them, and

they held celebrations that kings never dreamt of. The days when

Nabíl and two others lived in a room with no furniture. He must,

many a time, have seen Bahá’u’lláh entering that room again, and

heard Him saying again,

‘Its emptiness pleases Me … it is preferable to many a spaci-

ous palace, inasmuch as the beloved of God are occupied in it with

the remembrance of the Incomparable Friend …’[7] He must have

remembered how Bahá’u’lláh Himself, in those days, had no

change of linen, so that the one shirt He owned would he washed,

dried and worn again.

He must have recalled, and the joy of it must have mocked him

now, how ‘many a night no less than ten persons subsisted on no

more than a pennyworth of dates. No one knew to whom actually

belonged the shoes, the cloaks, or the robes that were to be found

in their houses. Whoever went to the bazaar could claim that the

shoes upon his feet were his own, and each one who entered the

presence of Bahá’u’lláh could affirm that the cloak and robe he then

wore belonged to him. Their own names they had forgotten, their

hearts were emptied of aught else except adoration for their Be-

loved … O, for the joy of those days, and the gladness and

wonder of those hours!’[8]

Never before had he been lost; his Lord had been there always,

waiting for him. Now there was the unanswering grave. Always

before, he had known he would come back to Him somehow;

during all those separations he had patiently waited—‘Though the

night of parting endless seem as Thy night-black hair, Bahá, Bahá!’

It is not for us to take our own life. If Nabíl longed for death, and

could have stopped to think, he might have gone away to a savage

country and taught the Faith and been killed for it. Anyone who

thinks about it can throw himself into some battle and either die or

get beyond the need for death, so that it is no longer a matter of any

concern and may come when it wishes. It is not for us to interrupt

time, impede the general rhythm, disrupt the infinite interrelated

events of the planet, open the way for others to follow us into

illicit death; or to leave our bodies as a reproach, an accusation

against our fellows and an extra burden which they will carry

around with them as long as they live.

But look at his face, flaming and longing; he could not weigh or

calculate. This time it was not something to write in a history, it was

not an extra syllable in a verse, it was his life. He only knew that he

must hurry into the sea and find Bahá’u’lláh. When he was sure of

this he wrote out the date of his death in a single Arabic word. The

number-value of the letters totalled the year 1310. The word was:

‘Drowned.’[9]

How it was, there, when he came to meet his Beloved, I do not

know. Whether the sea lay ivory and shell-coloured then, as it is

twilights and dawns, with the sunset wind or the dawn wind blow-

ing, and the harp in the pines; or whether the soft night waited for

him. However it was, we of the future who read his book and know

and love him were there. It was a moment that time will always

keep, when he came to his Lord.

## Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl in America

WRITTEN BY THE AUTHOR ON THE BASIS OF CONVERSATIONS

WITH HER FATHER, ALI-KULI KHAN

AFTERNOONS, HE AND I WALKED in the old cemetery in up-town

New York. We walked up and down under the trees, with the

gravestones around us. I would ask him about life after death, and

he would not answer. One day I burst out:

‘The Master told me that I would learn things from being with

you, and now I am not learning … I ask you again: In this world

we are known by our physical forms; how will we be known in the

next? The Master told me you would teach me.’

He said: ‘Since you force me, I must answer. But you will not

like what I shall say.’

‘Why not?’

‘Because the answer is this, that you would not understand how

life after death will be.’

I said, ‘But I understand Schopenhauer, and Kant. I understand

the Greeks. Why do you say I would not understand?’

He answered: ‘The proof that you would not understand is this:

that you ask.’

Then he told me that on every plane of existence, one needs the

use of a language to describe that plane. On earth, he said, there is

no language that will tell of the soul’s condition on a higher plane.

Then he tried to describe immortality for me, in various ways. One

example he used was maturity: there is no language, he said, by

which you can describe the conditions of maturity to a child. The

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child must evolve into maturity before he can understand it.

‘How can we evolve into the understanding of immortality?’ I

asked.

‘Through sustained devotion to the Cause,’ he said. ‘One grad-

ually becomes aware. You are serving; you are on the way. I pray

Bahá’u’lláh to assist you to understand that station. But it is not to

be grasped through study. A man’s knowledge of that condition is

expressed through his deeds. People feel that he has attained that

knowledge. But no words can describe it.’

This journey to America was not by any means the first of

Mírzá’s travels. Born at Gulpáygán, Persia, in 1844, Abu’l-Faḍl

was to spend some thirty years of his life in going from place to

place, at the behest of Bahá’u’lláh and the Master, to spread the

Faith. Eastern readers will not need to be reminded that he was an

outstanding scholar; that he headed one of Ṭihrán’s leading Arabic

universities, the School of Ḥakím-Háshim, where he also lectured

on philosophy; that he was referred to as an authority by professors

at the famed Al-Aẓhar in Cairo—the thousand-year-old seat of

Muslim learning—who brought him their works to revise; that he

was unexcelled in both old and modern Persian, was a master of

Arabic, was thoroughly versed in the cultures of both East and

West. Following his conversion, the result of eight months of

debate in 1876, he became so fearless an exponent of the Teachings

that he was several times imprisoned and threatened with death.

Before coming to the United States, he had travelled, taught and

written in Persia, Turkey, Russia, the Caucasus, Tartary, Syria and

Egypt; and he had even taken the Faith as far as the confines of

China. He attributed his teaching gift to a prayer revealed for him

by Bahá’u’lláh: ‘I beg of God to enable Faḍl to teach His truth,

and to unveil that which is hidden and treasured in His knowledge,

with wisdom and explanation. Verily He is the Mighty, the

Bestower!’

If I had never seen ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, I would

consider Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl the greatest being I ever laid eyes on.

When the Master told me I must leave Him, and go to America, I

sobbed. My grief took hold of me in the Persian way, and I beat my

head against the wall of the Master’s house in ‘Akká. Then ‘Abdu’l-

Bahá said, ‘It is a real opportunity for you to be with Mírzá,

because of his great learning and his great devotion to the Cause.’

In those days the Master’s helpers were few, and the burdens of

the Faith increasingly heavy. My service as amanuensis and En-

glish translator were urgently needed, and I worked for Him night

and day, but because He felt the American mission to be of supreme

importance, He gave me up to that work. In the spring of 1901, I

reached Paris with Lua and her husband, and found Mírzá there,

with May Bolles (later Mrs. May Maxwell), Laura Barney, Juliet

Thompson, Charles Mason Remey, little Sigurd Russell and other

believers. The Master cabled me to go on to the United States

immediately. In New York, I received a second cable from Him,

to go on to Chicago. Two months later Mírzá joined me there.

What had happened in Chicago was this: the Syrian, Khayru-

’lláh, had been teaching the Cause, adding to the Faith many

beliefs of his own, such as reincarnation, dream interpretation,

occultism and the like. He had written a book incorporating these

beliefs with the Teachings, and had gone to ‘Akká and asked per-

mission to publish it. The Master told him to abandon his super-

stitious beliefs, saying further that he would become a leading

teacher if he would give them up and spread the Faith. But he

returned to America and published his book. A rift resulted among

the believers; Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl and I were sent to heal the rift.

In Chicago we found Asadu’lláh, who had come to America with

the two devoted Bahá’í merchants of Egypt, Ḥájí ‘Abdu’l-Karím

and Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥasan-i-Khurásání; although still a recognized

teacher he was busily interpreting dreams for the believers and

hemming them in with superstition. After listening to Mírzá for

awhile, some of the believers said he was ‘cold and intellectual’.

They said Asadu’lláh was ‘spiritual’, because he interpreted their

dreams. They would walk down the hall, past Mírzá’s door, and go

on to Asadu’lláh. They would come and tell us that they were

personally led by the spirit, or had had a vision warning them

against a fellow-believer, and so forth. (Mírzá’s name for them was

jinn-gír—‘spook chasers’.)

We saw that all this occult confusion would lead to divisions

among the friends, especially as many of them were not yet well

grounded in the Cause. We talked the matter over and decided on

the following procedure: when anyone came to us, saying he was

guided by the spirit to do thus and so, we would answer, ‘The

Universal Spirit is manifested today in Bahá’u’lláh. If you have

visions or experiences urging you to some action, weigh this action

with the revealed Teachings. If the act conforms with the Teach-

ings, it is true guidance. If not, your experience has been only a

dream.’

Mírzá held classes three times a day in Chicago, and in addition

we taught once a week at the Masonic Temple. Our house, a head-

quarters for Eastern Bahá’í teachers, was on West Monroe Street.

Some of the firm and devoted believers whom we met there were

Thornton Chase, his secretary, Gertrude Buikema, Miss Nash,

Dr. Bartlett, Dr. Thatcher, Arthur Agnew, Mr. Leish, Albert

Windust, Mrs. Brittingham, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Ioas, Greenleaf,

the brilliant attorney, and his young wife, Elizabeth. At the Master’s

written direction, Mr. Peter Dealy came up from Fairhope, Ala-

bama, to study scriptural prophecies and other aspects of the

Cause with Mírzá.

My first memory of Thornton Chase, America’s first Bahá’í, is

his taking me to the corner drugstore opposite our house and intro-

ducing me to Coca-Cola, which I hated. ‘This is medicine,’ I told

him. ‘No,’ he said, ‘this is a good drink; you will like it later on.’

His prophecy has since been realized.

When my father, the early believer ‘Abdu’r-Raḥím Khán, was

Lord Mayor (*kalántar*) of Ṭihrán, and also head of the police,

Mírzá had known him well. Once he told me the following story:

when he, Abu’l-Faḍl, became a believer, he was on fire with the Faith.

He used to go to a coffee shop in the afternoons, sit there in an

alcove which was a few feet above the ground, and publicly teach

the Cause. One day an Armenian convert to Protestantism, who

was connected with the Protestant Mission at Ṭihrán, entered the

coffee shop and said some evil thing of Bahá’u’lláh. Mírzá was so

incensed that he jumped down out of his alcove and struck the

Armenian. The man appealed to the Board of Foreign Missions,

who sent to the Police and demanded that Mírzá be punished. My

father, the *kalántar*, said, ‘This is the sort of case which I must

handle myself.’ He then took Mírzá into his own custody; he told

him that the offence was serious; that he appreciated the nature of

Mírzá’s faith, but that the times were dangerous and that in any

event a man should control himself. He placed Mírzá in his own

office and sent for the Armenian. ‘Do you remember,’ he said to

him, ‘how His Majesty closed the Catholic Mission just a little

while ago? Now you know what a high position Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl

enjoys among the clerics of Islám. His Majesty might well be

angered at any complaints against him, and then he would surely

close the Protestant Mission as well, and you would lose your job.

Which do you prefer? That I punish Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl or that you

keep your job?’ The charges were hastily withdrawn.

One day Mírzá called me to him and spoke to me in a very

humble way. He said that, being acquainted with my family and

background, it was only with the greatest hesitation that he was

going to exact a promise from me: that I would cooperate with

him in all matters pertaining to the Cause, but that I would never

interfere in his private affairs. I said, ‘Dear Mírzá, since you know

my family, you know well that none of its members would interfere

in the private concerns of such a glorious being as yourself.’ He

answered, ‘Anyway, promise.’ So I promised, but I did not know

what was coming.

In December 1901, we left for Washington where Miss Laura

Barney had arranged quarters for Mírzá and myself. Our rooms

were on the top floor of a four-storey apartment house. He could

not endure noise; in fact, during the three or four years when we

spent the fall, winter and spring in Washington, he changed his

residence many times, escaping from noise. He had to concentrate

on the book he was writing, and dreaded the downstairs, where

there might be dogs (he was very fond of cats, however) or other

confusion.

His meals were to be provided by the landlady, but as time went

on I discovered he was living on practically nothing at all. He

brewed, and drank all day long, a delicate Oriental tea; he smoked

Egyptian cigarettes (later he gave these up because some of the

friends criticized his smoking and he did not wish to be a test to

them); once in a while he ate a thin biscuit. This was his nourish-

ment. Naturally, in the unaccustomed cold and the strange sur-

roundings, he grew frailer and frailer. I had to beg him to keep on

with his book—the *Bahá’í Proofs*—which the Master had com-

manded him to write; but it was obvious that he was getting too

weak for the task, and meanwhile, since I had promised to keep

out of his private affairs, there was nothing I could do.

Mírzá was almost continually in a state of prayer. His mornings,

noons and evenings were taken up with devotion. Once I went to

his door and found it locked. I rapped, there was no answer. We

forced the door, and found that Mírzá had fainted away as he

prayed, and that his jaws were locked together. The reason he

prayed with such fervour, and such weeping, was his concept of

the greatness of God and his own nothingness; his belief that his

very existence, bestowed on him by Divine mercy, was a sin in this

Day ‘whereon naught can be seen except the splendours of the

Light that shineth from the face of Thy Lord …’ I would say to

him, ‘You, a holy being, weeping like this. If you are a sinner, then

what hope is there for the rest of us?’ He would answer: ‘The day

will come when you, too, will know the degree of devotion worthy

to serve as a language by which we can praise Bahá’u’lláh.’

Finally, a time came when Mírzá was dying. I went to Mrs.

Barney, Laura’s mother, for whom Mírzá had great respect. I told

her of my promise, explaining that I had not understood why he

exacted it; she promptly had a chicken cooked, and brought it to

the house on De Sales Street. On arriving, she asked the landlady if

Mírzá had been accepting any food. ‘No,’ was the answer, ‘he pays

for it but does not eat.’ She then went up to Mírzá. ‘They tell me

downstairs,’ she said, ‘that you are refusing food. How can you

write your important book unless you eat?’ From under his eye-

brows, Mírzá darted his very small, very keen black eyes at me.

As soon as Mrs. Barney left he began: ‘You promised—’

I said, ‘The landlady told her.’

Mírzá said, ‘You had a hand in it.’

I answered, ‘I can’t see you die.’

Mírzá said, ‘I shall ask you a question: which of two people

would know better about a house? The man who has lived in it

sixty years, or the one who has just come upon it?’

I answered, ‘Yes, the man may have lived in it sixty years, but

he has never had any repairs made, and the roof and walls are

falling to ruin, and the house is now almost unlivable.’

That is how it was. Mírzá sick from not eating, and unable to

adjust to American food and American life. He would not let me

serve him in any way. If we went shopping, he would not even let

me carry the packages. Finally I wrote to the Master, because the

responsibility for his life and work was more than I could bear,

and I told of the difficulty of expediting Mírzá’s book and described

everything just as it was. Then I added that it might be a Persian

attendant, who could prepare food for Mírzá and look after his

needs, would solve the problem. When I had come through Port

Sa‘íd on my way to America, there was a boy around fifteen who

worked in Aḥmad Yazdí’s store there. His name was Aḥmad-i-

Iṣfáhání (later he took the name of Sohrab). This boy had begged

me to request the Master to send him to America. I now suggested

that he come here to look after Mírzá. The Master sent him here, to

serve Mírzá and return with him to the East. However, when

Mírzá sailed for home in 1904—with the MacNutts, Mrs. Julia

Grundy, and the Woodcocks and their daughter—Aḥmad-i-

Iṣfáhání did not accompany him. He remained in the United

States until 1912, when the Master Himself took him back to the

East, although he seemed loath to go.

Somehow, our work went on. Besides our classes, we would

address Bahá’í gatherings in the old Corcoran Building opposite

the Treasury Department. Mírzá would stand as he spoke, with

me at his side. He was a great, spontaneous speaker; he talked with

ardour, his voice varying according to his subject, and sometimes

very loud. He knew no English, but had an uncanny way of finding

out whether my translation was as he wished, and whether it was

clear; he could tell from my gestures, and from the effect on the

audience. He would speak perhaps five minutes at a time, before

pausing for the translation.

When explaining a difficult point, he would repeat himself, to

drive it home. One day a young believer came to him and said,

‘You know, dear Mírzá, we are an intelligent people. If you tell

us a thing once, we grasp it. But if you keep repeating yourself, the

way you did last night, people will surely criticize you, and us.’ He

thanked her, very humbly. ‘It was only to make the matter clear,’

he said. ‘But I appreciate what you have told me. Now, just one

question. What was I repeating, last night?’ The young woman

thougth for a while; then she said, ‘I don’t remember.’ ‘That is

why I repeat myself,’ said Mírzá.

Mírzá was a master of reasoning—he built a wall around people

and trapped them so that they had either to accept his statements or

acknowledge their ignorance. All kinds of scholars matched their

minds with him here, but I never saw him defeated. He was deeply

read in Church history, European theology and metaphysics, works

on which he had studied in Arabic at Al-Aẓhar. I remember once

a churchman came to him and violently attacked the Prophet

Muḥammad. Mírzá said to him: ‘Your leading authorities state

that none of the Jewish or Roman historians of the First Century

even mention Jesus, and many do not believe in the historicity of

Christ. Certain Christians inserted a reference to Christ in the

writings of Josephus, but the forgery was exposed. Others buried a

tablet in China, which said that Christianity had been brought to

that country in the First Century. This, too, was exposed. But as

for the Prophet Muḥammad, He not only proclaimed the existence

of a historical Christ, but He caused three hundred million people

to believe in Him; to accept Him not only as a historical figure but

also as the Spirit of God (Rúḥu’lláh). Was not Muḥammad, whom

you condemn, a more successful Christian missionary than your

own?’

Mírzá never encouraged any talk which might lead to inharmony.

Once, a friend came to him and said that another believer was doing

harm to the Faith. Mírzá listened carefully. Then he told me to

translate his answer word for word:

‘Do you believe that Bahá’u’lláh is the promised Lord of

Hosts?’

‘Yes’.

‘Well, if He is that Lord, these are the Hosts. What right have

we to speak ill of the Hosts?’

I had a hard time of it, getting Mírzá to write the *Bahá’í Proofs*.

It seemed to me that I had to extract every line and every page of it

by force. The American friends wonder why it consists of ‘Intro-

ductions.’ This is not only the classic convention of Eastern

scholars, but in addition, Mírzá contemplated a greater book.

What we have here is nothing compared to the flow of his know-

ledge. The Master directed Mírzá to write the book and me to

translate it, and in spite of failing health and every difficulty he did

not leave America until it was finished. He was a careful, pain-.

staking stylist, and yet he wrote very rapidly, with no corrections,

no crossing out. He would put up one knee, and lean his paper on

it in the Persian way, and write with a reed pen.

Mírzá was truly a divine scholar. He told me that he had read

the Íqán with ‘the eye of intellect’ seventeen times through, and it

had seemed to him a meaningless string of words. That later, he

had read it with ‘the eye of faith,’ and had found it the key with

which he could unlock the secrets of all the sacred books of past

religions. His work, the Fará’id, which deals with these subjects,

has not yet been translated into English. The Master, in a tablet to

the Washington believers written after Mírzá’s death in 1914, says

of him, ‘His blessed heart was the spring of realities and signifi-

cances, allaying the thirst of every thirsty one.’[1]

That the work went forward slowly was not always Mírzá’s

fault. We had a great deal to do—classes—meetings—innumerable

visitors to see. Speaking of visitors, whenever they brought flowers

and fruit to him, he was violently displeased. He would say: ‘Why

do they bring these things for me? I am only the slave of the slaves

of Bahá’u’lláh!’ I would not translate these expressions of his

humility, because I knew that our guests would only attribute them

to pride. I would thank the givers, and explain to Mírzá why I

could not translate what he had said.

On trains and in other public places people would look at Mírzá

and he would smile at them, with those keen, deeply set, jet-black

eyes. I never knew a man who saw every corner of a thing the way

he did. And he was never mistaken. I remember one year I was

reading Lavater, the German physiognomist, although I knew that

Goethe himself had given the subject up, saying it was not a

science. That year I saw an old man at Green Acre who looked

something like Emerson; he had the same high forehead and

projecting nose, although his jaw was weak. I told Mírzá that

according to the principles of Lavater the man was a genius. Mírzá

looked at me and smiled. ‘He does not even have the intelligence

of an average man.’ ‘How do you know?’ ‘By my knowledge of

physiognomy.’ ‘Well, judging by *my* knowledge of physiognomy,

he has both high intelligence and philosophic grasp.’ The next

morning, following our class, the man asked a question which at

once exposed his remarkably low mental level.

The future must evaluate what Mírzá brought to the Cause in

America. I have written these lines only to suggest a little of our life

here together; only to set down phases of his journey that hardly

anyone else was aware of. The future will appreciate how, when

Mírzá returned East, I was overwhelmed by the Master’s com-

mand to carry on his work in this country.

It is a long time now since he died, and the Master and the

believers mourned his going. But I can see him still, as if he were

here before me. A rather tall, spare figure, in a white turban and

light-brown robes. Beautiful hands—artistic and sensitive, but at

the same time intellectual and executive hands. A high forehead,

somewhat high cheek bones, an ascetic look, a faint smell of rose

water. And then the small, very black, very keen eyes.

Yes, but really to know his greatness, you had to watch him

when he was in the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Then his knowledge

reduced him to nothingness, and you thought of a pebble on the

ocean shore.

# V

# Age of All Truth

## The Goal of a Liberated Mind

‘“WHAT IS TRUTH,” SAID JESTING Pilate, and would not stay

for an answer.’ Pilate, it would seem, was much given to washing

his hands of things. Truth, if it existed at all, was something which

other people could take care of—just so long, of course, as it did

not interrupt his meals or his business. And so, he would not stay

for an answer.

The world has always been full of Pilates—of people who wash

their hands of truth. Our present day problems are their legacy.

They are those who live along comfortably, safe in their ruts,

careful to use as few of their faculties as possible. And when they

die, they sleep beneath complacent epitaphs—unless of course they

are fashionable, in which case they are reduced to ashes and repose

sedately in marble bureau drawers. And alas, they are not remem-

bered. To be remembered, a man must have had a tussle with truth.

He must have sat under the Bo tree with Gautama, or gone up to

Mount Sinai, or dreamed over the crucibles in Leonardo’s labora-

tory. He must have investigated truth for himself, refused to con-

form to his surroundings, dared to do his own thinking. ‘I think,

therefore I am.’ It is equally true that if I do not think, I am not.

And to think means independently to investigate truth.

Bahá’u’lláh has commanded His followers to do their own thinking,

and to ‘look into all things with a searching eye.’[1] He says in the

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Words of Wisdom, ‘The essence of all that We have revealed for

thee is Justice, is for man to free himself from idle fancies and

imitation …’[2] It is, then, through justice—best beloved of

virtues—that we are to know things by our own understanding and

see them with our own eyes. But the question arises, how are we to

achieve this justice, how are we to recognize the truth once we have

started on our search. To this, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá answers that there are

four standards of judgement, four ways of proving a thing true.

The first is sense perception, the second is the intellect, the third is

traditional authority, and the fourth is inspiration. When applied

individually, these tests are obviously inadequate, for the senses

are frequently unreliable, even the greatest intellectuals are often

at variance, traditional authority is easily misunderstood, and the

‘still small voice’ may at times be quite other than divine. But when

all four tests are brought to bear and result in a convergence of

evidence, we have satisfactorily proved a truth.

Bahá’ís, then, are commanded to seek independently for Reality,

and are told how to recognize it. They are forbidden to take any-

thing for granted. Even a child born into a Bahá’í family must

begin, so to speak, from the bottom and work up. He cannot be fed

truth with his cereal, and must prove to his own satisfaction the

reality of what he is taught. But it is obvious that a search started in

an atmosphere of faith is more readily successful, because ‘faith

seeking understanding’ will achieve, where unbelief seeking under-

standing must fall by the wayside.

And now, what is Reality? ‘Why, Reality is water,’ says Thales.

‘Reality is a sphere packed solid,’ insists Parmenides. Reality is

convergence of evidence,’ drones the psychology professor. Some

of our moderns deliver beautifully patronizing definitions of

Reality, as if they had it at home in a test tube. Others stutter when

confronted with the unwelcome question.

The Bahá’í view of Reality presents the only one that is im-

pregnable and withstands the test by the four standards of judge-

ment.

Bahá’u’lláh proclaims that Reality is the Word of God. The

significance of this statement is recalled by the opening lines of the

Gospel of John: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word

was with God, and the Word was God.’ This Word is revealed to

humanity by a Divine Manifestation—by one of those all-

illuminating Beings whom ‘Abdu’l-Bahá refers to as ‘Suns of

Reality’—a Buddha, a Christ, Moses, Muḥammad. Reality, then,

constitutes the teachings of the Divine Manifestations,—and Reality

in this day consists of the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh.

Having found Reality, realities are not far away. The true in art,

in science, in every phase of human activity, is that which is in

accordance with the Word of God, and that which is like God.

Therefore, a study of the Word of God, and a knowledge of God

Himself as revealed through His Manifestations, are infallible

determinants of Truth. And as learning is nothing more or less

than discovering and applying the truth of phenomena, it is

absolutely essential—if we wish to be learned—that we should

attain to the knowledge of God—that we should investigate

Reality. Bahá’u’lláh says ‘The source of all learning is the know-

ledge of God,’[3] and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us that the origin of all

learning can be traced to religion.

The failure to seek for Truth results in lasting and increasing

peril to the human race. ‘The greatest cause of bereavement and

disheartening in the world of humanity is ignorance based upon

blind imitation … From this cause hatred and animosity arise

continually among mankind. Through failure to investigate Reality,

the Jews rejected His Holiness Jesus Christ.’[4]

That no one is exempt from the search for Reality is proved by

the further words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá; after saying that each human

being is equipped for the investigation of Reality, He continues,

‘each has individual endowment, power and responsibility …

Therefore depend upon your own reason and judgement and adhere

to the outcome of your own investigation… . Turn to God,

supplicate humbly at His Threshold … that God may rend

asunder the veils that obscure your vision.’[5] Henceforward no one

should expose himself and humanity to the dangers of ignorance.

Originality is one of the thousand refreshing outcomes of the

independent investigation of Truth, for the simple reason that if

we look at anything, we look at it in a way peculiar to ourself. We

have to. We will all see the same Reality, but at different angles. A

change from the past, when originality has been so rare as to be a

matter of comment, and we have praised people as ‘original

thinkers.’ And with so many such thinkers in circulation, the

impetus to all the graces of civilization is self-evident. Besides

which, when each of us has to discover life for himself, each will be

as exultant as Columbus when his first redskin glittered through the

shrubbery.

## This Handful of Dust

ACCORDING TO AN AGED RELIGIOUS official in Constantinople,

who wore a lavender velvet skull-cap and had never spared himself

wrinkles in toiling after knowledge, Eve was made out of Adam’s

rib for this reason: that all humankind might be known to have

sprung from one father. He felt that had Eve been specially

created as was Adam, some amongst men might have gone back to

their mother, taken her side, established and maintained a duality.

As it was, Eve herself was only a component of Adam, the world

had only one parent, and from the beginning the principle of unity

was asserted.

College-bred Westerners who profess modernity may be only

amused at such a statement. Since Darwin, the Book of Genesis is

not often read in non-sectarian colleges, except in Bible courses,

where it is treated at arm’s length, or on Sunday evenings, if

chapel attendance is compulsory. Conditions indicate that the

professorial world is in doubt regarding how to proceed in the

matter. The situation is almost embarrassing, because 19th century

science has proved that the events related in Genesis cannot be

read literally, and the professorial world is still so taken up with

this discovery that it will not countenance the possibility of spiritual

significances in the age-old record. On the other hand, mothers

who grew up in a Matthew Arnold tradition desire the Bible for

their offspring because of its literary beauty and its cultural value;

hence the Bible courses, where the sacred lines are read as gingerly

as possible, and their meaning contradicted by the biology across

the hall.

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Our professors’ attempts at releasing their charges from ortho-

dox faiths are of course sincere; except for the old-school peda-

gogues, dreaming their lives away in a mid-Victorian afterglow,

every instructor feels that he must share with his classes, however

implicitly, what he considers to be true; and so he gives to them the

doctrines of our present age, an age bitterly disillusioned since the

19th century struck down, in a generation or so, the truths by

which humanity had lived two thousand years. So much was then

found untrue that human beings, with their characteristic exag-

geration, are now inclined to deny everything. One remembers the

modern child who not only did not believe in Santa Claus—he did

not even believe there was a Lindbergh. At best, the most educated

and tolerant of our contemporaries outside of Bahá’í communities

consider everything to be relative, shifting; at worst, we see hu-

manity embracing the most fantastic faiths conceivable, and re-

establishing the medieval criterion of ‘I believe it because it is

impossible’—until, with all our modern illumination, we find such

things as star-gazing and celery water elevated almost to a principle

of life. Society, then, offers countless examples of the educated,

who believe nothing, and of the quasi-educated, who believe any-

thing, providing it is not true.

To Bahá’ís, the Book of Genesis embodies profound spiritual

realities, and is sacred. We may, then, accept the words of the old

wise man of Constantinople, who sat under a shaft of sunlight in

his darkened room, and said that all mankind were born from a

single father. It is interesting in this connection to remember

Darwin’s concluding remarks in the *Origin of Species*, to the effect

that animals and plants are respectively descended from at most

four or five progenitors, and that both are possibly issued from one

prototype. Here were two men, examples intellectually of countless

others; one deep in the lore of the Torah, a follower of the Book;

the other at variance with orthodoxy, interested only in natural

phenomena, opposed to a teleological view of the universe (writing,

for example, ‘I am in an utterly hopeless muddle. I cannot think

that the world … is the result of chance; and yet I cannot look at

each separate thing as the result of Design’); and yet each coming

after years of search to a doctrine of original unity, however differ-

ently regarded: the priest rejoicing in the knowledge that human

kind are one family; the scientist interested in what he considered

a true explanation of origins, and saying, although he was probably

not much concerned with any spiritual implications which others

might draw from his work, that his theory and its connotations

apparently ‘accords better with what we know of the laws impressed

on matter by the Creator.’

Whatever our attitude toward the human race may be, it is

evident that thought must bring us to a belief in the basic oneness

of humanity. Such a belief is an indispensable corner stone in any

ideal life-structure that we may build; we cannot symmetrically

lodge in the divine pattern of the world unless our thought is

founded on the knowledge that the human family is one; that at

most existing differences are superficial, indicate varying oppor-

tunity, varying degrees of adjustment; and that, stirred by a new

heavenly force, every race will arise at last to fulfil its promised

destiny. For within every race is latent the power to develop to-

ward perfection, and wherever there is man, there is potential

reflection of divinity. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says that ‘The greatest bestowal

of God to man is the capacity to attain human virtues.’[1] He does

not restrict this capacity to white men or yellow men, or to any so-

called superior race; he tells us this bestowal is granted to ‘man.’

We must, then, honour the gift of God to man, and live in the

certainty that all human beings are divinely endowed, however

various may be the expressions of this endowment.

The understanding of human oneness is thus an all-important

article of successful belief, but should it remain merely a philo-

sophical conception, it is of little practical value. The violence of

modern race-hatred is not to be quieted by the mere reiteration of

an axiom. Our library shelves have been lined for centuries with

splendid thoughts, and the dust is thick upon them. It is for this

reason that Bahá’u’lláh has made it mandatory for His followers to

live the principle of world unity, saying, ‘It is incumbent on you to

be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same

mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being,

by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness and the essence of

detachment may be made manifest.’[2] Bahá’í communities include

members of every race and colour, and Bahá’ís are forbidden to

turn away from any human being; they are bidden, rather, to see

the face of God in every face.

This practising of oneness comes often as a shock to those who

are unacquainted with the Bahá’í Cause; such people express a

physical aversion even to sitting in the same room with members of

some race or races which they are accustomed to disdain; they feel

this physical distaste to be in a measure even divinely ordained by

the Creator; something on the order of that other physical mani-

festation, the antipathy to snakes, which many cherish in a spirit

of righteousness because of what happened in Eden. As a matter of

fact, the dislike of one race for another, far from being an ordained

protection to the chosen and justly imposed punishment on the

rejected, is the accumulated result of an age-long practice of

tyranny; we are averse to those whom we have mistreated, just as

we love those to whom we have been kind; the first recall to us our

ugly and inharmonious action, while the second reminds us of

happiness which came from fulfilment of function; it would seem

that service is prerequisite to love. Again, dislike of the unknown

is a cause of racial antipathy, and explains why people select some

races to accept and others to repel. Moreover, a scandalous tradi-

tion grown up around a race and fostered by enemies often prevents

the welcome of the victimized. Most important of all, perhaps, as a

source of race hatred, is a feeling that members of some other race

are unclean; uncleanliness is often the greatest barrier between

human beings; the idea of uncleanliness is so closely associated

with hate that every language includes in its vocabulary of profani-

ties terms imputing uncleanliness to those detested; and every

people feels that other peoples are relatively dirty. The stressing of

immaculate cleanliness in the Bahá’í teaching is thus of great

importance: an unclean humanity can never be united. It is

interesting that when a Westerner learns of the Bahá’í injunctions

regarding cleanliness he usually comments on the great benefit to

Easterners of this teaching; and in the same way, the Easterner,

often a Muḥammadan who washes five times a day, (whatever the

water) feels that at last the West is to be clean. In any event, an

attempt to adopt the Bahá’í standards of cleanliness is highly

spiritualizing, one knows that future peoples will be dazzlingly

clean.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us that ‘Man can withstand anything except

that which is divinely intended and indicated for the age and its

requirements.’[3] Conditions imply that the asserting of human one-

ness is become indispensable to livable existence, and we may there-

fore confidently believe that a time of perfect human solidarity is

upon us. Our love for others may no longer be selective—selective

love is indirect hatred. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that ‘When reality

envelops the soul of man love is possible,’[4] and by reality is intended

the Word of God as revealed through the great teachers who appear

among men when hearts have faded and minds have crystallized

in cruelty. He says, regarding human relations, ‘Never become

angry with one another … Love the creatures for the sake of

God and not for themselves. You will never become angry or

impatient if you love them for the sake of God … the imperfect

eye beholds imperfections,’[5] and again ‘… if you have an enemy,

consider him not as an enemy. Do not simply be long-suffering,

nay, rather, love him … Do not even say that he is your enemy.

Do not see any enemies.’[6] This love, this centrifugal power by

which hostility will be destroyed is impelling to its service people

of every religion and belief. This love is neither a pasty senti-

mentality nor an hysteria, but an unfaltering practice of waiting on

humanity; and humanity is not a vague abstract with a capital ‘H,’

it is the family, and the man going by in the street, and the chance

acquaintance. Such a service is not exercised with any hypocritical

hope of reward either in this world or the next—one does not

accept pay in exchange for love. The offering it, is considered a

privilege, like a tree’s privilege of blossoming when the spring

comes.

A leading anthropologist recently advocated intermarriage be-

tween the white and yellow races, saying that the union would

result in a superior type of human being. This statement is en-

couragingly in advance of popular belief, demonstrates that in-

formed men are approaching a conception of human oneness; and

since ideas born in the laboratory are found to influence people at

large, and to show them where they have erred before, it is interest-

ing that scientists are unsaying past criteria and substituting prin-

ciples that are more in harmony with the spirit of a modern age.

Again, psychologists find in their study of gifted children that

many such cases are products of mixed races. Obviously, were

humanity not essentially one, and were certain races inferior *per se*,

a cross could not be beneficial, and results would belie the above

conclusions. Furthermore, we have recently heard of some distin-

guished people among the professional class here in the United

States who are beginning to advocate intermarriage of coloured

and white races, asserting that in view of the outstanding progress

among coloured peoples, the old exclusion policy is no longer work-

able. Everywhere, apparently, the cause of human oneness is

winning adherents, and the ‘forts of folly’ are battered down.

Oneness, of course, should not be confused with sameness, which

is a tedious, artificial thing, entirely alien to a world where no two

grains of wheat have ever been alike. The peculiar curse of the

times is an effort at standardization; gum is chewed on the Hima-

layas, and everyone is trying desperately to be like everyone else, or

more so. This situation results from the advent of machines, and

will doubtless be corrected little by little, as humanity grows

accustomed to machines and has them subservient to beauty. A

Persian cobbler never dares to make two shoes identical in every

respect, because he thinks such an act will kill his wife; he may be

harbouring a superstition, but artistically he is quite sound. Indi-

viduality is precious and refreshing; the world presents subtle

blends of endless variations; there must be orchids and hills, roads

and tuberoses, intimacy of sunlight and the mystery of fog. Spiritu-

ally, too, every human being has his candle to burn, his spire of

blue incense smoke to offer as a gift and a worship in the temple of

humanity. Does it matter what colour are the fingers curved in

prayer? Or whether the music be a honey-slow spiritual from

Louisiana, or the flute-song of a Persian shepherd, watching in a

turquoise dawn? The sacred gift of an obedient life is treasured-up

for all eternity, and every giver is beloved. In this dawn of a new

humanity, no one is rejected. There are no untouchables, no social

lepers, no spurned and remnant peoples any more; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

tells us that the love of God haloes all created things.

The oneness of the world of humanity is to be established

because it is God’s will that ‘this handful of dust, the world,’

should be one home. No materialistic endeavours, however sincere,

can be of any permanent assistance here, because they cannot stir

the hearts of men; no ethical practical ‘system,’ no legions of deft

clerks and catalogues of statistics, no cheques and after-dinner

speeches, can right the hatred of one man for another. No smiles

can cup the blood that centuries have shed. Only a God-inspired

effort, functioning through the knowledge that all humanity is

equally beloved, that all are precious in the sight of God and wear

the emblems of His beauty, will build the alabaster cities where the

races of the future are to live united.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us that ‘the fundamental teachings of

Bahá’u’lláh are the oneness of God and unity of mankind’,[7] and

He says: ‘Just as the human spirit of life is the cause of co-ordina-

tion among the various parts of the human organism, the Holy

Spirit is the controlling cause of the unity and co-ordination of

mankind. That is to say, the bond or oneness of humanity cannot

be effectively established save through the power of the Holy

Spirit, for the world of humanity is a composite body and the Holy

Spirit is the animating principle of its life.’[8] Let us, then, be

servants of the Holy Spirit, and live hour by hour the knowledge

that humanity is one.

## The Rise of Women

AFTER ‘WOMBAT’ IN THE BRITANNICA, we come to ‘Women,

Diseases of’.

This is the first reference to ‘Women’. The idea of women

being chronic invalids seems to the Encyclopedia the most perti-

nent fact about them.

Man, of course, fares very differently. He is not pluralized, but

occurs proudly in the singular. His first heading is: ‘Man, Evolu-

tion of’. He stands for all humanity, and he isn’t even sick.

The Britannica was written primarily by men. We live in a

man’s world; that is the matter with it.

No religion prior to the Bahá’í Faith taught sex equality. The

Old Testament says to woman, of her husband ‘and he shall rule

over thee’.[1] Under Mosaic law, it is true that mothers are to be

honoured along with fathers, and daughters may inherit—in the

absence of sons. But women are of less account than men. They

may not even serve as witnesses in civil or criminal cases. They

pray to give birth, not to daughters, but to sons.

Marriage according to the Old Testament is polygamous. There

is no legal limit in Mosaic law to the number of wives and concu-

bines a man may have. If a man wishes a divorce, he carries out the

provisions in Deuteronomy 24:1, as follows: ‘When a man hath

taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no

favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her;

then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand,

and send her out of his house.’

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Even after the express prohibition of polygamy by Rabbi

Gershom B. Judah, ‘The Light of the Exile’ (960–1028 a.d.), many

of the Jewish peoples continued to practise it; the Jews of Spain,

for example, were polygamous as late as the 14th century a.d.

*The Jewish Encyclopedia*, under polygamy, states:

*In spite of the prohibition against polygamy and of the general*

*acceptance thereof, the Jewish law still retains many provisions*

*which apply only to a state which permits polygamy. The marriage*

*of a married man is legally valid and needs the formality of a bill*

*of divorce for its dissolution, while the marriage of a married*

*woman is void …*

There is no justification for reading sex equality back into the

New Testament. It is not there.

Jesus healed women along with men; He praised a woman’s

faith and her love, He condemned the scribes ‘which devour

widows’ houses’; He conversed with a woman in the same tones He

used to men; He gave such women as do the will of the Father the

rank of His mother and sister; He reiterated the Old Testament

commandment to honour father and mother; He forgave the

woman taken in adultery; and He softened the curse of the Old

Testament: ‘in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children’ with: ‘as

soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the

anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world’.[2]

He protected women from the lust of men; and He saved them

from being cast aside in divorce, except for adultery: ‘And I say

unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for

fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and

whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.’

Again: ‘And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be

married to another she committeth adultery.’[3]

But nowhere in the New Testament do we find any slightest

indication as to the sexes being equal. On the contrary, the New

Testament declares woman the inferior: ‘[man] is the image and

glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman

of the man.’[4] ‘I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority

over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then

Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived

was in the transgression.’[5] ‘Let your women keep silence in the

churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak … And if

they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home.’[6]

‘Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the

Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the

head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore

as the Church is subject unto Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own

husbands in everything.’[7]

Christian practice down to our times has been based on the

belief that woman (Eve) is the destroyer of God’s image, man; that

she is the devil’s gateway and a painted hell—see the Church

fathers for these and other metaphors; that she is mentally and

physically deficient; that marriage is evil, although preferable to

licence; that children are born in sin. Chivalry and the worship of

Mary, both imports from the East, had little appreciable effect on

the status of the average Christian woman.

Anyone who believes that Christianity teaches sex equality has

only to study the history of the Woman Suffrage movement. The

dates alone tell the story. An early, revered landmark in the evolu-

tion of women’s rights is Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of*

*the Rights of Woman*, inspired by France’s ‘Liberty, Equality, and

Fraternity’ and brought out in 1792. On July 19, 1848, the first

Women’s Rights Convention met at Seneca Falls, New York, at the

home of Mrs. Elizabeth Cady Stanton. However, the famous

gathering at Badasht, Khurásán, Persia—which posterity will

recognize as an irrevocable break with the past, and in the course

of which woman’s equality with man was unforgettably pro-

claimed—antedated this by a few days, or weeks.[8] It was at

Badasht that the great Ṭáhirih (Qurratu’l-‘Ayn) appeared without

her veil, and with solemn triumph, in the heart of a Muslim nation,

addressed the stupefied gathering, crying out: ‘This day is …

the day on which the fetters of the past are burst asunder.’[9]

Freedom for women was so dear to Ṭáhirih that she died for it.

She was ‘the first woman suffrage martyr’. In August, 1852, she

gave up her life, executed for her life’s work. In her last moments

she said, ‘You can kill me as soon as you like, but you cannot stop

the emancipation of women.’[10]

In 1867, in the case of Chorlton v. Ling, it was sought to estab-

lish that women were persons and as such entitled to the Parlia-

mentary vote. The Married Women’s Property Acts were passed in

Great Britain in 1882 and 1893; prior to this the wife’s legal

existence was merged with her husband’s: ‘My wife and I are one,

and I am he,’ expressed it. (The reader should, however, refer to

Mary R. Beard’s *Woman as Force in History* for a thorough study

of the field; as her title indicates, the author shows that women, far

from being at all times a subject sex, have actively shaped history.

This thesis is familiar to Bahá’ís; see for example a discourse

delivered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in 1912.)[11]

In the United States, the 19th Amendment, enacted August

26, 1920, gave American women the right to vote. It reads: ‘The

right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied

or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of

sex.

The New Testament does not teach monogamy nor condemn

polygamy. John Milton’s brilliant *Treatise on Christian Doctrine*

establishes this. He states:

*In the definition which I have given [of marriage], I have not said,*

*in compliance with the common opinion, of one man with one*

*woman, lest I should by implication charge the holy patriarchs and*

*pillars of our faith, Abraham, and the others who had more than*

*one wife at the same time, with … adultery; and lest I should be*

*forced to exclude from the sanctuary of God as spurious, the holy*

*offspring which sprang from them, yea, the whole of the sons of*

*Israel, for whom the sanctuary itself was made. For it is said,*

*Deut. xxiii.2. ‘a bastard shall not enter into the congregation of*

*Jehovah, even to his tenth generation.’ Either therefore polygamy is*

*a true marriage, or all children born in that state are spurious;*

*which would include the whole race of Jacob, the twelve holy Tribes*

*chosen by God.*

Milton denies the ‘twain shall be one flesh’ verses, so often ad-

vanced as meaning monogamy (e.g. Matthew 19:5), any such

connotation; he says in part, ‘the context refers to the husband and

that wife only whom he was seeking to divorce …’ He advances

Exodus 21:10 as clearly showing the sanction of polygamy: ‘If he

take him another wife, her food, her raiment, and her duty of

marriage shall he not diminish.’ And he adds: ‘It cannot be sup-

posed that the divine forethought intended to provide for adultery.’

Milton continues:

*That bishops and elders should have no more than one wife is*

*explicitly enjoined I Tim. iii.2. and Tit. 1.6. ‘he must be the hus-*

*band of one wife,’ … The command itself, however, is a suffi-*

*cient proof that polygamy was not forbidden to the rest, and that it*

*was common in the church at that time.*[12]

Muḥammad was the first modern feminist. The Qur’án gives

women many and specific rights. As learned Muslims and Islamists

have not failed to point out, this Book grants spiritual equality to

believers of either sex:

*Truly the men who resign themselves to God (Muslims), and the*

*women who resign themselves, and the believing men and the be-*

*lieving women, and the devout men and the devout women, and the*

*men of truth, and the women of truth, and the patient men and the*

*patient women, and the humble men and the humble women, and*

*the men who give alms and the women who give alms, and the men*

*who fast and the women who fast, and the chaste men and the*

*chaste women, and the men and the women who oft remember God:*

*for them hath God prepared forgiveness and a rich recompense.’*[13]

In the Qur’án, Adam is as guilty as Eve; Satan seduced them

both and in another passage Adam is the one deceived. In women

God has placed ‘abundant good’. Men are bidden to ‘reverence the

wombs *that bear you*’.[14]

Women inherit and own property and act as witnesses; they

receive alimony and widows also receive a provision. Divorce is

discouraged; according to a ḥadíth (oral tradition) it is lawful, but

abhorred by God; arbitration is enjoined to forestall divorce: ‘And

if ye fear a breach between man and wife, then send a judge chosen

from his family, and a judge chosen from her family: if they are

desirous of agreement, God will effect a reconciliation …’ The

love between man and wife is one of the signs of God: ‘And one of

His signs it is, that He hath created wives [mates] for you of your

own species, that ye may dwell with them, and hath put love and

tenderness between you.’[15]

Women are to be protected from lust;[16] men are to live ‘chaste-

ly … and without taking concubines’.[17] Monogamy is enjoined,

since the Text states: ‘marry *but* two, or three, or four; and if ye

*still* fear that ye shall not act equitably, then one only’.[18] Elsewhere

the text of the Qur’án states that such equitable action would be

impossible: ‘And ye will not have it at all in your power to treat

your wives alike, even though you fain would so do …’

In spite of woman’s tremendous advance under Islám, in the

law of Muḥammad, as in that of Moses and Jesus, men are superior

to women and the wife is subject to the husband; the Qur’án

teaches:

*Men are superior to women on account of the qualities with which*

*God hath gifted the one above the other, and on account of the out-*

*lay they make from their own substance for them … chide those*

*for whose refractoriness ye have cause to fear … and strike them:*

*but if they are obedient to you, then seek not occasion against them.*[19]

Other verses show that women 1300 years ago had not achieved

equality with men.[20]

We cannot foresee where the Bahá’í principle of sex equality will

lead; it is new, and connotes vital changes in the social structure.

Up to now, man—and at times, perhaps, women, for the matriarch-

ate in its broader sense is arguable—has been dominant. Now at

last a male-female check and balance system is established.

Anyhow, the implications are important for world peace. Man’s

domestic dominance may well have been a contributive cause of

war; the home pattern of aggression, resentment and retaliation is

similar to that which on the world scale develops as war. Moreover,

most languages are weighted with the idea of male superiority, and

the child is taught to disparage female opinion, which means also

to disparage woman’s antipathy to war.

Here are some aspects of the picture as envisaged by Bahá’ís:

‘Abdu’l-Bahá affirms that not only man, but woman, is created in

the image and likeness of God: ‘The “image” and “likeness” of

God applies to her as well.’ He shows that stages of life lower than

man do not treat the female as inferior:

*Among the myriad organisms of the vegetable and animal kingdoms,*

*sex exists but there is no differentiation whatever as to relative*

*importance and value … If we investigate impartially we may*

*even find species in which the female is superior or preferable to the*

*male … The male of the date palm is valueless while the female*

*bears abundantly … The male of the animal kingdom does not*

*glory in its being male and superior to the female. In fact equality*

*exists and is recognized. Why should man, a higher and more*

*intelligent creature deny and deprive himself of this equality the*

*animals enjoy?*[21]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

*God does not inquire ‘Art thou woman or art thou man?’ He judges*

*human actions. If these are acceptable at the threshold of the*

*Glorious One, man and woman will be equally recognized and*

*rewarded.*

And elsewhere:

*In some countries man went so far as to believe and teach that*

*woman belonged to a sphere lower than human. But in this century*

*which is the century of light … God is proving to the satisfaction*

*of humanity that all this is ignorance and error; nay, rather, it is*

*well established that mankind and womankind as factors of com-*

*posite humanity are co-equal and that no difference in estimate is*

*allowable … The conditions in past centuries were due to woman’s*

*lack of opportunity … She was … left in her undeveloped*

*state.*[22]

Few persons or institutions today practise the Bahá’í teaching of

educating the daughter rather than the son if it is impossible to

provide education for both; during the war, for example, crowded

American schools were not unknown to favour male candidates,

neglecting the female. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

*The education of woman is more necessary and important than that*

*of man, for woman is the trainer of the child from its infancy …*

*The mothers are the first educators of mankind; if they be im-*

*perfect, alas for the condition and future of the race.*[23]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá does not accept the argument of male superiority

based on the size of the brain:

*Some philosophers and writers have considered woman naturally*

*and by creation inferior to man, claiming as a proof that the brain*

*of man is larger and heavier than that of woman. This is frail and*

*faulty evidence inasmuch as small brains are often found coupled*

*with superior intellect and large brains possessed by those who are*

*ignorant, even imbecile.*[24]

The Master affirms that woman should not be considered in-

ferior because she does not go to war, and adds:

*Yet be it known that if woman had been taught and trained in the*

*military science of slaughter she would have been the equivalent of*

*man even in this … But God forbid! … for the destruction of*

*humanity is not a glorious achievement … Let not a man glory in*

*this,—that he can kill his fellow-creatures; nay, rather, let him*

*glory in this, that he can love them.*[25]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes a striking difference between man’s

psychology and woman’s. He states that man is more inclined to

war than woman; that woman, once she becomes fully effective in

society, will block war. Women, then, do not derive from warfare

the psychological satisfactions obtained from it by men, and their

repugnance to war should be implemented to keep the peace:

*Strive that the ideal of international peace may become realized*

*through the efforts of womankind, for man is more inclined to war*

*than woman, and a real evidence of woman’s superiority will be her*

*service and efficiency in the establishment of Universal Peace.*[26]

*The mother bears the troubles and anxieties of rearing the child;*

*undergoes the ordeal of its birth and training … Therefore it is*

*most difficult for mothers to send those upon whom they have*

*lavished such love and care, to the battlefield … So it will come*

*to pass that when women participate fully and equally in the affairs*

*of the world … war will cease; for woman will be the obstacle and*

*hindrance to it. This is true and without doubt.*[27]

What ‘Abdu’l-Bahá teaches regarding the effect of constant

negative environmental suggestion on woman should be especially

pondered. Everywhere woman is battered down by depressing

suggestion—that she is sick, rattle-brained, incompetent, that she

ages quicker than man, and so on. One sees here the same type of

poisonous social suggestion which attacks black American citi-

zens.[28] This gifted people (whom North America will some day

recognize as one of her most valuable population elements) is con-

tinually being told in thousands of subtle ways—in books, linguistic

expressions, movies, the theatre, from lecture platforms—by the

majority that they have no future, must stay in their ‘place’, are

biologically unfit, etc. The wholesome suggestion established by

black leaders—successful artists, writers, educators, sports cham-

pions and the rest—is extremely important. A fact is irrefutable; it

is there for people to see. In the same way one successful woman

gives the lie to all the old husbands’ tales of woman’s inferiority:

*The only remedy is education, opportunity; for equality means*

*equal qualification … the assumption of superiority by man will*

*continue to be depressing to the ambition of woman, as if her attain-*

*ment to equality was creationally impossible … If a pupil is told*

*that his intelligence is less than his fellow-pupils, it is a very great*

*drawback and handicap to his progress. He must be encouraged to*

*advance …*[29]

Since work in future will be allotted only on the basis of know-

ledge and skill, there is no need to particularize here; it is interest-

ing, however, that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá especially recommends the

‘industrial and agricultural sciences’ for women.[30]

Polygamy inevitably connotes woman’s inferiority. Monogamy

is Bahá’í law. The marriage contract is a partnership of two equals;

neither agrees to obey the other, and neither belongs to the other;

one individual cannot own another.

Women, under Bahá’í law, are accorded a few exemptions in

their religious observances. Furthermore, a few restrictions apply

to women: women inherit a lesser share than men, although this is

not mandatory if an individual prefers to distribute his property

otherwise,[31] and women do not serve in the Universal House of

Justice, although they serve on the Local and National Houses, and

the members of the last-named elect the members of the Universal

body. Of this non-membership in the Universal House of Justice,

‘Abdu’l-Bahá said the reason ‘will presently appear, even as the

sun at midday’.[32] It does not affect woman’s status of equality,

since the highest rank a Bahá’í can attain, that of Hand of the

Cause, is open to women as well as men.

## Till Death Do Us Part

ONE EVENING IN 1667, SAMUEL PEPYS, ‘returning home to find

his wife vexed by his absence … “did give her a pull by the nose

and some ill words”’; in consequence of this the lady followed him

to the office in “a devilish manner”, so that he had to take her

“into the garden out of hearing, to prevent shame”. On another

occasion, obliged by an acquaintance to attend church when he

had been on his way to what the biographer calls ‘a more secular

appointment,’ Pepys stayed there “in pain,” consoling himself by

turning his perspective glass on “a great many very fine women”

in the congregation, with which and sleeping he “passed away the

time till sermon was done …”. Domestic scenes naturally re-

sulted. Mrs. Pepys, ‘burning a candle in the chimney piece into the

small hours … made night a torment with her reproaches.’ Pepys

went down on his knees “to pray to God … alone in my chamber

… I hope God will give me the grace more and more every day

to fear Him, and to be true to my poor wife!” Not long afterward,

however, we find Mrs. Pepys threatening her husband with red

hot tongs. Eventually she settled her problem by passing away.[1]

Subtracting tongs and candle—and perhaps the prayer—the

Pepys’ family relationship continues to be repeated in millions of

current households across the planet. We are today more than ever

victims of a worldwide maladjustment between the sexes, a disorder

resulting in unnecessarily broken hearts and in a lamentable mis-

application of psychic energy. The world’s work is being carried on

by individuals whose attention is to a dangerous degree concen-

trated on the turmoil in their domestic relationships; unavoidably,

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United States

current humanity is distracted from its task of building a new

civilization, by the tremendous disturbances in present-day emo-

tional life. Although, lacking a uniform standard of behaviour,

human beings are at odds in all their dealings today, the man-

woman situation is probably the most embroiled of the lot; cer-

tainly the inharmony between the sexes is the most popular trouble

in the world.

Like other phases of life in the machine age, sex inharmony can

perhaps clearest be observed in the United States, where for terri-

torial and chronological reasons—for the expanse and quantity of

the phenomena presented, and their relative isolation from the

past—our current civilization is easily read. Studying the situation

in the United States one gathers that lack of factual sex equality is

responsible for much of the suffering at present so noticeable. The

woman problem is somewhat analogous to that presented by any

minority group—to that, let us say, of the black in the United

States, or of the minority peoples in various countries; like these,

women come birthmarked, born to redundant struggle. Women

are treated not as individuals, but as women. Compare, for example,

the lower salary paid a woman with the one paid a man for identical

work. In courtship it is the man who establishes whether the

marriage shall take place or not; to paraphrase, woman disposes

but man proposes. It is woman who is expected to be physically

attractive, not man—to spend hours in the Dante-esque torment of

a beauty parlour, while public opinion derides the man who devotes

more than a few minutes of the day to his personal appearance. In

the average home, it is woman who does the menial tasks.

‘Truth is the name we give to errors grown hoary with the cen-

turies,’ said Spinoza, and the Vaertings quote him to this effect in

their book, “The Dominant Sex.”[2] Anyone who believes that

woman belongs in a sphere predetermined by traditional notions

on the respective roles of the sexes, should in fairness refer to the

work of these and similar investigators. According to the above

anthropologists, one sex or the other has been dominant down the

ages; moreover ‘… the contemporary peculiarities of women are

mainly determined by the existence of the Men’s State, and …

they are accurately and fully paralleled by the peculiarities of men

in the Women’s State.’[3] The authors show, for example, that where

women were dominant, men remained in the home, engaged in

house work and caring for the children; they spent much time in

self-beautification, ‘curled the hair and the beard, wore plenty of

gold ornaments, and were diligent in the care of the teeth and the

finger-nails;[4] their youth was highly valued, whereas the age of a

woman was of no great importance, and they were physically the

weaker sex, for ‘… the women of the Women’s State have very

different physical aptitudes from those possessed by the women of

the contemporary Men’s State. Where woman rules, she is no less

superior to man in bodily capacity than man is superior to woman

in this respect where man holds sway.’[5] Menial tasks were left to

the men, while even the army was recruited from the women, and

even the Fall was attributed to a man, he having tasted of forbidden

fruit. Descent was reckoned through the mother, money was con-

trolled by women. In courtship woman was the aggressor; Robert

Briffault tells of ‘a love poem of the period of Rameses II, addressed,

as was usual in Egypt, by the lady to her beloved. The former opens

her heart thus: “O my beautiful friend! My desire is to become, as

thy wife, the mistress of all thy possessions!”’[6] We learn from the

same authority that the chief provision of an Egyptian marriage

contract was, “If I leave thee as husband because I have come to

hate thee, or because I love another man, I shall give thee two and a

half measures of silver … .”’[7] and further, ‘Where, as in Thebes,

the domiciles of husband and wife were sometimes separate, the

man might find himself in danger of starving. He accordingly took

the precaution to stipulate that the wife should “provide for him

during his lifetime, and pay the expenses of his … burial.”’

Pleasant as it is for the feminist to remember past grandeurs, to

think of Zenobia or of Queen Tomyris who conquered Cyrus, or

even to contemplate the new and still unrepresentative groups of

women achieving contemporary prominence—we should bear in

mind that authorities warn us against either type of monosexual

rule. Paul Bousfield even says; ‘… as long as there is any sex

dominance such a thing as world peace may be psychologically im-

possible’,[8] this because there is a tendency to displace primitive

desires for power from one sphere to another. The Vaertings con-

clude, ‘It is absolutely essential that humanity should discover ways

and means for the permanent realization of the ideal of sex equality,

and for the permanent prevention of either type of monosexual

dominance. In default, the millenniums that lie before us will be

no less wretched than those which are now drawing to a close.’[9]

Modern sex equality implies monogamy, not the verbal mono-

gamy to which the West has long been accustomed, but that defined

by the Vaertings as involving ‘premarital chastity in both sexes;

and faithfulness after marriage in the case of both parties.’[10] Inci-

dentally these investigators believe that monogamy ‘is only im-

possible where monosexual dominance prevails,’[11] and that ‘… in

human beings the monogamic trend is stronger than the poly-

gamic.’[12] The general practice of monogamy doubtless presupposes

an environment entirely other than that in which we now live.

Today our food, our music, our books, our clothing, the stage, the

museum, even the billboards along our streets, tend to forestall a

monogamic system. Authorities such as Bousfield urge drastic

changes: Non-differentiation in clothing, in education, in general

treatment, is an essential factor in equality … it is important that

the exclusive male and female names should be discontinued …

A revised idea of courtesy on a non-sexual basis is essential.’[13]

Bousfield likewise inveighs against such practices as modern danc-

ing, the pairing off of men and women partners at table, the ex-

clusive personal adornment of either sex, and other social factors

based on sex differentiation.

Monogamy, it should be remembered, is generally speaking a

modern institution. When Muḥammad appeared, He found poly-

gamy universally practised; Moses had imposed no definite limit

on the number of wives a man might have, and polygamy was not

formally prohibited among the Jews until the eleventh century, a.d.,

numerous Christian emperors, members of the clergy, nobles, were

polygamous, the commoners following their example. Since the

institution of concubinage was permitted and regulated in the Old

Testament with a “Jahveh said unto Moses,” early Christianity,

bound by its literal interpretation of Scripture, found it difficult to

abolish it. Concubinage was actually sanctioned by the Synod of

Toledo in 400 a.d., and was not actively suppressed as social im-

purity until the fifth Lateran Council in 1516.[14] Briffault tells us:

‘Muḥammad, who in the ecclesiastical imagination of the Middle

Ages was credited with having invented … polygamy, confirmed,

in reality, the general tendency of advancing economic develop-

ment by reducing the permissible number of legitimate wives to

four.’[15]

As a matter of fact, Muḥammad taught monogamy; He made

the marrying of a plurality of wives conditional on their being

treated with justice, and showed that a man could not act with

justice toward more than one wife. However, even the briefest

acquaintance with source materials will convince one that strict

monogamy has existed heretofore chiefly as an ideal, and even

today, the only difference between Eastern and Western polygamy

would seem to be that the Eastern variety is simultaneous, the

‘Western progressive.

Currently in most parts of the globe the husband is dominant,

and the happy marriage is almost a museum piece. A state of ten-

sion, resulting from woman’s dissatisfaction with the limited scope

allowed her by tradition, and from her resentment against the

privileges which her husband has arrogated to himself, is set up in

countless families, and it is well known that a child reared under

such conditions may be psychically maimed for life. Some authori-

ties, indeed, believe that the family—so often a reluctant amalgam

of uncongenialities—is doomed to extinction, but surveys show

that institutional life is unsuited to the proper development of the

child, and the family unit is found to be most in accord with

natural requirements; it is obvious, however, that with women

emerging to equality, the family will be greatly altered in future;

the ideal will be reached when neither parent is dominant.

A vast accumulation of literature—its very bulk proving that

something is wrong with the holy state—exists on the subject of

contemporary marriage. From Judge Lindsay to Léon Blum, to the

Iranian intellectual who blithely insists that marriage is about to

disappear altogether, every other thinker urges a solution. The man

in the street asks whom he is to believe. According to Bahá’í doc-

trine, the standard of behaviour is set in every dispensation by the

spiritual Educator of the time; this is not didacticism, but descrip-

tion, for it is Moses, it is Christ, it is Muḥammad who have founded

civilizations that have endured for centuries; it is Beings such as

these who are the law-makers; who do not compel, but who induce,

obedience.

Studying Judaism, Christianity, and Islám—which according to

the Bahá’í teachings are essentially one, representing, like the other

great Faiths, like the Bahá’í Faith itself, successive expressions of

the will of God—we find that the condition of woman gradually

improved, until, under Islám, she achieved rights and privileges

previously beyond her reach in a Men’s State environment. Under

the Muslim code the woman is not her husband’s possession but

enjoys rights as an independent human being; she acts regarding

herself and property without intervention of husband or father, has

a definite share in inheritance, can sue debtors in the open courts, is

treated with consideration in the matter of divorce. Aside from the

nature of these and the other Qur’ánic laws referring to woman,

their very number, as compared with the few laws regarding

woman in the Old and New Testaments, is highly significant.

Muḥammad could be called the first modern feminist. He decreed

respect for woman and gave her a legal status which women of the

West are only now attaining—this at a time when her position was

anything but favourable. Of woman in the Christian world, Ameer-

Ali points out that ‘Father after Father wrote on the enormities of

women … Tertullian calls women “the devil’s gateway … the

deserter of the divine law, the destroyer of God’s image—man.”

Chrysostom, says Lecky, “interpreted the general opinion of the

Fathers when he pronounced women to be ‘a necessary evil … a

desirable calamity, a domestic peril, a deadly fascination, a painted

ill’”’—and adds: ‘the rise of Protestantism made no difference in

the social conditions, or in the conception of lawyers regarding the

status of women.’[16] The Muslim attitude toward gender is summed

up in these lines from the thirty-third chapter of the Qur’án:

‘Verily the Moslems of either sex, and the true believers of either

sex, and the devout men, and the devout women, and the men of

veracity, and the women of veracity, and the patient men, and the

patient women, and the humble men, and the humble women, and

the almsgivers of either sex, and the men who fast, and the women

who fast, and the chaste men, and the chaste women, and those of

either sex who remember God frequently; for these hath God pre-

pared forgiveness and a great reward.’ [Sale]

One of the signs by which we recognize that phenomenal Being,

the Manifestation of God, is that His teachings are opposed to the

desires of His time. Muḥammad breaks the idols which are

the pride of the Quraysh; Bahá’u’lláh shatters many an idea that the

world has long worshipped; one of these is the idea of masculine

superiority. In decreeing sex equality Bahá’u’lláh attacks a funda-

mental concept of society, a concept the tenacity of which psy-

chologists are only beginning to understand. ‘… man,’ says a

recent investigator, ‘finds pleasure in all ideas of woman as a

“weaker vessel” … any slight weakness which is already hers is

greatly exaggerated … he carries her little bag or her parcel—not

because she is too weak to do any of these things for herself, but

because it produces in him a feeling of difference and superiority

… He hates the idea that she should compete on equal terms with

him at his work …’[17]

‘It is not to be denied,’ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us, ‘that in various

directions woman at present is more backward than man, also that

this temporary inferiority is due to the lack of educational oppor-

tunity … In the vegetable world there are male plants and female

plants; they have equal rights … In the animal kingdom we see

that the male and the female have equal rights … In the world of

humanity we find a great difference; the female sex is treated as

though inferior … This condition is due not to Nature, but to

education.’[18] Elsewhere He says: ‘Inasmuch as human society con-

sists of two factors, the male and female, each the complement of

the other, the happiness and stability of humanity cannot be as-

sured unless both are perfected … there must be no difference in

the education of male and female, in order that womankind may

develop equal capacity and importance with man in the social and

economic equation. In past ages humanity has been defective and

inefficient because incomplete. War and its ravages have blighted

the world. The education of woman will be a mighty step towards

its abolition and ending for she will use her whole influence

against war … In truth she will be the greatest factor in establish-

ing Universal Peace and international arbitration.’[19]

In the Bahá’í system, marriage is made difficult at the outset.

While in some parts of the United States a three-day delay has

proved beneficial in preventing unwise marriages, a much more

effective check is provided by the Bahá’í teaching that the consent

of all four parents involved is prerequisite to the union. One reason

for this law is that the whole purpose of the Bahá’í Cause is to

establish world harmony, and a marriage that tends to alienate a

number of people necessarily obstructs this. In practice it has been

found that this law provides an enduring basis for married life,

stressing as it does the importance of the marriage as related to the

group. The law applies whether or not the parents are Bahá is.

While marriage is made difficult, divorce—permissible in excep-

tional cases—is easily obtained, its main prerequisite being a year

of separation. ‘The thing which is lawful, but disliked by God, is

divorce,’ said Muḥammad, and the Bahá’í attitude is similar in this

respect. The emphasis in the Bahá’í law is on the careful selection

of a mate and on the importance of perpetuating the marriage.

Another feature of Bahá’í marriage is that the procreation of

children is its ‘sacred and primary purpose.’[20] Childless marriages

are viewed with anxiety by many leading thinkers. They involve

too little responsibility; they lack solidity; husband or wife is apt

at any moment to fold his tent like the Arabs and as silently steal

away. Whatever the further consequences of the childless marriage

—economic, social, physical—it is unquestioned that this system

tends to popularize divorce, and that divorce constitutes a serious

break in the community.

Like his health, an individual’s happiness is the concern of the

group. Bahá’ís believe that in the World Order which is forming

within our contemporary chaos, the individual’s happiness will be

assured by equal opportunities for the sexes, strict monogamy, love

marriages motivated by the desire to further the interests of the

community. The reader is reminded that according to the teaching

of Bahá’u’lláh, our modern world is capable of developing as facts,

through the power of the Bahá’í Faith coupled with scientific know-

ledge and equipment, the hopes and dreams of the past; hopes and

dreams that hitherto were realized only in germ.

## Atomic Mandate

IT WAS 5.30 OF A DARK MORNING, July 16, 1945, on the New

Mexico desert. The head of the Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory

stood tensely waiting. Six miles away, mounted on a robot-con-

trolled steel tower, an unknown thing was poised. This thing had

cost two billion dollars; it had cost the toil of thousands of scientists

over many years; whole cities had been built to build it, and great

factories spreading over miles of countryside. Now they would set

it going. If the test failed, all their work was lost. If it succeeded

too well, this scientist and his waiting colleagues might be the first

victims of an uncontrollable force, released by them to roam the

earth.

Time signals, broadcast by radio, remorselessly measured out

the last moments. The man held onto a post, steadying himself as

the time ran out. Then a voice called: ‘Now!’

And there came a great explosion of light, many times brighter

than noonday sun. Then there came a shock wave, knocking men

down. And after that, with a long roaring, a multicoloured cloud

boiled seven miles high. The man recognized that sound: it was

the last death cry of many human beings, still alive then across the

planet, matter-of-factly going about their business in the quiet

July night. At this moment he heard in his mind two lines from

Hindu Scripture: ‘*I am become death, the shatterer of worlds*.’

Someone lit the first fire, long ago. About a million years ago,

man was already using it. In our time, man has just come upon

atomic energy. Like fire, it can mean life just as well as death. And

like fire, it is here to stay.

People seem to feel, these days, as if a genie had been let out of a

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bottle and were lying in wait to kill them. But there is really no new

danger in the world. There is just the same old one: the human

mind and heart. Man is dangerous; his tools are not.

The answer to the Bomb is not another Bomb. The only possible

answer is a new kind of man.

There is a way of living in the world now which will make the

Bomb as harmless as a toy bow and arrow. There is a new way of

putting the individual and the nation and all nations together in a

pattern which makes peace.

There are now local, national and international Bahá’í com-

munities on the planet which are islands of world peace.

The people in these communities all feel the same way. They

are Chicagoans or South Americans or New Yorkers. East Indians

or Ethiopians or San Franciscans; they are black, white, yellow,

brown, any colour; they are rich or poor, schooled or unschooled;

their parents were Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Muḥam-

madans, free-thinkers, of any religion, of no religion. They are

citizens of many countries, but they take no political sides. They

all feel the same way now.

Here are some of the things Bahá’ís want:

All races equal and non-segregated

Men and women equal

The nations united, as states in a world government

A world police

A world language, taught in all schools

A world calendar

World education: the same chance for education everywhere

Science and religion equally important

Work for all; no idle rich and no idle poor; no extremely rich

and no terribly poor. A single standard of right and wrong for

everyone. Justice for everyone. The love of God and His Prophets.

Prayer. Preparation now for life after death.

One of the loveliest buildings in the ‘Western Hemisphere, the

Bahá’í House of Worship at Wilmette, Illinois, was built by

Bahá’í communities as a symbol of their purpose: to create one

world, united under God.

The design of these communities was drawn almost a hundred

years ago by the Persian nobleman Bahá’u’lláh (the Glory of God).

He showed how all religions promised peace on earth; He said the

time for that peace had now come. He showed how world peace

would begin first in the individual, then in the group, and then

spread over the whole earth.

He had nothing to gain by bringing a new religion, everything

to lose. He lost His rank in Persia; His palaces and possessions;

His freedom. Driven away from His country, He was a prisoner

and exile nearly forty years. Twenty thousand followers were killed

in Persia: homes broken into, whole families butchered, dead

bodies left to be trampled and stoned.

His voice, at first, made no more stir in the world than that first

roaring of the Bomb across the desert. But, today, people are

listening to both voices, and one says *Die*, and one says *Live*.

Here are some of His words:

*Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no*

*one should exalt himself over the other.*

*Breathe not the sins of others so long as thou art thyself a sinner.*

*The best beloved of all things in My sight is justice; turn not away*

*therefrom…. Noble have I created thee, yet thou hast abased*

*thyself. Rise then unto that for which thou wast created.*

*Thou art My dominion and My dominion perisheth not, wherefore*

*fearest thou thy perishing?*[1]

He says ‘I’ and ‘We’, as the mouthpiece of God. He speaks

directly to man, with the authority of all God’s Prophets. That is

why religious and worldly leaders, jealous of their own authority,

rose up to destroy Him. But they failed. Though He died still a

prisoner, in the Holy Land in 1892, His Cause will never die.

Bahá’u’lláh wrote a hundred books. He knew our modern prob-

lems, and discussed them, showing the solution. He knew the

questions of our time, and answered them. He knew, prophetically,

about the Bomb. After Him, His son, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, knew of it. In

1911 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said this to a Japanese Ambassador, Viscount

Arakawa:

*There is in existence a stupendous force, as yet, happily, undis-*

*covered by man. Let us supplicate God, the Beloved, that this force*

*be not discovered by science until spiritual civilization shall dominate*

*the human mind. In the hands of men of lower material nature, this*

*power would be able to destroy the whole earth.*[2]

In 1920, He wrote to friends in Japan:

*In Japan the divine proclamation will be heard as a formidable*

*explosion …*[3]

Here are others of Bahá’u’lláh’s words, showing how to live in

this atomic age. These nine sentences were chosen by Shoghi

Effendi, world head of the Bahá’í Faith, to be inscribed under the

great dome of the Temple at Wilmette:

*All the Prophets of God proclaim the same faith*

*Religion is a radiant light and an impregnable stronghold*

*Ye are the fruits of one tree and the leaves of one branch*

*So powerful is unity’s light that it can illumine the whole earth*

*Consort with the followers of all religions with friendliness*

*O Son of Being! Thou art My lamp and My light is in thee*

*O Son of Being! Walk in My statutes for love of Me*

*Thy Paradise is My love; thy heavenly home reunion with Me*

*The light of a good character surpasseth the light of the sun*

Bahá’u’lláh was used to wealth and ease. In His Persian gardens,

attendants spread silken carpets for Him, by a stream twisting

down from the snow mountains. White-mulberry trees dropped

their fruit into dark pools there, and nightingales sang in the

jasmine flowers, all through the sapphire night. His companions

were princes, delicately nurtured, wearing their jewels and bro-

cades.

Then He was seized because of His beliefs, and chained under-

ground in the Black Pit of Ṭihrán. This Pit, an abandoned reservoir,

was three flights down in the earth. It was peopled with criminals,

most of them naked, covered with vermin, sitting on the bare

ground in their own filth. No light ever fell there, through the cold

dark. No sweet air ever came. It was during the months He was

condemned there, His feet in the stocks, His body wasted and bent

under His chains, that He slept and heard a voice say:

*Verily We will aid Thee to triumph by Thyself and by Thy pen … .*

*Ere long shall the Lord send forth and reveal the treasures of the*

*earth, men who shall give Thee the victory by Thyself and by Thy*

*Name wherewith the Lord hath revived the hearts of them that*

*know*.[4]

There is nothing new about killing. Men have always killed one

another and the Bomb is just a better way of doing it.

But living without inflicting death on others is brand new. It

has never been done before. It calls for a brand new way of thinking

and acting; for new behaviour which will create a new kind of

people.

Such behaviour can only result from religion. Religions begin in

the east. They arrive periodically, as they are needed, down the ages.

Today, answering man’s desperate need, the Glory of God has

come.

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# VI

# The Divine Encounter

**Echoes of the Heroic Age**

MOZART WAS NOT YET BORN, AND the world—showing how man

suffers from deprivation without knowing it—went its way without

him. George Washington was twenty-one years old; two years from

this time he was to fight under Braddock in the wilderness of

Pennsylvania, and later on to write his brother: ‘I have heard the

bullets whistle, and believe me there is something charming in the

sound.’ Samuel Johnson was working on the second volume of his

Dictionary. He began this year of 1753 in prayer, asking that the

recent loss of his wife would dispose him to live out the rest of his

own days in the fear of God. Franklin’s works on electricity,

praised by Buffon, were attracting the attention of France, and the

American’s experiment to ‘draw lightning from the clouds’ had

been performed at Marly, before Louis ‘the Well-Beloved’. This

year Britain’s Royal Society presented Franklin with a gold medal.

Boucher was painting cherubs on the ceiling. Voltaire had abruptly

departed from San-Souci, vacating the room whose walls were

exuberant with monkeys, leaves, and fruits, leaving his host,

Frederick the Great, to write his verse alone. Newton had died in

1727. Darwin, Freud, and Einstein were far into the future. A few

years more and the *Universal History* would be published in

London, fixing the date of Creation as September 21, 4,004 b.c.

In this year, 1753, in a remote corner of the Arabian Peninsula,

a child was born who grew up to become what the West would call

a saint. His name was Shaykh Aḥmad. Through dreams and

intimations he fell so much in love with God that this world, not

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the next, was the unseen world to him, and he could hardly remem-

ber to dress himself or even to eat. Guided by his inward light, he

began to show the people how their religion of Islám had been

hopelessly betrayed and perverted until it was now beyond reform.

He called on all the followers of Muḥammad, of whatever sect, to

prepare the way for a Saviour, the Qá’im, soon to be made manifest.

He gave up home, family, and possessions and went away to the

holy cities of Najaf and Karbilá, where he became a famous mujta-

hid, an authorized expounder of Islám and doctor of the law. He

had thousands upon thousands of devoted followers. Clergy and

people alike revered him but he could remember nothing but his

mission, and he despised the honours they tried to lavish upon

him.

After a time his light guided him to Persia. He passed through

Shíráz and told the people: ‘Among you there shall be a number

who will live to behold the glory of a Day which the prophets of

old have yearned to witness.’[1] He settled down in Yazd, where he

wrote most of his books; historians credit him with ninety-six

volumes. By then his fame had become such that the Sháh of Persia

wrote him a letter. Whatever land the holy one’s feet should consent

to touch was a blessed land, the Sháh wrote. He, the King of Kings,

ought rightfully to visit the saint in Yazd; but the Sháh was held in

the capital by high affairs of state, and should he travel he would

have to be escorted by an army of 10,000 men. Yazd was too small

to contain them, and the fields about the town too poor to feed

them; a famine would be the result. ‘I feel sure,’ the monarch

wrote, ‘that although in comparison with you I am of small account,

you will consent to come and see me.’[2] The saint replied that he

must first go on pilgrimage to the Shrine of Imám Riḍá in Khur-

ásán.

Ever more loudly, Shaykh Aḥmad’s heart informed him that the

longed-for dawn was breaking. There were two Muslim traditions

which he continually repeated: ‘Ere long shall ye behold the coun-

tenance of your Lord resplendent as the moon in its full glory …’

And: ‘One of the most mighty signs that shall signalize the advent

of the promised Hour is this: “a woman shall give birth to One who

shall be her Lord” .’[3]

After his pilgrimage he went on to Ṭihrán and was royally

welcomed by the Sháh, dignitaries and officials coming out of the

gate to meet him. It was then November, 1817; on the twelfth day

of the month the wife of a favoured minister of the Crown had a

son. The saint’s heart recognized this Child: it was Bahá’u’lláh.

Now the Sháh’s eldest son, governor of Kirmánsháh, begged

for Shaykh Aḥmad, and the king surrendered him. Sadly, Shaykh

Aḥmad left the city that lies in wide, gold plains, at the foot of a

glittering, cone-shaped mountain. As he went, he prayed ‘that

this hidden Treasure of God, now born amongst his countrymen,

might be preserved and cherished by them, that they might

recognize the full measure of His blessedness and glory, and might

be enabled to proclaim His excellence to all nations and peoples’.[4]

When the saint drew near to Kirmánsháh, the prince sent the whole

town out to meet him.

Inevitably, disciples crowded to his lectures and eagerly shared

his writings. Then one day the prince died, and Shaykh Aḥmad

was free to leave Persia for Karbilá, for Mecca and Medina. Toward

the close of his life he wrote: ‘The mystery of this Cause must needs

be made manifest, and the secret of this Message must needs be

divulged. I can say no more, I can appoint no time. His Cause will

be made known after Hín.’[5] *Hín* is an Arabic word that means

time. As the saint’s followers were aware, each Arabic letter has a

numerical value; they knew that the letters in this word *Hín*

totalled 68, and they therefore looked ahead to the year 1268 of

the Muslim calendar. (In that year Bahá’u’lláh was chained in the

Black Pit of Ṭihrán, and there He received the first intimations of

His world mission.)

When he was eighty-one, Shaykh Aḥmad died and was buried

near the Prophet Muḥammad in the holy city of Medina. A picture

shows him wearing the robe and turban of his day, kneeling on a

flowered carpet, his hands clasped, his whole body immobilized in

contemplation. His nose is aquiline, and he has a white beard

flowing down. The eyes look upward, showing the whites, seeing

the unseen; his whole presence diffuses gentleness and peace.

Thousands listened to Shaykh Aḥmad, the founder of the

Shaykhí School; few heard him. He left his disciples in the hands

of the one individual who understood him, Siyyid Káẓim of Rasht.

When Siyyid Káẓim was a boy of eleven, he had memorized the

entire Qur’án. When he was twelve, he dreamed that he must

become the disciple of Shaykh Aḥmad. At twenty-two, when

he had given up his home and family and friends and gone to

Shaykh Aḥmad, he became the Saint’s most trusted follower; later

on, he became his successor. When the Shaykh left him for the

last time, he confided his secret to the younger man, saying: ‘The

Hour is drawing nigh, the Hour I have besought God to spare me

from witnessing, for the earthquake of the Last Hour will be

tremendous … neither of us is capable of withstanding its sweep-

ing force.’ To his followers, the Shaykh said: ‘Seek for knowledge

after me, from Siyyid Káẓim of Rasht, who received it directly from

me, who have it from the Imáms, who learned it from the Prophet

[Muḥammad] to Whom God gave it.’[6]

Often and often, the Siyyid repeated his master’s doctrines:

that the prophetic signs of the coming Judgement Day were

allegorical; that Muḥammad did not make His Night Journey to

Heaven in His physical form; that the physical bodies of men

would not rise out of their graves at the Resurrection; that the

Promised One was even now alive and in their midst.

Millions of Christians believe that Christ rose into the sky after

the crucifixion and will in the last days appear to all the world,

descending from the sky on a cloud. In spite of all that is now

known about the sky, they believe this. Millions of Muslims think

that the Twelfth Imám disappeared into an underground passage

at Samarra a thousand years ago and is waiting in one of the myster-

ious cities of Jábulqá and Jábulsá (reminiscent of that Jewish city

of Baní Músá, that lies at the ends of the earth, cut off by a round

river of flowing sand)—to come forth at the end of time and fill the

earth with justice. No geographer can convince them that these

cities are not on the map.

Where his master had been cherished by royalty and clergy

alike, the disciple was left to bear alone the massive batteries of

hate. Harassed, lonely, a target because of his unorthodox views,

he nevertheless knew how to find consolation. Once he got up at

dawn and went out through the streets of Karbilá in the cool

shadows until he came to a house where a young man in a green

turban stood waiting at the door. This Youth embraced him

tenderly, and led him into an upper, flower-filled room; here the

young Host filled and handed him a silver cup, repeating as He did

so a verse from the Qur’án: ‘A drink of a pure beverage shall their

Lord give them’ (76:21). Gold and silver vessels are forbidden to

the faithful in Islám; still, the Siyyid took this cup in both his

hands, raised it to his lips and drank. Nothing more was said; the

guest returned whence he had come. Some days later this same

Youth entered the Siyyid’s class and sat in a darkened corner; a

spear of light shot across Him in the shadows. The Siyyid fell

silent. Urged to resume his talk, he answered, ‘What more shall I

say? Lo, the Truth is more manifest than [that] ray of light …’[7]

His enemies were those entrenched powers who were deter-

mined to maintain their stranglehold on the minds of the people.

Light creates shadow; this is a law. Light speaks, and the shadow

arises to silence it. The Qur’án says: ‘Fain would they put out

God’s light with their mouths; but God desireth to perfect His

light, albeit the infidels abhor it’ (9:33). Merely by living and

teaching, he was a threat to them, because he set the people free

by showing them the truth. The Bible tells us, ‘Ye shall know the

Truth, and the Truth shall make you free’ (John 8:32).

A great number of his enemies in their attempts to destroy him

ultimately destroyed themselves. It happened in this way: they

banded together and began to stir up the city. The mischief spread

until they evicted the envoy of the Ottoman Government and took

over his revenues. The Sublime Porte duly responded by despatch-

ing a force to pacify the town, and Karbilá was besieged. The

Turkish commander who was conducting the siege then chose a

mediator—out of all the inhabitants of Karbilá he chose Siyyid

Káẓim. The Siyyid called in the ringleaders of the disturbance and

persuaded them to surrender in exchange for amnesty. Peace

seemed assured, but then the ‘ulamás stepped in; to them the

honour that had been shown Siyyid Káẓim by the Ottoman

Government was an unbearable thing, and so they went among the

populace, shrieked for a holy war, and demanded an attack on the

Turks by night. Informed of this, the commander announced that

he was going to force the gates of the citadel and take the town, and

that he would consider only one place as a sanctuary: the house of

Siyyid Káẓim. Whipped to a frenzy by the clergy, the mob only

laughed; but when dawn came, the Turks attacked, bombarded the

ramparts of the citadel, tore down its walls, entered Karbilá,

plundered its rich mosques and killed thousands of people. So

many now ran in panic to the house of Siyyid Káẓim that he had to

take over his neighbours’ houses to make room for them all; they

crowded in so fast that twenty-two of them were battered and

stamped to death. Others ran to the Shrine of Imám Ḥusayn and

the mausoleum of ‘Abbás, places inviolate since time out of mind,

but they were hacked and butchered till the holy precincts were

slippery with blood. True to his promise, the Turkish commander

recognized only one sanctuary in Karbilá: the house of Siyyid

Káẓim. This happened on January 13, 1843.

Siyyid Káẓim continued to herald the Promised One. Among

his prophecies was this, that the Promised One would be put to

death. As with Shaykh Aḥmad, many listened, but few heard.

‘I am spellbound by the vision,’ he said; ‘I am mute with wonder,

and behold the world bereft of the power of hearing.’ He knew that

many of his disciples would in the future deny the Truth. They

were false lovers, he said, and added: ‘By the tears which he sheds

for his loved One can the true lover be distinguished from the

false.’[8]

As he felt his days closing, he gave his followers one of the

strangest assignments in history: they were to leave their families

and possessions, to scatter, to discover the Promised One wherever

He might be, and if possible to die for His Cause. He repeated the

words of Shaykh Aḥmad, that a double revelation was imminent,

one to follow the other in rapid succession. This, he revealed, was

what was meant by the ‘Mystery’ and the ‘Secret’. And again he

told them: ‘after the Qá’im the Qayyúm will be made manifest.’[9]

It chanced that he went on a short journey to visit a shrine. On

the way, as he finished his noonday prayer under a palm tree by the

side of the road, a shepherd came up and called him by his name.

While his disciples listened in consternation the shepherd delivered

a message—words which he said Muḥammad had, through him,

addressed to the Siyyid in a dream. ‘Tell him from Me,’ Muḥam-

mad had said in the dream, ‘“Rejoice, for the hour of your departure

is at hand … On the day of ‘Arafih, you will wing your flight to

Me. Soon after shall He who is the Truth be made manifest. Then

shall the world be illuminated by the light of His face.”’ The Siyyid

smiled. He turned to his terrified friends and consoled them.

‘Would you not wish me to die,’ he asked them, ‘that the promised

One may be revealed?’[10] He serenely completed the pilgrimage,

returned home and took to his bed. On the day of ‘Arafih, which

was the very last day of the year 1843, his heart stopped. Then,

from the house which only the year before had been a place of

refuge from death, there rose the sound of loud weeping.

Messianism has been a factor in all religions, since each promises

a Return. In the Christian world the claim to be the return of Christ

has been met with so often as to be commonplace; and in fulfilment

of Matthew’s prophetic words many false Christs have arisen. That

imitations are present in quantity does not prove the absence of the

rare Original nor excuse the failure to seek Him; each mind and

heart must decide among them all, human life being in this, as in

everything, a sequence of choices.

Sporadically down the centuries among the followers of this or

that faith the messianic claim would be raised, but never had the

messianic interest been at white heat around the world as it was in

1844. Not only in Shíráz was the Promised One awaited, but in

New England as well, among Christians who knew nothing of their

Muslim counterparts across the globe.

William Miller of New England was a man of ordinary education

who had been an army captain and a justice of the peace. Prolonged

study of dates in the Bible had convinced him that all prophetic

time except the Millennium would inevitably run out by 1844,

perhaps as late in that year as October 22. A shy, unassuming man,

he felt no urge to spread this belief until one day a voice within him

said: ‘Go and tell it to the world.’ He struggled against the voice

but was defeated; by the end of 1843 he had delivered 3,200 lec-

tures on the coming of the Lord. Tens of thousands of Millerites

were, in that year, proclaiming that the Lord would come in a

cloud, that every eye would see Him, and that He would come as a

thief in the night; the fact that these prophecies were contradictory

bothered no one.

Miller was not certain of the season, only of the year, of the

Return. His followers waited, often in small groups in the night,

watching for the Lord to come from Heaven as He had the other

time (forgetting that He had been born the other time), riding on a

cloud, to catch up the righteous, purify the earth with fire, and

then reign there with the saints for a thousand years. Each time they

prepared themselves as if for death; each time they bore public

laughter and their own doubt. The poet Whittier once happened

on a Millerite camp meeting in the New England woods and found

over a thousand people sitting on logs and singing a hymn at fever

pitch. The pulpit of rough boards was carpeted with leaves; sheets

of canvas hung from it, showing dragons out of the Apocalypse.

Afterward Whittier recalled ‘the white circle of tents—the dim

wood arches—the upturned, earnest faces—the loud voices of the

speakers, burdened with the awful symbolic language of the Bible—

the smoke from the fires …’[11]

Suddenly those great days were over. Miller was old, sick, and

blind; the nation had mocked him, but worse was his feeling that

he had misled a multitude of believers. Still, he never renounced.

His final message to his people, before he died in 1849, was this:

‘I confess my error, and acknowledge my disappointment; yet I

still believe that the Day of the Lord is near, even at the door.’

When he closed his blind eyes, the last word he breathed was

‘Victory!’

Shoghi Effendi refers to the chosen disciples of Siyyid Káẓim as

a ‘handful of students, belonging to the Shaykhí school, sprung

from the Ithná-‘Asharíyyih sect of Islám … .’[12] This reference is to

the Islámic ‘Sect of the Twelve,’ that section of Islám which

believes in the Twelve Imáms—divinely-ordained and inspired

successors of Muḥammad—as differentiated from the Sunnites,

who believe the successorship of the Prophet to be an elective

matter, not particularly connected with divine grace. The Caliph

of the Sunnites was ‘merely the outward and visible Defender of the

Faith,’[13] while the Imám of the Shí‘ihs was one endowed with all

perfections, whom the faithful were bound to obey. The Shí‘ih

Muslims had long awaited the return of the Twelfth Imám, and

they called Him the Qá’im-i-Ál-i-Muḥammad—He Who arises out

of the family of Muḥammad.

The western world still, in the middle of the twentieth century,

is reluctant to learn that an independent Faith has again appeared,

a Faith as authoritative in the West as in the East. The West still

tries to describe this Cause of God as a sect of Islám—a description

that applies to the Shaykhí school but ceases to have validity after

1844 when the phenomenon of the Prophet, the Personage qualita-

tively different from the rest of mankind, the One who has three

planes of being while the rest have only two,[14] re-entered history

in the person of ‘Alí-Muḥammad, the Báb. To maintain that such

a world figure is only for Persians would be like saying that Mozart

is only for Austrians.

On January 22, 1844, Mullá Ḥusayn, the departed Siyyid’s

leading disciple, who had long been absent on a mission, returned

to Karbilá. As the mourners gathered around him, he asked them

what the Siyyid’s last instructions had been. To disperse, they

answered, ‘to seek out the Promised One.’ ‘Why, then,’ he asked

them, ‘have you chosen to tarry in Karbilá?’ He approached their

leaders, begging these to set the example and go. One answered,

‘We must remain in this city and guard the vacant seat of our

departed chief.’ Another said, ‘It is incumbent upon me to stay

and care for the children whom the Siyyid has left behind.’[15] Mullá

Ḥusayn left them then and went out of the city, and prepared him-

self to search by retiring to a mosque for forty days; he spent this

time in fasts and vigils, contemplation and prayer. When he was

ready, he went to Búshihr on the Persian Gulf. Probably he chose

Persia because of the prophecy: ‘The ministers and upholders of

His Faith shall be of the people of Persia.’[16] Down the centuries,

hidden in a mass of sacred traditions, had come other specific

references to the Promised One: the date of His arising, which was

to be the year 60 (1260 of the Muslim calendar, or 1844); His

lineage; His age; His personal appearance; even His name, for the

prophecy stated: ‘In His name, the name of the Guardian [‘Alí]

precedeth that of the Prophet [Muḥammad].’[17]

The Persian chronicler Nabíl writes that when Mullá Ḥusayn

was in Búshihr he smelled the fragrance of the Promised One, and

that he was drawn as if by a magnet towards the north, to the city of

Shíráz. It was May, and the city is one which surpasses the descrip-

tive powers even of Persian poets. Ḥáfiẓ, ‘Tongue of the Invisible,’

says that not in Paradise itself will you find the edges of its brooks

nor its flowering plants. It lies in a long green plain, a city of sky-

blue domes and long gardens. Snow mountains hem it round; it is

criss-crossed by lines of purple judas-trees and black cypresses,

and in May its mild air is a blend of orange blossoms and roses.

Mullá Ḥusayn was walking outside the gate of this city when a

stranger approached and greeted him. The Mullá, who in spite of

his youth in a country that favours age, was widely known and

honoured, took Him for some disciple of Siyyid Káẓim’s. The

stranger was a descendant of the Prophet—He wore a green turban.

There was a special, luminous quality about Him; perhaps it was

His young, manly beauty or the immaculacy of His clothing. In

any case He seemed to shine in the slanting afternoon sun.

The stranger invited Mullá Ḥusayn to His home. The Mullá

demurred, saying that his travelling companions were waiting for

him at the mosque, but the stranger as courteously insisted. His

presence, His gait, His vibrant tones exerted a powerful influence

on Mullá Ḥusayn who could not but follow Him. They went

through a lane and came to a wooden door set in a wall of sun-

baked brick. An Ethiopian attendant opened the door. As they

crossed the threshold the young Host repeated some words from

the Qur’án: ‘Enter therein,’ He said, ‘in peace, secure’ (15:46).

The Mullá’s spirits lifted; he could not tell why.

They climbed to an upper room, where the Ethiopian brought a

ewer and basin for the guest’s ablutions. A cool drink was given

him; then the samovar was carried in, and tea was made. After

that the Mullá rose to go, saying it was time for the evening prayer

and he must rejoin his companions at the mosque. Gently, his Host

urged that he remain and pray where he was, in the upper room,

and according to the Muslim fashion they stood together and

prayed. Mullá Ḥusayn was now deeply troubled, not only because

of this strange encounter, but because he was exhausted from his

unsuccessful journey; during the prayer, however, he reaffirmed

his faith in God’s promise and his own mission. It was twilight

now and the darkness drifted in with the smell of evening flowers.

About an hour after sundown the young Host asked: ‘Whom,

after Siyyid Káẓim, do you regard as his successor and your leader?’

Mullá Ḥusayn described the Siyyid’s last instructions. No successor

had been appointed, he said; the disciples one and all had been

bidden to disperse, to seek, until they should at last discover the

Qá’im. ‘Has your teacher,’ the Host resumed, ‘given you any

detailed indications as to the distinguishing features of the pro-

mised One?’ Earnestly setting them forth, Mullá Ḥusayn named

over the signs, which he knew by heart: he knew the lineage of the

promised One, knew His age, His innate knowledge, His qualities,

His physical appearance. There was a long silence in the room.

Suddenly it was broken by the Host. ‘Behold,’ He cried, ‘all these

signs are manifest in Me!’

Courteously, Mullá Ḥusayn began to explain; he was looking,

he said, for One unsurpassed, One transcendent, wise, holy, filled

with power. But his own words choked him off. Brooding, he went

over the prophetic signs, testing them out. Then he considered the

secret tests he had stored up in his own mind. One of these had been

confided to him by Siyyid Káẓim: without being asked, the true

promised One would reveal a commentary of the ‘Best of Stories,’

the Súrih of Joseph in the Qur’án.

Again his young Host said: ‘Might not the Person intended by

Siyyid Káẓim be none other than I?’ The signs were enumerated

again; the questions and answers began; and then, abruptly, the

Host said: ‘Now is the time to reveal the commentary on the Súrih

of Joseph.’ He took up His pen and, unbelievably fast, began to

write, His voice gently rising and falling, His pen flashing, and He

did not pause until the entire first chapter of this work which was

to become known as the Qur’án of the Bábís, ‘*the first, the greatest,*

*and mightiest*’ of their books, was finished.[18]

Outside, the night had fallen; the smell of blossoms was as

insistent as drums. Mullá Ḥusayn could neither speak nor move.

At last, in the silence, he slowly got up and, not wanting to, asked

permission to go. His Host smilingly refused: ‘If you leave in such

a state, whoever sees you will assuredly say: “This poor youth has

lost his mind.”’ Then He added: ‘This night, this very hour will,

in the days to come, be celebrated as one of the greatest and most

significant of all festivals.’[19]

Soon after, the Ethiopian brought them food. The special love

of the Host, the reverence of the attendant, were qualities Mullá

Ḥusayn had never met with before. He lost all track of time. He

was in the Heaven he had read about in the Qur’án: ‘Therein no

toil shall reach us, and therein no weariness shall touch us … Their

cry therein shall be, “Glory be to Thee, O God!” and their saluta-

tion therein, “Peace!” And the close of their cry, “Praise be to God,

Lord of all creatures!”’[20]

‘O thou who art the first to believe in Me!’ the Youth told him.

‘Verily I say, I am the Báb, the Gate of God, and thou art the

Bábu’l-Báb, the gate of that Gate.’[21]

Mullá Ḥusayn now felt such power rising in him that, if all men

in their massed force had come against him, he could have with-

stood their attack. Afterward he said of that night: ‘The universe

seemed but a handful of dust in my grasp.’[22] It was dawn, and over

the gardens of Shíráz floated the muezzin’s thin, tremulous cry.

Mullá Ḥusayn rose to leave the One whom he would never leave

again, not even in death. He went down the steep stairway leading

from the upper room; since he had climbed it a few short hours

before, his life and the world’s life had changed forever.

## Millennium

A RECENT ARTICLE BY A MAN well versed in current trends pro-

claims the coming of a new era. According to this authority, people

are no longer interested in what have been, for the past decade,

burning questions; a cynical attitude toward religion, a patronizing

slant on spirituality and idealism, an avidity for the brutal in

thought and conduct, may no longer be classed as modern; rather,

we are recovering from ‘post war materialism,’ and are on the eve

of a period when the chief issues will be idealism, the seeking of

‘a religion which will satisfy the unchurched,’ and a more scientific

attitude toward science, whose hypotheses we will accept with

discretion, rather than immediately revolutionize our mode of life

on the basis of some new theory which may later be disproved.

The Bahá’ís have known of this imminent new era for over a

hundred years. It was in 1844 that the Báb appeared in Persia and

awakened the East to the coming of ‘Him Whom God should

manifest,’ and this Coming occurred when the world was in the

deepest misery and was sunk in a sea of materialism. What the

cited article referred to as post-war materialism was in a larger

sense not post-war at all, because the war itself was the result of

hideous materialism accumulated through centuries of growing

away from divine truths. A study of the climactic nineteenth

century would substantiate this. The times were ugly with the

suffering occasioned by a mismanaged Industrial Revolution, a

heartless, destructive society, a Napoleon; human beings were

crowded into poor-houses and left to die; children were working

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seventeen hours a day in the mines; families were living on

‘potatoes-and-point’—hanging a bit of meat over their table and

watching it while they ate. The pages historians have left behind

bring us not only details of intense physical suffering, but also

describe the spiritual torture which fell upon men; death was all

around them, and they cried aloud for help, and ran from one ark

of deliverance to another.

This was a new thing in history, this awaiting a millennium.

The Western Middle Ages had looked back over their shoulder at

the Ancients and the Bible; if they expected a new era, it was only

one in which all things would be destroyed and the world would

cease to exist; and even in life, they looked for death, mortified

their flesh, and retired into solitude. With the Renaissance and the

coming of humanism, an intellectual, materialistic development

began, which culminated in the brilliant eighteenth century, a

period in which men could see through existing conditions but not

above and beyond them, and in which patronizing intellects

disported themselves in their own technique. As every text book

shows, the second half of the eighteenth century saw a wave of

sensitive idealism which swept upward to the chaotic nineteenth.

From the last of the eighteenth century, men began to prophesy a

new era, a millennium, and it would seem that there was not a

thinker who did not anticipate the coming of a new day. Carlyle

thundered of the abomination of desolation and saw a phoenix

rising from a world in flame; to Ruskin, a beneficently ethical

Beauty would moralize society; Arnold thought that culture, that

sweetness and light, would ensure a new order; Emerson awaited

the Master Poet who would open up new horizons; the followers of

Saint-Simon wore their vests buttoned backward as a sign of new

brotherhood and inter-dependence; Musset, the burning young

Romanticist, shouted, ‘Which of us will be a god?’

We all know what happened. The Millerites went up to their

hill and Christ did not come floating down; the ardent New-Era-

ists were quenched in 1848 with the political reactions which took

place; haloes were broken, one by one; and after that men were

ashamed to hope any longer, and gradually turned to the coldest

realities available; we had a man like Zola, a theory like Darwin’s,

an unhoping, subdued, invertedly defiant attitude which is now

called modern.

All this time, while the world was in torment and waiting for

deliverance, the New Era was dawning in a lost, forgotten country.

In 1844, in that decade which historians call the dividing line

between our times and the dead past, the Báb announced the

coming of a great World Teacher. In Persia, though of old the king

of kings had bequeathed the whole known world as legacy to his

three sons, there were now only shattered columns, only dust heaps

left of his palaces. Persia in 1844 was a synopsis of all the diseases

which can afflict humanity: there was despotism, poverty, ignor-

ance, mutual hatred; the masses entirely relying for guidance on a

grasping, tyrannical priesthood; the women, the educators of

humanity in its most impressionable years, degraded to a menial

position; a despotic government; a country where idealism and

spirituality had guttered out; a people hermetically sealed against

salvation. Yet even there, a group of men awaited a millennium,

felt the imminence of a spiritual rebirth. These recognized the

Báb, not only from the prophecies which they had studied and

which His coming fulfilled, not only from their years of prayers

and meditation, but also from His radiant, majestic bearing, His

inspired knowledge, His triumphant message. And so it was that

the East was awakened and prepared for Him Who was heralded,

for Bahá’u’lláh.

Prophecies are proofs of a new era to students of the various

sacred texts; but to the unchurched, to agnostics, or atheists, or

the indifferent, equally impregnable proofs reiterate the advent of

a spiritual millennium.

The modern world is divided against itself, and a world divided

against itself cannot stand. The only possible way out of present

day conditions is by arbitration, and yet this is null and void when

the arbitrators have the old divisions in their hearts. A religion is the

only power intrinsic and compelling enough to amalgamate human-

ity; unity means religious unity; where faiths are at variance, there

is always a point beyond, a secret room in each man’s heart where

his brothers may not enter, a shekina where he bows his head in

hostile superiority. Humanity needs one religion, one standard of

right and wrong; at present there are no standards at all; what is

moral in one house is a life and death offence in the next; when a

society no longer believes in an indivisible, ultimate Good, which is

one just as the colour white is one, that society is in its death throes.

The Will of God, revealed throughout the ages by His Mani-

festations, is the ultimate Good. God is fullest revealed in the

noblest of men, the highest creation, His Manifestation. He can be

clearly known only through the Great Teachers who are His living

exponents. It is idle to say that we can construe God for ourselves;

our imaginations belong to us, and we cannot even avoid being

patronizing toward our belongings because they are ours, much less

worship them; even an Emerson or a Dante cannot see farther than

an ‘oversoul’ or a ‘great white rose.’ But among the Manifestations

of God, since only through these shall we find the standard, there is

no previous one whose teachings in their present form will bring

peace.

Missionaries will tell us that they have been obliged to divide up

their sphere of activity into zones, each zone receiving the faith

according to the interpretations of a different schism; this can

hardly be termed a dissemination of unity.

Centuries have passed away, and no one has been able to make a

conclusive choice from among the ‘two and seventy jarring sects.’

It is doubtful whether we should guard a flame of sacred fire, or

bathe in the Ganges, or lead a holy bull to pasture. Our thousand

schools of thought, offshoots of religious belief, are equally unable

to bring men together. Philosophy cannot be lived without religion.

Agnosticism will not satisfy an active mind. Atheism expounded is

nothing less than theism with some changes of vocabulary, and the

atheist is also groping for a standard.

It is only in obeying the command of Bahá’u’lláh that we worship

one God and serve one humanity, following the essential oneness

at the heart of each religion, that the world can be at peace.

Everyone agrees that peace among nations is imperative, that

castes and races must be reconciled, must heal the wrongs they

have done each other, that universal education of a spiritual as well

as material quality is essential, that true science and true religion

are in harmony, that men and women are equal … It is easy to

agree with the Bahá’í principles, but not to obey them.

The Bahá’ís are those who, not content with mere agreement,

spend their lives in striving to obey the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh;

they have chosen a path which leads to martyrdom, to loss of for-

tune, to the constant setting aside of personal desires. The accept-

ance of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh is a serious thing; there is no

turning back from such acceptance, for there is no individual who

can be at rest with himself once he has renounced his soul’s highest

truth. This is a Cause for the courageous; for those who can give

even their tired hours, their broken, reluctant bodies, in service; for

those who can win victories and never see their laurels; for those

whose hearts shall not waver, though all the heavens and the earth

arise against them.

But isolated courage, sporadic sacrifice, is not enough; it is only

through coordinated effort, through symmetrical, rhythmic activ-

ity, that the kingdom of God shall come upon earth. World regener-

ation is ensured by the establishment of the Bahá’í Administration,

through which channel alone can a Bahá’í life be led. Were it not

for the order and discipline maintained among us by the impreg-

nable institutions which Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá have

founded, our efforts would cancel each other, and, as is adequately

illustrated by the history of former religious dispensations, our

very power and spirit would assure disintegration.

When Bahá’u’lláh passed away in 1892, the enemies assailing

the Cause expected immediate victory, but to their astonishment

the Bahá’ís rallied in solid phalanxes around the Centre of the

Covenant, and the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh were spread to every

country; again in 1921 with the ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the

world awaited an end to the progress of the Cause, but instead the

Bahá’ís, now infinitely more numerous and widely distributed

than in 1892, turned with one accord to the Guardian of the Cause,

Shoghi Effendi, and under his guidance set themselves to carrying

out the injunctions in the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

The result is that today the Bahá’ís are a disciplined, united group

working together in powerful harmony, demonstrating the truth

that human beings may retain their widely differing personalities

and yet function collectively as ‘one soul in different bodies.’

And just as each Bahá’í has seen the dawn of a millennium in

his own soul, has felt himself changing, developing, casually

accomplishing what men hold impossible, so will the whole world

find itself transformed, the old materialism pass away, the new

spirituality be established.

## Easter Sunday

THERE IS A POEM BY Vachel Lindsay called ‘The Chinese

Nightingale.’ It has a refrain that says ‘spring came on forever.’

That is a lovely line—spring came on forever. It expresses the

season—its lack of finality and its recurrence.

Emerson says something like it in his famous address to the

senior class of the Harvard Divinity School, which he gave in 1838.

He speaks of ‘the never-broken silence with which the old bounty

goes forward …’

Spring comes on and the old bounty goes forward. Men seem to

have forgotten this. They have lost hope—they are milling around

in the shadow of the atomic bomb and they have forgotten the

bounty and the yearly rebirth of hope.

About 2,000 years ago this Easter day Mary Magdalen had

bought spices to anoint the body of Jesus the Christ. She went to

the sepulchre in the garden and found it empty. The linen that had

wrapped Him lay in the tomb, and the cloth that had bound His

head—but His body was gone—and all these 2,000 years we have

not known where it was laid to rest.[1]

That dawn in the garden was the beginning of hope. From then

on the theme of the disciples was not death, but life. And now, our

theme is no longer death, but life. We have seen enough death.

This is the day when, to borrow a phrase from Thomas Mann,

the Beloved has returned. The life of the spirit has been reintro-

duced into human affairs. The Prophet of God has come again. He

is called in Bahá’í terminology ‘the supreme embodiment of all

that is lovable.’

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353–8, “The Coming of the Beloved”.

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United States

The Persian writer Sa‘dí compares the coming of the Beloved

to the sunrise. He says: ‘I remember one night that my beloved

entered the door and I leapt up so quick that my sleeve caught the

lamp and put it out. He sat down and began to chide me, saying,

Why did you quench the lamp when you saw me? I said, “Because

I thought the sun had risen”.’

People often ask for the Bahá’í teachings on what is heaven.

Bahá’u’lláh says: ‘O Son of Being! Thy Paradise is My love; thy

heavenly home, reunion with Me. Enter therein and tarry not.’[2]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s favourite Christian hymn was ‘Nearer my God, to

Thee.’ He tells us that nearness is likeness—it is to be character-

ized with the characteristics of God, and we find them in the Divine

Manifestations. World peace must be founded on these facts.

Today is the Bahá’í Festival of Riḍván. Riḍván may be translated

as ‘the paradise of the good pleasure of God.’ On this day in 1863

Bahá’u’lláh proclaimed His mission—in a garden of Baghdád,

called by Bahá’ís the garden of Riḍván.

Baghdád is a city of brown rivers and domes and palm trees.

The garden of Riḍván is a hospital now. It is shadowy and cool,

and all day long there you hear doves—thousands of doves.

Bahá’u’lláh was a nobleman, exiled from Persia—and shortly

prior to His Declaration He began to give forth—reveal—remark-

able teachings. His companions knew that some great thing was

about to happen. The historian says that ‘Many a night would [His

amanuensis] gather them together in His room, light numerous

camphorated candles, and chant aloud to them the newly revealed

odes and Tablets in his possession. Wholly oblivious of this …

world, completely immersed in the realms of the spirit, forgetful of

the necessity for food, sleep or drink, they would suddenly dis-

cover that night had become day, and that the sun was approaching

its zenith.’[3]

This process of revelation is the gift only of the Prophet of God.

It is different in kind from poetic inspiration and from academic

and other types of thinking. It is the great contribution of the

Bahá’í Faith to present-day problems—the supplementing of

human thought with the thought of a Prophet of God. The writings

of Bahá’u’lláh are available and you can study them and evaluate

what this means.

And so this Easter coincides with another scene in another

garden—also in the East, for all religions come from the East—but

this time the garden was in Baghdád. It was during the season of

roses. Visitors came to Bahá’u’lláh from all over Baghdád to say

good-bye to Him—for He was about to be exiled again. And early

in the mornings, the gardeners would pick the roses and pile them

in the centre of Bahá’u’lláh’s tent—and He would give them to

various of His followers to take to His Arab and Persian friends in

the city. This custom is still followed in Haifa; I have seen the

Guardian of the Faith give flowers or handfuls of petals from the

holy shrines on Mount Carmel, to the friends.

This ‘Most Great Festival’ took place during the twelve days

prior to Bahá’u’lláh’s being exiled out of Baghdád. During those

nights the moon was growing toward the full, and the nightingales

were so loud that as He walked up and down the flower-bordered

paths in the moonlight, only those followers who were near Him

could distinctly hear His voice.

There is a remarkable Tablet about the Festival of Riḍván—it

is in the *Gleanings*. In it the Prophet or Manifestation of God is

referred to as the Pen—because He is moved by the Holy Spirit (if

this terminology is too theological for you, say He is moved by the

tremendous power which stirs the Prophet of God), and writes as

He is irresistibly moved to write. It is in part a colloquy between

the Spirit and Bahá’u’lláh. It begins:

*The Divine Springtime is come, O Most Exalted Pen, for the*

*Festival of the All-Merciful is fast approaching. Bestir thyself,*

*and magnify, before the entire creation, the name of God, and*

*celebrate His praise, in such wise that all created things may be*

*regenerated and made new … This is the Day whereon naught*

*can be seen except the splendours of the Light that shineth from the*

*face of Thy Lord, the Gracious, the Most Bountiful …*

And later the Pen halts, and this colloquy occurs:

*We have heard the voice of thy pleading, O Pen, and excuse thy*

*silence. What is it that hath so sorely bewildered thee?*

And the Pen answers—

*The inebriation of Thy presence, O Well-Beloved of all worlds,*

*hath seized and possessed me*.[4]

The mystics would understand this: St. Theresa and John of the

Cross and Rúmí and ‘Attár. This love is something that the mystics

understand. It was St. Theresa who wrote: ‘Let mine eyes see

Thee, sweet Jesus of Nazareth, Let mine eyes see Thee, and then

see death.’

In the *Saturday Review of Literature* Elmer Davis brought out a

now famous article called “No World, if Necessary”. It is a dis-

cussion of the book One World or None, described as a report to the

public on the full meaning of the atomic bomb. This book is a

collection of articles on the bomb and its implications, by American

atomic scientists.

Elmer Davis emphasizes that the scientists state the problem

but offer no solution—and he ends, ‘Has it occurred to them that if

their one world turned out to be totalitarian and obscurationist [I

looked up this word and it apparently means “striving to prevent

enlightenment’] we might better have no world at all?’

Davis sees the need for a world language—which is one of the

principles of our Faith. He also wants a world armed force, as the

Bahá’ís do—this would be the most advanced army the world has

ever known, serving the entire planet somewhat as a fire depart-

ment puts out fires in a town. Davis says, I think very acutely, that

the thirteen original states which federated had a common back-

ground as to institutions, traditions and thought.

It is precisely the function of the Bahá’í Faith to supply humanity

with this common background. The Bahá’ís all have it, in the

three hundred and thirty countries where the Faith has penetrated.

To me it is miraculous that already a Persian peasant in a mountain

village and a San Francisco matron walking down Post Street for

instance, should have one and the same goal.

When I saw the representatives of the different nations together

at the first United Nations Conference, they were many people,

and they stayed many. When I attended the Bahá’í Convention

I saw many different people who had become one.

How the unification of the human race has already been accom-

plished by Bahá’u’lláh is something for you to investigate. The

world plan of Bahá’u’lláh is set forth in two short pages, in a

wonderful statement by the Guardian of the Faith—called

*A Pattern for Future Society*. There is nothing vague about the

Bahá’í world of tomorrow. Although only the future can develop the

infinitely varied and complex picture, we know the general outlines

as Bahá’u’lláh taught them to us in the second half of the 19th

century.

The oneness of religions will be a vital factor in this world uni-

fication. Because it is not generally known in America that to be a

Muslim you have to believe in both the Old Testament Prophets

and Jesus, Whom the Muslims call the Spirit of God—Rúḥu’lláh—

I shall quote this statement of the Muḥammadan belief from

Qur’án 2:130:

*Say ye: We believe in God, and that which hath been sent down*

*to us, and that which hath been sent down to Abraham and Ismael*

*and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes: and that which hath been*

*given to Moses and to Jesus, and that which was given to the*

*prophets from their Lord. No difference do we make between any*

*of them: and to God are we resigned.*

And to show the harmony between Jew and Muslim, there is this,

from Qur’án 16:121, 124:

*Verily, Abraham was a leader in religion … We have moreover*

*revealed to Thee that Thou follow the religion of Abraham, the*

*sound in faith.*

Whenever people work to separate faiths, to revive old hatreds and

further antagonisms, we should work to demonstrate their oneness.

The Bahá’í civilization is based on the fact that once again a

Manifestation of God has appeared among men. It is through

approaching Bahá’u’lláh that we have all become unified—however

diversified we were before.

Our loyalty is to something beyond the horizons of this world—

it is to something not ourselves that makes for righteousness, as

Matthew Arnold says.

The fanatical Persians who opposed Bahá’u’lláh thought He

attracted people through magic or through a substance which He

mixed with the tea He served to His guests. But we whose eyes

have never seen Him, for He died an Exile and Prisoner near

‘Akká in 1892—know that the magic was not in the tea.

In His Tablet to Pope Pius IX, Bahá’u’lláh says:

*The Word which the Son concealed is made manifest. It hath been*

*sent down in the form of the human temple in this day. Blessed*

*be the Lord Who is the Father! He, verily, is come unto the nations*

*in His most great majesty … My body longeth for the cross,*

*and Mine head waiteth the thrust of the spear, in the path of the*

*All-Merciful, that the world may be purged from its transgressions*.[5]

It is very difficult to tell about the Bahá’í Faith; the teachings

are so rich, so vast. Bahá’u’lláh wrote a hundred volumes—and there

are also the writings of the Báb, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi.

It is hard to tell anything adequate of all this. It is like the Persian

story of the holy man or mystic who was sitting under a tree, lost in

meditation. His disciples sat around him, and when he returned to

himself they asked: Out of that garden whence you have come,

what gift did you bring us? He said: ‘I had in mind when I should

come to the rose-tree, to hold out my skirt and fill it with flowers as

a gift to the friends. But when I reached there, the scent of the

roses so ravished my senses that my robe fell away from my hands.’

## Bahá’u’lláh’s *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*

THIS IS THE LAST OUTSTANDING Tablet of Bahá’u’lláh. The

last He wrote before He left us; before that happened of which the

Báb has written, ‘all sorrow is but the shadow of that sorrow.” This

is the last of the hundred books He revealed for us.

It was written to a priest in Iṣfáhán, a priest called the ‘Son of the

Wolf’. His father had spoken the words that sent the ‘twin shining

lights,’—the King of Martyrs and the Beloved of Martyrs—to their

death. They were laid in two sandy graves near Iṣfáhán. (Years

afterward, an American woman named Keith Ransom Kehler knelt

there and wept and brought them flowers; then in a few days she

was stricken and died, and the friends carried her back to these

same graves and buried her beside them.)

This priest, Áqá Najafí, had committed the unforgivable sin: he

had violated the Covenant and blasphemed against the Holy Spirit;

that is, he had hated, not the lamp, not the Prophet of God as an

individual—from ignorance, or because he did not recognize Him—

but the light itself, the perfections of God which the Prophet

reflects; he had hated the light in the lamp—and ‘this detestation of

the light has no remedy …’[2]

This priest was, then, the most hopeless of sinners. His evil

found expression in many ways, and among them was this, that

with his pupils, he kicked at and trampled the martyred body of

Mírzá Ashraf, in Iṣfáhán (not the Ashraf of whom we read in

*Gleanings*,[3] Siyyid Ashraf, whose head was cut off in Zanján).

And yet, Bahá’u’lláh begins this Tablet with a prayer of repent-

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ance for Áqá Najafí to recite. He offers this breaker of the Covenant

forgiveness; just as, in His Most Holy Book, He offers forgiveness

to Mírzá Yaḥyá, the treacherous half-brother who tried to destroy

him. This offering is a demonstration of ‘Badá’—of the principle of

the free operation of the Will of God, Who doeth whatsoever He

willeth and shall not be asked of His doings. It proves how mistaken

is that large group of human beings who believe that everything is

on a mechanical basis—that this much sin brings this much punish-

ment, and so much good buys so much reward. To them, God is a

blind force, operating mechanically—something like the third rail

in the subway. They themselves, however, would greatly resent

being called a blind force. (The Báb develops this principle of

‘Badá’ in the Persian Bayán.)

*Thou beholdest, O my God, him who is as one dead fallen at the*

*door of Thy favour, ashamed to seek from the hand of Thy loving-*

*kindness the living waters of Thy pardon.*

*Thou hast ordained that every pulpit be set apart for Thy*

*mention … but I have ascended it to proclaim the violation of*

*Thy Covenant …*

*O Lord, my Lord! and again, O Lord, my Lord! and yet again,*

*O Lord, my Lord!*[4]

Throughout the Tablet, he is several times directed to pray;

is addressed as would be one of Bahá’u’lláh’s own sons; is told to

arise and serve the Faith; to believe, serve and trust; to enter the

presence of Bahá’u’lláh (Whom he had never seen);[5] to save men

from the ‘mire of self,’[6] to ‘seek the Most Great Ocean’[7] and that

‘thereupon, will the doors of the Kingdom be flung wide before thy

face …’[8] He is told: ‘O Shaykh! We have enabled thee to hear the

melodies of the Nightingale of Paradise … that thine eye might

be cheered …’[9]

As Dr. Ali-Kuli Khan has pointed out,[10] the varying titles by

which Bahá’u’lláh addresses Áqá Najafí indicate that the Letter is

intended for a much larger audience than he. It is ‘a presentation

of the Faith to humanity’; many aspects of man are singled out and

addressed. These titles include: ‘O Shaykh’; ‘O distinguished

divine’; ‘O thou who has gone astray!’; ‘O thou who hast turned

away from God!’ Occasionally, too, others are specifically named:

‘O people of Bahá’; ‘O Hádí’.[11] Many aspects of man are singled

out and addressed. You find here, not only the evil priests who in

every dispensation hold men back from their Lord—the ‘blind

mouths’ of *Lycidas*—but the good divines, who are ‘as eyes to the

nations,’ reminiscent of the ‘‘Ulamá in Bahá’ of the Most Holy

Book. You find here the king and the scholar, the everyday believer,

the saint, the sinner.

This Tablet, then, is much more than a letter to an individual.

It is an important general presentation of the Faith. In this Work,

as the Guardian tells us, Bahá’u’lláh ‘quotes some of the most

characteristic and celebrated passages of His own writings, and

adduces proofs establishing the validity of His cause.’[12]

Most books bring you closer to the author. But when you study

the work of Bahá’u’lláh, He eludes you. As the Guardian has told us

in *The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh*, He is ‘unapproachably glorious’.

Goethe says, ‘Above all peaks there is rest.’ I have read this

book three times and studied it over a long period; it seems to me

more likely that above all peaks there is another peak.

You want, though it is almost impossible, to read this at one

sitting. It comes rapidly, and the English translation by the Guar-

dian is flawless. You want more and more of it and are too impatient

to stop and think over this and this, as you are urged along, and you

mark things to come back to. It contains sentences like these:

*I belong to him that loveth Me …*

*… others had, at times, to nourish themselves with that Divine*

*sustenance which is hunger.*

*In the treasuries of the knowledge of God there lieth concealed a*

*knowledge which, when applied, will largely, though not wholly,*

*eliminate fear.*

*Man’s actions are acceptable after his having recognized* [*the*

*Manifestation*]*.*

*He is truly learned who hath acknowledged My Revelation, and*

*drunk from the Ocean of My knowledge, and soared in the at-*

*mosphere of My love …*

*A just king enjoyeth nearer access unto God than anyone.*

*These, verily, are men who if they come to cities of pure gold will*

*consider them not; and if they meet the fairest and most comely of*

*women will turn aside*.[13]

It offers historical material which in future will stimulate the

keenest research. We learn, for example, of the Master’s first betro-

thal; of Bahá’u’lláh’s arrest in Níyávarán and of the kind of chains

He was bound with; of the machinations against Him by Persian

officials in Constantinople and of the suicide there of Ḥájí Shaykh

Muḥammad-‘Alí; the fact that Mírzá Yaḥyá was not exiled out of

Persia; that he abandoned the writings of the Báb in Baghdád; that

Hádí Dawlat-Ábádí tried to destroy every copy of the Bayán; that

the Azalís tried to claim Siyyid Javád-i-Karbilá’í as one of them-

selves, pasting his picture under that of Mírzá Yaḥyá; that

Bahá’u’lláh had never read the Bayán; that in 1863 (this date is

given in *God Passes By*) Bahá’u’lláh suggested to a Turkish official,

Kamál Páshá, that his government convene a gathering to plan for

a world language and script.[14] (In this connection, Volapük was

invented by Johann Martin Schleyer of Konstanz, Baden, about

1879; Esperanto, by Dr. Ludovic Lazarus Zamenhof, was first dis-

cussed in print by him in 1887.)

It gives us a moral code, including such precepts as:

*If anyone revile you, or trouble touch you, in the path of God, be*

*patient, and put your trust in Him Who heareth, Who seeth. He, in*

*truth, witnesseth, and perceiveth, and doeth what He pleaseth,*

*through the power of His sovereignty*.[15]

*The sword of wisdom is hotter than summer heat, and sharper*

*than blades of steel … withhold not from the poor the things given*

*unto you by God through His grace. He, verily, will bestow upon*

*you the double of what ye possess.*

*If ye become aware of a sin committed by another, conceal it, that*

*God may conceal your own sin*.[16]

*Be … thankful in adversity … Be fair in thy judgment and*

*guarded in thy speech … Be a haven for the distressed, an*

*upholder and defender of the victim of oppression … a home for*

*the stranger …*[17]

The fear of God is continually stressed:

*We enjoin the servants of God and His handmaidens to be pure*

*and to fear God …*[18] *The fear of God hath ever been a … safe*

*stronghold …*[19] *Their [the Bahá’ís] hearts are illumined with the*

*light of the fear of God …*[20]

Students of the Qur’án will remember how strikingly the fear of

God is likewise extolled in that Book: ‘God loveth those who fear

Him,’ and ‘Whoso feareth God, his evil deeds will He cancel …’[21]

Among many such precepts, Bahá’u’lláh states here: ‘Regard for

the rank of sovereigns is divinely ordained …’[22] and interprets

‘Render unto Caesar’ far differently from the current meaning given

this verse in Christendom, where it is made to imply that Caesar is a

sort of reversal of God, a concept at variance with the Bahá’í teach-

ing on kingship.

Bahá’u’lláh also answers, in this Work, a question often asked:

Why a new religion? He says, by implication to the Muslims, that if

they prefer what is ancient, why did they adopt the Qur’án in place

of the Old and New Testaments? And He states that if bringing a

new Faith be His crime, then Muḥammad committed it before

Him, and before Him Jesus, and still earlier, Moses. He adds:

*And if My sin be this, that I have exalted the Word of God and*

*revealed His Cause, then indeed am I the greatest of sinners! Such*

*a sin I will not barter for the kingdoms of earth and heaven*.[23]

(Strange, how often the public asks this question, forgetting

today’s universal wretchedness; the mind’s loneliness, that is

crowding those brick buildings with the barred porches, that you

see as you travel through the country; the enslavement of human

beings by other human beings like themselves; the moral rottenness

—you have only to look at the sidewalks of any big city early in the

morning, and the debris in its gutters, you do not even have to

read the doctors’ case histories, or the newspapers. And if you are

one of those ‘nice people’ so many persons claim to be, who do not

drink to excess, nor harm anyone, and therefore do not need a God

to obey—or need only some sterile deity of their own choosing, a

selection from whose precepts they will follow when they see fit,

and whose synthetic thunder, listened to, or not listened to, once a

week, does not fool them for a moment—then you are empty, you

are ineffective, you make no impact on society; and those discarded

men sprawling in the streets are your glass of wine, and those piles

of dead bodies you turn away from in the press, are your professed

goodwill, and all that useless agony in so many men’s and women’s

hearts, is your sexual sophistication.)

The Bahá’ís of the West are gradually learning more about the

Báb; through *The Dawn-Breakers*, *The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh*,

and this present Text, they are drawing closer to Him, and to the

story of His life, which is the story of His love for Bahá’u’lláh.

Among His utterances here is the striking plea to His followers that

even should an impostor arise after Him, they should not protest

against the man, nor sadden him.[24] In time, twenty-five persons,

most of whom later begged forgiveness of Bahá’u’lláh, claimed to

be He Whom God Shall Manifest.[25] This was because of His

longing to protect the True One. He is His own proof, the Báb told

His followers: ‘… who then can know Him through any one

except Himself ?’[26] The breath of the Báb’s despair is here, and His

beautiful words, ‘I … am, verily, but a ring upon the hand of Him

Whom God shall make Manifest …’[27] Bahá’u’lláh links the

Heraldship of the Báb with that of John the Baptist, and shows

how John’s companions as well ‘were prevented from acknowledg-

ing Him Who is the Spirit (Jesus).’[28]

Not only are we brought near to Him Who was the return of the

Twelfth Imám, but to all the Imáms, and—since the Guardian is

as the Imám—to the institution of Guardianship in our own Faith.

The reference to the ‘snow-white’ hand of the Qá’im goes back to

Moses’ sign in the Qur’án.[29] By the ‘Impost’[30] is meant the tithe,

payment of which is a religious duty, as are the Fast and the

Pilgrimage: ‘We are the Way … and We are the Impost, and We

are the Fast, and We are the Pilgrimage, and We are the Sacred

Month, and We are the Sacred City …’ says the Imám Ja‘far-i-

Ṣádiq. In connection with the Imámate, E. G. Browne’s brief

summary is valuable: ‘According to the Imámite view … the

vice-regency is a matter altogether spiritual; an office conferred

by God alone, first by His Prophet, and afterwards by those who

so succeeded him … the Imám of the Shiites is the divinely-

ordained successor of the Prophet, one endowed with all perfections

and spiritual gifts, one whom all the faithful must obey, whose

decision is absolute and final, whose wisdom is superhuman and

whose words are authoritative.’[31]

Swiftly, in this Book, the scenes pass. There is the dungeon, and

the dream there, and the promise:

*Verily We shall render Thee victorious by Thyself and by Thy*

*Pen … Erelong will God raise up the treasures of the earth—men*

*who will aid Thee …*[32]

There is the dramatic suicide in the mosque, of Ḥájí Shaykh

Muḥammad-‘Alí. There is the ‘city, on the shores of the sea,

white, whose whiteness is pleasing unto God …’[33] The mood

varies, the tempo shifts. You can hear these swift questions and

answers in music, as a kind of spiritual:

*Hath the Hour come? Nay, more; it hath passed … Seest thou*

*men laid low? Yea, by my Lord … Blinded art thou… Paradise*

*is decked with mystic roses … Hell hath been made to blaze*.[34]

There are the thought-inducing lines on the moan of the pulpits:

*I was walking in the Land of Ṭá (Ṭihrán)—the dayspring of the*

*signs of thy Lord—when lo, I heard the lamentation of the pulpits*

*and the voice of their supplication unto God, blessed and glorified be*

*He. They cried out and said … Alas, alas! .. Would that we had*

*never been created and revealed by Thee!*[35]

This reminds us of the Qur’ánic verse, referred to earlier by

Bahá’u’lláh: ‘God, Who giveth us a voice …’[36] And then the

earth-quaking apostrophe to the She-Serpent:

*Judge thou equitably, O She-Serpent! For what crime didst thou*

*sting the children of the Apostle of God …?*[37]

This refers to the martyrdom of the ‘twin shining lights,’ descen-

dants of Muḥammad; you would need Michelangelo or Milton to

comment here.

People who must choose often ask whether they should add this

or that book to their private library. My reasons for owning this

one are: Its beauty of text, translation, and format; its brevity; its

richness from the academic point of view—the materials it offers

for study; its comprehensiveness—for, although it is an indepen-

dent creative work, having its own unity of form, its own personal

spirit—it is almost an anthology, and one selected by Bahá’u’lláh

Himself. And then, there is the totality of its impact on the reader,

and the eternal gift it holds out to him, of the mercy of God.

Yes, it helps us to enter His presence; it brings us to ‘Him

Whom the world hath cast away and the nations abandoned …’[38]

Where has Áqá Najafí gone now? Where has he gone in his

enormous globular turban and his curled-up shoes? He was, as

Bahá’u’lláh called his fellow, ‘the last trace of sunlight upon the

mountain-top.’[39] Where has he taken all his hatred? In any event,

it became the occasion of this Book, this last earthly gift to us from

Bahá’u’lláh; His enemies brought Him poison, but He changed it

into honey for His loved ones.

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in America

ADDRESS DELIVERED ON THE BAHÁ’Í CENTENARY,

WILMETTE, 1944

ONE OF THE POEMS OF William Blake centres around the legend

that Jesus visited the West. This poem has been set to music and

Paul Robeson sings it unforgettably. Blake says among other

things: ‘And did those feet in ancient time Walk upon England’s

mountains green? … And did the countenance divine Shine forth

upon our clouded hills?’

Almost in our time, a world faith has been born. One of the

Central Figures of this faith journeyed to the West. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s

western journey will mean more and more to this hemisphere and

to the whole world, as the years go by.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá sailed on the *Cedric* from Alexandria, and He

reached New York April 11, 1912. The reporters went aboard the

*Cedric* at quarantine. The ship was held up several hours because

there was smallpox and some typhoid aboard. They found the

Master on the upper deck, standing where He could see the pilot;

one of the interviewers, Wendell Phillips Dodge, wrote an especi-

ally fine feature article which the Associated Press later spread

throughout the world.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s face, the account says, ‘was light itself’. He was

‘strongly and solidly built … alert and active … His head thrown

back and splendidly poised … A profusion of iron grey hair bursting

out at the sides of the turban and hanging long upon the neck;

a … massive head … remarkably wide across the forehead and

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United States

temples…’. He was wearing a long black robe over a second robe

of light tan, and His turban was pure white.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá was always at home with everyone. When the

reporters approached Him He talked to them about newspapers.

He said: ‘There are good and bad newspapers. Those which …

hold the mirror up to truth, are like the sun: they light the world …’

During the crossing, the Master had spent much of His time

standing beside the wireless operator. He was greatly interested in

modern inventions; He was to say: ‘Science is not material; it is

Divine … every other blessing is temporary. Science is a blessing

which man does not have to give up.’

The reporters were pleased when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told them a

story about a pilgrim going to Jerusalem; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had said

to the pilgrim that love for God should be to him as a telegraph

wire, one end in the heavenly kingdom, the other in his heart.

The pilgrim answered that his telegraph wire had broken down. The

Master had replied: ‘Then you will have to use wireless telegraphy.’[1]

There was a memorable moment when the *Cedric* passed along-

side the Statue of Liberty. As you know, the Statue seems almost

a living presence. There is a definite feeling of holiness about it,

because it embodies the hope of so many millions of people around

the planet. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, standing on the deck before it, ‘held His

arms wide … in salutation and said, “There is the new world’s

symbol of liberty and freedom. After being forty years a prisoner

I can tell you that freedom is not a matter of place. It is a con-

dition … When one is released from the prison of self, that is

indeed a release.”’[2]

The reporters asked Him about women’s suffrage. He told them

that women should be given the same advantages as men—that if

you had to choose between educating a boy and a girl, educate the

girl—that even physical inequalities are due to custom and training.

He added that the world of tomorrow will be much more a woman’s

world than now, because ‘the spiritual qualities … are gaining

ascendancy’.[3]

All this time, and since early morning, hundreds of Bahá’ís had

been waiting on the pier. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá did not wish a public

welcome, and when the ship docked, He sent word that they should

meet Him that afternoon at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Edward B.

Kinney.

In looking over the records of that journey, we find that the

American clergy, both rabbis and ministers, gave ‘Abdu’l-Bahá a

special welcome and paid Him many tributes. A few sacrificed their

pulpits to become declared Bahá’ís.

His first public talk in America took place in a church. It was

the Church of the Ascension on lower Fifth Avenue in New York.

This old church is open day and night, and some of us like to go

there and remember the days of the Master, because His presence

is always immediate there. A light always burns on the altar

between two white candles. There is a low, carved wooden pulpit.

The stained glass is aquamarine and amber, draped Gospel figures

and sky and blossoms; much pale gold, and an Oriental feeling;

pale gold organ pipes, like bars of sunlight moving into the shadows.

The rector, Percy Stickney Grant, said when he introduced ‘Abdu’l-

Bahá: ‘In Him we see a master of the things of the spirit.’

Another early talk was at the Bowery Mission in New York.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá told the poor that they were His companions. He

told them that Jesus lived in the fields, exposed to rain and cold.

He said happiness does not depend on wealth. At the close He

shook hands with each of the three or four hundred men present

and gave each some pieces of silver, so that none of them went

without food and a bed that night. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself was poor

to the end of His life, because He gave everything away. During

His last night on earth, they wanted to change His night robe to

cool Him from the fever; they looked for His other robe, but He

had none because He had given it away.

Soon after coming to America the Master visited Washington.

He was greeted at the railway station by Persia’s envoy, Ali-Kuli

Khan. Banished from His native land, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was neverthe-

less welcomed across the world by Persia’s representative.

In Washington many leading personalities of the day were

presented to the Master at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Parsons and

also at the Persian Legation. The Red Cross was having its ninth

international meeting, and its Secretary, Miss Mabel Boardman,

generally left her office only to consult with President Taft, but

she came to the Legation to meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá; among others

present at this reception were Admiral Peary, just back from the

North Pole and the celebrity of the hour, and Alexander Graham

Bell, inventor of the telephone. The Master met each one and said

something specially directed to each. To Admiral Peary He said,

smiling: ‘You have been afar off, in those northern regions. What

did you find there, except ice and cold? If you journey in the regions

of heaven, you will find the Divine Presence.’[4]

Alexander Graham Bell was so impressed by the Master that he

invited Him to attend a Wednesday night symposium at the Bell

home, where every available scientist of note was a frequent guest.

In the course of His talk there, the Master said that the telephone

was vitally important, but that His own work was to teach men how

to communicate with God.

In Washington, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also spoke to over one thousand of

the faculty and students at Howard University. He always seemed

happiest when both black and white were present, as on this occa-

sion. The audience listened breathlessly. His talk was ‘followed by

a positive ovation and a recall.’

‘Abdu’l-Bahá always approached the question of human varieties

without sentimentality. He simply declared that all human beings

are made of one substance. That day at Howard He said: ‘Today

I am most happy … I see the white and colored people together.

In the estimation of God there is no distinction of color; all are one

in the color … of servitude to Him … I pray in your behalf

that there shall be no name other than that of humanity among

you.’[5]

There was a famous children’s meeting held in Washington,

typical of many that followed. (The Master had time for the child-

ren. One child printed a letter to Him, and He answered it on the

back, in His own hand, and returned it to the family to keep.) He

blessed and embraced the children and gave them gifts: rock candy,

or perhaps an envelope full of flower petals. He taught the giving

of presents. A Bahá’í who sat outside His door told me that from

dawn till midnight, people would stream in with fruit or flowers,

and each person would leave with some gift another had brought.

Costly gifts He would not accept. He did not permit the Ameri-

can Bahá’ís to pay His expenses or to give Him things. He said you

should even shake the dust of a town off your shoes and not carry

it away with you.

Late one afternoon in Washington He said: ‘Today from

morning until this moment, I have been speaking. From dawn even

until now.’[6] Looking back, we wonder how His body could bear

the load. In New York alone, during the seventy-nine days He was

there, He made public addresses in, or formal visits to, fifty-five

different places. He was sixty-eight; He had been a prisoner forty

years. Once He said to Juliet Thompson: ‘I work by the confirma-

tions of the Holy Spirit. I do not work by hygienic laws. If I did I

would get nothing done.’[7] That afternoon in Washington, He

spoke of the sinking of the *Titanic*; He was grieved that some of

His fellow-passengers had transferred at Naples, from the *Cedric*

to the *Titanic*. He said: ‘At first it is very difficult to welcome death.’

Then He told them: ‘These disasters sometimes take place that men

may know that God is the real Protector.’[8]

In Chicago ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke before the Fourth Annual

Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of

Colored People. He said that being made in the image and likeness

of God was not meant in a physical sense, but that ‘the perfections

of God, the divine virtues, are reflected … in the human reality’.[9]

He spoke at Hull House, saying ‘There is need of a superior power

to overcome human prejudices …’[10] He addressed the Federation

of Women’s Clubs and the Theosophical Society.

A photograph shows. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá here, on this ground, laying

the cornerstone of this Temple. The Master is seated, perfectly

natural and at ease, holding a wooden implement of some kind.

Every one in the picture looks serious, and aware. In the corner you

can see Lua, the Mother Teacher of the West. The Master broke

the earth with a gold trowel; then He called for more workmanlike

implements and they brought an axe and shovel. The nations whose

citizens helped break the ground that day were Persia, Syria, Egypt,

India, South Africa, England, France, Germany, Holland, Norway,

Sweden, Denmark, the Jews of the world, and the American

Indians. When the Master set the stone in its place He said, ‘The

Temple is already built.’

In the same way, we Bahá’ís know that the federated world of

the future—the Most Great Peace—is already built.

Speaking at the Plaza Hotel in Chicago, the Master said this

about the destiny of America: ‘… because I find the American

nation so capable of achievement, and this government the fairest

of western governments, its institutions superior to others, my

wish and hope is that the banner of international reconciliation may

first be raised on this continent and the standard of the “Most

Great Peace” be unfurled here. May the American people and

their government unite in their effort in order that this light may

dawn from this point and spread to all regions …’[11]

He loved to walk in Lincoln Park. There is a photograph show-

ing the Bahá’ís seated on park benches around Him and listening

to Him teach. One day in the park He said: ‘Some of you have

observed that I have not called attention to any of your individual

shortcomings. I would suggest to you, that if you shall be similarly

considerate in your treatment of each other, it will be greatly con-

ducive to the harmony of your association.’[12]

Somewhere in America ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had a memorable talk

with a rabbi. The rabbi finally said, ‘Indeed, you are one of the

greatest logicians of the world. Up to this time I have been talking

to you as a man; now I will address you as a rabbi.’ As always with

the Jewish peoples, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained the station of Christ

and urged them to accept Him. He showed how Jesus spread the

Old Testament around the world. He said that if they would

declare that Christ was the Word of God their troubles would be

over. Of their persecutions He once prophesied: ‘You must not

think it is ended. The time may come when in Europe itself they

will rise against the Jews.’[13] The rabbi objected to the Christians

worshipping Jesus and the Master replied: ‘Christ was the mirror;

God was the sun.’

Among the interviews one of my favourites is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s

talk with Hudson Maxim, the inventor. Maxim invented a high

explosive called ‘Maximite’; he was the first in America to make

smokeless gunpowder; he built a dynamite factory, and so on. The

Master showed on this occasion that He could speak with humour

even about the central purpose of His life—world peace; He said:

‘During these six thousand years there has been constant war,

strife, bloodshed. We can see at a glance the results. Have we not a

sufficient standard of experience in this direction? Let us now try

peace for a while. If good results follow, let us adhere to it. If not

let us throw it away and fight again. Nothing will be lost by the

experiment.’

Maxim said our industries kill more men than war does, through

preventable accidents. The Master replied, ‘War is the most

preventable accident.’

Maxim kept minimizing the dangers of modern warfare. He

said, ‘War is no more dangerous than automobiling.’ The Master

kept insisting on the terrific power of modern war, describing

results which have only been realized today. He said, ‘… in

modern times the science of war has reached such a stage of perfection

that in twenty-four hours one hundred thousand could be sacrificed,

great navies sent to the bottom of the sea, great cities destroyed …

The possibilities are incalculable, inconceivable …’ Maxim

replied by making a diagram to show one’s relative safety when in

the neighbourhood of an exploding bomb.[14]

One minister who came was not friendly. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá ans-

wered all his questions with reserve and patience. The minister

asked by what authority Bahá’u’lláh is placed with Abraham, Moses

and Jesus—and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, ‘Today we believe Bahá’u’lláh

to be an educator … If He has opened the doors of human hearts

to a higher consciousness, He is a heavenly educator. If He has not

accomplished this we are privileged to deny His claim …’ Then

‘Abdu’l-Bahá gave the minister an armful of white roses.[15]

In the pine grove at West Englewood, New Jersey, the Master

founded a commemorative meeting which will last always. He said,

‘The very words I speak to you today shall be repeated … for

ages to come.’[16] There were black and white present—there were

Jews, Christians, Moslems. The Master was Host. As always when

He was present, there was love present.

He brought something back to the world that had died out of it.

He brought love back. His stay on earth with us reminds me of

something Swedenborg has written: ‘There was a certain hard-

hearted spirit with whom an angel spoke. At length he was so

affected by what was said that he shed tears, saying that he had

never wept before, but he could not refrain, for it was love speaking.’

When the Master first came to America a moving picture com-

pany requested Him to pose for them. He replied ‘Khaylí khúb’

(very good). The Bahá’ís were horrified. They told Him that His

photograph would be shown in moving picture houses all over the

country. He replied ‘Bisyár khúb’ (most good). The company made

a wonderfully impressive short of Him; as He was photographed,

He was praying that God would bless this means of spreading the

Faith.[17]

Later the Bahá’ís requested Him to have a longer film made and

this was done in the Howard MacNutt home in Brooklyn. Many of

you have seen it. The Master is all in white. He strides up and down

in the garden, reminding one of what the ancients said—that the

gods were known by their walk. He also shows His absolute meek-

ness and servitude—going here and there as the Bahá’ís asked. You

may have noticed that in the film, a lady kisses His hand; His

reaction is instant disapproval. He did not wish such demonstra-

tions, because He said we are all servants. In one shot He is almost

completely hidden—by hats—ladies’ hats. A long line of people

pass before Him, many of them women, each one supporting a

1912 hat. (I privately call that scene the Clouds which obscure the

Sun of Truth.) A recording was later made of His voice, speaking

the same words as in the film, but everyone agrees that it does not

affect one as did His living voice.

At first it seemed as if the Master did not plan to visit California.

He said that He had already worked very hard in the United

States. He said He had ‘breathed on the souls … of all the

Bahá’ís in such a way that had it been upon bone, it would have

taken on flesh …’[18] One day in Dublin, New Hampshire, He

told how the California Bahá’ís were urging Him to visit the West

Coast. He loved Dublin; He said in English: ‘Good mountains,

good green, good meadow, good plain, good view …’[19] He always

responded to green trees. Once on the train, going past trees, He

turned to a fellow-passenger and said, ‘The green—the green’! The

prison-land around ‘Akká had been very barren.[20]

Somebody in Dublin wanted to know: ‘What shall we say when

they ask, “Of what use are the flies and mosquitoes?”’ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

told him to answer: ‘Of what use are you? What benefit have you

given to the world? The same benefit that you have given to the

world, the mosquito has. You say that the mosquito … sucks

human blood; but you kill animals and eat them … Therefore

you are more harmful than the mosquito.’[21]

And ‘Abdu’l-Bahá went to California and other western states.

America’s first Bahá’í, Thornton Chase, died in Los Angeles before

the Master reached there. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá went to the graveside and

scattered flowers over it—took the flowers and scattered them. It

was like Shakespeare’s word ‘to strew’ (‘Sweets to the sweet … I

thought thy bride-bed to have deck’d … And not have strewed

thy grave.’). Even from Beirut, Syria, people wrote to America

about this episode. The Master said that the Bahá’ís should visit

the grave of Thornton Chase every year on His behalf and feed and

give alms to the poor.[22]

There were many unforgettable days in California. In Sacra-

mento, the capital, the Master said: ‘May the first flag of Inter-

national Peace be upraised in this state.’[23]

In Oakland He spoke before the Japanese Y.M.C.A. A Japanese

poet, Mr. Kanno, read a poem composed in His honour. The

Master’s talk was translated from Persian to English to Japanese.

There were many scholars present. Mothers held out their babies

to Him and He smiled and blessed them and said: ‘Good baby,

Japanese baby.’[24]

He addressed nearly two thousand of the students and faculty

at Stanford University, being introduced by the president, David

Starr Jordan. As at Howard University, they gave Him an ovation.

The November 1st, 1912, issue of the *Palo Altan* is entirely

devoted to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s visit and His California addresses. The

editorial is titled: “The New Evangel”.

People will always remember the day He spoke in Temple

Emmanu-El, the great synagogue in San Francisco. He stood in the

pulpit, between pillars of palms, and the sunlight filtered down

through coloured windows. As ever, He urged the Jewish people

to believe in Christ, and gave them logical reasons for so believing.

In the same way, He always urged the Christians to believe in the

Prophet Muḥammad. He did not always tell people what they

wanted to hear—He told them what they had to hear—and made

them like it.

In San Francisco He spoke to the blind. He said ‘sight is only

for a time, but insight sees the beauty of God. May you not see the

dust …’[25] He showed special favour to East Indian university

students who visited Him. He loved Golden Gate Park, and used to

walk along the shore of a little lake there.

And there was the great Feast in Oakland, at the home of Mrs.

Goodall. The rooms were decorated with yellow chrysanthemums

and pyramids of fruit. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá walked about, speaking to the

Bahá’ís as they sat at the table and ate.

Here in California too, as in New York, He affirmed His function

as the Centre of the Covenant. He showed how every Prophet

entered into a Covenant with His people: promised a future Pro-

phet. Abraham promised Moses; Moses promised Jesus; Jesus,

Muḥammad; Muḥammad, the Báb .and Bahá’u’lláh. But Bahá’-

u’lláh’s Covenant is unique in human history, because it is two-

fold: He tells of a Promised One who will not appear before a full

thousand years; but He also appoints in writing the Interpreter of

His Faith, the Centre of His Covenant, His Son ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Today we know what they did not known in 1912—that ‘Abdu’l-

Bahá in His turn appointed a Centre, around which the Bahá’í Faith

revolves: His grandson, Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Cause.

New York is called the City of the Covenant, because in New

York ‘Abdu’l-Bahá climaxed His life work by establishing for all

time the character and implications of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant.

This fact of the Covenant protects the Bahá’í Faith from schism,

all over the world.

In Boston, exactly thirty-two years ago tonight, the Master

spent His Birthday at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Francis W. Breed.

Mrs. Breed baked the birthday cake herself, and she planted tiny

flags all over it, representing as many nations as she could find …

The main lesson He taught, I think, was love. You could say

He was all mind, all magic and sensitivity and laughter, but still

the main thing was love. Everyone understood it. A nun going by

on the street looked tenderly at Him; He spoke to one of the Bahá’ís

in His party and said, ‘Tell her who I am.’[26] In California He gave

a talk and as always He stopped every few moments for the inter-

preter to put the words into English. There was an American in the

audience, a poor man, an uneducated man; he hated the inter-

preter; he said: ‘Why does that fellow interrupt the Master all the

time?’[27]

On the *Celtic*, that last day, when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was to sail away,

He told His followers that they must love all mankind. He said,

‘Beware lest ye offend any heart, lest ye speak against anyone in his

absence, lest ye estrange yourselves from the servants of God …

You must consider your enemies as your friends … Those who

are not agreeable toward you must be regarded as those who are

congenial and pleasant …’[28]

This western hemisphere will always carry the mark of ‘Abdu’l-

Bahá’s footsteps; always remember His coming out of prison, in

His old age, to sow the seeds of peace in the West. Because it is as

one of the poets has written—‘The years are very long, but love is

longer.’

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Portrayals from East and West

MATERIALS FROM THE PAPERS OF ALI-KULI KHAN

AND THE CONVERSATIONS OF JOHN AND LOUISE BOSCH

*ALI-KULI KHAN (NABÍLU’D-DAWLIH) was born in Káshán, Persia,*

*about 1879. His father was Mírzá ‘Abdu’r-Raḥím Khán Ḍarrábí. About*

*the year 1898, Ali-Kuli Khan became a Bahá’í and from that time on*

*served the Faith for almost seventy years, till his death in Washington,*

*D.C. April 7, 1966. In 1909 he was sent by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to the*

*United States as a Bahá’í translator and teacher. Later, marrying an*

*American lady, he headed the Persian Legation at Washington. It was*

*he who selected and dispatched W. Morgan Shuster to Persia to*

*reorganize, as Treasurer-General, the country’s fiscal structure; and*

*who persuaded President Woodrow Wilson to make it possible for*

*Persia to send a mission to the Peace Conference at Versailles. A*

*member of that mission, Ali-Kuli Khan later served his country in*

*various other capacities and became Head of the Court of the then*

*Crown Prince Regent (Qájár). His life goal, the linking of Persia and*

*America, can be summed up in these words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from* The

Promulgation of Universal Peace:

*‘For the Persians there is no government better fitted to contribute*

*to the development of their natural resources and the helping of their*

*national needs … than the United States of America; and for the*

*Americans there could be no better industrial outlet and market … It*

*is my hope that the great American democracy may be instrumental in*

*developing these hidden resources…. May the material civilization*

*of America find complete efficacy and establishment in Persia, and the*

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United States

*spiritual civilization of Persia find acceptance in America … .*

*Surely there will be great harvests of results …’*[1]

WHEN I WAS SEVEN WE LIVED IN Ṭihrán, where my father was

Mírzá ‘Abdu’r-Raḥím Khán the Kalántar (Mayor). A mullá taught

us children in school. We sat in a row on the floor, each with his

book before him on a bookstand. We read the Qur’án without

knowing what it meant, and Sa‘dí, and Ḥáfiẓ. The mullá had a long,

slim, flexible pole (*falak*); whenever he thought best, a child’s feet

would be strung to it by a rope; each end of the pole was held by

boys who twisted it so the feet were held fast, soles up; the mullá

himself did the whipping, beating the soles of the victim with his

club (*chúb*) till, sometimes, the blood came. This was the bastinado.

The children were terrified of it; panic made me study extra hard.

Like most boys everywhere, the boys were cruel enough. They

used to carry black Japanese reeds that had a string-like fibre

inside; with this fibre, they would, when the mullá’s attention

wandered, thread a live fly, and watch it fly off, trailing its thread.

Sometimes they were punished for that. Another favourite thing

was, using the two forefingers, to shoot white beans at the mullá or

another boy. Nobody would ever give anybody away; the source of

the bean was impossible to trace. Since we always read our lessons

aloud in a kind of murmuring chant, the boys, whatever else they

might be up to, would keep on with their murmuring, to convince

the mullá that all was well.

I was born with a tooth, which in Persia is supposed to mean

precocity. I was always the youngest. This was bad enough, but

later on when we were sent to the Sháh’s college my studious habits,

coupled with the fact that I always told the truth, got me into real

trouble: the others would beat me for studying. A teacher would

ask a question, and each boy would say in turn, *man balad nístam*—

‘I don’t know.’ The teacher would get to me and I would come out

with, ‘I don’t know, …’ and then I would weep and say, ‘I know

but I’m scared of *them* …’ One time this led to twenty of them

being bastinadoed—all my older brother’s—Ḥusayn-Qulí Khán’s—

best friends. That night I didn’t dare sleep at our house. When it

seemed wisest I would sleep over at my uncle’s; he and his wife, a

granddaughter of Fath-‘Alí Sháh, treated me as their son. In any

case I kept on memorizing most of the pocket edition of Samuel

Johnson’s dictionary and after a while the others realized that my

industry could be put to practical use: in our English class they

would force me to write compositions for the whole class; thirty

compositions, each one different. However, on their outings, they

wouldn’t take me along, saying I was too little.

By then, our father was dead. He had become a Bahá’í, but our

mother continued to be a strict Muslim throughout her life. Father

used to say, ‘I know my boys will become Bahá’ís.’ And we did,

but our two sisters remained Muslim. My brother was, to begin

with, a strict Muslim himself, and he was an athlete and very

strong. Then another athlete, Ustád Qulám Ḥusayn-i-Banná,

taught him the Bahá’í Faith. My case was different. Because of all

that schooling I had no interest in religion at all. What engrossed

my mind—crushed me, in fact—was the way foreigners were

exploiting my country. I could see how they were setting up their

puppets, making use of the mullás, and preventing the Sháh from

sending students abroad. By now, what with speaking English and

French and being known as a serious scholar I had become a kind

of student leader, with my own little group. At the time I was one of

five Persians who were fluent in English, and received an appoint-

ment as chief translator to the Prime Minister. But my brother

began to draw my friends away.

In those days I would drink my fill of *‘araq*—ardent spirit. It

looks like water but there the resemblance ends. By night my

friends and I would visit an old graveyard strewn with rocks and

planted with clover. We used to sit there in the bright moonlight,

breathe the crystal air, recite poems, and drink, and play the *tár*—

a kind of guitar with six strings, played by plectrum—and beat the

*dunbak* or one-headed drum, played with the fingers and palm.

Our poems were our own, or from the classics—Rúmí, perhaps

(‘*I drunk and you crazed, who will carry us home?*’). There were no

girls; the girls were all veiled, all shut away in the *andarún* (the

‘within’; that is, the gynaeceum or women’s apartments, often, in

Persia, a separate house).

Náṣiri’d-Dín Sháh had a handsome son-in-law, Prince Ẓahíru’d-

Dawlih. This prince had inherited the mantle of the great murshid

or spiritual guide, Ṣafí-‘Alí Sháh; he was a dervish, and belonged

to the order of the Sháh Ni‘matu’lláhí. His dervish headquarters,

that is his seminary or *takyih*, had become a fashionable retreat; and

learning the mystical dervish terminology was now the style. When

frequenting them I would use all their terms but with my own—

and I am afraid often ribald—meanings. For example to their term

‘*Gazer*’, (one who contemplates mystic beauty, *ahl-i-dídár*) I would

append my secret definition: voyeur. The dervishes who conversed

with me noted that my terms were always perfectly correct; the

code meanings were only for me and my fellows. I also invented

meaningless but impressive terms which gained respect; words,

say, like khusvázíyár. If anything, I was a kind of diabolist in those

days; it was my *défi* to the world. My fellows and I used to say that

all those Muslim believers sitting around killing fleas in Paradise

were good-for-nothings, and that the progressives were all in Hell.

Meanwhile the Dervish Prince and his intimates would fore-

gather and repeat their *Dhikr* (remembrance or mentioning; the

plural is *adhkár*; Shoghi Effendi translates *dhákirín*, from the same

root, as rememberers). ‘*Alláh-hú*,’ they would recite, ‘*Alláh-hú*:’

God—He! God—He! And they would smoke their hashish, either

in hubble-bubble pipes or ordinary pipes or cigarettes. The drug

was made essentially of *chars*, Indian hemp juice, and the users

were called *charsí*.

I knew where my brother was leading my friends astray. At night,

after the curfew, they were crowding in with him to secret meetings

in remote houses along the back lanes of Ṭihrán. Obviously if we

were to keep on with our excursions and parties, I would have to

act. I decided to attend their meetings, expose the foolishness of the

teachers who addressed them and win back my friends. We had

had good sport with the mullás and the dervishes; now I would

show up the Bahá’ís. And so, hurrying along with the others, in

almost total darkness, single file, I felt my way through the walled,

uneven, pot-holed lanes of the city. If the youth at the front

chanced to stumble into a hole, it was a point of honour with him

to say nothing about it; the rest should also have their chance to

stumble in.

For something like six months I attended these clandestine

meetings. My servant waited at the door with my bottle of *‘araq*,

and once in a while I would stroll over to the door. Following hours

of talk, the hosts would bring in pulaw. I would grumble: “Must

I listen all night, for one dish of pulaw?” But the truth was, after

a while the Bahá’í teachers began to make sense; and I fell in love

with ‘Abdu‘l-Bahá.

I made a secret vow, not ever to sleep in a bed till I should see

the Master. This vow I kept for over a year, always sleeping on the

ground, or the floor. With two friends I wandered off, all three

disguised as dervishes, hoping to reach the Holy Land. We avoided

the main caravan routes, and sometimes our lives were in peril.

Then I was forced back to Ṭihrán because the way was barred by

what seemed to be ‘political plague’—plague, often non-existent,

but conjured up by the colonial powers to close this or that frontier.

Then in the dead of winter I simply walked off without saying

good-bye to anyone. Somehow I got across the Caspian to Bákú

and lived there in the cellar of the not-yet-built Bahá’í Travellers’

Hospice. Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-‘Alí (the Angel of Carmel) was there,

aged prematurely because of his terrible imprisonment in the

Sudan. He used to let me address the meetings there, and I spoke

in Turkish. At last permission came for me from the Master. I

went steerage, and disembarked from the ship by a rowboat, off

Haifa. The believers met us there and took us to a coffee house

where we were served tea, bread and cheese. I asked them, ‘Where

is the Master? Do we go to ‘Akká now?’ ‘No,’ they told us. ‘The

Master is in Haifa. He is now laying the foundation of the Holy

Tomb on Mt. Carmel, and He spends a week in ‘Akká and a week

in Haifa.’ They told me He had recently rented a house on an

avenue roughly parallel to the sea, near a sort of embarcadero

where the German Emperor, visiting Haifa, had landed the year

before, in 1898. This avenue led to the street of the German Colony.

(By 1906 when I was again on pilgrimage, the house was gone, or

changed into an apartment house.)

I began to shake. ‘The Master is here in Haifa? Am I going to

see Him? Am I about to look upon His face?’ ‘Yes,’ they told me.

‘But how can I gaze upon the Master?’ ‘You will be happy to see

Him,’ they said. ‘But when I look at myself, I know I do not

deserve to enter His presence.’ ‘He invited you to come,’ they said.

‘And the Master is forgiving; and once you are in His presence

your worries will be over.’ We started out for the Master’s house,

I weeping all along the way. We got there and went up the steps.

Then came His voice, calling for the travellers. I never heard a

sweeter voice; and yet it had authority; there was a ring to it; it was

the kind of voice that would grow and reach out and still it was so

melodious. At every moment, even now, that voice is in my ears.

And I remember it together with the faint scent of attar of rose

that He used; He had the attar, and the essence of rose too—they

would send it to Him from places like Káshán and Iṣfáhán and

Shíráz.

He had come over early from the small house in the German

Colony, where He would spend the night, looked after by one or

another of His daughters in turn, or by His sister, the Most Ex-

alted Leaf. Very early, He had come over to receive the pilgrims.

It was about sunrise, and not yet fully light. Following the others,

I entered His room. I saw Him standing there. And suddenly, in

my own mind, I was seeing Bahá’u’lláh, Who had passed away

seven years before. I did not expect this age, this beard and hair

(though there was still much black in it, mixed with the steel gray).

The only picture we had ever seen of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was the one

taken in His youth. Still, this was not an aged man who stood before

us, but lithe and powerful. He wore a white turban, like a fez, only

white, with a crisp white cloth wound about the base of it; usually

He had on light gray robes, or beige or light brown. I think that

day He wore a mantle called *jubbih* (not an *‘abá*, an *‘abá* has no

sleeves), and it was gray. Only half-conscious, I fell to my knees

and kissed His feet. He lifted me up and embraced me, kissing me

on both cheeks. And seeing that I could not bear the intense power

of His presence, He told His servant, Ustád Muḥammad-‘Alí, to

lead me to the travellers’ room and give me refreshments. There I

had some tea, and hardly ten minutes afterward, I felt strong again.

At that moment Ustád Muḥammad-‘Alí came in and said, ‘The

Master wants you.’ This time when I entered His room the scene

had changed. I was strong now; I heard Him say, ‘*Khush ámadíd*.

*Marḥabá, marḥabá* … .’ A blessed arrival—welcome, welcome.

Then He addressed me, speaking words such as these:

‘The Blessed Beauty, Bahá’u’lláh, may my soul be offered up for

Him, promised this Servant that He would succour me from His

All-Highest Realm; that He would raise up souls who would assist

me to spread far and wide this Covenant and Cause. You are one of

these souls, raised up to this end. The Cause of God has reached

America. Thus far, however, only a few pages of the sacred Writings

have been translated into English, and not in the best way. Now

that you have arrived, your knowledge of the English language and

your eagerness to serve the Faith—expressed in so many letters—will

enable you to accomplish this important work. I therefore wish you

to remain in the Holy Land with this Servant, to translate the

sacred Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh and to serve as my amanuensis and

interpreter. There are many letters which come in from America,

and a number from American and other Bahá’ís in France and

other parts of Europe. I wish you to translate these so that I may

dictate the answers.’

‘How wonderful that He desires me to stay on,’ I thought to

myself. For I had believed that like other pilgrims I would, after

the long journey, be permitted to remain for a time and afterward

I would return to my own country or leave for some other place

which He might indicate. Then from the table He gathered up a

sheaf of Tablets—written in glossy, black ink on cream-coloured

paper, folded in three—placed them in my hands, and directed me

to retire to the travellers’ room and translate them. I looked at

them. They were addressed to American believers and as was

customary in those days, when the Master had had only occasional

Syrian translators to serve Him, they were written in Arabic.

I found there were times when I could speak to the Master;

there were other times when one did not dare. I never saw Him in

the same condition: on occasion He was most approachable; again

He was majestic, inaccessible, and one hardly dared breathe in His

presence. But always He showed a great dignity, combined with

courtesy and humility. For example when He desired to impress

a person with the necessity of obeying the Teachings and rectifying

his life, He never said: You must do thus and so, be self-sacrificing,

see no fault in others, and so on—He always said: *We* must …

Now I could speak and I said to Him: ‘But these are in Arabic!’

He smiled in a divine way; His face beamed with light. He reached

over to His table (throughout this interview He remained standing)

—on which He had flowers, papers, rock candy, rose water—and

with both hands full of candy He told me to hold out my hands.

I laid the Tablets on the table edge, stretched out my cupped hands

and He filled them with candy; and still smiling, He took my face in

His two hands and said: ‘Go and eat this candy, and by the grace

and power of the Blessed Beauty thou shalt be enabled to translate

from Arabic into English. Indeed, thou shalt in time find it easier

to translate from the Arabic than from the Persian.’

I cannot describe what strength was bestowed on me by that

action of His, and those words. All I know is, I withdrew to the

next room and then and there began to translate the Tablets. And

yet—although the script is the same—Arabic is a foreign language

to Persians, and my training had been in other tongues. In time I

procured Arabic-English dictionaries but I found them so limited

that they were of little help. Then I drew on translations made by

Professor E. G. Browne and other Occidentals, and I discovered

that their work touched only the surface; and I came to the con-

clusion that the first essential for a translator of Bahá’í sacred

Writings is that he be a believer, a follower of this Faith.

After that, the Master said: ‘This is your bed. Sleep in it.’ And I

remembered my vow. He meant the bed in His corner room, facing

the street, at the front of the rented house, the room where He

received guests and would occasionally rest. But for four or five

nights I still slept on the floor. I was afraid to sleep in the bed of

‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Then Ustád Muḥammad-‘Alí, the Master’s servant

who had been a builder, came to me and said: ‘Do you know,

Jináb-i-Khán, that you are disobeying the Master?’ ‘What do you

mean?’ I cried. ‘Here I am, working night and day translating the

Tablets.’ ‘That is not what I mean,’ he said. ‘You haven’t slept in

the bed.’ So, for some time, I did. And often, in later years, I

thought over a Muslim ḥadíth which says that a day would come

when God would appear in His Divinity and all men would be

struck with awe and flee away. Then He would disappear, and

reappear in the garment of Servitude; for it is written: ‘Servitude

is an essence the substance of which is Divinity.’

Back of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s reception room, at the rear of the build-

ing, was the travellers’ room, a kind of hospice. Next to it in back,

with a barred window giving on another street, was the room of

Siyyid Taqí Manshádí, to whom the Master entrusted all the mail.

Manshádí’s handwriting was well known everywhere; and with

the Tablets he sent out, he would enclose a brief, bare account of

all the Bahá’í news. Between ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s reception room and

the travellers’ room at the rear, was a kind of storeroom, about

fourteen by sixteen feet. All kinds of things were stored in there:

brooms, odds and ends, and especially the beautiful marble sarco-

phagus sent from Rangoon, Burma, to contain the remains of the

Báb (destined at last, fifty lunar years after His execution in Tabríz,

to be entombed ‘in spite of the incessant machinations of enemies

both within and without,’ on the Holy Mountain of Carmel in

1909.[2]) Close to the one barred window, which gave onto the court-

yard, there stood against the wall an unpainted wooden table and

beside it a backless bench. This storeroom was my room in Haifa.

On the wall were a few pegs for my few spare clothes. Here I slept,

on the wooden bench. Years later I learned that the casket con-

taining the sacred remains of the Báb and His companion, who was

shot while trying to shield Him, was hidden in that very room of

mine, at that very time.

I remember several occasions when the Master dictated five

different Tablets—often in different languages: Turkish, Arabic,

Persian, Old Persian—answering five different letters from as many

parts of the world: Persia, India, the United States, Europe. He

would dictate one paragraph to me, one to the first son-in-law, one

to the second son-in-law, one to Mírzá Ḥabíb, then back to me.

To each, without the slightest hesitation, He would follow up the

sentence last dictated, as if He were reading it all from a book. One

afternoon in Haifa he was receiving the great Muslim Judge of

‘Akká. An urgent letter had to be answered, in Arabic. Courteously

explaining to the Judge that He had to finish the letter, ‘Abdu’l-

Bahá kept on dictating. I was a very rapid writer; the Judge was

surprised to see how rapid. He asked the Master if I could read

what I had written. ‘Certainly,’ replied the Master. He then asked

the Master to bid me read it back; and so I did, at top speed.

Often, as He was on His way to Mt. Carmel He would stop and

dictate, and I had to be ready. I learned to write with the paper on

my lap or the palm of my hand.

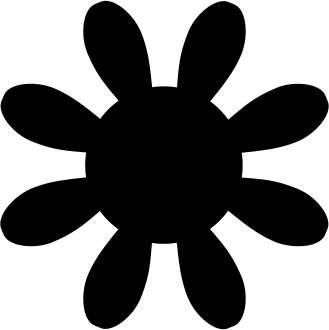
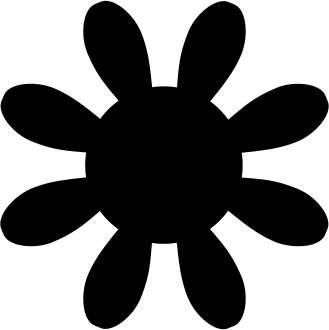
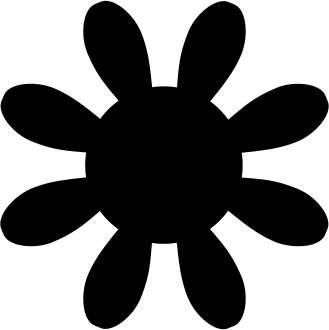
Once when I dropped from weariness, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá referred me

to the story of the cruel blacksmith and his apprentice. It was the

child’s task to blow the bellows, hour after hour. The exhausted

boy would cry out, ‘I die! I die!’ and the blacksmith would answer:

‘Die and blow! Die and blow!’

*JOHN DAVID BOSCH WAS A SWISS from Canton St. Gall who*

*emigrated to the United States in 1879. Later he returned to Europe and*

*studied wine-making in Germany, France, and Spain. He became a*

*Bahá’í in 1905; with his wife Louise he pioneered in Tahiti (see The*

*Bahá’í World, New York: Bahá’í Publishing Committee, 1930, III,*

*368–71), and they were present in Haifa at the time of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s*

*passing. In 1927 he and Louise dedicated their northern California*

*property to the formation of the Geyserville Bahá’í Summer School.*

*The material we give here consists of conversations with John at*

*Geyserville, written down as he spoke, and of documented information*

*supplied by him and Louise, often copied in their presence, in preparation*

*for a (as yet unpublished) biographical account which they desired me*

*to write and which is currently on file in the archives of the National*

*Spiritual Assembly of Switzerland. We begin these excerpts with the*

*days shortly before he became a follower of this Faith.*

JOHN INVESTIGATED EVERYTHING, looking for truth, but could

not seem to find what he wanted. Every two or three weeks he

travelled from Geyserville to San Francisco, in connection with his

work for the Northern Sonoma County Wineries. One day in 1903,

coming home on the Cloverdale train, John saw an acquaintance—

a Mrs. Beckwith of Chicago, a woman of about his age (forty-seven),

who used to go up to a sanatorium near Santa Rosa, and whom he

had also met at Theosophical meetings in San Francisco. She called

to him. He saw that she had a book.

‘I said, “If I sit alongside of you, I’m not going to let you read—

we’re going to talk.” She laid the book down. I picked it up and

started to read. I forgot to talk to her. I said to myself: “This is just

what I wanted. The connecting link I was missing.”’

The book was Myron H. Phelps’ *Life and Teachings of Abbás*

*Effendi* (New York: Putnam’s, 1903), just published. Mrs Beckwith

told him, ‘To hear of this is the greatest of privileges, but will be

followed by the greatest obligations. You had better not know of it

if you cannot follow it up.’ She referred John to Mrs. Goodall of

Oakland for further investigation.

It was his busy season, the time for picking grapes. For three

months he couldn’t go. Then, one November afternoon, he went to

Mrs. Goodall’s; he had no introduction, but mentioned Mrs.

Beckwith and Phelps’ book, and that was enough. Kathryn Frank-

land was there. The two women talked to him. He bought all the

available pamphlets, mostly by Thornton Chase (the first American

Bahá’í), and the book *The Hidden Words*.

From that day on, he attended meetings. He told me that some-

times he had to choose between his Masonic club (he was a thirty-

second degree Scottish Rite Mason), the saloons in San Francisco,

and the Oakland meetings.

‘I would have one foot on the ferry and one on the wharf, but

something inside would say, “I’d better go over to Oakland.”

Sometimes they had from twenty-five to forty-five women there

and I was the only man and never said a word. I let them all talk by

themselves. I kept going; I stuck with it.’

In those days Thornton Chase had an important insurance

position in Chicago, with a salary of $750 a month which dimin-

ished every year because the Faith meant more to him than his

business. Whenever he was coming to San Francisco he wired

John; they would stop at different hotels, but dined together. ‘He

was very tall—about six feet two. He always ate two or three ice

creams after supper; he always dug a big bite right out of the middle

of it to start with. Around eleven o’clock, he used to say, “Now,

John, I guess it’s about time to take you home.”’ Arm in arm, they

would go to John’s hotel, talking steadily about the Cause. They

would sit in the parlour. ‘About one o’clock I used to say, “Now,

Mr. Chase, I guess it’s about time to take you home.” We used to

wonder what the policeman on the beat thought about us. One

night we brought each other home till four in the morning.’

And John became a Bahá’í. On May 29, 1905, he went down to

the winery office very early and wrote ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: ‘… may my

name be entered in the Great Book of this Universal Life … My

watchword will be “Justice.” Humbly Thy servant …’ Afterward

it turned out that the Master sent John a message on June 11, in

care of Mrs. Goodall: ‘O thou John D. Bosch: Raise the call of the

Kingdom and give the glad tidings to the people, guide them to the

Tree of Life, so that they may gather the fruits from that Tree and

attain the great bounty.’

Luther Burbank was one of those to whom John gave the Bahá’í

Message. In 1907 John asked him for an appointment to tell him

something new; he said to John and Mrs. Brittingham, ‘I can only

give you five minutes.’ ‘We were there an hour and a half,’ John

told me. Burbank read the books, and was addressed jointly with

John in at least one Tablet (June 24, 1912). Another visit to Bur-

bank which John remembered took place March 30, 1913, when he

called on the scientist with the Howard MacNutts and Julia

Grundy. The Governor of Colorado and his wife were there,

sitting in the parlour; Mr. Burbank took the Bahá’ís through folding

doors into an adjoining room, and an hour later he was still carrying

on an animated conversation with them. John glanced into the

other room and saw the Governor and his wife fast asleep in their

chairs.

There were many Tablets and messages for John Bosch, through

all the years. On August 17, 1909, the Master wrote to Mrs. Good-

all; ‘Exercise on my behalf the utmost kindness and love to John

D. Bosch. With the utmost humility I pray … that that soul may

become holy, find capacity to receive the outpouring of eternity and

become a luminous star in the West.’ Early in 1910 (the date on the

envelope is May), the Master wrote to John: ‘According to the

texts of the Book of Aqdas both light and strong drinks are pro-

hibited. The reason for this prohibition is that it [drink] leads the

mind astray and is the cause of weakening the body … I hope

thou mayest become exhilarated with the wine of the love of God

… The after-effect of drinking is depression, but the wine of the

love of God bestoweth exaltation of the spirit.’ John had forty men

in four wineries under him. In one year, he crushed up fifteen

thousand tons of grapes, which makes over two and a quarter

million gallons of wine. ‘I thought it over,’ he said. It was not long

before he decided to retire.

From a Tablet jointly addressed to John Bosch and Luther

Burbank, and dated June 24, 1912, at Montclair, New Jersey, an

extract reads: ‘As to my coming to California it is a little doubtful,

for the trip is far and the weather hot and from the labors of the

journey the body of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá hath not much endurance. Never-

theless we shall see what God hath decreed.’ On August 1, the

Master wrote John from Dublin, New Hampshire: ‘O thou who

art longing for the visit of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá! Thy yearning letter was

wonderfully eloquent and its effect on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was inexpres-

sible. I greatly long to fulfil the request of the friends, but am as yet

in these parts, until later the requirement of wisdom will be

revealed. If the western cities demonstrate their infinite firmness in

the Covenant, this will act as a magnet to draw ‘Abdu’l-Bahá …’

On August 10 John wired: ‘I made special trip to San Francisco

today. A great spirit of prayer, thankfulness, joy and hope filled

the Assembly. Tonight anticipating the coming of the Center of the

Covenant unity and firmness are manifest. This supplication begs

earnestly for Thy personal presence, from D’Evelyn, Lua [Get-

singer], [Bijou] Straun, Bozark and [Thornton] Chase, John D.

Bosch.’ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá answered John by wire August 13, from

Dublin: ‘Your telegram was the cause of much happiness. God

willing I will depart for the western part. Give these glad tidings

to each and all.’ John told me this was the first telegram announcing

the Master’s journey West. Mrs. Goodall received the second.

John’s was sent him in care of Mrs. Goodall’s daughter, Mrs. Ella

G. Cooper (wife of the noted San Francisco physician, Charles

Miner Cooper), who forwarded it to him with this note: ‘Awful

temptation to open this! Do let us know if it is very encouraging—

Greetings, E. G. C.’

But it was not the same with Thornton Chase. That great man,

who had been a captain in the Civil War, a student at Brown

University, and later Superintendent of Agencies for the Union

Mutual Life Company, and was ‘the first to embrace the Cause of

Bahá’u’lláh in the Western world’[3]—felt that the Bahá’ís, himself

included, were not worthy of the Master’s visit.

‘John, don’t you think it’s too soon? The Bahá’ís aren’t ready.’

‘Well, I’m ready for Him,’ said John.

As the Master reached San Francisco, down in Los Angeles

Thornton Chase died. ‘It was too much for him,’ John told me.

All Thornton Chase’s Bahá’í papers and books, and five or six

calligraphies by Mishkín-Qalam, were willed to John. Mr. Chase

had sent on most of his Tablets to the Chicago archives, but John

received about ten of them in a tin box. Mrs. Chase burned some

fifteen hundred of her husband’s letters (not Tablets) before John

could get to Los Angeles.

John remembered the minutest details of the things that were

important to him, and generally in the same words. Papers were in

carefully marked envelopes, Louise would be called in for more

memories and documentation; they had long since worked out

between them how their life had been.

Before urging the Master to come West, John, unable to wait,

had been East to see ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and this journey was always

present in his mind. When he heard that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was on the

high seas, he went to San Francisco to get permission from the

president of the California Wine Association, Percy T. Morgan, to

go East. Morgan said, ‘Why do you want to go, in this bad April

weather?’ John said: ‘Because I feel like it.’ ‘Very well,’ said the

president, ‘if the wineries are in shape.’

John took the first train East, fretting because it didn’t go fast

enough. In Washington he phoned one of the believers and learned

that the Master was still in New York. John left on the night train.

At five-thirty the next morning he was at the Hotel Ansonia, and

he went upstairs to see the door of the Master’s room. Dr. Get-

singer (Lua’s husband) was there and recognized John from a

photograph. John asked for an appointment and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sent

word, ‘In a few minutes.’ Then Dr. Getsinger called John in.

‘I went as a business man. I had some questions to ask. When I

saw Him I forgot everything. I was empty.’ Then, in the con-

versation that followed, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told John all the things he

had wanted to know.

‘Foolishly I said, “Oh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, I came three thousand

miles to see you.” He gave a good hearty laugh—you know what a

wonderful laugh He had (here John laughed as the Master had,

that faraway morning, and I caught the sound of that world-

shaking laughter: Olympian—knowledgeable—the laughter of

omniscience—I don’t know how to say it. This was not the only

time John seemed to me like a reflection of the Master. There was

something about his presence; something spotless or fragrant, but

not as we know the words. I had noted this in Ḥájí-Amín, too,

in Persia). And He said, “I came eight thousand miles to see

you.

‘I told Him I was in the wine business and grossed fifteen thou-

sand tons of grapes in one season, which makes over two million

gallons of wine. “Oh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá,” I said, “I am a foreigner,

born in Switzerland, and have not the command of the English

language. I would love to be a speaker. All I am doing is to give

away pamphlets and as many books as are printed.”

‘He looked serious. He said, “You are doing well. I am satisfied

with you. With you it is not the movements of the lips, nor the

tongue. With you it is the heart that speaks. With you it is silence

that speaks and radiates.”

‘We had tea together. I was there about half an hour. He said,

“You are one of the family; you come in and out anytime you want

to.”’

It was a cold, snowy day. In the forenoon John was in and out of

the room, watched people coming by the dozens to see ‘Abdu’l-

Bahá, listened to ‘Abdul-Bahá’s words to them. Around noon, he

circled the block to look at the Hotel Ansonia. Back at the front

door, he saw many people rising in the lobby:

‘When His Majesty came—how straight He walked!—they all

rose.

‘‘Abdu’l-Bahá walked to the first of three waiting automobiles.

The other two were already filled with Bahá’ís and their friends.

All at once I saw the Persian in the first machine pushing the air at

me so I backed up, thinking he wanted me to go away [this Persian

gesture for “come here” looks much like the American one for “go

away”; it often confused the early American Bahá’ís]. Then I saw

Mountfort Mills standing there making a pulling gesture at me so

I went forward. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá grabbed my hand and pulled me into

the rear seat; Mountfort closed the door and I was alone with

‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

‘The believers had planned to show the city to the Master; the

stores, hotels, banks; to give Him a good time seeing New York.

Just as I stepped into the machine and was seated, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

looked at me. He just looked at me, and all at once with an immense

sigh—or what you call it better than a sigh—like the whole world

would be lifted from Him so He could have a rest, He put His head

on my left shoulder, clear down as close as He could, like a child,

and went to sleep.

‘I was still as a mouse; I didn’t want to move—I didn’t want to

wake Him up. The trip was nearly a half hour and often I won-

dered what the others thought—that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was looking out

of the window all the time. He woke up just as we stopped at the

Kinneys’ home.’

John had not been invited, he told me, but he went in, met the

Edward B. Kinneys for the first time, and remained for lunch. At

three the Master addressed about one hundred and fifty people in

the large studio, speaking perhaps a quarter of an hour. Edward

Getsinger placed an armchair in the middle of the room for Him

but the Master did not sit in it. People were standing along the

walls and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá walked from one to the other, and took

their hands to say good-bye. A young girl was on John’s right.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá smiled at her and walked past John to another young

woman on his left. ‘He just turned His head and He didn’t look at

me, just passed me and took the girl’s hand. If I ever had cold feet

and weak knees it was then. It took me a few seconds till I remem-

bered the words He had said in the morning: “You are one of the

family now.” That was why He didn’t say good-bye to me. It was one

of the worst punishments I ever had in my life, till I remembered.’

I asked John to describe the Master. He told me that ‘Abdu’l-

Bahá’s eyes had a luminous white ring around the iris; that He had

a wonderful smile and also a very serious look. John looked in the

glass, trying to explain the Master’s complexion: ‘His skin was the

colour of my forehead.’ John’s fair skin was lightly tanned by the

California sun; I would have described his skin with a Persian

term—‘wheat-coloured.’

‘I never paid any attention to how He looked. I only know every

time I was with Him I was way down below Him—way down in the

bottom. Like nothing. His hair was gray and white and shining; a

little curly. You always felt a nearness to Him even when He was

far across the room.’

John said a person’s atmosphere or presence affected him

strongly; he called it their aura.

John went to most of the meetings for about five days in New

York and then someone put him in the same pullman car on which

the Master travelled to Washington. The Master would leave His

compartment and come out into the main ‘palace’ car. Going

through Pennsylvania an interpreter called John. All at once the

interpreter called out and addressed John as Núrání, and John

requested the Master to write his new name down. John would

linger on the vowels when he said the word, and I could hear the

Master’s echo; vigorous, positive, in the Persian way. It means

filled with light.

Again, John was on the same pullman when the Master left

Washington for Chicago, For three days John attended meetings.

He was present when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá laid the cornerstone of the

Bahá’í House of Worship at Wilmette, but with his usual diffidence

he let ‘an elderly woman’ represent Switzerland on that occasion,

neither of the two, however, taking an active part. Many Cali-

fornians had come to Chicago to see ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He called them

all to Him and they were with Him about an hour.

Just before leaving for the West Coast—John did not give me

the date; I assume it was May 2, a day when the Master had

delivered five public addresses—he was paying his hotel bill at the

Plaza when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá came in. ‘One of the Persians in His

party called to me. The man at the desk said, “Those people want

you.” I stepped over to the elevator, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá seized my

hand and wouldn’t let go, and pulled me into the elevator and up

to His room on the fifth floor.’ Nobody was there except Dr.

Baghdádí. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá did not speak until they were in the room.

Then he went to His bed, lay down, and began talking with

Baghdádí; He told how He had addressed four hundred women,

and described how the ladies looked. The Master had found them

terribly funny; with keen enjoyment, He described them to John

and the Doctor. Anyone who remembers the ladies of 1912, not as

Hollywood films them but as they were, mostly plain and dumpy,

with stiff skirts, jutting bosoms, ‘rats,’ (these were hair pads with

tapering ends) and to crown all, hats that were wedding cakes and

nesting birds, knows. Then He said, ‘Now it’s time for you to go.’

Somebody had given Him a big cake. He put that in John’s arms,

with apples and bananas, so many that John had to get somebody

else to push the elevator button, and John left.

John Bosch was one of those whom ‘Abdu’l-Bahá chose as a com-

panion for the time when He should leave the world. Afterward,

the friends saw that the Master knew the moment of His passing

and had prepared for it. Some who had asked permission to visit

Him at that time, He had gently turned away. But to John He had

written, ‘I am longing to see you,’ and when John and Louise,

responding, asked to come, His cable replied: ‘Permitted.’ They

reached Haifa about November 13, 1921.

John was present on November 19 at the Master’s last public

talk; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá pointed to John on this occasion and addressed

the talk to him: He spoke of divine love, and how different it is

from human love, which fails in the testing and in which there is no

element of self-sacrifice, He told John that the Persian believers

loved him, although they could not speak their love, and that if

John went to Persia they would if necessary give up their own lives

to protect his. He said: ‘When lovers meet it may be that they

cannot exchange a single word, yet with their hearts they speak to

one another. Thus do the clouds speak to the earth and the rain

comes down; the breeze whispers to the trees; the sun speaks to the

eyes of men. Although this is not actual speech yet this is the way

in which the hearts of the friends communicate … For instance,

you were in America and I was in the Holy Land. Although our

lips were still yet with our hearts we were conversing together.’[4]

Surely besides the universal meaning, there was a special mes-

sage here for John, something for him to remember over the long

future before he could again be in the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

‘You were in America and I was in the Holy Land … yet with

our hearts we were conversing together.’

Three days before the last, John was in the garden and all at

once he saw the Master. ‘He walked as straight as if He had been a

young man. He looked well and strong. He walked like a general.

When we had made one short round, about fifty steps, He left me.

He went up to the garden, and came down and brought me a

tangerine. In English He said: “Eat … Good.” I didn’t do like

the Americans and put it away for a keepsake. I peeled it and ate it

and put the peelings in my pocket.’

It was in the early hours of Monday, November 28, that John

and Louise were awakened to the agonizing news that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

was suddenly gone from their midst. Curtis Kelsey with another

believer was sent to ‘Akká with the terrible word. John saw people

weeping as he went to the Master’s bedroom. He knelt down beside

the bed. Then the Most Exalted Leaf, the daughter of Bahá’u’lláh,

took his hand and placed him beside her on the built-in divan along

the window. With her he kept a vigil there from two until four

o’clock. Once, he rose, walked the two steps to the bed, took the

Master’s hand and said, ‘Oh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá!’ It was about three

o’clock then. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s hand was still warm. He seemed

alive. ‘I still hoped He lived,’ John told me.

The Most Exalted Leaf wept far less than the others, at all

times maintaining her great dignity and composure. But many times

she sighed, through the night, and many times uttered the words,

*Yá Iláhí*—O God, my God!’ Two years younger than her beloved

Brother, Bahíyyih Khánum was the ‘most precious great Adorning’

of Bahá’u’lláh’s house.[5] ‘… all her days she was denied a moment

of tranquillity,’ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had written; ‘Moth-like she circled

in adoration round the undying flame … .’[6] Her life had spanned

the Conference at Badasht, the martyrdom of the Báb, the birth of

the Bahá’í Faith as her Father lay chained in the Black Pit of

Ṭihrán, the peril, destitution and humiliation of years of captivity

and exile, the death of Bahá’u’lláh in 1892, the Great War—when

the enemy had determined to crucify ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and all His

family on the heights of Carmel. She had stood by her Brother

when their Father left the world, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, because He

was named the Successor, was deserted by His people, ‘Forsaken,

betrayed, assaulted by almost the entire body of His relatives … .’[7]

Now, for a brief period, Khánum at seventy-five was the *de facto*

head of the Bahá’í world; she was the custodian of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s

Will and Testament, and her loving, sorrowing messages rallied the

grief-obliterated Bahá’ís of East and West. Now she was destined

to stand beside and support yet another crucial Figure in Bahá’í

history, destined to be, Shoghi Effendi wrote, the ‘sole earthly

sustainer, the joy and solace of my life.’[8] Small wonder that her

Father had revealed for her lines such as these: ‘Let these exalted

words be thy love-song … O thou most holy and resplendent

Leaf: “*God, besides Whom is none other God, the Lord of this world*

*and the next!*” … How sweet thy presence … how sweet to

gaze upon thy face… .’[9]

Three days later John was up on Mt. Carmel at the Shrine when

he saw a veiled lady walking slowly, painfully from the Shrine to

the gardener’s house. She seemed inexpressibly weary. He won-

dered if it would be permissible to help her. He went forward, took

her left arm and helped raise her a little up the steep hill. Suddenly

she swung her veil back and looked deep into John’s eyes. ‘I looked

back into the most beautiful blue eyes. Like an angel’s. It’s very

hard to express or define the looks of an angel. I really thought she

was a young woman.’ Later Riḍváníyyih Khánum came over to

the Pilgrim House. ‘I am going to tell you something,’ she said.

John thought it might be something very serious, since he, a western

man, had taken the arm of a veiled lady. Instead, Riḍváníyyih

conveyed to John the thanks of the Most Exalted Leaf.

They had wrapped the Master in five separate folds of white silk

and on His head they had placed a black mitre given to Him by

Bahá’u’lláh. His coffin had been placed on two chairs beside the

bed. John was present when His sheeted form was lifted into the

coffin; while others held the Master’s head and shoulders and arms,

Mírzá Jalál held His feet, and John His knees. His body seemed

natural, John said, not rigid. John helped the others to close the

coffin down. He said he knew the living Master was there. ‘I felt

He was there. Not in the body—even now I feel that again—His

presence. I am sure He was there.’ When others started to raise

the casket up, John didn’t understand at first, but did as they did,

and lifted it to his right shoulder. Then all at once he remembered

that time in New York, long past, when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had leaned

down on his left shoulder and gone to sleep.

On the long way up Mt. Carmel, Sir Herbert Samuel, the British

High Commissioner, walked directly ahead of John. Once John

looked back, and saw all the carriages, empty and left behind: the

ten thousand mourners were all coming on foot, although the

cortège took an hour and five minutes to reach the Shrine. Once

when the tall Sir Herbert stopped suddenly, John stubbed against

his heel; afterward he recalled the gentleness with which Sir

Herbert asked his pardon.

John told me that already by seven that Tuesday morning

soldiers were lined up on both sides of the street and some were in

the Master’s compound. As John entered, on the left going up the

steps, he saw an Arab soldier standing guard; the man was leaning

on his gun and the tears streamed down his face.

Some time after that, Louise Bosch was in the ‘Tea Room’ at the

Master’s house, alone. The ladies had disappeared. Preparations

had been completed for the arrival of Shoghi Effendi, expected

home from Oxford University that day. ‘Then I heard what must

have been his footsteps coming up to the front door and coming in;

when he gave—I don’t know how to describe that cry—an outcry

of greatest grief—pain—*ache*. It was *loud*. And then I remained in

the room. Although I did not see Shoghi Effendi I knew for certain

it was he. So I remained quiet in the Tea Room. Then I heard some

further footsteps of his, and the closing of a door.’

On Wednesday, the day after the funeral, the mother of Shoghi

Effendi told Louise that the Most Exalted Leaf and the Consort of

‘Abdu’l-Bahá had opened a sealed letter left by the Master. This

letter bore Shoghi Effendi’s name; in his absence they were obliged

to open it, not knowing where to bury the Master or what, for a

waiting, despairing Bahá’í world, His instructions might be. Thus

they found out that Shoghi Effendi was the Guardian even before

he did. Shoghi Effendi’s mother confided this to Louise, not under

a seal of secrecy but just as one believer to another, sharing the

provisions of the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Both the

institution and the term—Guardian—were new to the Bahá’ís of

that day.

‘They didn’t show him the Will at first. He was all right. He

came to lunch at the Pilgrim House. But from the third day on, I

didn’t see him. Then on the fifth day past sunset I went over, and

what I saw I shall never forget. He was coming out of a room and

walking through the door of the Most Exalted Leaf’s room. He was

like an old man, bent over and he could barely speak, but he shook

hands with me, and looked at me for a moment. He spoke like a

person who cannot hear anything now or doesn’t want to see any

one now. He was wholly changed and aged and walking bent and

he had a little light or candle in his hand. I think he said to me, “It

is all right.”

‘But I saw something terrible had happened. He had reacted just

the way the Family had known he would. That’s why he didn’t

come back to the Pilgrim House. He got ill. He couldn’t eat; he

couldn’t drink or sleep.

‘After the first three days had passed and he had seen the Will

he couldn’t at all accept it. He seemed to make such remonstrances

that his mother felt called upon to recite to him a history of a

similar time after Muḥammad when one of the Holy Imáms would

not serve. [Louise was not sure which Imám; we assume it was

Ḥasan.] So Shoghi Effendi’s mother said; “Are you going to repeat

the history of that Imám, who also felt that he was not qualified?”

I felt extremely privileged that the mother of Shoghi Effendi told

me of this.’

Shoghi Effendi was then twenty-four years old. He had gone to

Oxford to better prepare himself as a translator to serve ‘Abdu’l-

Bahá. Already reeling from the blow of his Grandfather’s passing,

he was dealt this ‘second blow … in many ways more cruel than

the first …’[10] A vital office, described by him in later years as

carrying a staggering weight of responsibility, was suddenly loaded

onto his young shoulders.[11] In the opening pages of his book

*Bahá’í Administration* there are brief references to his prolonged

illness, during the early days of what became a ministry lasting

thirty-six years.

Although the Guardianship-to-be was a well-kept secret, it was,

strangely enough, not a total one. A Tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s to

Miss F. Drayton of New York City contains a strong clue; it

states: ‘… Verily that Infant is born and exists and there will

appear from His Cause a wonder which thou wilt hear in future …

there are signs for it in the passing centuries and ages.’ When the

National Bahá’í Assembly of the United States referred this Tablet

to the Guardian, he verified that he was the infant mentioned here.

These lines close the second volume of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s published

English Tablets.

But more explicit was the Master’s confiding, to an individual

who was not a Bahá’í, the fact that Shoghi Effendi was to be His

successor. On August 6, 1910, when a little serving girl in the

Household had to have her finger lanced, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sent for

the Family’s German physician, Frau Doktor Fallscheer. Afterward

the Doctor sat with Bahá’u’lláh’s daughter, the Most Exalted Leaf,

drinking coffee and conversing in Turkish; then, summoned by

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Doctor repaired with Bahíyyih Khánum to the

Reception Room, which soon crowded up with pilgrims and others,

coming and going. The two ladies, continuing their conversation,

sat down apart from the rest. At that point a son-in-law of ‘Abdu’l-

Bahá’s entered the room, and the Doctor noticed that his eldest

son, Shoghi Effendi, whom she knew by sight, followed him. The

child, who seemed about twelve or thirteen, greeted and took

his leave of the Master and his great aunt Bahíyyih Khánum with

wonderful courtesy, in the Persian way; and the Most Exalted

Leaf confided to the Doctor that this child was to be the Master’s

successor and ‘Vizier’. The Doctor was much impressed with his

grown-up, solemn courtesy in entering and leaving the room, and

with ‘his dark, candid, trusting eyes, not swerving for even a

moment from the magical blue glance of his Grandfather.’ ‘Abdu’l-

Bahá came over to the ladies and as they rose, He told them to

be seated, settled Himself informally on a Persian stool and said:

‘Now, my daughter, how do you like Shoghi Effendi, my future

Elisha?’ (The reference was to 2 Kings, chapter 2.) ‘Master,’ she

answered, ‘if I may say it, in his young face I see the dark eyes of

a sufferer, of one who will have much to bear.’ That day the

Master also informed her that He would send Shoghi Effendi to

study in England. In later years the Doctor returned to Germany

and, not long before she died, became a Bahá’í. Her memoir was

published in the German Bahá’í magazine, *Sonne der Wahrheit*

(1930–31).

When Hand of the Cause Dr. Hermann Grossmann and Mrs.

Grossmann consulted the Guardian about the Fallscheer notes,

Shoghi Effendi ‘expressed the opinion that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá must have

had great confidence in Frau Doktor Fallscheer inasmuch as He,

at the time before the beloved Guardian went to England, that is,

when the Master may have first considered the idea of sending him

there, talked to her about it and on that occasion mentioned that

Shoghi Effendi was to be His “Vizier”, as she expressed it.’[12]

Before leaving Haifa, Louise wanted an Eastern street costume

and veil such as the ladies of the Household then wore, in deference

to the time and place. Riḍváníyyih Khánum helped to make it and

they dressed her in it. Few sights were funnier to Easterners than

a Western woman trying to wear the veil. They led Louise, striding

along in her wrappings, to a room where she found the ladies at

prayer. An aunt of the Guardian’s said: ‘You must go and see

Shoghi Effendi.’ Then she opened a door to the next room and

announced through the crack: ‘A Turkish lady wishes to see you.’

Feeling like a child in fancy dress, Louise went in. ‘I stood maybe

four or five feet from his bed. He sat up in bed and when I could

not contain my laughter he said, “Oh, it’s Mrs. Bosch,” and he

pointed to my shoes. Then he laughed a little and I and his aunt

laughed. She told me this was the first time Shoghi Effendi had

even smiled since his return.’

The last words that Shoghi Effendi spoke to Louise when she

and John took leave of him were: ‘Tell the friends, time will prove

that there has been no mistake.’

# VII

# Where’er You Walk

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## In the High Sierras

## DAYTIMES THE TROUT STREAM WAS like a big trout, slippery,

dappled, now and then flashing white, easing under the watery

aspens. At night it was pale in the blackness. Sitting by the camp-

fire one could only hear it and see a vagueness down there under

the bank where it ran. One could not distinguish between the moths

brought into the flame, and the sparks flying out, and higher

insects catching the light as they passed, and shooting stars, and

stars. One could not keep track of these things.

Except that the stars were campfires again. This used to be

Indian country, here under the incongruously Swiss-looking snow

crags, along the trout stream; here you can still pick up Indian

arrowheads of dark bottle-green obsidian, with the hairy chisel

marks. When the white man drove the Indians away, they went up

there in the sky, over our heads, and lit those campfires. So we

have peace between the two again, with the red man up there the

winner. His spirit is always seeping back into America, like the

blood of the heart seeping back, and it never wipes away. (That

time we saw Boulder Dam, the least Indian of all things, we found

that Indian patterns had been worked into the massive floors; soft

moccasined, his spirit had come back.)

You would look into the redness of the campfire, and there,

standing on its tail and watching you with white, piteously smoking

eyes, was the ghost of the trout you had caught in the morning and

fried at noon; fried it so fresh that it leapt in the pan.

That particular night something was going to happen, up there

in the mountains. Everything was waiting for it. The wind had

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lowered, the hot ashes fell softly, the stream quieted and the aspens

stilled. Now it was happening. We looked up out of our well of

blackness to the ridge: the trees along the ridge were catching fire,

they were burning, like hair in a nimbus on some old saint’s picture.

Flaming hair of trees along the ridge. We waited not moving, and

we saw the white fire growing, and then we saw it was the white

moon burning and rising up there over the fall of the ridge. Then

the night went on as before. It resumed.

Later in the night we went over to the little store on the lake for

a couple of bottles of milk. This place is listed on the map as

‘primitive area,’ and it is safely far away from any towns, but even

so we were only around the corner to milk ‘from non-reactive

tuberculin tested cows.’ That is America.

No moon during the mile’s walk, only the black wind to lean

against. The lake was rimmed with a beach piled with tree limbs,

twisted satiny-white wood that made good burning. We could have

sworn the lake was an ocean with China just beyond it, its further

shores were so lost and unattainable.

On our way back we punched the dark now and then with our

flashlight. Everything was black and quiet. Something was going

to happen. We looked up to the hilltop, above the road, and there

suddenly was the moon, dawning again, with all the freshness and

drama, the ceremony and pause, of its dawning an hour ago, over

our campfire.

I had never known before that the moon has many dawnings in a

single night. It comes up as many times as there are hills and valleys

and eyes watching.

An idea in the world is the same—it has many risings, each

authentic and new and especially for the people it shines on. When

you describe it, the people do not only hear what you tell them,

they get the idea at first hand. It rises for them as it did for you.

The great world ideas are like that. For instance, about the time

Jesus rose over England—597—Buddha rose over Japan, 552. A

new world idea comes, this time from Shíráz and Baghdád, and it is

only beginning to rise, say over the western seas.

‘I do not see the new world idea coming out of the East as you

describe it,’ people comment. It is perfectly all right for them to

say this; they are telling you the truth. But then other people,

apparently no more brilliant or stupid than the first, do see it. It

rises for them, a special dawning for them, and their faces begin

to glow with it. It is not only your moon any more, it is theirs too.

You don’t have to repeat any more, ‘See the moon coming up’—or

‘Wait a minute and you’ll see the moon coming’—They would only

look at you and say, ‘Are you crazy? Of course I see it.’

Back at the campfire, the tamaracks had turned to cypresses in

the moonlight. You had to force yourself not to imagine an Eastern

palace there, piling lightly into the sky, poised above seven cloudy

pools, tiled and terraced, one below the other, one spilling into the

other. You had to hang on to yourself not to feel a nostalgia for

something long ago that you never knew about; this is much worse

than missing something that was once yours. Probably, through a

twisting of time, it is a homesickness for what will come later on,

perhaps in the world beyond this. Anyhow it takes hold of you if

you sit by a trout stream in the summer moonlight.

# Midnight Oil

A COLLEGE PROFESSOR ONCE returned a paper on philosophy

with the marginal comment that, after all, true happiness is to be

found only in a state of complete nonexistence. The words of

professors are frequently so profound that the ordinary mind had

best make no attempt to fathom them. However the remark is an

interesting one, because it reminds us again of the innumerable

philosophies and systems of existence which are quietly flourishing

about us, often in the least likely places. Philosophers write con-

scientiously tedious tomes on how to live life, and our libraries are

crammed with utopias and paradises, each representing someone’s

solution to the problem, ranging from descriptions of a world

where the houses are edible and the streets are paved with sapphires

to the heaven of the Divine Comedy, where triumph the joys of the

intellect. Nor is the average human being’s mind entirely idle;

for as the world goes on in its impulsive way, counting calories and

puzzling comfortably over the latest murder mystery, each indivi-

dual is yet evolving for himself, as a sort of by-product, a philo-

sophy of life; this he will confide on occasion to friends in need.

He will tell them, for instance, to return to Nature, and there they

will find peace—out under the great redwoods balm is awaiting

them; or he will insist on the contrary that the spectacle is always

within the spectator, and induce them to abandon the redwoods

and take up mind-reading or Swedish gymnastics. Should he quote

Scripture, he will do so with the pointless charm of Rabelais’ pil-

grims, whom Gargantua ate in a salad and who found in the Old

Testament a literal reference to their experience; he will regard the

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essence of Scripture only with indulgent respect, and dismiss it as

counsels of perfection. He prefers to invent some sleight-of-hand

method of living, some system of philosophy, either original or

derived from a fellow mortal to whom he has entrusted his

judgement.

Man desires a complex and obscure solution to existence; he

would rather go bare-foot, subsist entirely on carrots or listen to

the voice of his departed uncle issuing at midnight from an alu-

minium horn, than prefer his neighbour to himself, or confine his

business activities to honest ones. Moreover his conduct is not

unreasonable, for a peculiarity of the universe is that it may, logi-

cally, be made to fit any theory whatever; Schopenhauer, disap-

pointed in love, had little difficulty in blaming the female sex for

the French Revolution; while some of our modern scientists could

with equal justice attribute the disturbance to a pandemic dys-

functioning of endocrine glands.

Such are human attempts at directing existence. They are by

definition imperfect, for obviously a finite mind cannot hope to

settle the infinite business of living, any more than unconscious

natural phenomena could organize themselves into a disciplined

whole. A study of every philosophy, whether home-made or recog-

nized, will prove that for one acceptable tenet there are ten to be

rejected; that every human leader of a school tacitly obliges his

followers to disregard many clearly established truths because

these happen to conflict with his doctrine; and that even should he

bring the moon out of a well, he wears a green veil which none may

lift.

In the whole range of human experience there is no fellow

human being, however great, who can claim us unreservedly; we

invariably find, after reading his book or watching him live, that he

suffers as we do from human inadequacy; and so it is that Flaubert

warns us not to touch our idols, because their gilt comes off on our

fingers; and Emerson grows indignant when we exalt another

human being and seek our truth from him, because our ideas are

easily as valuable as his, we too are subject to ‘gleams from within,’

we find in every work of genius our own rejected thought.

We all, then, have our gleams from within, even though they are

often but the vague phosphorescent lights which skim over grave-

yards after dark. But if we would see, we must stand in the full

beating force of the Sun of Reality, which alone gives truth to the

known and the power of knowing to the knower. We must go to

the source of all knowledge, which is the knowledge of God; it is

only in this light that a science or a philosophy, an act or an event,

may be estimated; and this knowledge, which is our only true

standard, is embodied in the words and deeds of the Divine Mani-

festations, Who come to us at Their appointed times and make the

world new again. They are the Truth which all men seek, and all

other doctrine is true only in so far as it approaches Their divine

explanations. They unravel for mankind the significance of human

endeavour, and light up the waste and chaos which men have made

of former religious dispensations; and learning is sterile without

them. They are the soul of life, and the rest is only technique.

Their words are the blossoming trees and the pools white with

dawn, and men’s words are at best like those Japanese bits of paper

that develop into flowers when they are dipped in water.

There are those who say that if the Prophets of God bring with

them a new springtime, while scholars and thinkers do not, it is

because the Divine Messengers appeal to the emotions, and they

speak simple truths which all can understand, while philosophers

have their being on a high intellectual plane to which only the

chosen few may hope to ascend. This thought is comforting to our

so-called intelligentsia, but unfortunately it does not bear investi-

gation. Those who have watched mysogynists warm to Schopen-

hauer and the bellicose to Nietzsche, patricians to Plato and

politicians to Machiavelli, intuitionists to Kant and cynics to Vol-

taire, must conclude that emotions are strongly engaged. As for the

second point, that the average mind is unable to understand the

great truths in our libraries, it is undeniable that some of our

writers are involved and tedious; but after painfully ferreting out

their meaning we usually find that it could have been expressed in

a few simple words, and we decide that what is obscure in a

philosopher is his vocabulary. Moreover a thoroughbred thinker is

apt to be meticulously lucid; Socrates blamed himself when his

pupils failed to understand him, and was at pains to clarify; and

Descartes addressed his Discourse to the layman, saying that good

sense is the best-shared thing in the world.

But the words of a Divine Manifestation are so perfect in regard

to form that the meaning lies open before us; here we do not see

as through a glass darkly; the window is flung wide, and we may

look as long and as far as our capacity allows; and with each new

experience, each new fact learned, the vista develops, and the

horizon recedes. The intellectual stimulus is indeed such that it

brings to birth new civilizations, driving thought toward reality;

while the higher emotions, without which no good act is ever

accomplished, are awakened—the heart speaks and is answered.

The Bahá’ís are commanded to engage in the most strenuous

endeavour, both mental and spiritual; our education may never be

spoken of in the past tense; the lines laid down by His Holiness

Bahá’u’lláh stretch to infinity, and there is no profitable learning

from which we are excluded. For the difference between truth and

opinion is this, that the first is a setting-free of the mind, and the

second a postponement of wisdom.

## Will and Testament

ONE DAY I WAS OUT ON THE BACK porch painting a table. An

insect settled on the table and stuck in the paint. It thrashed and

floundered but only sank deeper. Feeling like Providence, I gave it

my finger to climb out on, and transferred it to the porch railing,

where it sat infinitesimally in the sunshine, scraping off the yellow

paint. It was not grateful; it didn’t know I existed. A few minutes

later another insect landed on the tabletop and stuck. I gave it my

finger and it heaved itself out. However, this time I found that I

was not Providence; I was only an agent; I was not a dispenser of

life and death. Because this time the insect was too badly damaged

to survive, and I destroyed it. Then I remembered that Muḥammad

says in the Qur’án: ‘God maketh alive and killeth.’

With this reservation I shall explain why I am a Bahá’í and give

such reasons for it as I know. And with this preface: Menninger

tells us that the conscious mind, in relation to the unconscious, is

‘a thin shell or fringe, perhaps as much in proportion as the skin of

an apple is of the whole fruit.’ We live in mystery, we don’t know

much. We are shapes fashioned out of something very perishable—

mud. We are taking a ride in the sky.

The non-believers I meet, think that to believe you have to have

a thing called faith. They say they wish they had it, but you know

they don’t; in fact, while they are talking, their faces and hands are

telling you how superior they feel in their non-believing, and how

immature, how naive they find you. They discovered some time

back that Santa Claus is only a device to sell the goods in a store,

and they say that God is only a device to keep you quiet; a way of

shutting your mouth so that you will let the world go on. Then if

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you stir them, they turn on you, and rage against God (in Whom

they do not believe) for allowing such things as venereal disease

and poverty and war.

I don’t know why some people have faith and others don’t. The

Báb says, ‘The difference which separates believer from non-

believer is knowledge.” If present-day intellectuals are often un-

believers, it is because they see religion in its decay. Religion to

them is strange clothing, robes and trappings, hocus-pocus; and

strange ideas, complicated and irrelevant. However, in the ages of

faith it is the intellectuals who believe, and lead the others: Augus-

tine, Rúmí, Dante, for instance; highly sophisticated, highly in-

tellectual.

My grandfather in New England gave a stained-glass window to

his church, and my grandfather in Káshán went daily to his mosque.

One hoped to be saved by the Blood of the Lamb, and the other to

cross over the bridge that spans hell—the bridge narrow as a hair

and sharp as a knife. One lived in the salt New England weather,

against the white houses and the leafy streets; the other lived where

the Wise Men came from, Káshán with its heat and scorpions and

its fields of roses. According to family records, this latter was in the

mosque one day, and the Báb came in, and my grandfather saw

Him and believed; he heard that voice which afterward people

could never describe, ‘except with a kind of terror.’ Well, this may

be one reason why I am a Bahá’í.

Although I believe in Christ, I could not be an orthodox Chris-

tian, because the Church rejects Muḥammad. Personal study,

which is the only legitimate basis for my thinking, has convinced

me that a being of Muḥammad’s dimensions could not be less than

what we call a Prophet of God. For what He was, for what He

said, for what He achieved, I believe in Him. For Islám’s centuries

of culture, when the West was in darkness; for Islám’s solution of

problems which drove Christian minds to madness and with which

the West is still tortured—the problem of the nature of God; the

problem of faith versus good works; the problem of celibacy and

puritanism; for Islám’s insistent promotion of science, which the

Church suppressed; for Islám’s statement of the rights of women—

for all these I accept Islám.

Another reason why I am not an orthodox Christian is this: if I

read my eyes out, I still couldn’t decide which denomination is the

true one. Conservatively there are hundreds of divisions in Chris-

tianity; I don’t have time to become entangled in all that theology.

Besides, the New Testament is two thousand years away from me,

and scholars are not decided as to what it says. I can’t overlook

the fact that the Gospels were not written by the Apostles but by

another generation of men; that the earliest, the Gospel of Mark,

was set down thirty or forty years after the Crucifixion; that the

oldest extant manuscript of the New Testament dates from the

fourth century; that they have counted no less than 175,000

variations in the available texts; that in short, as one author says,

‘Jesus never heard of the New Testament …’ I cannot even read

Shakespeare, who wrote in my language only three hundred years

ago, without glossaries and commentaries and learned disquisitions

—how can I judge the Greek and Aramaic of two thousand years

back? They tell me I must reconstruct that period, know those times

to understand the teaching—well, I am busy with my own times.

Nevertheless, I believe in the Christ. His breath is on those

pages. Besides I have seen Him in hospitals and breadlines, in some

art forms and in some people’s eyes.

All right, why am I not a Muslim? The text of the Qur’án is

clear; it is not hearsay, it is the revealed work of Muḥammad,

brought down to us across thirteen hundred years. Well, I do not

find my century in the Qur’án, any more than I found it in the

Gospels. The spiritual problems, yes. The command to work and

pray, to be humble and to fear God, yes. And the Golden Rule.

But I do not find my century there. What should we do with a

world in arms? What about the machines displacing the men?

What about women, with their new, disruptive, agonizing equality?

What about the ends of the earth brought close together? I do not

find these things in the sacred books of thirteen hundred or two

thousand years ago. I am not satisfied when a mujtahid reads them

into the Qur’án, when a priest reads them into the Gospels.

The most intelligent of my non-Bahá’í friends, I mean of my

friends who were born since 1900, are, generally speaking, agnostic.

They are interested, not in theology, but in world reform. If they

go to church it is for the Bach and the stained glass. But what they

want, heart and soul, is justice; food and jobs; money for books

and microscopes, instead of bombs. Beauty, and love, and some

kind of achievement for every one.

I want these things, too. I want a new world. Today we have the

brains and we have the equipment to get it. Thirteen hundred years

ago, two thousand years ago, there were still centuries of slavery

and blood and pain ahead. Today we have the planet in our hands—

almost. Today we have hope.

But here is where I differ from these young, agnostic friends—

I believe in God. The reason is that I cannot explain away Moses

and Buddha, Zoroaster and Jesus, Muḥammad, the Báb and

Bahá’u’lláh. Who are They—what is the strange eloquence They

possess, which we call revelation, how is it that They subjugate

the world? They are not academicians, taking notes out of books;

They are not philosophers; They are not madmen; They are not

poets or generals. How is it that They know what will work; how

is it that They always founded a new culture; how is it that They

are specialists in civilization? To me, They have an other-worldli-

ness which proves that there is another world; in fact They Them-

selves are heaven, and Their ways prove God. A belief has to take

into account all the facts; agnosticism excludes the greatest fact,

the appearance amongst us of these superhuman personalities.

And then, I differ with them as to method. Let us assume that,

as they wish, a non-religious group takes over the planet: what is

to hold that group together? Religion, as I understand it, is the

only cohesive force there is. This process of common belief in God,

and common obedience to His Prophet, unites the most discrepant

and recalcitrant peoples; as a result of their single inspiration and of

their clubbing-together, a new civilization develops. But a non-

religious group must inevitably break into factions under this and

that leader. If you reject the rule of heaven, then you are under the

rule of earth, which is that the strongest always wins. My friends

don’t want the strongest to win, they want democracy. But democ-

racy can exist only in a believing society; it is Christianity, it is

Islám, that teach democracy; it is only in the light of faith that all

men are brothers—only in the light of the next world, where money

and brains will cease to matter; otherwise, most men will always be

slaves to the strong. We Bahá’ís have felt, over and over, the tug

of our individual wills, and have known—perhaps better than

anyone else, since world unity is our business—that only the terrific

pull of the Faith has held us together.

Incidentally, lots of people say that they will believe in religion

but not in the Manifestations of God. They want to accept the

Sermon on the Mount but not Jesus. They want to accept the

Bahá’í teachings but not Bahá’u’lláh. Well, the teachings without

the name won’t work. The name is the life element. It is for the

name that men will die. Because principles do not move the heart.

That is why they have to pin bits of ribbon and metal on soldiers.

Principles in themselves are not creative; the brain watches, but

the personality as a whole does not respond. Our race has spent

much more time in the jungle than the laboratory, and we are

infinitely more than rational, and the magic is in the name. Remem-

ber what Saint Theresa wrote for Jesus, fifteen hundred years after

He was crucified—Let mine eyes see Thee, sweet Jesus of Naza-

reth—Let mine eyes see Thee, and then see death.

I am not, then, a believer in world reform by secular legislators,

because I think that a group which denies God can never love men

enough to establish world unity. Neither do I think that people of

differing religions, each secretly considering the others as either

damned or incomprehensible, can ever make a world state.

And I do not belong to any of the previous great religions be-

cause they are divided into sects, and because their scriptures,

although necessary and inspiring, do not practically relate to

modern times. I know that they all teach the Golden Rule but that

is not what I mean. I want enlightenment on such practical points

as the following: How can we stop war? Should we have public

ownership of the means of production? Is divorce permissible?

Should we use alcohol? I also want fuller explanation as to what

we are doing in the universe; I want to know more about God, and

the life after this, and the function of prayer.

There is still something else. I mean there is the Guardian of the

Bahá’í Faith. The secret of Bahá’í strength is the tie between the

individual and the Guardian. We obey our elected representatives,

our Local and National Spiritual Assemblies, because our interest

is centred in him. Because of the Guardianship, then, I believe in

the Bahá’í plan for establishing a world federation. I have heard of

no other plan which would work.

After ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, it was love for the Guardian that built

our world order. It was because of his clearly spelled-out in-

structions that, since 1963, the Bahá’í world has revolved around

The Universal House of Justice.

With the sudden passing of Shoghi Effendi, the first Guardian,

in London, November 4, 1957, the administration of the Bahá’í

Faith moved into a new phase. Conformably to the Book of Aqdas

and the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Faith came under

the jurisdiction of Shoghi Effendi’s Chief Stewards, the Hands of

the Faith, and the various National Bahá’í Spiritual Assemblies.

In due course these two institutions arranged for worldwide

elections whereby the first Universal House of Justice was estab-

lished in 1963. World jurisdiction of the Bahá’í Faith is vested in

this body. The world headquarters of the Faith are in Haifa,

Israel.

The great forward surge of the Faith under the administration of

the Universal House of Justice and the counsel and encouragement

of the Hands of the Cause of God is proof of God’s continuing

guidance. But it should never be forgotten that the momentum for

this advance, the pioneering movement that spread the Bahá’í

Faith over the entire globe, and the organization of the believers

into a responsible, responsive world body, all were the result of

Shoghi Effendi’s devoted, tireless, selfless, divinely-inspired

ministry of thirty-six years.

When I first saw Mount Carmel it was mostly weeds and rubble.

I like to think of the Bahá’í Shrines there now, there and at Bahjí.

I remember the white pathways spattered with red geraniums. The

terraces high over Haifa, over the blue curve of the Bay; oranges

glinting in their leaves, and a hundred black cypresses. I think of

handfuls of tuberose petals, piled on the Holy Thresholds inside

the Shrine rooms. And I remember a night at Bahjí when a blue

moon came up through the blue flowers of the jacaranda tree, and

blue blossoms fell on the grass. I think of the inner garden of the

Shrine; and the small inner room, set with precious rugs and lamps,

which is the holiest place in the Bahá’í world. I think again of the

red geraniums streaming over Mount Carmel; red geraniums, the

willing blood of many martyrs.

## Where’er You Walk

HE LEFT THE WOMAN AND HER CHILD in the sand hills, gray

under the burning sky. He gave her a skin full of dates and another

of water, and turned and left her. She followed, calling to him, but

he went on, not turning back, not answering. At last she cried out:

‘Is it God who has bidden you to do this?’ And he spoke the one

word: ‘Yes.’ He went on, and left her and his child in the empty

hills. He saw the spring that would bubble up there out of the sand,

and the House he would build in a time to come; a square House

that would stand through the ages as a sign for all men. And he

saw that the child would not die; he saw it living, and the stream

of his posterity shining in the world for ever and ever. But he knew,

too, as he went away over the fiery hills, that he would never see

again this woman that he loved …

The land lay out beneath him. The silver plains, the palm trees

blowing, and far against the sky, the feathery blue sea. He watched

it for a long time; it was all as he had known it would be. It was all

there as he had dreamt it long ago: honeycomb, and wheat; white

flocks, fields of white lilies; doves nesting; green figs on the boughs.

It was all as in his dream. But he was not to enter the land; he was

not to set foot down there in the valleys. He was to stay here always,

laid in a grave in the sand where no one would find it. Before, it had

been refused him to see the glory that his heart longed for; now he

was not to go down into the land …

He stood at the altar in the darkness, sheltering the fire. The

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flames burned in his eyes and wavered over the walls. He could

hear the soldiers coming nearer; they had fought their way into the

city, burning and pillaging, cutting the inhabitants down. Now their

cries swelled around the Temple; now they were beating at the

door. It gave, and someone was panting down there in the darkness.

He stepped in front of the altar, guarding the flame, placing his

body between the flame and the man working towards him in the

shadows. Then the light struck on a curved blade swinging over

him. As he fell, he hurled his rosary at the man and it made a

bright circle in the darkness. His blood spurted into the flame and

smoked on the altar …

He came in from the garden to the bedroom of his wife and

looked down at her as she slept. His eyes clouded, until her face

was only a paler shadow in the shadows. The child lay in her arms.

He wanted to kiss it one last time, but she clasped it so tightly he

was afraid to waken her. He turned from them both and left them,

and went out into the dark …

He heard them casting lots for his clothing as he hung above

them. Their spittle had dried on his cheeks. They were calling to

him to come down from where he was, they were shouting: He

saved others; himself he cannot save. He could taste the fruit of

another vineyard on his lips. He could see, two thousand years to

come, women still wearing this hour against their breasts. He

hung, outspread against the sky, and the blood was slipping from

his hands and feet …

When he walked through the street they turned to laugh at him;

sometimes they struck him; once when he was bowed at prayer

they covered him with entrails from a sheep. Even their idols

seemed to mock him as he passed; idols that stood, insolent and

firm, after ten years of his preaching, and looked down at him. He

said the idols were only wood and stone; he said there was another

God, one God, that no man could see; but only beggars listened to

him, while the idols had thousands of worshippers from far and

near, and stood plain in the sunlight. He left his home and went

away to another place, a city in the mountains where fruit trees

grew. He thought the people would listen to him here, because they

were not his people. But when he opened his lips, they stoned

him …

Thousands of oil lamps were burning in the mosques. In the

fire temples, flame went up from the tripods, and priests in mouth-

veils and long yellow robes were tending it. In cathedrals, white

tapers were lighted, tips fluttering like moths in the shadows.

Every church had its lights; every synagogue and temple; even the

darkest shrine had its floating wick or its red spark of incense. But

here in the bare room on the mountain, no lamp, no candle, no

light. Only the blackness, only the slow cold eating into the brick of

the walls and floor. The world lighted its lamps and its tapers and

censers for him: and he here on the mountain, alone and a prisoner

in the night …

They straightened as best they could the broken young body and

washed the blood from it. Before His eyes they tore the garments

from the shattered limbs and cleansed them. He leaned above His

son and spoke to him: should He spare his life; should He make

him well again? The memory of the answer was here in the cell,

would always be here: The son would have his blood pour out on

the prison floor, if only the people who were far away could come to

their Beloved; if only they could come to his Father, and stand

before Him, and be in His presence; so the priests and kings, the

mountain wastes, town walls and bars, should no longer keep them

back.

They had carried him away now, tight in his shroud. They had

gathered up his stained clothing; his poor, tattered clothing, not

the embroidered robes he would have worn, as a young prince in

the faraway gardens at home. The place was empty where he had

lain. It was as if tuberoses had fallen here, maimed and broken on

their stalks.

He has come to us many a time, from the realms of the placeless,

where the maids of heaven live, each in her house of pearl; where

the ever-blooming youths go round with their jewelled flagons.

He has come, many a time, and taken on our life, and suffered our

human days as we suffer them.

The Letters of Negation have denied Him when He came, and

if you asked them what is the secret of the universe, unless it be

He?—they have had no answer to give. There is nothing, they have

answered, it is all shifting confusion, like a dream. And if you said,

what is a dream—they have had no answer.

But the Letters of Affirmation have declared Him, whenever He

has come. He is the mystery, they have said, He is the meaning of

the universe.

When He spoke, the first door of fire opened before Him, and

also the first door of light. And the Letters of Negation withered

away; and the Letters of Affirmation saw their joyous and clamour-

ing blood flow down for Him.

He has come, many a time, and walked among us, so that hardly

anyone lives who was not born under one or another of His laws,

however dimly remembered; and hardly anyone has thought or

written except in the breath of His words.

Who is He, this One who has come, and loved us for ourselves,

and not as human lovers do, in search of their own good. Why has

He loved us, who are busy with our little day of life, as animals and

insects are busy, so that we have no time to listen to Him. (We

have plenty of time for other things—the letter that will fade in a

box, the money that will be lost, the book that will gather dust.)

In the end, we have always bowed down to Him, long after we

have put Him to death. He has said, ‘Am I not your Lord?’ (*A-lastu*

*bi-Rabbikum?*)[1] and in the end we have answered, ‘Yea, verily.’

(Balá)[1] And we have at last believed in His name, that He was the

Friend of God, or the Interlocutor of God, or the Son of God, or

the Messenger of God, or the Glory of God. And all men will in the

end kneel down to Him: ‘And thou shalt see every nation kneel-

ing.’[2]

How can we draw close to Him, in this day when He has been

amongst us again? Sometimes, reading His words, we hear His

voice as He first recited them, as they flowed from His mouth, far

away in the narrow prison over the sea. We hear the beat of the

rhyming Arabic and Persian syllables, and the suffering voice,

unending as the waves below the barred window.

We remember the divan where He sat in His last days, His white

felt cap on the cushion, His ewer and basin, the small leather

slippers by His bed. But how can we approach Him, shut out as we

are by His light. How shall we know Him, if our eyes see Him in

the placeless world beyond this one …

We go outward, away from time. We step off the rim of the

universe. We pass onward, as those whose equivalents we are,

passed onward before us. We bequeath our living to those who

come after, in this hand-me-down planet. (If we have beauty, others

had beauty before us, and will have it again; if we have a singing

voice, they were singing in Persepolis and Thebes.) We pass, like

the shape of fog in the wind.

And against the body in the ground, and the grass fading over it,

and the stone effaced; and against our ways gone in such a short

time from anyone’s memory—against this, we have His word. And

out in the placeless regions beyond time, we have His voice.

Perhaps that is why, wherever He walks, the light slips round

from face to face. And we shall know Him by the welcome, the

swift penetrating mercy, the concealing grace; by the splendour,

the obliterating glory. So let them have the darkness who desire it.

But let us have the light.

*A-lastu bi-Rabbikum?*

*Balá!*

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8. Bahá’u’lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, translated by Shoghi Effendi,

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9. Thompson, *Diary*, extracts published in *World Order*, Vol. 6, no. 1

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10. Tablet in the possession of the author

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Barney, (Bahá’í Publishing Trust, London, 1961), pp. 225–6 [SAQ]

Headlines Tomorrow

1. Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Administration*, (Bahá’í Publishing Trust,

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2. *Gleanings*, no. cxii

3. ibid. p. 250

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1. *Dawn-Breakers*, p. 27

2. ibid. p. 30

3. ibid. p. 77

4. Thomas Carlyle, *Heroes and Hero-Worship, The Works of Thomas*

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2. *Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 85–6

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4. ibid. pp. 92–4

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8. ibid.

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10. ibid. pp. 107–8

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1. See Marzieh Gail, *The Sheltering Branch*, (George Ronald, 1959),

p. 71, for another account of this incident.

2. *Dawn-Breakers*, p. 413

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6. ibid. p. 285, footnote

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9. ibid. p. 280

10. ibid. p. 286

11. ibid. p. 295–6

12. Gobineau, p. 167

13. Sir Francis Younghusband, *The Gleam*, (London, 1923), p. 202

14. T. K. Cheyne, *The Reconciliation of Races and Religions*, (London,

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15. Gobineau, p. 294

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17. *Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 622–3, *passim*.

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1. *Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 397–8, records this.

2. E. G. Browne, *Materials for the Study of the Bábí Religion*, (Cambridge,

1918), p. 353. Ranking with the better English renderings from Persian

verse—excepting always Edward Fitzgerald’s—this by E. G. Browne

is obviously not definitive.

3. *Dawn-Breakers*, p. 581

4. ibid. p. 373

5. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to the author’s father.

6. *God Passes By*, p. 222

7. *God Passes By*, p. 137

8. ibid.

9. Gharíq. The year 1310 a.h. began a.d. July 26, 1892, and ended July

14, 1893.

Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl in America

1. Tablet in possession of the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Wash-

ington; quoted in *Bahá’í Proofs*, p. 26

The Goal of a Liberated Mind

1. *Bahá’í World Faith*, p. 142

2. ibid.

3. ibid. p. 141

4. *Promulgation*, p. 285

5. ibid. p. 287

This Handful of Dust

1. *Promulgation*, p. 373

2. *Hidden Words*, Arabic, no. 68

3. *Bahá’í World Faith*, p. 234

4. *Promulgation*, p. 229

5. *The Divine Art of Living, Selections from Writings of Bahá’u’lláh and*

*‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, compiled by Mabel Hyde Paine, (Bahá’í Publishing

Committee, Wilmette, 1944), pp. 115–16 [DAL]

6. *Promulgation*, p. 261

7. DAL, p. 116

8. *Promulgation*, p. 315

The Rise of Women

1. Genesis 3:16

2. Luke 13:12; Mark 5:34; Luke 7:47 and Matthew 26:13; Luke 20:47;

John 4:10; Matthew 12:50; Matthew 19:19; John 8:I I; Genesis 3:16;

John 16:21

3. Matthew 12:50; Matthew 19:19; Mark 10:12

4. I Corinthians 11:7–8

5. I Timothy 2:12–14

6. I Corinthians 14:34–35

7. Ephesians 5:22–24

8. The incident of Níyálá, which occurred just after the Conference at

Badasht, took place about July 17, 1848. (*Dawn-Breakers*, p. 301)

9. *Dawn-Breakers*, p. 296

10. *God Passes By*, p. 75

11. *Promulgation*, pp. 131–2

12. John Milton, *A Treatise on Christian Doctrine*, translated by Charles R.

Sumner, (Boston, 1825), pp. 302–23, *passim*.

13. Qur’án 33:35. Rodwell’s translation.

14. ibid. 7:20; 20:118; 4:23; 4:1

15. ibid. 4:8 and 4:13; 2:282; 2:233 and 2:242; 2:241; 4:39; 30:20

16. ibid. 24:30

17. ibid. 5.7. This is Rodwell’s translation; Sale parallels Rodwell here;

A. Yúsuf ‘Alí translates, ‘Chastity, not lewdness, Nor secret intrigues.’

A fourth version is, ‘Without taking (other) companions.’

18. Qur’án 4:3. A. Yúsuf ‘All’s note on this reads: ‘The unrestricted

number of wives of the “Times of Ignorance” was now strictly limited

to a maximum of four, provided you could treat them with perfect

equality, in material things as well as in affection and immaterial

things. As this condition is most difficult to fulfil, I understand the

recommendation to be towards monogamy.’ (The Holy Qur’án I,

179, n. 509)

19. Qur’án 4:38. A. Yúsuf ‘Alí translates: ‘beat them (lightly).’ Sale: ‘and

chastise them.’ Wife beating was of course legal in Christian countries.

Yúsuf ‘All’s translation of 4:38 begins: ‘Men are the protectors … of

women, Because … They support them’; he translates 2:228: ‘But

men have a degree (of advantage) over them.’ His note on 2:228 shows

clearly the non-equality involved: ‘The difference in economic posi-

tion between the sexes makes the man’s rights and liabilities a little

greater than the woman’s … in certain matters the weaker sex is

entitled to special protection.’ (op. cit., I, 90, n. 255). The Bahá’í

Faith, it goes without saying, does not consider one sex ‘weaker’ than

the other. (Cf. *Promulgation* pp. 72–3)

Sale translates the passages: ‘Men shall have the preeminence above

women …’ (4:38) and ‘the men ought to have a superiority over

them’ (2:228). A leading contemporary Islamist translates: ‘Men are in

charge of women (lit., they are standers over them)’ (4:38) and com-

ments on the meaning of 2:228: ‘Man is the creditor, woman the

debtor.’

20. Qur’án 43:17–18; 2: 228

21. *Promulgation*, pp. 72–3

22. ibid. p. 129

23. ibid.

24. ibid. p. 277

25. ibid. p. 72

26. ibid. p. 278

27. ibid. p. 130

28. In the United States, the rise of women is in fact bound up with the

rise of the American Negro race. It was to emancipate the black that

early women leaders needed public platforms—and were opposed by

the churches, who suffered them not to teach. This parallel develop-

ment is thought-provoking: one oppressed group arising to serve the

other; both, so far and to a certain extent, victorious.

Certain of the words addressed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to women are identi-

cal in sense with those He spoke to the black people; to the latter He

said: ‘In the estimation of God there is no distinction of color; all are

one in the color and beauty of servitude to Him. Color is not impor-

tant; the heart is all important … The mineral kingdom abounds

with many-colored substances and compositions but we find no strife

among them on that account. In the kingdom of the plant and vege-

table, distinct and variegated hues exist but the fruit and flowers are

not in conflict for that reason … In the animal kingdom also we find

variety of color … They do not make difference of color a cause of

discord and strife … They know they are one in kind.’ And again:

… the accomplishment of unity between the colored and whites will

be an assurance of the world’s peace.’ (*Promulgation*, 41–43). And

further: ‘… every man imbued with divine qualities … is verily in

the image and likeness of God.’ (ibid. p. 67)

29. *Promulgation*, p. 73

30. *Promulgation*, p. 277

31. The Universal House of Justice, *Synopsis and Codification of the Laws*

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5. ibid. p. 76

6. Robert Briffault, *The Mothers*, (3 vols., London, 1927), p. 383

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10. ibid. p. 57

11. ibid. p. 56

12. ibid. p. 59

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16. Syed Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islám*, (London, 1949), pp. 251–2

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18. *Paris Talks*, p. 161

19. *Promulgation*, p. 104

20. Shoghi Effendi, The *World Order* *of Bahá’u’lláh*, (Bahá’í Publishing

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2. Lady Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway*, (Bahá’í Publishing Trust,

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3. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets to Japan*, first published 1928; reprinted in

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4. Bahá’u’lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, (Bahá’í Publishing Trust,

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Echoes of the Heroic Age

1. *Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 4–5

2. ibid. pp. 5–7, note 3

3. ibid. p. 12

4. ibid. p. 13

5. ibid. pp. 17–18

6. ibid. p. 16 and 16n

7. ibid. p. 27

8. ibid. p. 38

9. ibid. p. 41

10. ibid. pp. 44–5

11. R. M. Devens, *Great Events of the Greatest Century*, (Chicago, 1883),

p. 314

12. *God Passes By*, p. 402

13. *Dawn-Breakers*, p. li

14. *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 178–9

15. *Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 47–8

16. ibid. p. 49

17. ibid.

18. ibid. p. 57–61

19. ibid.

29. Qur’án 10:10–11; 56:24–5; *Dawn-Breakers*, p. 62

21. *Dawn-Breakers*, p. 63

22. ibid. p. 65

Easter Sunday

1. The Bahá’í Faith teaches that the resurrection is a symbolic, not a

‘literal truth: ‘The resurrections of the Divine Manifestations are not of

the body.’ (SAQ p. 96) The Bible tells us that Jesus said He came from

heaven—although all knew He was born of Mary. Obviously, ‘heaven’

has a spiritual significance. Just so, His ‘disappearance under the earth

for three days has an inner signification, and is not an outward fact.’

‘In the same way, His resurrection … is also symbolical; it is a

spiritual and divine fact, and not material …’ ‘Beside these explana-

tions, it has been established … by science that the visible heaven is

a limitless area, void and empty, where innumerable stars and planets

revolve.’ (SAQ p. 97) The meaning, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, is that at His

crucifixion His cause was like a lifeless body; the believers were

troubled and agitated; then after three days they became steadfast,

began to arise and serve—and the reality of Christ became resplendent.

‘… science and the intelligence affirm it.’ (SAQ, p. 97)

2. *Hidden Words*, Arabic, no. 6

3. *God Passes By*, pp. 152–3

4. *Gleanings*, no. xiv, *passim*.

5. *The Bahá’í Revelation, A Selection from the Bahá’í Holy Writings*,

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1. *Le Bayán Persan*, translated by A. L. M. Nicolas, (4 vols., Paul

Geuthner, Paris, 1911–14), vol. II, p. 118

2. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 146

3. *Gleanings*, p. 35

4. Nicolas, op. cit., II, pp. 97, 6, 8, 4

5. *Epistle*, pp. 9, 18, 93, 88, 97, 103, 113, 130, 131

6. ibid. p. 131

7. ibid. p. 139

8. ibid. p. 140

9. ibid. p. 103

10. unpublished manuscript notes.

11. *Epistle*, p. 17

12. *God Passes By*, p. 219

13. *Epistle*, pp. 25, 35, 32, 61, 83, 91–2, 124

14. ibid. pp. 170, 20 et seq.: 77, 106 and 123; 108, 166, 167, 165, 161, 165,

138

15. ibid. p. 24

16. ibid. p. 55

17. ibid. p. 93

18. ibid. p. 23

19. ibid. p. 27

20. ibid. p. 122

21. Qur’án 9:4; 65:5

22. *Epistle*, p. 89

23. ibid. p. 27

24. ibid. pp. 159–60

25. *God Passes By*, pp. 125, 131

26. *Epistle*, p. 62

27. ibid. p. 155

28. ibid. pp. 171 and 157

29. Qur’án 28:32

30. *Epistle*, p. 113

31. E. G. Browne, ed. *A Traveller’s Narrative* *written to illustrate the*

*Episode of the Báb*. (2 vols., Cambridge, 1891), vol. II, p. 296, Note 0

32. *Epistle*, pp. 20–21

33. ibid. p. 179

34. ibid. p. 131 et seq.

35. ibid. pp. 127, 163

36. *Epistle*, p. 9; Qur’án 41:20

37. *Epistle*, p. 100

38. ibid. p. 36

39. ibid. p. 99

‘Abdu’l-Bahá in America

1. W. P. Dodge, *Star of the West*, April 28, 1912

2. ibid.

3. ibid.

4. Reminiscence by the author’s mother who was present at the meeting.

5. *Promulgation*, pp. 41 and 43

6. Reminiscence; the same sense is given in *Promulgation*, p. 44

7. Thompson, unpublished diary.

8. *Promulgation*, p. 45

9. *Promulgation*, p. 66

10. ibid. p. 65

11. ibid. p. 80

12. Reminiscence.

13. *Promulgation*, p. 409 records this interview.

14. *Star of the West*, September 8, 1912, records this interview.

15. Reminiscence, also recorded in Howard Colby Ives, *Portals to Free-*

*dom*, (George Ronald, Oxford, 1943)

16. *Promulgation*, p. 209

17. *Star of the West*, September 8, 1912

18. ibid.

19. Reminiscence.

20. Reminiscence by the author’s father.

21. Reminiscence.

22. *Star of the West*, November 4, 1913

23. *Promulgation*, p. 371

24. Reminiscence.

25. Reminiscence.

26. Reminiscence by Mr. and Mrs. Edward B. Kinney.

27. Reminiscence by Mrs. Ella G. Cooper.

28. *Promulgation*, pp. 465–6

‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Portrayals from East and West

1. *Promulgation*, pp. 32–3

2. *God Passes By*, p. 276

3. ibid. p. 288

4. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “The Universal Language of the Spirit”, *Star of the*

*West*, October 1922, p. 163

5. “The Passing of Bahíyyih Khánum, the Most Exalted Leaf,” *The*

*Bahá’í World*, (Bahá’í Publishing Committee, New York, 1936), vol.

V, p. 169

6. ibid. p. 172

7. *God Passes By*, p. 247

8. “The Passing of Bahíyyih Khánum,” p. 169

9. ibid. p. 171

10. Rúhíyyih Khánum, “Twenty-Five Years of the Guardianship”, *The*

*Bahá’í World*, vol. XI, p. 113

11. Shoghi Effendi, The *World Order* of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 150

12. Personal letter.

Will and Testament

1. *The Persian Bayán* 6:4; excerpt translated by M.G.

Where’er You Walk

1. Qur’an 7:171

2. ibid. 45:27