

# **Religion and Relevance:**

**The Baha'is in Britain 1899 – 1930**

**By**

**L.C.G. ABDO**

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## ABSTRACT

The subject of this thesis is an investigation of the Baha'i Movement in the British Isles during the first three decades of the last century, which is an hitherto un-researched subject. The first discovery is that the Baha'i movement was an inclusive supplementary religious movement, not requiring the renunciation of existing beliefs and connections, and in this it is to be sharply distinguished from the exclusive Baha'i Faith which was to follow. Through the use of archival material, journals, newspapers, books and pamphlets it has been possible to identify practically all of the eighty or so people who identified as Baha'is during the period. They were found to be, in most cases, many-sided colourful characters, who were linked by networks, which are identified and the particular nature of each discussed. The visits to Britain of the charismatic leader 'Abdu'l Baha to Britain are analysed, in particular for what he said and did, but also to establish the interplay of the networks during the visits. The First World War brought the break up of several networks and the death of 'Abdu'l Baha in 1921 brought the end of charismatic leadership. This marked the beginning of an administration which alienated those whom old age and infirmity had not already removed from the Movement. The demise of the Baha'i Movement meant there was almost no continuity between the Movement and the establishment of the Baha'i Faith in Britain around 1936. Theoretically, the exposition is made within a modified form of Sperber and Wilson's Theory of Relevance. Although networks are now a commonplace in sociological theory concerning religion, and the establishment of the administration a fine example of the routinisation of charisma, a supplementary religious movement of this kind which required no 'conversion' needed a new approach. The notion of degrees of relevance supplied this need. Accordingly a modified theory of relevance is developed in the Introduction and serves well to account for how the inchoate Baha'i message was disambiguated and enriched variously by the different networks. As the 'message' became clarified, for some relevance diminished. Not all religious relevance is cognitive and epistemological so the concept of ontological relevance is developed to account for the effect of the presence of a highly spiritual person. Finally 'Abdu'l Baha is found to be a master of relevance and his explanation of relevance is examined together with criticism of Baha'i missionary techniques on the grounds of excessive relevance.

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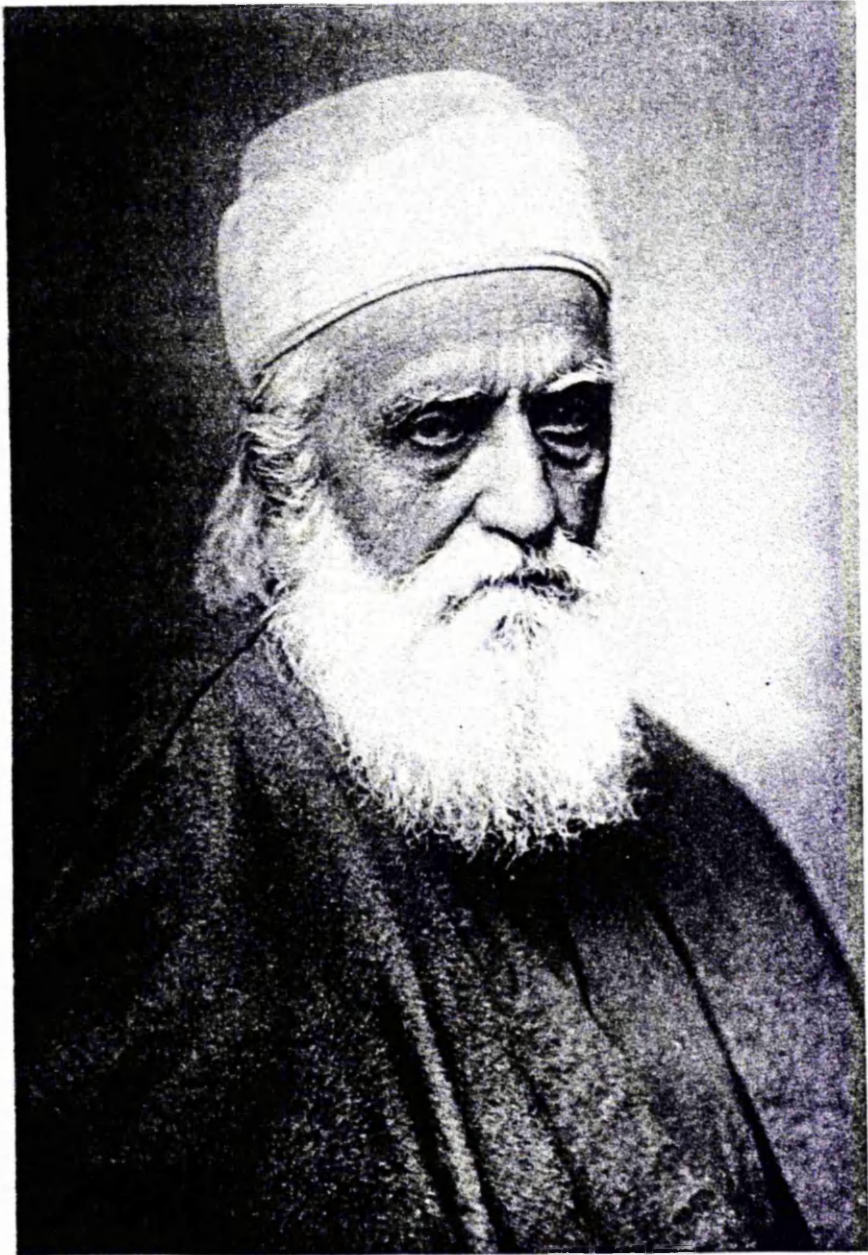
Finally, I wish to acknowledge the uncomplaining and uncompromising support of my family, especially my sons, Hani and Joey, who were with me for much of the way.

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**'ABDU'L BAHA:  
THE MASTER OF RELEVANCE**

# RELIGION & RELEVANCE

## The Baha'is in Britain 1899 - 1930

### INTRODUCTION

#### 0.1 The scope of the thesis

The subject of this thesis is an investigation of the Baha'i movement in Britain between the years 1899 - 1930. Hitherto, there has been little scholarly examination of the Baha'is in Britain<sup>1</sup>, although there have been a number of studies on Baha'i communities elsewhere in the world.<sup>2</sup> The paucity of research, therefore, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Academic interest in the British community is limited to two short articles, both by Philip Smith and published in Studies in the Babi and Baha'i Religions series. In volume five, *Studies in Honour of the Late Hasan M Balyuzi*, Smith's "What was a Baha'i? Concerns of the British 1900 - 1920" appeared and in volume six, *Community Histories*, his "The Development and Influence of the Baha'i Administrative Order 1914 - 1950". A few popular histories mainly in the form of biography have been published, notably Weinberg's *Ethel Rosenberg*, (Oxford, George Ronald, 1995) and *Shoghi Effendi in Oxford* by Riaz Khadem (Oxford, George Ronald, 1999). The quirky *The Servant, the General and Armageddon* by Roderic and Derwent Maude (Oxford, George Ronald, 1998) deals with 'Abdu'l Baha during the First World War and the role of British Baha'is. The major sources concerning 'Abdu'l Baha's visits to the British Isles are Blomfield's *The Chosen Highway*, (Wilmette, Ill. Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1967) a rather confused narrative which does not always clarify the dates and circumstances of events; *'Abdu'l Baha in London*, a collection of addresses and notes of conversations, (East Sheen, Surrey, Unity Press, 1912) *Seven Candles of Unity*, a detailed account by A. Khusheed of 'Abdu'l Baha's stay in Scotland and numerous articles in *The Christian Commonwealth*, *Star of the West* and *International Psychic Gazette* as well as other local and national newspapers. Some of the essays in Whitehead's *Some Early Baha'is of the West*, (Oxford, George Ronald, 1976) *Portraits of Some Baha'i Women* (Oxford, George Ronald, 1996) and *Some Baha'is to Remember* (Oxford, George Ronald, 1983) deal with individuals within the British Baha'i group. A brief history of the British Baha'is by Moojan Momen, originally prepared for the *Baha'i Encyclopaedia* was published in the July/August and September 1998 issues of the *Baha'i Journal*.

<sup>2</sup> The development of the Baha'i Faith in the West has not been subject to full scholastic scrutiny. The North American community was examined by Peter Berger in "From Sect to Church: A Sociological Interpretation of the Baha'i Movement", PhD dissertation (New School for Social Research, New York, 1954) and Loni J. Branson, "The Baha'i Faith and its evolution in the United States and Canada from 1922 - 1936" PhD dissertation (Universite Catholique de Louvain, 1981); Arthur Hampson, "The Growth and Spread of the Baha'i Faith", PhD dissertation (University of Hawaii, 1980); Sandra S. Kahn, "Encounter of Two Myths, Baha'i and Christian, in the Rural American South: A Study in Transmythicization", PhD dissertation (University of California at Santa Barbara, 1977). Robert Stockman's *The Baha'i Faith in America* Vol. 1 (Illinois, BPT, 1985) and Vol. 11 (Oxford, George Ronald, 1995) is probably the definitive study of the Baha'i experience in the United States. The Canadian Baha'is have been examined by Will C. van den Hoonard in *Origins of the Baha'i Community of Canada, 1898 - 1948* (Ontario, Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1996). The story of Baha'ism in the Pacific is told in *Forty Years of the Baha'i Cause in Hawaii, 1902 - 1942*, Agnes B Alexander (Honolulu, NSA of the Baha'is of the Hawaiian Islands, 1974); "Some Aspects of the Baha'i Faith in New Zealand", MA thesis by Margaret J Ross (University of Auckland, 1979); "The Baha'i Faith in the Asia Pacific" Graham Hassall, (*Baha'i Studies Review*, Vol. 6, 1996). Some recent works, such as David Piff's *Baha'i Lore*, (Oxford, George Ronald, 2000), which examines the content and function of unofficial lore in the Baha'i tradition, and Bahiyyih Nakhjavani's article "Fact and Fiction: Interrelationships between

intrinsic interest to a Baha'i of the subject itself, have provided both the motivation and the justification for this study. It might have been thought that this relatively minor episode in British social history, while of some academic and antiquarian interest, would have been innocent of controversial issues and undemanding in terms of theory. This has proved not to be the case. In researching this period, and in searching for conceptual frameworks in which best to articulate the findings, it has been found necessary to be, to a certain extent, theoretically innovative, specifically with regard to the question of 'relevance'. A theoretical thesis would advance a theory and then test it against one or more case studies: it would make explanatory claims, seeking to explain why things are as they are. Here, 'why' is considered too ultimate a question, too demanding of psychological, biographical and even providential explanation, so the emphasis is on the more proximate question of 'how'. The futility of asking the question of why people join new religious movements is evidenced by the unhelpfulness of the answer that has been too often given, deprivation. How people are attracted to such movements is not only more proximate, it is also more fruitful, more accessible and less condemnatory. The application in this thesis of a modified theory of relevance to account for how people became Baha'is, and how, in some cases, they ceased to be Baha'is, is, admittedly, a theoretical innovation, but, as has been stressed above, it is a theory utilised for exposition not for explanation; it is used as the most effective way found to give an account of what happened during the period, not to explain why it happened; it is used for its sheer elegance. The originality of this thesis, therefore, lies in that it studies the hitherto unstudied; it does not stand or fall by the appropriateness or not of the theory of relevance. It is, however, natural to hope that the elegance and the heuristic power of the theory of relevance will be sufficiently demonstrated by the end of this study for others, probably more concerned with socio-religious theory than with Baha'is, to take its application further. The need for greater understanding of relevance in religious matters is no more clearly illustrated than in the frequency with which the word is used from the pulpit to increasingly empty pews.

## X 0.2 *Baha'is and Scholarship*

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history and imagination" (*Journal of Baha'i Studies* Vol. 10, No. 3 ABS Canada 2000) have begun to examine the gap between perceptions of belief, popular religion and orthodoxy.



Before theory, however, first a major controversial issue must be addressed. The field of Baha'i studies remains small and dominated by Baha'is. There are tensions between scholarship and belief within the Baha'i community. A recent edition of *The Baha'i Studies Review* (vol. iii no.2, 1994) was dedicated to the "Challenges and prospects of Baha'i Scholarship". It contained articles encouraging scholarship and a letter from the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, dated 5<sup>th</sup> October 1993, on the subject of pre-publication review. This is the process of submitting work for censorship prior to publication; a Baha'i who fails to do this can risk loss of voting rights and ultimately expulsion from the community. This letter makes clear that "These requirements are of course not reflected in the standards currently prevailing in Western academic institutions". Baha'is are called upon to create "new models of scholarly activity" and not to "merely reiterate the conventions" of inadequate systems. It goes on to say:

"We do a grave disservice to both ourselves and the faith when we simply submit to the authority of academic practices that appeal for their claim to objectivity to theories which themselves are being increasingly called into question by major thinkers. While non-Baha'i academics may slip carelessly into regarding the institutions founded by Baha'u'llah as simply another form of "religious establishment" and avoid serious examination of the truths of His Revelation in this fashion, it is clearly impossible for anyone who is a Baha'i to follow them down this empty track.

"The House of Justice is aware that the continuation of the policy of review can cast a shadow on the good name of the Faith in the eyes of certain non-Baha'i academics."

The following quotation from the compilation on scholarship prepared by the Research Department is also relevant:

"The principal concern of the House of Justice is over a methodological bias and discordant tone which seem to inform the work of certain of the authors. The impression given is that, in attempting to achieve what they understand to

be academic objectivity, they have inadvertently cast the Faith into a mould which is essentially foreign to its nature, taking no account of the spiritual forces which Baha'is see as its foundation. Presumably the justification offered for this approach would be that most scholars of comparative religion are essentially concerned with discernible phenomena, observable events and practical affairs and are used to treating their subject from a western, if not a Christian, viewpoint. This approach, although understandable, is quite impossible for a Baha'i, for it ignores the fact that our world-view includes the spiritual dimension as an indispensable component for consistency and coherence, and it does not beseem a Baha'i to write ... about his Faith as if he looked upon it from the norm of humanism or materialism. In other words, we are presented in such articles with the spectacle of Baha'is trying to write as if they were non-Baha'is. This leads to these authors drawing conclusions and making implications which are in conflict with Baha'i teachings and with the reality of the Faith. A good Baha'i author, when writing for such a publication, should be fully capable of adopting a calmly neutral and expository tone, without falling into the trap of distorting the picture by adopting what is, in essence, a materialistic and localised stance.<sup>3</sup>

Given the situation outlined in these quotations, it is important at the outset to declare the stance of the present thesis. First, it is written by a committed Baha'i, but one who sees no contradiction between being a Baha'i and being a scholar. All religious traditions have suffered at the hands of certain positivist academic disciplines, disciplines for which the given is that there is no transcendent dimension to reality, and, in consequence, have watched often their most cherished values and beliefs being subjected to sometimes almost oafish sociological and psychological reductionism. Believers of every stripe within academia have had to operate under severe and testing constraints during the regnancy of the dominant modernist and positivist discourses. The best have survived, often with honour and a grudging respect, but it cannot have been comfortable to live and work in a largely positivist institution. Now things are changing, as modernist certainties become less certain, but not necessarily for the better

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<sup>3</sup> Letter from the Universal House of Justice dated 4<sup>th</sup> October 1994 to a National Spiritual Assembly (probably the NSA USA concerning articles for the *Baha'i Encyclopaedia*)

from a believer's perspective, since postmodernist poly-vocalism, as a replacement, seeks to eliminate the possibility of certainty altogether. Nonetheless, within a disciplinary field like the Study of Religions, it is now possible to produce exemplary scholarship that leaves open the dimension of transcendence, and that it is the aim of the present study. Second, the submission of a thesis to a university is not regarded as an act of publication and nothing written here has been subjected to a pre-publication review, nor has it been written as if it were to be.<sup>4</sup>

### 0.3 Baha'is and History

In no field is the situation created for Baha'is to approach scholarship from the perspective of belief more delicate than in history. Within the Baha'i academic community there are already tensions,<sup>5</sup> where historians using the traditional "western, if not a Christian" academic approach are being urged to "develop a new paradigm". This dilemma is further compounded by the fact that Baha'is regard as infallible 'Abdu'l Baha and Shoghi Effendi, both of whom wrote histories. Although it can be argued that historical writing was outside of their spheres of infallibility, many Baha'is treat their historical writings, *Travellers' Narrative* and *God Passes By* respectively, as though they were divinely revealed scripture. Baha'is divide Baha'i history into three evolutionary stages following a scheme outlined by Shoghi Effendi. The first is the Heroic or Apostolic Age, (1844-1921) which is associated with the founding or "Central Figures" of the Faith. It begins with the Declaration of the Bab, includes the ministries of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l Baha and ends with the death of 'Abdu'l Baha in 1921. The second age, the Formative Age, (1921-onward) is further divided into three epochs. The First Epoch of the Formative Age, and the only one pertinent to this study,

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<sup>4</sup> It is no part of this thesis to debate any stance taken by the Baha'i authorities, particularly when the matter concerned is not at issue here. It would, however, be negligent not to point out that the review system has been attacked by prominent members within the community. For example, the Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United Kingdom, Barney Faith, delivered a spirited assault on the pre-publication review in "Baha'i Review, should the red flag be repealed?", *Baha'i Studies Review* No.5, Vol.1, 1995

<sup>5</sup> See for example MacEoin, D. "The Crisis in Babi Baha'i Studies" in *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin* 17:1 (1990)

was characterised by the “birth and the primary stages in the erection of the Administrative Order of the Faith.”<sup>6</sup>

That the period examined in this work does not correspond precisely to any of the ages or epochs of Shoghi Effendi’s scheme must not be taken as implying dissent from what is no more than a natural and sensible division of the major phases of Baha’i history when viewed from the central position which Shoghi Effendi occupied. History is not monolithic; there are many different histories: economic, political, social, religious and so on; there are histories of art, of fashion, of technologies, of ideas, of agriculture, of cookery etc.; and there are countless local histories. No overarching scheme could conceivably accommodate all these different histories with a single co-ordinated periodisation, and certainly Shoghi Effendi does not make any such claim. The period chosen for investigation here, for reasons that will become apparent, represents a specific phase, a completed cycle in the experience of Baha’is in one specific locality, that of the United Kingdom. It is inconceivable that any, let alone all of the different local histories of the many places Baha’ism penetrated, should correspond one with another with regard to phase, stage or circumstance. Accordingly, the history of the Baha’is in Britain is examined and discussed in this thesis within its own terms and contexts, but with one significant difference from what might be considered the historian’s norm, it will leave open the dimension of transcendence. Reductionism in any field is largely the application in explanation of an inappropriate level of causality. It arises, within the terms already developed, from a failure to separate the proximate how from the ultimate why.<sup>7</sup>

Certainly the question why at one level is often answerable in terms of the laws, the how, of the level above. But those laws in turn have their own why, and so on until

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<sup>6</sup> Effendi, S., *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America, 1947-1957*. 1980 Wilmette, BPT

<sup>7</sup> Reductionism is not always the application of material causality to non-material effects, it can also be the reverse. If someone breaks a cup while washing up and is asked why, they might attribute it to the slipperiness of the soap or the unexpected heat of the water; they might offer up a psychological explanation of a Freudian type; they might suggest a supernatural explanation in terms of gremlins or even consider it part of the Divine Plan. To avoid such an embarrassment of options, the strategy employed here is to concentrate not on the why but on the how. It is safer, and quiet sufficient for most purposes, to ask the person how they came to break the cup and receive the answer they were not paying attention to what they were doing.

all the possible ontological levels have been exhausted, and one is finally left with the ultimate irreducible why. In seeking to understand how things were in Britain and how they came about, it is the ultimate question of why which is left open as being beyond the historian's competence. It is at this level, perhaps, that one could seek to reconcile the local history of the Baha'is in Britain with Shoghi Effendi's scheme of providential history, but it will not be attempted here. This then is the methodological stance towards history adopted in this thesis; should it contribute in any way towards the formation of a new paradigm for Baha'i historians, so much the better, but that is not the present purpose.

There is one other matter concerning history that should be discussed at this point because it is a common cause of confusion, and can even cause hurt. This is the nature of tradition. Take the English language. At one level of categorisation, English can be seen as a tradition handing down a particular mode of conceptualisation and representation, and, in its literature, accumulated experience itself, from one generation to the next. Traditions are interesting not only inherently for what they hand on, but because they operate at a level of categorisation which combines and reconciles change and continuity, unity and diversity, historicity and a-historicity. English, at this level, is seen to be highly diverse, yet to be a unity; it is known to have changed considerably across generations, as can be seen by comparing the English of Chaucer, the English of Shakespeare and contemporary English, yet it is still regarded as the same "English"; it has a history and has been part of history, yet it has about it too a timelessness, a property of somehow being above the fray. Such are some of the consequences of seeing English as a tradition, but there is one other: it appears to diminish the importance of the individual speaker. In a moment of awareness when one is speaking or writing, one sometimes feels that it is 'English' which is really expressing itself, and, however brilliant or articulate the speakers, their role is simply to act as the unwitting servants of an impersonal tradition which cares nothing for them or their wit and articulateness but only with being kept alive and passed on from one generation to the next. Beside the great rolling momentum of tradition, the individual is insignificant; the dog may bark, but the caravan passes on. What happens when the subject is no longer language but religion?

There are two modes of perception or attitudes towards their faith known to most believers or practitioners. The first mode is simply to live and practice in one's own faith community and feel completely at home there. The second mode is to recognise there are other parishes or dioceses or even other denominations which, no matter how different each is, are considered, nevertheless, to be formed and illuminated by the same central creative revelation. An incurious believer, existing happily in a faith conceived of within these two modes, will have a primarily synchronistic view of his or her faith. If the faith is viewed as a tradition, however, and the diachronic or historical dimension is introduced, it is nearly always the case that the individual believers will simply project back the present into the past, assuming it has always been as it is now. Then the historian who points that this is not the case, is seen as a threat to the believer's faith; but this should not be so, since it is not the faith the historian threatens, it is only the believer's unthinking lack of curiosity. Some traditions see themselves as unchanging, timeless essential unities, whereas, in fact, they have been historically diverse and changed greatly over the centuries. To see a faith as a religious tradition is, it is suggested here, no more than the proper way of reconciling these two views. Religious authorities who have been over-protective and sought to obscure their own history have nearly always failed, certainly in the long run. If religion had not been carried by historical religious traditions, it would not exist today to enrich human life. The cost of this portage is change, diversity and historicity. The final point raised above about a tradition appearing to diminish the significance of the individual is, interestingly enough, turned to advantage by religious traditions, which present the traditions of their faiths as far greater than any individual, as something to be served and preserved and handed down for future generations.

The findings of this thesis came as an initial surprise to its author, then a delight and finally an enrichment of understanding and faith. Faith survived history. Before outlining what some of those findings are, however, it is necessary to turn to Peter Berger.

#### *0.4 Peter Berger's Doctoral Thesis*

It is not widely known that the distinguished sociologist and sociologist of religion, Peter Berger, wrote his doctoral dissertation in 1954 on the Baha'is. It contains four parts. The first part deals with the Bab, Baha'u'llah and doctrinal developments. The second part, entitled 'Transition', deals with 'Abdu'l Baha, doctrinal developments and Western expansion. The third part, entitled 'Organisation', deals with 'Abdu'l Baha's Will and the establishment of the Baha'i Administration, developments under the Guardianship and then with the American believers. The fourth part treats theoretical considerations. His thesis, largely contained in the fourth part, is, as might be expected, both complex and sophisticated and cannot be done justice here. In brief, he looks at the notions of 'sect' and 'church' from Weber onwards and re-defines "the sect as a religious grouping, transitory or lasting, based on the belief that the spirit is immediately present. The church, on the other hand, may be defined as a lasting religious grouping based on the belief that the spirit is remote." (Berger 1954: p.152) Weber's concept of 'routinisation' can be demonstrated in the development from a sect into a church, as indeed it can be in the case of the Baha'i movement, but, he argues, the introduction of the Weberian use of charisma is not necessary in the definition of a sect.

Against this background Berger looks at the relationship between religious motif and the inner social structure of the religious grouping. By religious motif, a term taken from the Lund school of Swedish theology, he does not mean an intellectual or theological formation, but rather a pattern, a gestalt, of religious experience that can be traced in a historical development. In his broad typology of sects, Berger identifies three main types, each with a characteristic motif: 1. Enthusiastic, with the motif of 'An Experience to be Lived'; 2. Prophetic, with the motif of 'A Message to be Proclaimed'; 3. Gnostic, with the motif of 'A Secret to be Divulged'. He further divides the Prophetic type into two sub-types: the Chiliastic, with the motif of 'The Lord is Coming'; and the Legalistic with the motif of 'A New Order'. He suggests that the legalistic sub-type is the one that is frequently the last stage before the sect becomes a church. Within this conceptual framework he understands the development of the Baha'i movement:

“It arose as a peculiarly mixed type, incorporating the chiliastic and gnostic motifs which we have traced to their Islamic context. The predominant motif from the beginning, however, was the chiliastic one, the prophetic proclamation of the coming of a new era in the history of mankind; “O, Lord of the Age” the cry on the mouths of the Babi warriors and martyrs, echoing the chiliastic expectations of centuries of Shi’ite Islam. The motif was carried over into the dispensation of Baha’u’llah, “Him whom God shall Manifest”. The motif was weakened and broadened in the period of transition dominated by the person of Abdu’l-Baha, when it was also transferred to the west. As the movement came to America and Europe, it continued its character as a mixture of the chiliastic and gnostic motifs. In many ways, it resembled in the west the other oriental sub-types of the gnostic type, which brought “wisdom from the east” into Parisian drawing rooms and Hollywood country clubs. Yet it continued its chiliastic appeal in the west, with its message of the new Christ and the new era of history, merging Shi’ite eschatology with the expectations of western Adventism and liberal progressivism alike. Already within ‘Abdu’l Baha’s lifetime the motif began to take on more and more legalistic characteristics, as the imminence of the manifestation was replaced in emphasis by a new order of civilisation that could be understood in humanist and liberal terms as well as in religious ones. With the death of ‘Abdu’l Baha the spirit receded into further remoteness, as the ‘manifestational night’ began to fall. The new order was increasingly legalised around the institution of the Guardianship. The Baha’i church was in the making.” (Berger 1954: 257-8)

Berger goes on to show how the motifs, the sect’s attitude towards the world, largely determined its inner social structure and ecclesiastical forms:

“In the urgency of the chiliastic message there is no room for elaborate institutions... The world must be warned, awakened, brought to subjection to the message, but the power to do this comes from the spirit and the message, not from any social organisation. The advent of legalism changed this. The new order which the Baha’i manifestation was to bring, had to evolve slowly within the present world. Consequently it required planning and organisation. The



legalistic motif found its counterpart in a legalistic social structure.” (Berger 1954: 166)

It is in the final section of the work that Berger addresses the issues of reality and conversion, issues he has returned to on many occasions in his later, more mature, works. He considers religious reality, in the Baha’i understanding, to be a totally new world of experience and perspective into which the individual enters through religious experience, the step from the old into the new being conversion. Conversion is defined phenomenologically by Berger as the passing from one level of experience and perspective to another one that is totally new and different. There are many reports of conversion following personal encounters with the Bab, or Baha’u’llah or ‘Abdu’l Baha, so powerful were the effects of their spiritual presences, but even for those for whom the Baha’i experience was mediated through literature or other individuals, Berger insists, the evidence suggests the experience was no less real. Berger distinguishes between the experience and the ‘message’:

“The western converts who met him (Abdu’l Baha) submitted to the spell cast by his powerful personality. He entered a room and its reality was changed. It became a place of peace and quiet, in which his words received a tremendous importance. We realise this when we read the conversion records and compare them with ‘Abdu’l Baha’s numerous letters. It cannot have been so much what he said as how he said it, or better, as who it was that said it. His addresses and remarks generally appear repetitious, shallow, often seemingly nothing but verbiage, yet they cannot have sounded this way when spoken by the man himself.” (Berger 1954: 178-9)

Just as the spiritual presence of ‘Abdu’l Baha created the context in which his seemingly banal words became endued with tremendous importance for the individual, so, Berger suggests, at the social level, the American cultural climate of the time provided a context particularly receptive to the overall Baha’i message. This was because the two fundamental Baha’i motifs, the chiliastic and the gnostic, were already present in the American and western consciousness and were particularly urgent and

acute at the time. Berger points out that the chiliastic, Messianic motif was no stranger to Christianity. He writes:

“It is no accident that the first word which reached America of Abbas (‘Abdu’l Baha) was his characterisation by Khairu’llah as the returned Christ, living again in Palestine and bringing a new Kingdom of God. We have demonstrated that Baha’i missionary activity has had little contact with American Adventism proper, but its appeal was to the secularised Adventism of western belief in progress, evolution and world betterment. A new age in which all religions and races would live together in peace - this was the idea which attracted most American believers to the Baha’i message, an idea expressing the deepest aspirations of what Myrdal has called the ‘American creed’” (Berger 1954: 180)

The gnostic motif was very much in the background by the time that the Baha’i message reached the west, and there it remained. However, vestiges of this motif were to be found in the aura of mystery that surrounded the Baha’i leaders, and this was found appealing, as it was the assumption that people of such spirituality would have access to mysteries denied to the more mundane. In Berger’s view, it was the genius of Abdu’l Baha to recognise the universality of these fundamental motifs and to incorporate them into his life and work. The only reason the Baha’i movement did not do even better than it did can be ascribed to the competitiveness of the market situation which it found in the west, since it faced competition not only in the religious market in general but also competition in its specific religious motifs. Berger concludes his thesis with an analysis of the characteristics of the competing meaning systems.

There have, of course, been many studies since Berger’s unpublished thesis in 1954 and many more sources have become available. One particularly thorough and scholarly study is Peter Smith’s *The Babi and Baha’i Religions From Messianic Shi’ism to a World Religion* (Smith, P 1987). Smith, who is himself a Baha’i, follows Berger in his use of motifs, although more elaborately, and is much richer in historical detail: it is a much longer work than Berger’s covering a greater time span, and, though analytical, it is not theoretical. But the curious outcome of comparing the two studies, and one it is believed any objective reader would confirm, is that it is Berger, the non-

Baha'i sociological scholar, who has captured and affirmed the spirit active in the early Baha'i movement. In the account of Smith, however, the sense of the spirit is remote, possibly obscured by over-cautious scholarship but equally suggestive of the possibility that, in the thirty three years between the two studies, the routinisation of charisma has extended far beyond theological forms and ecclesiastical structures. It is as if Berger is, in his own Weberian terms, treating the life and workings of a sect, whereas Smith is documenting the history of a church. Priority has therefore been given to Berger's study, since it deals more centrally with the period under investigation in this thesis, albeit in America, and raises theoretical matters that are of concern to developments in Britain. Neither study deals with the early Baha'i in Britain, other than in passing mention, but both deal with the early American Baha'is, some of whom were responsible for introducing the Baha'i cause to contacts in Britain, France and other parts of Europe.

Abdu'l Baha, who initiated and oversaw the expansion of the Baha'i movement to the west, visited London, Paris and Switzerland in 1911. He then went to America in 1912 where he stayed for eight months, returning via England and Scotland to Paris, where he spent some time. In 1913, he left Paris, visited Budapest and Vienna, and then returned finally to Alexandria. Berger writes:

“Abbas (Abdu'l Baha) was disappointed in the results of his trips to Europe, especially to France, where he had put high hopes on the small, largely Jewish, group that had formed around Hippolyte Dreyfus. After his return to Europe from America, he is reported to have said: *“America is good! America is good! They have another motion, life and exultation. America - so far as the Baha'i Cause is concerned - cannot be compared to England, neither England compared to France... The future of the French Republic is fraught with great danger. It cannot stand on such atheistic foundations. The American people are religious, they are attracted, they are investigating, they are open-minded, they praise God. You find there many spiritual people.”* It was indeed in America that Abbas found his most enthusiastic welcome.” (Berger 1954: 73-4)

If Berger is interesting on the subject of Abdu'l Baha's evaluation of the relative spiritual potential of America, England and France formed during his visits, he is equally so on the type of groups that he addressed and connected with:

“Wherever Abbas went in Europe and America he was received with great honours as an eastern sage with an important message. He especially sought out liberal religious groups, spiritists and interfaith organisations, and cultivated very friendly relations with the Theosophical Society.” (Berger 1954: 72)

Having outlined the contents of Berger's thesis - quiet shamelessly using these contents to provide a background to the present study - it is important to situate his approach. 'Religion', arguably, has a dual location: in the culture of a society, manifesting in 'religious' institutions, rituals, codes of conduct, writings, belief systems etc.; and in the subjective consciousness of individuals. For present purposes, culture is for society what experience is for an individual, the given totality. Berger, like Weber before him, is a sociologist who approaches religion in and from its cultural and social location. From this stance, the individual person is 'simplified' into being a member of a particular social institution, simplified in the sense of shedding other dimensions. This further requires a process that leads individuals to become members, which is provided by the problematic construct of conversion. Berger has wrestled with this construct many times in his writings, as one might worry at a wobbly tooth, and he does so in his thesis, where conversion is presented, if not as a total Pauline transformation of an individual's views, values and assumptions, at least a major redistribution of emphases whereby all things become new. His seemingly obsessive concern with the nature of 'conversion' is perhaps due to an un-stated recognition that it is not a psychological reality but rather a sociological imperative, - there has to be some way by which 'members' are produced. This is not to deny the possibility of religious transformation, simply to suggest that it is rare and requires further discriminations.

As a well-trained sociologist Berger has included in his thesis a survey conducted by questionnaire of a large sample of the New York Baha'i community. He found they were overwhelmingly middle class, and that half were professional or business people. Women constituted 61%, in common with other American religious

groups. Most became Baha'is as adults and of their own choosing. The significant percentages of their previous religious affiliations are Protestants 52%, Catholics 7.8% and Jews 15.6%. When asked to formulate what attracted them to the movement, 71.9% gave the answer in terms of some aspect of Baha'i doctrine, 14.5% in terms of religious experience and 13.7% in terms of social experience, such as the example of Baha'i friends or the experience of fellowship. Of the 71.9% who gave doctrinal answers. 21.4% attributed their attraction to the doctrine of religious unity and progressive revelation, 21.4% to the doctrine of world unity and brotherhood, 10.3% to the doctrine of progressive and scientific faith, 10.3 % to the doctrine of the fulfilment of Biblical prophesy, and 8.5% to Baha'i social doctrine. Of those 14...5% who put the attraction in terms of religious experience, 8.5% expressed it as the fulfilment of religious needs.

Such questionnaires are infuriating, appearing more to obscure than elicit, but they do tell us something. What the above survey, however, does not do, is lend any support at all to the hypothesis of conversion in the sense of a total change of attitudes, assumptions and values. Indeed, if anything, it suggests the opposite. It could be read as suggesting that Baha'i doctrine was found attractive precisely because it confirmed one or more attitude, assumption or value that individuals already held but no other system was prepared to acknowledge. As such the survey stands in contradiction to much of Berger's thesis, certainly with regard to conversion, but also to a degree with the matter of motifs. How can this be? It is because the survey changes the religious locus from the socio-cultural to that of the subjective individual consciousness. It probably did not intend to, because it begins by dealing with class, profession, sex etc., but by the end individuals are jumping out of these categories in a spirit of contradiction. In his later writings, for example *The Social Construction of Reality*, Berger attempts to reconcile the two loci within the sociology of knowledge, but in his thesis they remain, unacknowledged, in inherent contradiction.

There is a second duality relevant here beside the social and individual locations of religion, that of producer and receiver. This gives a four term system:

	<b>Social</b>	<b>Individual</b>
<b>Producer</b>	Charismatic Leader	Deeply Spiritual

	Prophet	Individual
<b>Receiver</b>	Conversion and Members	Relevance to Individual

This table shows clearly four different viewpoints from which ‘religion’ can be studied and the different terminologies these viewpoints generate. From the point of view of producer, the social role is filled by the prophet or charismatic leader who, when viewed from the point of view of individual consciousness, is considered to be a person of deep spirituality, or a person moved by the spirit. From the viewpoint of receiver, the social category yields the member, who becomes a member through conversion. Since one is either a member or not a member, conversion has to be total, because this is a social process equivalent to, say, religious joining. Some seek to apply conversion to the reception of religion by the individual consciousness, but that usage will not be adopted here to avoid confusion. It is clear from Berger’s survey that some parts of the Baha’i religious portfolio are attractive to some individuals but less so to others; presumably some individuals find more elements attractive than others do. It would seem odd to speak of degrees of conversion for individuals while at the same time using conversion as a social absolute. What can be spoken of as having degrees of more or less, depending upon the individual, is relevance. Relevance implies a ‘to whom’, and there are degrees of relevance. Berger treats the Baha’i movement from the social side of the table, although he is not afraid to speak also of charismatic leaders as individuals moved by the spirit. This thesis, which deals with Baha’is in Britain prior to institutionalisation, is concerned with individuals and with degrees of relevance. Having identified the viewpoint it is time to introduce the subject.

### *0.5 Baha’is in Britain*

The year 1998 was celebrated by British Baha’is as centenary year. 1898 was the year in which Miriam Thornburgh-Cropper returned to England from a pilgrimage to Palestine. It was during her stay there she had encountered and adopted the Baha’i teachings. She taught her understanding of the Baha’i teachings to her friend Ethel Jenner Rosenberg. In that 1898 - 1998 represents one hundred years of Baha’is in

Britain, the celebration was entirely appropriate. But to suggest as some have done, that Ethel Rosenberg was the “first English woman to embrace the Baha’i Faith” or, again, that she “converted to the Baha’i Faith” is precisely the projection backwards of the present onto the past that has been described above. The Baha’i Faith, as it is known today, did not begin to emerge in Britain, even in an inchoate form, until the mid 1930s, that is, after the period under review. What existed prior to that, from 1899 until the early 1930s, will be called here the Baha’i Movement or Baha’ism which is how its adherents referred to it and to distinguish it from the Baha’i Faith which was to follow. It is of course pedantic to object to ‘embrace’, ‘converted to’ and even ‘Baha’i Faith’ when they are all, after all, simply meant to indicate that Ethel Rosenberg became a Baha’i, and these are the turns of phrase which would indicate this in the later period, so the backward projection here is linguistic rather than historical. Nonetheless, the distinction between the Baha’i Movement and the Baha’i Faith is an important finding of this research.

In Britain, the loosely knit groups of individuals who first identified as Baha’is became the Baha’i Movement, which was subsequently replaced by the Baha’i Faith. It is important to Baha’is today to be recognised as a discrete world religion, and much Baha’i literature begins by stressing its separateness from other religions. This has not always been the case; the Baha’is in Britain prior to 1930 repeatedly denied that they were a new or separate religion, some referring to themselves as Baha’i Christians and retaining or, in some cases, acquiring church membership. The principal distinction, then, between the Movement and the Faith, was that the majority of pre-1930 Baha’is did not perceive themselves to be part of an independent religion, but rather saw Baha’ism as being a supplement to their existing religious beliefs, and, in many cases, practices. This thesis, then, defines the British Baha’i Movement as a ‘supplementary religious movement’, based on the following criterion: membership of the Baha’i Movement required no act of conversion; adherents remained in (and in some cases joined) other religious organisations and no break with pre-existing belief was required. Baha’ism was not seen as an alternative to other traditions, rather as a method whereby these traditions could be interpreted in a wider context. For a movement to be independent, two criteria must be met, the leadership must intend it to be and the membership must understand it to be. Certainly the majority, if not all, who identified

as Baha'is in Britain during the first three decades of the last century did not understand themselves to be part of an independent movement - or if they did they were careful not to commit such ideas to paper. The attitude of the leadership was ambiguous, but public statements aimed at Westerners deny any expectation of their severance of links with their traditional religious institutions.

This situation created the conditions for an extraordinary range of interesting, even colourful, people to be drawn to the Baha'i Movement, although the total number at no stage exceeded one hundred. This manageable number, and the excellence of the Baha'i archives, has meant it has been possible to research many of these individuals and their lives and interests more fully than is often the case. The outcome has been the discovery of specific networks within the membership, each operating on the basis of their own unique set of pre-existing assumptions. There have been a number of studies of networks and new religious movements in which attention has been drawn to recruitment. Snow, for example, argues that the probability of recruitment into a movement is dependant upon two conditions, a pre-existing link to a network, and the absence of a countervailing network. There has also been some study of the differences between groups which allow their members to retain prior and extra-movement involvement and those who do not. In the latter case, the removal of networks forces such movements to proselytise strangers. In the case of the British Baha'is of this period, pre-existing links were the basis of networks within the Baha'i Movement, and each network had its own understanding of what constituted Baha'ism, so people were thus attracted to a particular version of Baha'ism which dovetailed with pre-existing beliefs and which was reinforced by pre-existing social relations. These networks have been identified and discussed at various points in the thesis, and constitute a major finding. But while network theory has been well explored in the literature, the material here suggests, but does not insist, that networks can be taken further and treated not simply as people, but as contexts of assumptions within which a newly arrived message can be disambiguated and enriched. To do this use has been made of the theory of relevance developed by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson in their work *Relevance, Communication and Cognition*, of which a short outline now follows.

### *0.6 The Theory of Relevance*



For the full statement of the theory of relevance, recourse must be had to Sperber and Wilson 1986: what follows now is the very barest of its bones. When we overhear part of a conversation, that is something not addressed to oneself, it is often incomprehensible, even though it is in one's own mother tongue. Let us say we overhear the sentence: "They are all at it." We do not know who they are, nor what they are up to, only that it is probably something highly reprehensible. What comes from our automatic and inevitable processing of the sounds is technically known as a partial semantic representation. What we do not know is the context of the utterance, and we might allow our imagination freedom to fit any number of possible contexts to this partial semantic representation just for our own speculative amusement. If we knew the appropriate context to apply, and every conversation creates much of its own rolling context, then the utterance becomes disambiguated and enriched and can create a considerable contextual effect such that our amusement might be instead horror and outrage at the awfulness of what was taking place. Two types of action are then involved in comprehension: the first, linguistic processing to yield a partial semantic representation; the second, inference whereby contexts are matched against the representation until the appropriate one fits, thereby generating its contextual effect through disambiguation, reference assignment and enrichment. The question is, how do we know what the appropriate context is? Here the theory of relevance offers an explanation.

The theory of relevance proposes that everything addressed to someone by somebody else comes with a guarantee of relevance. Not only that, but the speaker will have put it in such a way that the addressee will have no difficulty grasping it. The theory of relevance therefore proposes that the appropriate context is the one which produces the maximum contextual effect with the minimum of processing effort. It argues that having contextual effects is a necessary condition for relevance, and that, other things being equal, the greater the contextual effect, the greater the relevance. A context is a set of assumptions, which are likely to be held with varying degrees of strength or conviction, with which the new information interacts, thereby producing the contextual effect. The contextual effects discussed in the theory are of three main types: contextual implication, the contradiction of existing assumptions and the strengthening

of existing assumptions. The presentation by Sperber and Wilson is, of course, much fuller than this and deals with many other issues, as well as being strongly argued at every point. It raises the notion of relevance from being an intuitive undeveloped everyday concept to being a theoretical construct of importance in cognitive and communication theory. Ultimately the theory emerged from the shift that took place a few decades ago in linguistics from production theory to reception theory, which led to greater interest being taken in pragmatics. It also derived from developments in the cognitive sciences and in semantics and logic. One of its most significant innovations is its recognition that the context is not the predetermined given, as was previously assumed, but rather there is, even in everyday conversation, a choice of contexts, the choice resolved by the principle of relevance, the pursuit of which, they argue, is the goal of human cognition.

It used to be thought that humans had a special 'Language' faculty that distinguished humankind from the animal and other kingdoms. It is now recognised that in fact we use the same procedures in processing speech and meaning as we do in processing and making sense of the world. Further, as Sperber and Wilson emphasise, language is not unique to humans<sup>8</sup>, nor is communication, what is original, as far as one knows, is the human use of language in communication, alongside other mediums<sup>9</sup>. What matters here, is that relevance is not restricted in its application to the domains of cognition and communication. Relevance intuitively can figure in all domains. What is proposed now is that the theory of relevance is the most elegant and fruitful way of

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<sup>8</sup> "The activities which necessarily involve the use of language (i.e. a grammar governed representational system) are not communicative but cognitive. Language is an essential tool for the processing and memorising of information. As such, it must exist not only in humans but also in a wide variety of animals and machines with information processing abilities. Any organism or device with a memory must be able to represent past states of the world or itself. Any organism or device with the ability to draw inferences must have a representational system whose formulas stand on both syntactic and semantic relations to each other. Clearly these abilities are not confined to humans." (Sperber and Wilson 1986: 173)

<sup>9</sup> "The great debate about whether humans are the only species to have language is based upon a misconception of the nature of language. The debate is not really about whether other species than humans have languages, but about whether they have languages which they use as mediums of communication. Now the fact that humans have developed languages which can be used in communication is interesting, but it tells us nothing about the essential nature of language. The originality of the human species is precisely to have found this curious additional use for something other species also possess, as the originality of elephants is to have found that they can use their noses for the curious additional purpose of picking things up. In both cases, the result has been that something widely found in other species has undergone remarkable adaptation and development because of the new uses it has been put to. However, it would be as strange for humans to conclude that the essential purpose of language is communication as it would be for elephants to conclude the essential purpose of noses is for picking things up." (*ibid.* :173-4)

accounting for how individual people are attracted to religious movements. There is a neutrality about relevance, as there is about the notion of a good fit, because the two notions belong to a realm at the interface of fact and value. There is a bit of fact and a bit of value in both, but not too much of either. To say that an individual was drawn into a particular religious movement because it was relevant to them at the time, or fitted and suited them as they were then, is greatly to be preferred both to the attribution to them of social or psychological inadequacy, as in the deprivation theory of the anti-cult movement, or to the suggestion they attained sainthood in some Damascene transformation, as can be implied in the term conversion. How then would the principle of relevance work in the domain of religion?

### *0.7 Religious Relevance*

Every individual can be considered a context, or at least, a potential context, in that they can be seen as a unique sets of assumptions, values, feelings and attitudes at any given moment. Just as each new utterance changes the context of the next utterance in communication, so individuals are ever-changing contexts, although they often represent themselves to themselves and others as remaining more or less the same person. In the course of their lives individuals are constantly processing new information, filtering out and dismissing much that which does not appear relevant to themselves. Largely this is an automatic process of the human reactive mechanism which gives an instant yes or no to an idea, feeling or sensation, quite often before it has reached the threshold of conscious awareness where individuals imagine they make choices. Despite the kaleidoscopic nature of the individual as a context, and the automatic pre-conscious censorship of the reactive mechanism, people, like the 'selfish gene', are actively alert to anything which is relevant to themselves. Depending on the individual's biography and the accidents which have conditioned much of the automatic reactive mechanism, there are many for whom that which pertains to the 'religious' or 'spiritual' is potentially relevant, to the point that their reactive mechanism lets such 'messages' through for conscious consideration.

The degree of relevance to the individual is measured by the contextual effect created when the new 'message', in whatever form it takes, - it could be an experience,

an encounter, or a simple act of love and consideration, as well as a communication, - meets with the assumptions, values, feelings and attitudes of the individual in their configuration at that particular moment. The three main contextual effects discussed above, contextual implication, the contradiction of existing assumptions and the confirmation of existing assumptions, will serve well here. To be told: “Christ died for you” can, and should, have profound implications for every Christian, and can be taken as an example of the first type of contextual effect. For the second type, one’s personal beliefs contain deeply held assumptions, and when these are challenged it can and does produce a considerable effect, although whether this results in the need to author a treatise *contra* someone or other, or produces, after deliberation, a change of mind, will depend on the circumstances. Of the third type there will be many examples in what follows. It is not just a case of saying the producer of the ‘message’ is ‘right’, or the self-satisfaction of being ‘right’ oneself, nor the anticipation that the producer might be useful to one’s cause, rather it is more often that the contextual effect is created by the confirmation that one’s own personal subjective reality is shared and has, thereby, an objectivity as well.

Anyone who has spent time with a truly spiritual person will recognise what Berger describes in the quotation above about the effect of the presence of Abdu’l Baha. “He entered a room and its reality was changed. It became a place of peace and quiet, in which his words received a tremendous importance.” His attribution of this effect to Abdu’l Baha’s ‘powerful personality’, however, is perhaps unfortunate, since, nowadays, this would be too suggestive of large-ego-ed celebrities or business moguls. It requires a deep spirituality, conversely an absence of ego and personality, to produce such inner peace in those present and to change the reality of a room. In terms of relevance theory, Abdu’l Baha had created in the audience his own context; he had stilled the reactive mechanisms of those present so that they would receive his words in a deeper part and so changed the context within each individual. Accordingly, his words, which Berger describes as frequently banal, became charged with significance to those present; they became maximally relevant.

It is not difficult to regard networks as contexts, in that they are founded on a communality of assumptions and values; nor is it difficult to transfer the notion of an

individual's contextual effect to that of a network's collective response. This thesis will confirm the findings of scholarship on networks, that individuals belonging to a pre-existing network join a new movement along with the other network members, and leave it when the network no longer finds the new movement relevant. It is therefore possible to see the role of networks as providing that most essential requirement of relevance theory, the guarantee of relevance. When a speaker addresses one, it has the guarantee of relevance, that what is said will be of interest to the hearer, (the maximum contextual effect), and that it has been put in such a way that the first conclusion they draw will be the right one, (the minimum processing effort). While the network guarantees the relevance of the new movement the individual belongs, but leaves when the network's guarantee is withdrawn.

There remains one highly important element in relevance theory to consider: that of the inferential process that matches the appropriate context to the partial semantic representation and permits the disambiguation, reference assignment and enrichment which then gives rise to the contextual effects. In the early days of the period under review, the Baha'i 'message' was both unclear and ambiguous. When a message is ambiguous or unclear, it leaves room for individuals to disambiguate it in their own ways, to make their own inferences and to enrich it as they will. The enigmatic guru is often the most 'charismatic' simply because his followers have the scope to interpret and enrich his status and behaviour according to what they most desire him to be and do, often later to be disappointed. In the early representation of Baha'ism, this thesis distinguishes between values and beliefs, a distinction born of the material. By values is meant such desiderata as Unity, Harmony, Love, Equality of the sexes, Education, Social and Economic Equality, and a Universal Language. By belief is meant the deep acceptance of the Baha'i understanding of the status of Baha'u'llah. The values are ones to which most could readily assent, but each was of particular interest to one network or another, although only one network, the one that survived the longest, adhered to the belief. Somewhere in between value and belief is the chiliastic, millenarian motif of a new and better world not too distant in the future. Because Baha'ism was a supplementary religious movement, with no requirement to abandon existing beliefs or practices, and with little or no organisation, network members were able to find the relevance of Baha'ism in the particular value or values or belief of their

pre-existing interest, and disambiguate and enrich Baha'ism around that feature. One cannot speak of 'conversion' in this situation, only of finding varying degrees of relevance. It is because of this that the theory of relevance has been extended to religion and chosen as the most appropriate means of exposition for the situation of the early British Baha'is.

### *0.3 Organisation of the Study*

Chapter One examines the 'message' of Baha'ism through the material available to "seekers" in the early years of the last century and considers what might have been perceived as relevant. It is argued that the lack of material, and the ambiguity of that available, created a situation in which relevance could easily be inferred. The similarities between the Baha'i teachings, or at least what was known of them, and other contemporary religious movements such as Liberal Christianity, Unitarianism, Theosophy and Occultism are examined to show how the milieu was a particularly receptive context for Baha'ism at that time with many pre-existing values and assumptions in common.

In Chapter Two, the development of the Baha'i Movement through networking is subjected to the theory of relevance. It is argued that the network itself becomes a context in which the information is disambiguated. In this case the Baha'i teachings are comprehended differently depending upon the network through which they are encountered. Thus approached from a perspective of, say, Christian Socialism, the Baha'i social program is confused with established beliefs and understood to compliment them.  
compliment them.

Chapter Three deals with 'Abdu'l Baha's visits to the British Isles, and with how these caused the networks to converge. It also traces the development of a coherent Baha'i message nuanced for maximum relevance to western listeners. In this chapter the content of this message is considered in relation to relevance and the development of motifs. The interplay of the networks is examined to demonstrate how the message was tailored for utmost relevance to the audience in question.

Chapter Four discusses the development of the British Baha'is through the years of the First World War. The breakdown of the networks and the existence of a simplified message is reinforced by a change in direction. The publication of the *Divine Plan* requires Baha'is to teach the new message and not simply to 'live the life' in their established network. By the time hostilities cease and the plan can be implemented the message is already outdated and many of the movements the Baha'is had belonged to have ceased to exist. The death of 'Abdu'l Baha in 1921 brought the period of charismatic leadership to an end and relevance began to recede.

Chapter Five looks at how the Baha'is worked hard to routinise charisma by building the Baha'i Administration. This was entirely inward looking activity of relevance to no one except Baha'is. The stress on teaching was continued but there were fewer people to teach. Without a charismatic leader,<sup>10</sup> with an outdated message and an over-riding interest in internal administration, the Baha'is had retreated from relevance and the British Baha'i Movement was doomed.

In Chapter Six, the theoretical conclusions to be drawn from this work are examined, as are certain criticisms directed at Abdu'l Baha. His ambiguity on occasions was attributed to sinister motives, but these criticisms are rejected in favour of seeing that part of his genius consisted in his being a master of relevance. Having examined throughout the thesis the notion of relevance from the point of view of the receivers, it is good to conclude with a discussion of relevance from the point of view of its producer, and to see how his sensitivity to his audiences enabled him to redistribute the emphases of his message, and to see how thus the early British Baha'is made their contribution to the resultant Baha'i Faith.

10. Whilst it could be argued charisma was still present in the role of the Guardian + the Hands of the Cause - it was far more routinised and qualitatively different, Shoghi Effendi was not a charismatic leader in the sense Abdul Baha was.

## CHAPTER ONE

### MESSAGE AND MILIEU

Relevance and Context 1899 – 1907

#### *1.1 Outline of the Chapter*

This Chapter seeks to portray, first, the ‘message’ of Baha’ism as it was in the early days of the period under review and, second, the contemporary milieu in which it was received. Neither task is particularly easy, but both are interesting. The evolving message of Baha’ism, certainly in the early part of the period under examination, was not explicit in Britain; there were accounts and reports of a preliminary or a subjective nature, but most who became interested did so through personal contact with someone who was already interested. It must be stressed that the number of people concerned was never more than a hundred throughout the entire period. If one were to characterise the public understanding of the message in Britain, in so far as there was one, it would be of something vague, obscure and ambiguous, more an assemblage of values and aspirations than doctrines. But included in the message was the image of a mysterious spiritual figure in the Near East called ‘Abdu’l Baha who spoke of God’s progressive cycles of revelation, of love, of the unity of humanity and religions, and of the equality of men and women.

It is, of course, not easy to be precise about what was known in Britain of anything, let alone Baha’ism, at any given period, since a few people would have known a lot, and most people nothing. It is, however, a necessary question to ask just what information was available to those seeking to investigate Baha’ism. Here the category of those who knew a lot has only one member, Edward Granville Browne, an outstanding Orientalist and later Professor of Arabic and Persian at the University of Cambridge, who took a personal interest in studying the development of Babism and Baha’ism. He devoted several works to the subject; he lectured beyond Cambridge and contributed numerous articles of a general nature on the subject to more widely accessible



publications. Special attention is therefore given to his portrayal of the Baha'i message. Although not directly relating to Britain, another source of information about Baha'ism, albeit a highly eccentric one, was Kheiralla. His activities were mainly in America but he had contacts in Britain and, since American Baha'is were present in both the UK and Paris, attention is given to his presentation.

With regard to the milieu into which the 'message' was received, no attempt is made to give a full socio-religious portrait of Britain at the time, but attention is given to those individuals and organisations and movements which were known to have been in some way associated with Baha'ism at some stage, or who provided a context into which some aspect of Baha'ism appeared relevant.

### *1.2 The work of EG Browne in relation to the Babi & Baha'i Movements*

The modern Baha'i Faith is unique amongst religions in that its origins were reported in the international media. Numerous articles about the Bab appeared in Western newspapers<sup>1</sup>. The Bab not only attracted media attention, his mission was the subject of widespread Western scholarship<sup>2</sup>. It was however, the work of Edward Granville Browne<sup>3</sup> which made the Bab, if not a household name, at least a familiar figure to those interested in the area, of which there were many<sup>4</sup>. Browne wrote and edited numerous works on Persia, many of which mention the Babi and Baha'i movements. Browne first became interested in the Babi Movement after reading the work of Comte de Gobineau and in 1888 travelled to Persia to undertake his own research. This ultimately resulted in the publication of *A Year Amongst the Persians* in 1893. Much of the work contained in this book concerning the Bab and the Babi Movement was first published in two papers in the July and October 1889 editions of

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<sup>1</sup> See Momen, M *The Babi & Baha'i Religions, 1844 - 1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts*, Oxford, George Ronald, 1981. This is a collection of published and unpublished documents, arranged chronologically, with an introduction to Western scholarship and biographies of significant individuals.

<sup>2</sup> Work appeared in Russian by Alexander Toumansky; in German by Baron Victor Rosen; the Bab's book of laws was translated into French by ALM Nicolas in *Seyyed Ali Mohammed dit le Bab*, Paris, Dujarric & Cie, 1902. Perhaps the most important early work, the one which is known to have influenced EG Browne, was M le Comte de Gobineau's *Les Religions et les Philosophies dans l'Asie Centrale* Paris 1865 & 1866.

<sup>3</sup> See Momen, M *Selections from the Writings of E G Browne on the Babi & Baha'i Religions* Oxford, George Ronald, 1987, for detailed listing and brief analysis of content of Browne's publications.

<sup>4</sup> In his forward to the *Bibliography of English Language Works on the Babi & Baha'i Faiths 1844 - 1985* (Collins, WP Oxford, 1990) Ian Semple wrote "the heroic career of the Bab and his martyred followers

*The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*. In 1890 Browne travelled to Cyprus and Palestine to follow up developments in the Babi Movement. He knew the Movement had undergone a schism and was keen to understand the issues involved. He met with Mirza Yahya, the successor of the Bab and the leader of the Azali party, in Famagusta and with Baha'u'llah, the leader of the much larger Baha'i party, in Acre. Both groups welcomed Browne and were keen to co-operate with him. He was given much new material and unique access to leading figures. In 1891 Browne published a two-volume work entitled *A Traveller's Narrative*. In its introduction Browne explains how 'I had expressed a strong desire to become better acquainted with the later history of the Babi movement ... In reply I was told that a concise and authentic history carried down almost to the present day had been compiled, and that same day this book, ... was placed in my hands' (Browne 1891 p. xlii). The work was by an anonymous author but is now attributed to 'Abdu'l Baha, the son and successor of Baha'u'llah. *Traveller's Narrative* is described by Browne as having four chief features, the secondary importance accorded to the Bab (i.e. over Baha'u'llah), the depiction of Mirza Yahya as a person of no consequence, the temperate tone observed towards the Shah of Persia and the deprecation of resistance to the government by earlier Babis. The book is important to this study because it was one of the first published sources that reproduced any of Baha'u'llah's teachings in English<sup>5</sup>. Browne's final major work on the subject was *Materials for the Study of the Babi Religion* issued in 1918. This contained a chapter dealing with the Baha'is in the West.<sup>6</sup>

More significant in spreading the story of the Bab than Browne's scholarly publications was the information culled from them that appeared in numerous popularised handbooks on religion. The importance of Browne's work in relation to this study is that it anticipates many of the motifs that would constitute the formation of the Baha'i message. A clear example of this kind of general book resulted from a series of lectures given at the South Place Institute in London between 1888 and 1889. The lectures, including Browne's on Sufism and Babism, were published under the title *Religious Systems of the World* in 1889. By 1911 this book was in its tenth edition

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became the talk of educated society in Europe, and Edward Granville Browne of Cambridge University made its rise the subject of his intense study."

<sup>5</sup> As an appendix to Vol. 2 of *Traveller's Narrative* Browne lists twenty six European publications about the Bab and Babism; of these, seven are in English, eleven in French (of which several were Russian publications) and eight in German. Apart from works by Rosen & Gobineau, they are mainly accounts by travellers or secondary sources.

suggesting a fairly wide readership. It is not unreasonable to suppose this is the type of popularised scholarship which might be read by people who would subsequently investigate the Baha'i Movement further, and consequently it would colour their "first impressions." Browne's article on Babism is twenty pages in length, eighteen pages of which recount the history of the Bab. It describes the emergence of the Babi Movement from the Shaykhi Movement<sup>7</sup> and how Mirza Ali Muhammad of Shiraz (1819 -1850) declared himself to be The Bab in 1844. It was initially considered that he meant that he was the gate to the hidden Imam whose return was anticipated by Shi'a Muslims<sup>8</sup> but it later became evident that his claim was to be the Imam himself. Browne outlines the story of the Bab's ministry up to his execution in 1850, pausing to describe some incidents in detail. Only one page outlines the 'most salient features of their faith' and in these some of the motifs which dominate the Baha'i Movement first appear.

The first of these "salient features" is the understanding that there has been a new revelation of the truth to mankind by the 'one, eternal, incomprehensible' God and that the essence of the teaching of all past and future prophets is basically the same. Browne's explanation of the Manifestation is very vague, especially as arguably the most important aspect of the Baha'i teachings was the understanding of the role of Baha'u'llah. Baha'u'llah (Mirza Husayn-Ali 1817 - 1892) was the half brother of Mirza Yahya (c. 1830 - 1912) who had assumed the leadership of the Babi movement after the death of the Bab. His leadership was ineffective and the movement became demoralised and fragmented. In 1866 Baha'u'llah publicly declared he was the one announced by the Bab as "Him whom God shall make manifest" thus proclaiming himself a Manifestation of God and the start of a new cycle of prophesy. The majority of Babis accepted Baha'u'llah's claim and became known as Baha'is; those who remained loyal to Mirza Yahya were henceforth referred to as Azalis. All the other components of the message as outlined by Browne might be described as values; Baha'u'llah's station as a manifestation of God is the only one that is a belief, yet it is dismissed in a paragraph. It was the understanding of the station of Baha'u'llah that would in time prove to be of

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<sup>6</sup> By 1918, the number of European language publications listed by Browne has risen to forty nine and includes anti Baha'i authors.

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed study of the roles of charisma and authority within Shi'ism in shaping the transformation of Shaykhism to Babism see MacEoin, D "From Shaykhism to Babism: A Study in Charismatic Renewal in Shi'i Islam" PhD Thesis Cambridge University 1979. Bayat, M. *Mysticism & Dissent, Socio-religious Thought in Qajar Iran* provides a useful background to the period.

major importance in distinguishing the Baha'i Movement from the Baha'i Faith. As late as the 1920s, it was the official NSA policy in the United States that a "Baha'i" was someone who "accepted/believed" in the social teachings of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha and a "believer" was someone who "accepted the Manifestation" i.e. attributed a revelatory origin to those teachings. To elect an Assembly required nine "believers"; only having nine "Baha'is" was not enough. Thus many early references to people being "Baha'i" should not necessarily be taken to mean that they were assumed to accept the idea of revelation. Only some of those who called themselves Baha'is accepted the belief in Baha'u'llah; others were attracted to values which they perceived to concur with their own. Thus, the values of peace and harmony attracted a network of people involved in peace movements. The values of equality attracted feminists and socialists, the East/West unity value attracted orientalist and the unity of religions appealed to Liberal Christians and Unitarians. Each of these overlapping networks would contribute to developing these values into a programme.

Despite not elaborating on Baha'u'llah's claim to be a Manifestation of God, it is him not the Bab whom Browne quotes when outlining the beliefs of Babism. The following passage is quoted at length because it mirrors so completely many of the contexts in which the Baha'i teachings would be elaborated and even uses some of the most often quoted sayings of Baha'u'llah.

“As to the belief in a future life, it is there, but it is not prominent. A universal reign of peace, love, freedom, and unity of belief and effort is the thing primarily aimed at; for Babism, in spite of the mystic enthusiasm which pervades it, differs from Sufism in the essentially practical objects which it has in view. A material resurrection is denied, and the immaterial future of the spirit must not divert our thoughts from the work of regenerating the world. War must cease, nations must mingle in friendship, justice must become universal, all men must be as brothers. “Ye are all fruit of one tree,” says Beha, “and the leaves of one branch. Walk, then, with perfect charity, concord, affection and agreement, for I swear by the Sun of Truth that the light of agreement shall brighten and illumine the horizons.” So again he says, “Pride is not for him who loveth his country, but rather for him

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<sup>8</sup> See Momen, M *Shi'a Islam* Oxford, George Ronald 1992 for a full description of beliefs concerning the Hidden Imam and his expected return.

who loveth the whole world.” “As for those who commit sin and cling to the world.” He says elsewhere, “they are assuredly not of the people of Beha.” “Religious hatred and rancour is a world-consuming fire,” we read in another place, “and the quenching thereof most arduous, unless the hand of Divine Might give man deliverance from this unfruitful calamity.” People of all creeds are to be associated with in a fair and friendly spirit, not shunned as unclean or treated as foes. Persuasion may be used to gain converts, but the employment of force is hateful to God. “If ye be slain it is better for you than that ye should slay.” The diffusion of knowledge is a most laudable thing, for, says Beha, “he who educateth his son, or one of the sons of another, it is as though he had educated one of my sons.” But studies like logic and philosophy, which produce only disputation, are discouraged. The study of living languages is, on the other hand, encouraged since it is conducive to a closer union of diverse peoples. It is, however, recommended that in the course of time one language (either one of those at present existing, or a new universal language) and one writing be chosen by the assembled representatives of the different nations, and that these be taught to everyone, so that thenceforth there may be no obstacle to the free intercourse of all mankind.” (Browne, 1889)

What then does this list of ‘salient features’ amount to? Firstly, a reiteration of monotheism and the fulfilment of prophesy and then a list of values rather than beliefs - love, unity, brotherhood, education for all and international communication. Members of any religious faith could agree with these aspirations which are totally devoid of theological content. These rather vague values anticipate the motifs which would eventually provide the contexts for the development of the social programme of Baha’ism. Despite his detailed account of the Bab, the quotations Browne uses to describe the salient features are all from Baha’u’llah. In a later work he writes:

While ethical teaching occupies a very subordinate place in the writings of the Bab and his disciples, it constitutes the chief part of the Baha’i teachings ... Of the ethical teachings of Baha’u’llah ... These teachings are in themselves admirable, though inferior, in my opinion, both in beauty and simplicity to the teachings of Christ. Moreover, as it seems to me, ethics is only the application to everyday life of religion and metaphysics, and to be effective must be supported by some

spiritual sanction; and in the case of Baha'ism, with its rather vague doctrines as to the nature and destiny of the soul of man, it is a little difficult to see whence the driving power to enforce the ethical maxims can be derived." (Browne, 1918 p. xxii)

Browne must have been a great disappointment to the Baha'is<sup>9</sup>, who had hoped he would embrace their Cause. He had been granted four interviews with Baha'u'llah and given a major historical book to translate. Browne diverged from the Baha'is over issues of Persian politics and he moved closer to the rival Azali sect. He makes clear in his work that his interest in the history of the Babi and Baha'i movements "is the light it throws on the genesis and evolution of other religions". In a startling passage he compares the dispute between Baha'u'llah and Mirza Yahya with the dispute between St. Paul and St. Peter, implying the Bab's Christ-like status while reducing Baha'u'llah to an apostle. He describes Baha'u'llah's ethical teachings as inferior to those of Christ and devoid of spiritual content. However, he does not acknowledge that it is he (Browne) who in earlier work (there are nearly thirty years between the publication of the two works cited above but Browne does not appear to have elaborated his analysis one iota) reduced Baha'u'llah to a few "bullet points". These included the end of nationalism and religious hatred, friendly association with all, no ritual uncleanness, rejection of physical force, education for all and a universal language.

### *1.3 Browne and the introduction of Relevance*

There are two points outside Browne's list, which deserve attention. They directly relate to the concept of relevance. The first is the description of the death of the Bab and its relevance for Christians. It is in the event of the martyrdom of the Bab that the first instance of relevance for the Western adherents of Baha'ism can be found. According to Baha'i sources (Shoghi Effendi: 1995 p.56) when the Bab was summoned to face the firing squad, he remarked, "Not until I have said to him [his amanuensis, Said Hussain] all those things that I have to say can any earthly power silence Me." He was led off to face his executioners, seven hundred and fifty riflemen, under the command of an Armenian Christian. The Bab and a young disciple, Anis, were suspended on a rope

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<sup>9</sup> For a detailed explanation of the Baha'i perspective on Browne, see HM Balyuzi, *Edward Granville Browne and the Baha'i Faith*, Oxford, George Ronald, 1970

and the regiment opened fire rank upon rank in the manner of a British infantry square. When the smoke cleared, the Bab had vanished and his friend stood unharmed. Eventually the Bab was located in his cell concluding his conversation with his amanuensis. This time he went willingly to face his executioners (the Christian regiment had been stood down and replaced with a Muslim one) remarking, 'I have finished my conversation with Said Hussein.' The second attempt at execution was successful and the bodies of the Bab and Anis were 'completely dissected.' The relevance for those approaching the Baha'i teachings from the Christian tradition is noted by James Webb in *The Flight From Reason*, 'The parallels with Christian legend are obvious. The Armenian colonel corresponds with the centurion with the lance. The miracle of the first execution, the combination of divine imperiousness and meek acquiescence, are all in accordance with what the West knew of divinity. ... The bodies of the Bab and Anis were stolen from under the eyes of the guard placed upon them, hidden, and eventually buried on the slopes of Mount Carmel.' (Webb: 1971 p.34) Thus, at the very root of the Baha'i message was an inference which would require the minimum of contextual shift for relevance to Christians.

A figure who is mentioned at some length in Browne's work is Tahirih (1814-1852) as she is called by Baha'is or, alternatively, Fatimih Umm Salamih, Qurratu'l-'Ayn or Zarrin-Taj, who was a prominent follower of the Bab. She was the daughter of Hajj Mulla Salih and related to other leading members of the religious establishment. She was a highly intelligent and original scholar, whose participation in religious argument was unique for a woman of her time. Browne uses her involvement in the Babi movement to indicate the Bab's progressive stance on women's rights. Later Baha'i writers would also use her to enhance relevance for Western women involved in the struggle for suffrage. For example, Shoghi Effendi describes her strangulation and then comments, 'Thus ended the life of this great Babi heroine, the first woman suffrage martyr, who, at her death, turning to the one in whose custody she had been placed, had boldly declared: "You can kill me as soon as you like, but you cannot stop the emancipation of women."' (Shoghi Effendi: 1995 p.75) Thus was she repackaged for enhanced relevance. What suffrage movement he is claiming she was martyred for is not clear, as there was no demand for universal franchise in Iran at the time of her death. In fact the cause of women's rights would be one of the most important contexts for the elaboration of relevance for Western Baha'is, despite the fact that Baha'u'llah wrote

little about the status of women, stressing rather the equality of humanity and only implicitly that of men and women.

What then was the message that a reader, seeking spiritual enlightenment, confronted with Browne's work would encounter? They would be able to consider the heroism and tragic fate of the Babis in the context of it being the beginning of a new religion, which according to Browne's early analysis was potentially as important as the major world religions. What one would get from reading one of Browne's articles is the history of the Bab, Qurratu'l-'Ayn and some rather vague ethical teachings. Superficially this is not much, but it gives a seductive combination of heroic deeds, romantic heroines (some eroticism) and theological vagueness, all which had the potential to be enriched and found relevance for feminists.

#### *1.4 The Baha'i Teachings spread to the West*

Around the same time that Browne was lecturing at South Place, Ibrahim Kheirella was beginning to spread his version of the Baha'i teachings in North America. There does not appear to have been a conscious plan to spread the teachings of Baha'u'llah to the West. Certainly no written records of such a venture have survived. Ibrahim Kheirella would later claim that he had been despatched specifically for this task but his idiosyncratic approach to Baha'ism and his innovative methods would make him an unlikely candidate for such an important mission. It may be that he and Haddad did have some kind of official sanction for their activities, however, if that was the case they seem to have acted independently and had little contact with 'Abdu'l Baha. The importance of this apparent isolation is that Baha'i teachings in the West were allowed to spread in an uncontrolled manner leaving much to the inference of the hearer and consequently allowing enrichment and subsequent relevance.

It was shortly after the death of Baha'u'llah that the teachings of the Bab and Baha'u'llah were first introduced to the United States of America by a Syrian from a Christian background, Ibrahim George Kheiralla (18??-1919). Kheiralla was born in a village near Beirut. He graduated from the Syrian Protestant College in 1870. Soon after graduation he relocated to Cairo where he was involved in numerous commercial ventures, which seem to have been relatively successful until about 1888 when a legal



dispute went against him causing financial problems. It was during his time in Egypt that Kheiralla began his tangled matrimonial affairs. In 1882, after his first wife died, he married a Coptic widow whom he later divorced and in 1890 he married for the third time. According to Hollinger (1984, p100), he came into contact with Baha'ism through his third wife's brother, who had been converted to the Baha'i religion by 'Abdu'l-Karim Tihrani. He became Kheiralla's Baha'i teacher with whom he studied for two years before converting in 1889. Stockman (1985, pp.16-17) claims Kheiralla's introduction to Tihrani was by "a black magician" and that he was deeply interested in the occult. He goes on to point out that the transmission of the Baha'i teachings must have been oral as Kheiralla could not read Persian and Tihrani could not speak or write Arabic. Tihrani taught Baha'ism as an esoteric doctrine, requiring spiritual preparation before initiation.

Kheiralla's understanding of the Baha'i teachings seem to have included the belief that Baha'u'llah was God incarnate together with numerous popular Middle Eastern religious ideas about dreams, magic and talismans. He was especially keen on the Baha'i teaching of the hundredth and greatest name of God, which he believed had potent magical powers. Early in 1893, Kheiralla joined another Christian adherent of Baha'ism, called Anton Haddad in America. The two men were involved in a number of imaginative but doomed business ventures before Kheiralla bought a doctorate and set himself up as a healer in 1894. His healing practice seems to have been fairly successful. Utilising traditional Middle Eastern magical and spiritual healing techniques, he charged two dollars a visit. His healing business introduced him to the alternative medicine and cultic milieu of Chicago. In 1895 began to teach his version of Baha'ism, and not only were his teachings unorthodox, so were his methods. He invited 'Truth Seekers' (his term) to a series of thirteen graduated lectures in which he promised to reveal secret wisdom to those who stayed the course. According to Berger 'Seekers' who disagreed with their teacher were 'excused'; thus Kheiralla "eliminated all but the most credulous." (Berger, 1954, p.87). He taught that the millennium would begin in 1917, following a great war. He also taught the doctrine of reincarnation, although it is unclear if this was a misunderstanding of the Shi'i doctrine of *raja'at* (the return of all twelve imams and their followers) or an acceptance of ideas current in the American popular religion of the day. Wherever it came from, central to his teaching was that Baha'u'llah was God, and his son was a reincarnation of Jesus. Kheiralla's thesis continued that the Baha'i teachings were proved by the Bible. His emphasis was almost exclusively Christian in orientation, and,

whilst other faiths were acknowledged, their importance was minimised. Kheiralla was very successful. He was soon unable to cope with the number of 'Truth Seekers' requiring his classes and was required to hand over some of the work to students he had trained up to teach "The Pith" as he referred to his secret doctrine. By 1900 there were about 1,700 Baha'is in America.

Kheirella's methods are outlined in detail in Browne's *Materials for the Study of the Babi Religion*, in which he reproduces a correspondence with a Miss A. A. H. of Brooklyn, New York, who provides abstracts of the lessons as well as some of the questions she raised and he failed to answer to her satisfaction. The confusion that seems to have been part of the teaching almost certainly allowed hearers to embellish the message to their own satisfaction.

In 1898 Kheiralla had led a pilgrimage to Palestine, paid for by Mrs Phoebe Hearst. He was greeted by 'Abdu'l Baha as "Baha's Peter," "the Second Columbus," and the "Conqueror of America". However, during this visit he became alienated from 'Abdu'l Baha. It seems he argued with both Persian Baha'is and with one of his converts, Dr. Edward Getsinger, over points of doctrine. He seems to have wanted 'Abdu'l Baha to clarify such matters as reincarnation and his assertion that God had a personality. Both Hollinger (1984, p.113) and Berger (1954, p.90) argue that Kheiralla's disillusionment began with 'Abdu'l Baha's conciliatory attitude to his dispute over Biblical interpretation and his failure to back him in the aforementioned arguments. Berger repeats Kheiralla's claim that 'Abdu'l Baha would not explain matters of doctrine satisfactorily and that he refused him the knowledge that he sought. Hollinger claims he was puzzled by 'Abdu'l Baha's relativism and finally came to see it as dishonesty. Stockman (1985, p.154) places greater emphasis on doctrinal dispute and the oral tradition that Kheiralla demanded the leadership of the Baha'is in the west. There are numerous examples that 'Abdu'l Baha was loath to dismiss the beliefs of others, while it seems possible that with his occultist background Kheiralla could have assumed that "higher" esoteric knowledge (and the power derived from it) was being withheld. Certainly his estrangement from 'Abdu'l

Baha caused Kheiralla to ponder on the validity of his half brother's rival claim to the leadership of the Baha'i community.<sup>10</sup>

Eventually Kheiralla's confused loyalties became apparent and the American Baha'i community threatened to be split in two. 'Abdu'l Baha's response was swift. Whilst he was prepared to tolerate heterodox teaching, he would not accept disloyalty. Kheiralla's own teacher, 'Abdu'l Karim Tihrani, was despatched to America, apparently in order to heal the split but whether by accident or design he actually began to rally support for a loyalist faction, demanding ordeals by faith and finally referring to Kheiralla and his supporters as 'Covenant Breakers'. In 1900 Kheiralla finally declared his support for 'Abdu'l Baha's disloyal half brother Muhammad Ali<sup>11</sup>, and his followers, who were henceforth referred to as Behaists, numbered about three hundred. The loss of Kheiralla and his supporters was a blow to the Baha'i community and both factions lost members.

What was the legacy of Kheiralla? He built a community of nearly two thousand souls who claimed adherence to the Baha'i teachings. He was the first to address Baha'i theology in a Christian context and some of his thinking still underpins western Baha'i approaches to the Bible. After his defection Persian Baha'i teachers were drafted in to the United States to consolidate the remaining believers and thus a more cohesive and doctrinally orthodox group emerged.

While the status of Kheiralla as a Baha'i missionary is unclear, we can be certain that there was absolutely no conscious plan to introduce the teachings of Baha'u'llah into the British Isles at this time. This is important because it means that there was very little input by the Baha'i leadership. The British Baha'is would be free to enrich their very limited information and draw relevance from whatever context they chose to use to disambiguate it.

Kheiralla had little influence on the growth of Baha'ism in the British Isles; however, he can be credited with introducing it. His fourth wife was English and on their

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<sup>10</sup> Under the terms of Baha'u'llah's will Muhammad Ali, his younger son was to be appointed to lead the community after the death of 'Abdu'l Baha. However, shortly after their father's death, a split occurred and at the time of Kheiralla's visit Muhammad Ali offered an alternative leadership.

honeymoon, in 1895, they visited England. During this visit her aunt, Miss Marion Brown of London, became a Baha'i (Stockman: 1985, p.37). There is no further mention of Brown in any Baha'i literature. More significant was the presence on the 1898 pilgrimage of a Mrs Thornburgh-Cropper, an American resident in England who was to be a central figure in the development of Baha'ism in Britain. Thornburgh-Cropper's presence on the pilgrimage was itself a fairly random event. She was a friend of Phoebe Hearst, a member of the Californian newspaper owning family whose extensive fortune had helped the spread of the Baha'i message in North America. Although Mrs Hearst became disenchanted with the Baha'is she was the financial backer of the Kheirella pilgrimage. Thornburgh-Cropper, an American national, was living in England and joined the party when they stopped in London on route for Palestine. Although there is evidence of her previous interest in religion there is nothing to suggest she had any previous interest in or contact with the Baha'is.

Thornburgh-Cropper could have reinforced her understanding of the Baha'i teachings by reading, although, as stated above, the literature available was scant. Most of the efforts of translation at this time were put into translating the Tablets of 'Abdu'l Baha and it would be some time before a concerted effort to translate the Writings of Baha'u'llah into English would be made. In 1900 Anton Haddad translated the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* into English and it was circulated in typescript form amongst the American Baha'is. At least one copy of this reached Britain but it is impossible to say when. Also in 1900 a collection of writings by Baha'u'llah entitled *Tablets, Communes and Holy Utterances* was published in the USA, which was probably also translated by Haddad. One of the first books specifically about the Baha'is, rather than the Babis to be published in English was Myron Phelps' *The Life and Teaching of Abbas Effendi*. The first edition of this work was published in 1903. Phelps, an American, wrote "While spending the summer of 1902 in London, it happened that through friends I heard of Beha'ism (sic) which has adherents in England, as well as a much larger number in the United States." (Phelps: 1912, p.xxxviii) Phelps must have met Thornburgh-Cropper, and the contents of his book must have addressed the kind of issues they discussed and the sort of information they felt appropriate to publish in order to promote the Baha'i

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<sup>11</sup> Muhammad Ali's campaign against 'Abdu'l Baha resulted in 'Abdu'l Baha willing the leadership of the Baha'i community to his grandson; had he remained loyal he would have inherited in 1921 and enjoyed the position of leadership until his death in 1937.

cause. This book is the first to dwell on the fourth of Smith's motifs - devotion to 'Abdu'l Baha. The book is in three parts, the first and largest part outlines the life story of 'Abdu'l Baha; there is then a small section on the ethical teachings and then a number of discourses on various subjects. It is interesting to note that there is no stress on the social teachings but rather on the spiritual and religious aspects of 'Abdu'l Baha's thought. It is the first book published in the West which addresses Baha'i teachings from the perspective of their possible relevance to Westerners rather than from the perspective of an orientalist. This work is very different in style from Browne's scholarly research, although Browne wrote the introduction to the second edition and confirmed the authenticity of its content.

At this stage the Baha'i message was one that was based on values and aspirations rather than doctrines and it was this that allowed such enormous scope for inference and consequently for relevance. Relevance is enhanced by ambiguity; the vagueness of what was understood to be the Baha'i message would allow it to be understood according to the preconceptions of its hearers. Before going on to investigate the activities of those who would embrace the Baha'i Cause in Britain it is necessary to look briefly at the world they inhabited.

### *1.5 Heresy and Choice*

In his book *The Heretical Imperative* (1980) Berger notes the literal meaning of heresy is choice in religion. The English word "heresy" comes from the Greek verb *hairein*, which means, "to choose" (Berger: 1980, p. 27). For heresy to be a deviation, he continues, a religious authority must exist, and without such an authority heresy becomes an imperative. In this book Berger argues that the modern situation, - he measures modernity by the ratio of inanimate to animate sources of power, - results in individuals developing a modern consciousness in order to cope with the structures of the situation in which they live. Berger goes on to argue that modern consciousness "entails a movement from fate to choice" (Berger: 1980, p. 11). Pre-modern societies, he points out, are traditional societies in which a strong degree of certainty exists. Modernity on the other hand pluralises and consequently opens up choices in everything from what brand of commercial product to use, to choices in lifestyle and sexual orientation and ultimately to choices in religion:

“In pre-modern situations there is a world of religious certainty, occasionally ruptured by heretical deviations. By contrast, the modern situation is a world of religious uncertainty, occasionally staved off by more or less precarious constructions of religious affirmation. Indeed, one could put this change even more sharply: For pre-modern man, heresy is a possibility - usually a rather remote one; for modern man, heresy typically becomes a necessity. Or again modernity creates a new situation in which picking and choosing becomes an imperative. (Berger: 1980, p.28)

The London to which Mrs Thornburgh-Cropper returned from her pilgrimage with Dr. Kheirella was a town awash with religious choices and heresies of all kinds. Some of these were relevant to the Baha'is. Others, such as secularism, were not. There were also a number of movements outside of Christianity that played an important part in preparing the ground for Baha'ism. In 1871 Darwin's *The Descent of Man* was published. This work was to undermine traditional Christian beliefs about creation, while Biblical criticism, such as Ernest Renan's *Life of Jesus*, threw the historical Jesus into sharp relief against the Christ of the Church. During this period, as Christianity attempted to reconstruct itself to face the challenges of a new era, all sorts of new ideas and heresies formed alternative and supplementary belief systems with which to either reject or adapt orthodoxy. It is against this background of emerging religious pluralism that the story of the British Baha'is must be viewed.

Literature on the development of alternative and supplementary religious movements at the start of the twentieth century is surprisingly scant. Whilst there is a wealth of literature on new religious movements, much of this is concerned with post Second World War developments. The historical roots of the “New Age Movement” have been examined by Raschke (1980) and Faivre (1994) Godwyn (1994) considered the historical role of Theosophy. Webb (1971) and (1985) made an important contribution to this field in discussing the development of supplementary belief systems in Europe. Albanese (1977) and Ahlstrom (1972) produced more analytical work that attempted to locate esoteric, occult and metaphysical in terms of broader cultural historiography. Their work was, however, restricted to the North American experience.

Two men, prominent in the area of supplementary religious belief, played an important role in the early Baha'i Movement: they were the Reverend Reginald John Campbell, Minister of the City Temple Congregational Church, and the Venerable Albert Basil Orme Wilberforce, Archdeacon of Westminster Abbey. These men represent two dominant strands amongst the Baha'is. Campbell was connected to socialist politics and the settlement movement and he moved amongst the highest strata of the radical literati. Wilberforce was not simply an establishment figure whose congregation included some of the most affluent Baha'is, he was also deeply involved in spiritualism, freemasonry and the esoteric. These two men were pivotal in the networks from which the Baha'is were drawn. For most Baha'is today their importance lies in their activities during the visit of 'Abdu'l Baha. However their thinking laid a foundation for Baha'ism which has not been acknowledged. Whilst Baha'ism does not seem to have been of major significance to either Campbell or Wilberforce, it is hard to imagine the early Baha'i community without their presence.

### *1.6 Reginald John Campbell*

Reginald John Campbell (1867 to 1956) was born in London. His health was so delicate that as a child he was sent to Northern Ireland to be brought up by his maternal grandparents. He was both the son and grandson of Nonconformist ministers but on his return to England he joined the Anglican Communion (Campbell: 1916, p.28). Campbell seems to have always been torn between religious Conformity and Nonconformity. This was compounded by the political radicalism of English Nonconformity towards which he was drawn as opposed to the political conservatism of Ulster Protestantism and the Orange Lodge that he rejected. He describes that even as a child his experience of God through nature led him towards sacramentalism and ultimately Anglicanism (Campbell: 1916, p.12). Campbell went to university with the intention of taking orders in the Anglican Church. However whilst he was at Oxford he underwent a mystical experience which caused him to abandon his ambitions and aim instead for an academic career. But, the pull of Nonconformity on his soul proved irresistible and he returned to the church of his grandfather where no doctrinal subscription was required. He was admitted to the Congregational ministry and, in the summer of 1895, took up his duties in the Old Union Street Church in Brighton. He would later describe his time in Brighton as "one of the happiest of my whole ministerial career." (Campbell: 1916, p.81) The church (founded in

1662,) had been in decline for sometime, despite being the mother Nonconformist church in the district. Campbell's ministry seems to have very successful. The congregation soon outgrew the building and were forced to amalgamate with another church. At the time of his departure for London plans were being made, by his congregation, for the construction of a new church which would provide a focus for the whole county as well as being at the geographical and social centre of the town.

Campbell's second church was to be The City Temple. Although the building was relatively new, founded in 1873, the congregation went back to the time of Cromwell. Dr. Joseph Parker had been the Preacher who had overseen the building of the new church and his presence in the "great white pulpit" could pack it to its 2,500 capacity. Parker initiated Thursday morning services, actually at noon, to reach office workers and shopkeepers during their lunch times. An important development was the support for Parker and the City Temple of the *Christian Commonwealth* magazine, first published on 20th October 1881 as an organ of the Baptist Spurgeon Movement but which had been more recently uncommitted to any party within Nonconformity. In October 1901 Albert Dawson, a long serving member of the City Temple, became editor of the *Christian Commonwealth*, and thus sympathetic coverage was assured. By 1901 Parker was a sick man, and unable to fulfil all his duties at the City Temple. Quite how he knew Campbell is not clear. Dawson certainly visited the Union Church, so this may have been the connection. Campbell was persuaded to undertake the Thursday morning services and from October 1902 to May 1903 he commuted between London and Brighton for this purpose. With the support of the *Christian Commonwealth*, Campbell was remarkably successful. Within five months Campbell was preaching to standing-room crowds of 3,000, and within a year formal complaints were made by non-seatholders, who, after queuing up in the cold weather outside, were still not assured of admittance (Smith: 1967, p. 208). When Parker died on 20th November 1902, there was no doubt as to his successor. At the age of thirty-five Reginald Campbell took over the premier pulpit of the Congregational ministry.

What, then, was the nature of the message that he brought? Was it really substantially different from Parker's? The answer is that it was. Both theologically and socially he was not only in advance of Parker, but his position was also more sophisticated. But this was not apparent to many of his congregation at the outset.



For whereas Parker tended to sound shocking but on reflection turned out to be only mildly unorthodox, Campbell's spiritual and poetic tone carried implications which, if understood, might be deeply disturbing. (Smith: 1967, p. 210)

As well as his work at the City Temple Campbell was involved with numerous radical organisations, for example, The Progressive League (League of progressive thought and Social Service) of which he was president. The League had begun in January 1907 as the New Theology League but within a month it was renamed the Society for the Encouragement of Progressive Religious Thought. It was meant to fulfil an important role in the new reformation which was gathering momentum. The objects of the League were Spiritual Fellowship, Theological Freedom and Social Regeneration. Campbell and the *Christian Commonwealth* seem particularly preoccupied with the League during 1910. The 9<sup>th</sup> March issue is a League "special"; the 4<sup>th</sup> May issue advertises the "Spring Assembly of the Progressive League" which is to be addressed by the Rev. J Bruce Wallace (whose brother in law, Wellesley Tudor Pole, would play a significant role in the Baha'i Movement) on the subject of "The Spiritual Life - What is it?". In the July 13<sup>th</sup> issue the readership are informed that the Progressive League is now the Liberal Christian League. Campbell remained president of it until 1911, when he was forced by ill health to reduce his activities. The various fellowships and brotherhoods regularly reported in the *Christian Commonwealth* form a network of organisations promoting various progressive causes and Campbell was an active participant in many of them when his health allowed. It was these organisations which formed part of the system of networks through which the teachings of Baha'ism would spread.

Perhaps the most important new influence on Campbell during his sojourn at the City Temple was his conversion to socialism and his membership of the Independent Labour Party and the Fabian Society. He wrote extensively about this in *Christianity and the Social Order* (Campbell: 1907). In this book he attempted to show the correspondence between the principles of Christianity and socialism. His introduction to socialism was a curiously negative one. He was attacked by the trade union movement for his conservative stance on the Church's role in public education and on Sunday observance. This brought him into contact with Labour leaders for the first time. He struck up close friendships with both Keir Hardie and George Bernard Shaw and in the autumn of 1905 preached a sermon on Christianity and Collectivism in the City Temple,



during which he declared himself a socialist. In his book, Campbell explains that the churches are becoming obsolete, serving only a small section of the middle class. Conversely, the masses are not at all hostile to the religion of Jesus, but hostile to the churches because they do not teach the religion of Jesus. Socialism is simply Christianity in a new and relevant form (Campbell: 1907, p.17) *Christianity and the Social Order*, is basically a book in two parts, the first outlining the theological concept of the Kingdom of God throughout Christian history and the second a brief outlining of socialism and feminism. Neither part of the book is particularly original or profound. The idea of Christian Socialism was already well established and, although the notion that God's Kingdom upon earth would be established through the medium of the Independent Labour Party and the Fabian Society rather than the churches was unusual, it was not unique. Where this book was relevant for the Baha'is is in the contention that anything which promotes "universal brotherhood is Christianity" and that the religion of Jesus is no longer taught in the Churches. Such ideas may have encouraged an acceptance of beliefs outside traditional Christianity by implying that they represented a truer understanding of the religion of Jesus. Furthermore, Campbell's insistence on Socialism as the means to the Kingdom of God finds a resonance in the understanding of the Western Baha'is to the concept of the *malekoot* in Baha'ism.

"Bahaism isn't otherworldly enough to be a religion. Tolstoi might just as well say Tolstoism is a religion."

"It hasn't dogmas perhaps. But it has " - he hesitated - "what I should call an immense Love of God, and acquiescence in the Divine Will. Did you ever read the *Fbretti* or a Kempis's *De Imitatione Christi*?"

They have that spirit in them - heaps of it. A sort of mediaeval mysticism, a cheerful mysticism, which finds comradeship with all the world. Their Malekoot seems to me to be identical with the "divine enlightenment of the Franciscans."... Then she suddenly looked up with a laugh, and exclaimed

" There we are! "

" What?" Talking about religion. I told you it was infectious in this country. You've caught it from the Persians, and now I am getting it from you ! If we were in London we should no more dream of discussing such things than of flying. New Theology is associated with the suburbs, of course, ...(Stevens: 1911, p. 187

The seemingly unconscious linking of the *malekoot* with the New Theology in the passage by Ethel Stevens (Lady Drower) above brings us to Campbell's most controversial work *The New Theology*. The New Theology controversy broke out on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1907. In a *Daily Mail* interview Campbell stated his belief that the recorded events of the "historical" Jesus were merely legend, which had little or nothing to do with the divine spirit of Christ, the importance of which lay in its immanence, the presence of Christ in men and history. Whilst this sort of thinking was commonplace at the City Temple, published baldly in the press, without context - it created a storm. Demands were made for Campbell to resign. The controversy took on a life of its own: the more Campbell attempted to explain his position the more he aggravated his opponents. The *Christian Commonwealth* became the organ of the new movement and by the year-end could report its best ever circulation. Gradually Dawson enlarged the influence of his paper to include Catholic Modernism, the Liberal Movement in the Church of England and other progressive spiritual movements. In June 1909 Dawson set up an editorial board of which Campbell was chairman. The board included T. K. Cheyne, Sir Richard Stapley both of whom were connected to the Baha'i Movement. In an attempt to clarify his position Campbell published *The New Theology* in the March of 1907, which was reprinted in April, May and September of that year and again in January 1908. Most of what it said, had been said before in his sermons, and it might be argued that it simply reinforced the entrenched positions of his supporters and opponents. In it he defines the New Theology and this definition is quoted in its entirety:

"Where or when the name New Theology arose I do not know, but it has been in existence for a least one generation. It is neither of my invention nor of my choice. It has long been in use both in this country and in America to indicate the attitude of those who believe that the fundamentals of the Christian faith need to be rearticulated in terms of the immanence of God. Those who take this view do not hold that there is any need for a new religion, but that the forms in which the religion of Jesus is commonly presented are inadequate and misleading. What is wanted is freshness and simplicity of statement. The New Theology is not new except in the sense that it seeks to substitute simplicity for complexity and to get down to moral values in its use of religious terms. Our objection is not so much to the venerable creeds of Christendom as to the ordinary interpretations of those creeds. And, creeds or no creeds, we hold that the religious experience which came

to the world in Jesus of Nazareth is enough for all our needs, and only requires to be freed from limiting statements in order to lay firm hold once more upon the civilised world. The New Theology is an untrammelled return to the Christian sources in the light of modern thought. Its starting point is a re-emphasis of the Christian belief in the divine immanence in the universe and in mankind. This doctrine is certainly not new, but it requires to be placed effectively in the foreground of Christian preaching. In the immediate past the doctrine of the divine transcendence - that is, the obvious truth that the infinite being of God must transcend the infinite universe - has been presented in such a way as to amount to a practical dualism, and to lead men to think of God as above and apart from His world instead of expressing Himself through His world. I repeat that this dualism is practical, not theoretical, but that it exists is plain enough from such statements as that of the present-day theologian who speaks of God's "eternal eminence, and His descent on a created world." This kind of theologising leads straight to the conclusion that God is to all intents and purposes quite distinct from His creation, although He possesses a full and accurate knowledge of all that goes on in it and reserves to Himself the right to interfere. In what sense language like this leaves room for the divine immanence it is difficult to see. The New Theology holds that we know nothing and can know nothing of the Infinite Cause whence all things proceed except as we read Him in His universe and in our own souls. It is the immanent God with whom we have to do, and if this obvious fact is once firmly grasped it will simplify all our religious conceptions and give us a working faith." (Campbell: 1908, p. 7)

Whilst the insistence upon the immanence of God might appear to contradict the Baha'i doctrine of the unknowable nature of God who can only be understood by humanity through His manifestations, in a sense it does not. For the Baha'i understanding of God is not identical with that of the Christian concept of a transcendent God. Furthermore the early Baha'is do not seem to have had a clear understanding of Baha'i belief in this area as is indicated by frequent questions about Pantheism which may be rooted in New Theology concepts.

In the *New Theology* Campbell explained his commitment to socialism and for many of his followers this may have been the first indication of these sympathies.

*Christianity and the Social Order* was published later in the year expanding on this theme. Campbell's opponents were not limited to the Nonconformist ministry. Many socialists were dismissive of Campbell's grasp of socialist theory:

"Such trends were suddenly presented as a party-line in 1906 under the tendentious title of the 'New Theology.' The founder of the group, R. J. Campbell, announced that the New Theology was the religious counterpart of Socialism, for Campbell was a Fabian. In 1907 a summer school was held at Penmaenmawr, 'with the object of linking the movement more closely with social reform.'<sup>1</sup> But Campbell was a superficial thinker with little knowledge of Socialism or social reform, and it has been alleged that the basis of the relationship aimed at was little more than the mere fact that the New Theology and Socialism were both new and both in the 'spirit of the age' and so must be in fundamental agreement, and it has also been alleged that 'almost every work by the school bears the word "new" in the title.'<sup>12</sup>

Some went even further in their condemnation:

... why else the transports of excitement from the mid 1900s, over the Rev. R. J. Campbell's New Theology whose novelty amounted to little more than a vaguely universalist optimism plus an I.L.P.-ish politics, the whole mixture yeasted with fashionably evolutionistic waffle? (Barrow: 1986, p.230)

Whilst it is fair to say that Campbell was neither a great nor original thinker, it should be pointed out that he never made any such claims for himself. Campbell was simply a pastor with some interesting, if unusual, ideas. The controversy surrounding his ideas was not of his making, although it might be argued that his poor handling of the situation caused it to get out of proportion. Certainly, there were many people who found his ideas attractive, if only because they mirrored their own. It is correct to point out that this was one of many emergent creeds with "new" in the title. New Theology was very much "of the times", as was socialism that it sought to merge with Christianity.

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<sup>12</sup>Quoted in Grant, John W, *Free Churchmanship in England 1870-1940*.  
No date or publisher given, Grant, op. Cit. 139

Campbell weathered the storm for several more years, spending most of 1911 in the United States on a lecture tour. His ever-problematic health caused him to reduce his workload on his return but more importantly a spiritual crisis was impending. Perhaps Campbell had never had the inner convictions assumed by his supporters or perhaps the pressure of being perceived as the leader of the “Second Reformation” was just too much but in 1914 Campbell had a severe breakdown. When he returned to the pulpit two years later he would no longer stand by his thesis, and had embraced the “other”.

The beginning of the end of the New Theology came in 1907, when an old friend of Campbell’s from his days at Oxford published a rebuttal of the New Theology entitled *The New Theology and the Old Religion*. Charles Gore, Bishop of Birmingham, took up the New Theology in his Lent lectures in Birmingham Cathedral. He published all eight along with five sermons, all of which refuted Campbell’s analyses. Gore’s book might be regarded simply as a well-written traditional response to a rather lightweight challenge from an ephemeral heresy except for the extraordinary effect that it had. Campbell wrote in his *Spiritual Pilgrimage*

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By the middle of 1914 at the furthest all this was clear to me, and it was only a matter of time before I should feel free to act upon it. I felt that, as Bishop Gore says, the Church of England had a special mission in the world, that of witnessing for a liberal Catholicism. My affinities were with that, and I knew it. That, despite all its exaggerations and incoherences, was what the new theology movement had consciously or unconsciously been seeking. There could be no returning to Protestant individualism; in the corporate unity of the Catholic Church, and that alone, was full satisfaction to be found for my religious needs. One had to get into the main stream of Christian history if that were possible.

(Campbell: 1916, p.274)

In 1916 Reginald Campbell was ordained a priest of the Church of England by Charles Gore, Bishop of Birmingham and he took up his first employment as priest of St. Philip’s Cathedral Church, Birmingham. He later went on to parishes in Brighton and Westminster, and he continued writing and published numerous books. He remained a staunch socialist within the Church’s High Anglican party. Despite his frail health, he lived to ninety years of age. He never again rose to prominence or was embroiled in such

heated controversy. Perhaps his work at the City Temple is best summed up by Warren Smith:

Campbell's tenure at The City Temple was a dozen years. The years of brilliant tumult were from 1907 to 1910. When he had gone, those who had sat under his spell must have wondered if it had not all been a dream. They had had the sense of riding the crest of a new reformation into a reformed society. The Kingdom of Heaven was attainable - perhaps almost at hand. Then the angelic man who had brought them to these heights became confused, confessed his error, and left them, as the War came upon them and swept away the old Europe. When the great let-downs of the world are recounted, a special word will need to be said for the pre-War congregation at London's City Temple. (Smith: 1967, p.233)

Campbell was involved with many of the causes in which Baha'is were active, for instance, the Independent Labour Party, and the Women's Freedom League. As a member of the editorial board of *Christian Commonwealth* he would have been acquainted with the Baha'i T. K. Cheyne as well as periodic Baha'i contributors such as Pole. Yet, how important the Baha'is were to Campbell is unclear. He makes no reference to Baha'ism in his spiritual autobiography, *A Spiritual Pilgrimage*. This book is a detailed record of the influences on his theological development, and there he lists books and people who he claims influenced him. It is intended to show that he never deviated too far from Christian orthodoxy and was always moving towards Anglicanism. Throughout the book he stresses his connection with Anglican churchmen, which makes his omission of his foremost New Theology disciple in the Church of England rather curious. Basil Wilberforce not only supported the New Theology and wrote a book of that name, he was to introduce Campbell to Wellesley Tudor Pole and his Glastonbury vessel and ultimately to Baha'ism. Wilberforce's interest in Spiritualism was important to Campbell's friend Oliver Lodge who was a founding member of the Psychic Research Society. Despite his admiration of all things Anglican, one churchman, Thomas Cheyne, does come in for scathing criticism.

"When I recall the wild extremes to which some of the speculations of twenty years ago went I can but marvel at my own docility under their bold assertions; I believed them too readily, as did others. Professor Cheyne must be credited with a

certain measure of responsibility for this among English readers. His Jerahmeel theory is only one instance out of many that might be adduced in illustration of his tendency to erect elaborate superstructures upon the flimsiest foundations. No one could call his scholarship in question, but his bias was always in the direction of denying the historicity of events, narratives, and personalities as presented in scripture. The plain meaning of anything was abhorrent to him; he must always hunt for the myth of which it was the embodiment. But this habit became rather serious when he put the *Encyclopaedia Biblica* on the market as an authoritative work of reference for Bible students at large. Such a comprehensive accumulation of learning ought to have contained only assured critical results, or at least have indicated plainly when the individual judgements advanced were open to doubt, whereas it did anything but that.” (Campbell: 1916, p.117)

It may be that these two men were never of great significance to Campbell, or perhaps they were influences better deleted from an explanation of a return to orthodoxy. However, as Campbell is at times almost brutally self critical in his attempt to absolve himself his of former errors, there would not appear to be any reason to doubt his honesty in this matter. He makes no reference to Baha’ism in any published work and is in fact rather dismissive of “Eastern” religions in general, (Campbell: 1916, p.106/7).

### *1.7 Basil Wilberforce*

The other churchman of crucial importance to the Baha’i Movement was Albert Basil Orme Wilberforce (1841-1916) who was born on 14<sup>th</sup> February, 1841, the youngest son of Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford and subsequently of Winchester, and grandson of William Wilberforce campaigner in the British Parliament for the abolition of slavery and the slave trade. His mother had died from fever less than a month after his birth, a circumstance attributed to the fact that the town drain passed directly beneath the ecclesiastical family home. He was educated at Eton and Exeter College, Oxford where he first joined the Freemasons.

Basil Wilberforce joined the Apollo Lodge at Oxford in 1862, and proceeded in due time to higher grades of the craft. His Masonic certificates, carefully docketed lie before me as I write. (Russell: 1918, p.14 note 1)



He was ordained in 1866 as chaplain to the Bishop of Oxford and went on to become curate of Cuddleston, Oxfordshire, of Seaton, Devonshire and St. Jude's, Southsea, before being appointed Rector of St. Mary's Southampton in 1871. In 1894 he became Canon of Westminster Abbey and by virtue of holding that office he became the Rector of St. John the Evangelist, Smith Square. In 1896 he added the Chaplaincy of the House of Commons to his duties. He published a number of works including, *The Trinity of Evil* 1885; *Sermons Preached in Westminster Abbey*, 1898; second series 1902; *Following on to Know*, 1904; *Speaking Good of His Name*, 1905; *Sanctification by the truth*, 1906; *New Theology*, 1908; *The Hope that is in me*, 1909; *The Power that Worketh in Us*, 1910.

Wilberforce was a Liberal and supported Gladstone, who in turn repaid him by appointing him to the Canonry of Westminster - but with the proviso that he did not preach abstinence from alcohol from the pulpit of Westminster Abbey. However much an individual and an innovator, he could not have been closer to the heart of the establishment of the nation. He performed his State duties meticulously, carrying the Imperial Crown at the coronation of Edward VII in 1902 (and the Queen's Crown at the coronation of George V in 1910).

It is not easy to summarise what Wilberforce believed in, as his biographer, Russell points out, "Wilberforce was always a good deal swayed by what was in the air" (Russell: 1918, p. 68). His views were changeable and eclectic. Russell summates that he believed in traditional divinity, American mystagogues, and divine immanence, and that he never lost hold on the central facts of Christianity. Wilberforce was rigorous in some matters and infinitely flexible and liberal in others. He campaigned vigorously for the Temperance lobby; he signed the anti-drink pledge in 1873; and he tried to introduce grape juice for communion wine. He had no respect at all for the medical profession and was totally opposed to vivisection. His openness in matters of religion drew criticism. He was condemned for allowing an un-baptised Hindu to address his congregation from the pulpit. He also administered the sacrament anointing the sick with oil - something quite out of keeping with current Church of England practices. Much of his spiritual direction had come from outside the church. He used to attend the annual conferences held at Broadlands in Hampshire (later the home of Earl Mountbatten), which had been started

by American Quakers and welcomed all-comers. Here Wilberforce met James Williamson Farquhar, who had by turns been a Presbyterian, a Swedenborgian, a Spiritualist - and had even lectured on behalf of atheism. Farquhar's *Gospel of Divine Humanity* had a profound influence on Wilberforce. Through the Broadlands conferences he became more ecumenical in outlook. Despite Russell's contention that he had an "open mind" on the subject, the Archdeacon was also a dedicated attendee of spiritualist seances. For him, communication with the departed seemed a perfectly normal and proper thing to do, in no way in conflict with his ministry. His father, Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, had also been accused of "table tapping". Something of his metaphysical position is shown in this extract of his vision of the Creed:

"... The Holy Spirit is the Lord, the Life-giver and the Sustainer of the Universe; the Inspirer of art, science, literature, prophesy, inspiration holiness, prayer. Though limitless, dateless and universal, He is revealed as discoverable and accessible in the Holy Catholic Church. He is the invisible bond between souls that are sundered. He assures of pardon; convinces of the non-reality of death; and of the endless continuity of the individual life. Amen." (Russell: 1918, p. 120)

Unlike many of those convinced of communication with the dead, however, Wilberforce rejected the doctrine of reincarnation. In a letter to his brother Reginald dated Easter 1913, he wrote:

"I gave reasons again for my abhorrence of the doctrine of reincarnation. I utterly disbelieve in it. Fancy the Prodigal Son, after his time in "Deva Khan", with his ring and his fatted calf, being sent back to there to work out his karma! He deserved it!! The theory is not in the old eastern faiths - not a trace of it in the Atharva Veda, the oldest record in the world." (Russell: 1918, p. 122)

Wilberforce was totally committed to women's suffrage. A notable feature of the congregation at his Church of St. John the Evangelist, Smith Square, was that women outnumbered men by ten to one. It was observed that 'women somehow felt safe with him', pouring out their troubles 'into his patient ears, secure not only of genuine sympathy but also of sensible advice'. His biographer wrote:

He had known in his life the guiding influence of a woman's love and his sense of what he owed to it affected his view of everything that pertained to womankind. Conspicuously it made him an eager advocate of female suffrage; it led him to rely on woman's help in works or moral reclamation; and it inclined him to a lenient judgement on woman's faults, even when the suffragettes tried to destroy John's Church.

However, perhaps Russell's most perceptive comment on his commitment to the cause of women is the following,

an eager advocate of women's suffrage ... his sympathy with feminism was reinforced by his impatience of order and discipline. He was instinctively at war with whatever, in his view, hampered the free work of the spirit ...(Russell: 1918, p. 117)

Like Campbell, Wilberforce does not seem to have been particularly influenced by his involvement with the Baha'is. However, his importance to the Baha'is was enormous especially during the first visit of 'Abdu'l Baha. Wilberforce was first introduced to Wellesley Tudor Pole on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1907. Pole's friends Christine and Janet Allen had attended some lectures given by Wilberforce on the relationship of Eastern religions to Christianity, when visiting London in the spring of 1907. They felt that he was someone of learning and influence in whom they could entrust the story of the artefact they had found in Glastonbury. On 20<sup>th</sup> July 1907 the Glastonbury vessel was presented to a number of important friends of Wilberforce, including Rev RJ Campbell and Alice Buckton, at a meeting called for that purpose at Wilberforce's home in Dean's Yard, Westminster. The importance of the Glastonbury vessel to the Baha'i Movement is discussed at length elsewhere. Suffice to say at this point it provides evidence of a link between Wilberforce, Campbell and Buckton immediately prior to Pole's claim that he first heard of the Baha'is when in Constantinople in 1908. Thus it would appear that Wilberforce first encountered the Baha'is through what we will later describe as the Celtic Network. Wilberforce was deeply revered by many of the early Baha'is. The following poem was written by Alice Buckton shortly after his death; it indicates both the importance and the spiritual station which they attributed to him.

## BASIL WILBERFORCE

Fearless and true ! thou veteran of GOD !  
Forth-strider into dark and turbulent ways,  
Pitiless to the false, and to the faint  
Most pitiful - how art thou gone from us !  
By that deep brain and full persuasive strength,  
By the slow step and clear arraigining voice,  
Swift with a scorn that spent its living dash  
Like summer lightning ! by the wistful smile  
And free uplifted head, companied round -  
To those that watched - with viewless ministries !  
Long shall we miss thee ! nay, not miss thee ! for,  
That steady power that drew our pilgrim feet,  
The Thing we saw yet saw not - Presence, Life,  
Verity of Verities ! we yet shall find  
When we arrive, leaving behind us here  
These fast deciduous days; and stand at last  
Where now thou movest, working hand in hand  
With all thou lovest, and the New-lit Dawn !

Another point of contact between Wilberforce and the Baha'i Movement was Lady Blomfield. The following is from the unpublished biography written by her daughter Mary Hall.

“At the time of which I am writing, she admired the fearless teaching of R. J. Campbell who had dared to write a book called “The New Theology”, but she had greater and deeper respect for the interpretation of Christianity given by Basil Wilberforce, Archdeacon of Westminster. Every Sunday she would go to St John’s Westminster to hear the enlightened Archdeacon preach. He became a much revered friend of my mother’s.” (Hall: undated, p.7)

Blomfield embraced Baha’ism in Paris in 1907. When she returned to London, she attended meetings at the Higher Thought Centre and wrote “at this time (late

1908/1909?) we had the pleasure of hearing Mr. Wellesley Tudor-Pole (sic), who explained to us the deeper significance of what afterwards became known as the Great Event of the Baha'i Cause" (Blomfield: 1940, p.3). Pole would seem to be the contact between Wilberforce and Baha'ism, not Blomfield. Although Blomfield's exposure to Baha'ism was slightly earlier than Pole's she appears to be somewhat in awe of him. Certainly Pole acted as Wilberforce's messenger and envoy to 'Abdu'l Baha. Wilberforce's ideas, his belief in Spiritualism and his acceptance of the Glastonbury Vessel as the Holy Grail would place him closer to Pole than to more mainstream Baha'i thought.

Neither Campbell nor Wilberforce plays any role in 'Abdu'l Baha's second visit, which raises the question as to whether they were perhaps not as enamoured with the reality of the Baha'is as with the theory of Baha'ism. Certainly, the anti-Baha'i writer Samuel Wilson believed so:

"He ['Abdu'l Baha] was as Canon Wilberforce said, "not an orator, nor even a preacher," practised in public address. One of the distinguished clergymen whose pulpit he occupied said to me, "The man has no special message. He is a faker." (Wilson: 1915, p. 281)

Wilson's bias is too strong to accept his claim unreservedly and, unfortunately, he does not reference his quotation from Wilberforce nor name his other source. However, the absence from the Baha'i scene of both men and their failure to write anything about Baha'ism must have some significance. Campbell's influence amongst the Baha'is as a theologian was greater than that of Wilberforce. But Wilberforce seems to have had the greater personal involvement. He was known to many of the Baha'is and held in deep respect.

Campbell and Wilberforce were central figures in the shaping of a context for the Baha'i teachings to be perceived as relevant. Campbell's New Theology was especially important, since many of the pre-1913 Baha'is can be linked to the *Christian Commonwealth* and it is hard to imagine that any of them were unfamiliar with New Theology. The Baha'i message, as it was first introduced to the West, can be deconstructed into values which in turn become the conduits of context into which

relevance can be ascertained. If the values are identified as comprising the message, then peace and harmony, equality and unity of religions are commonly held by Liberal Christianity, New Theology and Baha'ism. Whilst the centrality of Jesus was a feature of both Liberal Christianity and New Theology, this was not true of Baha'ism. On the other hand the role of Baha'u'llah was unique to Baha'ism but only partially understood. This demonstrates the incompleteness of the message and the consequent scope for inference and enrichment. A number of other movements were important in the development of the Baha'i Movement and they are discussed in detail below.

### *1.8 Religious Liberalism - Unitarianism*

Perhaps the most important single religious trend behind the introduction of Baha'ism to Britain was Unitarianism. Although only a few of the Baha'is were members of Unitarian churches, Unitarians were instrumental in a number of religious developments which formed part of the context in which the Baha'i teaching were perceived as relevant. The historical roots of this Unitarianism are deep in Renaissance and Reformation Europe. A small group of Radical Reformers from Italy began asking whether or not the traditional understanding of the Trinity as three co-equal "persons" or personalities was scriptural. They were much encouraged by a discovery made by Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536), a Dutch Catholic, who had shown that the most famous of the traditional Trinitarian proof-texts "These are three that bear record in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit and these three are one" (1 John 5:7 AV) did not appear in the most reliable and ancient New Testament manuscripts. The first Anti-Trinitarian congregation in England and Wales was set up by John Biddle (1615-1662). Biddle's friend Henry Hedworth (1626-1705) was introduced to a Transylvanian Unitarian by some exiled Polish Socinians, and became the first known person to use the word 'Unitarian' in printed English. "I will therefore present to the reader", he wrote in 1672, "a short account of these men's opinions concerning Christ, who for distinction sake call themselves Unitarians". Late in the seventeenth century Socinian views began appearing within the Church of England. Thomas Firmin (1632-1697) an Anglican merchant, assisted Socinian refugees and subsidised a series of Unitarian Tracts. Samuel Clarke (1675-1729) an Anglican vicar, published *The Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity* (1712) in which he argued that supreme honour should be given only to God the Father. Clarke's book was widely read among Nonconformists as well,

and when in 1719 the Dissenters of Exeter put this disputed point of doctrine to their friends in London, a split occurred among the Dissenters of profound significance. From that date reluctant and deliberate Dissenters, thrown together in 1662, rearranged themselves into Subscribers and Non-subscribers to creeds and statements of faith. The main stream of organised Unitarianism was to grow from among the Non-subscribers. The right of private judgement in religious faith, free from subscription to binding creeds and statements of faith, from this time on became of major importance to the liberal heritage. For Non-subscribers the church was a 'saving' community, not a society for the already 'saved'. Practical Christianity was preferable to doctrinal controversy, and religious faith should above all be reasonable. Unitarianism developed as a liberal movement emphasising a strong commitment to social change. By the start of the twentieth century it was well established in Britain, Europe and the United States. One of the Unitarian inspired developments which prepared the way for Baha'ism was Liberal Christianity. The international movement of religious liberals was launched by Charles William Wendte, an American Unitarian minister, when he addressed the Boston Unitarian Club on the subject of "Liberal Christianity in England and Germany" on 10<sup>th</sup> January 1900. On 30<sup>th</sup> May 1901 the First Congress of the International Council of Unitarian and other Religious Liberals was held in Boston. It was attended by seven hundred representatives from twenty eight countries. They organised biannual conferences in Amsterdam, Geneva, Boston, Cologne, Berlin and Paris, before the outbreak of war disrupted their activities, which included a planned world tour of western theists who were to act as a kind of ecumenical leavening. The Liberal Christians were not set on starting a new church but rather on finding common ground between the religious left, whatever tradition they formally adhered to. The generally accepted beliefs included an acceptance of the non-divine Jesus, a "Modernist" view of scriptural criticism, humanitarianism, stronger bonds with non-Christian traditions especially Islam, social issues included temperance, pacifism, women's rights and socialism.

In an interview in *Christian Commonwealth* (August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1910) Dr Wendte stated, "More and more it is apparent through the study of comparative religions, that Christianity can no longer claim to be the only religion given for the salvation of mankind; more and more the beauty that is contained in old and ethnic forms of religion are being disclosed to us". He goes on to outline a basis of a universal religion, he claims

that the basis of Hinduism, Christianity and Islam is that of “revelation through nature, history and the soul of man; the incarnation of God, not only once and exceptionally in history in the person of Jesus Christ, but in differing degrees in all the great seers and saviours of the human race ...”

A close colleague of Wendte's, Dr C. W. Elliot, writing in the *Christian Commonwealth* (August 31<sup>st</sup>, 1910) described the universal religion thus, “Finally, this twentieth-century religion is not only to be in harmony with the great secular movements of modern society - democracy, individualism, social idealism, the zeal for education, the spirit of research, the modern tendency to welcome the new, the fresh powers of preventative medicine, and the recent advances in business and industrial ethics...” The *Christian Commonwealth* took up the cause of Liberal Christianity. It will be recalled that the Progressive League, a group organised around the publication became the Liberal Christian League and that Reginald Campbell remained president of it until 1911, thus, Liberal Christianity fused with New Theology to form an international ecumenical radical movement.

Many of those around the Baha'i Movement were familiar with Liberal Christianity prior to and concurrent with, their involvement with Baha'ism. The role of the *Christian Commonwealth* and Campbell in both causes cannot be underestimated. 'Abdu'l Baha attended the Liberal Christian's International Congress of Religions in Paris in 1913, as did Tagore and Jayatilaka. The *Christian Commonwealth* (July 16<sup>th</sup>, 1913) reported “if a universal religion is possible or desirable, it is to be achieved through the labours of such men as these as much as by the labours of the distinguished Western scholars who met in Paris today.”

The multi-faith emphasis of Liberal Christianity formed an important plank in the thinking of those who felt that they could honour religious leaders equally with Jesus and still remain Christians. The “value” of religious unity and the development of a universal religion which was promoted by Liberal Christianity was an obvious context in which the Baha'i teachings of universalism and the unity of religions could be found relevant.

The influence of Unitarianism was not restricted to Christianity; perhaps one of the most significant religious developments internationally was the impact of



monotheistic and Unitarian concepts on Hinduism. The founder of this movement, sometimes referred to as “The Founder of A Universal Religion” was Raja Rammohan Roy, (1772-1833). Rammohan received an excellent education including the study of Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit; he read Aristotle and Euclid as well as the Qur’an. He became particularly well versed in the Upanishads and this led him to become an ardent admirer and advocate of the monotheistic religion inculcated in the Upanishads. His resistance to what he considered was a debased form of religion which formed popular Hinduism led to a breach with his family and set him travelling across India and Tibet (Rushbrook (ed.) 1985, p. 495) Rammohan joined the East India Company in 1796 as a clerk and began to learn English. After the death of his sister in law in an act of *suttee*, he campaigned against this practice until the passing of the Suttee Act in 1829. In 1814 Rammohan began his life’s work in earnest. He published the Upanishads in Sanskrit and later in English and Bengali and continued his attack on Hindu orthodoxy with the publication of “A Defence of Hindu Theism” and “A second Defence of the Monotheistical System of the Vedas” both in 1817. He also engaged in controversy with Christian missionaries. In order to study Christianity he learnt Hebrew and Greek with the help of his lifelong friend William Adam. He then began translating the Gospels into Bengali. This undertaking proved eventful as it resulted in Adam publicly announcing his conversion from Trinitarianism to Unitarianism. In 1820 he published “The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness,” a compilation of the teachings of Jesus from the Gospels with the miracles and dogma left out. This caused a major controversy amongst the missionary community and he followed it up with “Appeals to the Christian Public in Defence of the Precepts of Jesus.” Religious reform was his ultimate end but in the process he concerned himself with all manner of secular and social reform, especially concerning the role of women and education.

Rammohan’s greatest desire was to bring together people of all races and creeds for the worship of the one God. In his quest for the unity of religions he opened, on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1830, the first Temple of Universal Worship of The One without a Second. From the principles upon which the Temple was founded developed the Brahmo Samaj:

“..which in the fullness of time was to take its stand on universal brotherhood and the universal worship of the common Father of all. Later under Devendra Nath Tagore - the next leader of the Brahma Samaj - was evolved a congregation with a covenant and a public declaration of faith. It was left to the genius of Keshub Chunder Sen, the third great leader, fifty years after, to form it into an organised church which recognises in all prophets and saints a harmony, in all scriptures a unity and through all dispensations a continuity. (Rushbrook (ed.) 1985, p. 500)

The Brahma Samaj had many notable members, including Devendra Nath Tagore and Dwarakanath Tagore the grandfather and father of the Nobel Prize winning poet Rabindranath Tagore, who spent much of 1911 attempting to heal the divisions into which the Brahma Samaj had split. Another notable who passed through their ranks was Swami Vivekananda. He addressed the “Parliament of Religions” at the Chicago World Fair, where one of the earliest mentions of Baha’ism in the west was made, and is named as an influence on Lady Blomfield by her daughter in her biography (Hall: undated, p. 6). The third leader of the Brahma Samaj, Keshub Chunder Sen, announced in 1880 a New Dispensation, which he declared was a divinely ordained mission to teach the harmony of religions and the union of all faiths in one great religion.

The relationship between these two Unitarian inspired movements was laid out in 1910 when two leaders of the Brahma Samaj (Church of the Eternal Spirit or Church of God) the Rev. P.K. Sen and Professor T.L. Vaswani “visited the offices of the *Christian Commonwealth* to bring greetings from the east to the organ of a sister movement to their own” (i.e. New Theology/Liberal Christianity). The interview was published in the 12<sup>th</sup> October 1910 edition.

“Are there many points of agreement between the gospel of the ‘New Dispensation’ and the ‘New Theology’?”

“Yes, there are points of close contact. In the first place we unite with ‘New Theologians’ in emphasising the doctrine of divine immanence. Indeed, the note of emphasis in our theology is that God is a living reality, a self revealing spirit, and so immanent in each individual soul”...

“What are the points of difference between the ‘New Dispensation’ and the ‘New Theology’?”

“I think they should be interpreted as points of distinction. First, whereas you speak of your movement as a theology we speak of ours as a dispensation, thereby emphasising the truth that the hand of God is in it ... Again, we do not speak of this as a Christian movement, because we believe our faith should be the synthesis of all world religion. We therefore speak of our faith as the religion of harmony. We believe that we are on the threshold of a new age which will witness the reunion of religions of the East and West the one great Religion, which is God communion and God service This synthesis must be realised by each one of us individually.”

“What is the harmonising religion?”

“The harmonising note is to be found in the contact of all religions with God and his self revelation.”

“How do you account for diversity?”

“We believe that God’s revelation is not oral but vital ... God works by influencing souls, and each assimilates impressions according to its personal response...”

“You were indicating some of the points of distinction between the New Dispensation and the New Theology. Are there others?”

“We do not seek to make Jesus the centre of our faith as does Liberal Christianity. The focus of the faith is the self revealing spirit. We believe in a fraternity of world-teachers. We revere and honour all the prophets, and so some of our members feel specially drawn to Christ, some to Buddha.”

“Have you a social gospel?”

“We believe in the synthesis of the social and the spiritual. Religion, we maintain, must be at once a mystical communion with God and a practical fellowship with man. There are two essential points in our social message: the essential solidarity of mankind and the harmonising of east and west. Also important is the education of girls, the training of Indian women, the help of Indian widows, and the uplifting of people generally.”

Thus the connectedness is made clear. They agree on the immanence of God, the link between the social and the spiritual and a general concept of religious unity. The Brahmo Samaj disagreed on an important point of convergence with Liberal Christianity, namely that of the centrality of Jesus. Moreover, a new element is now added, the unity of east and west. The final paragraph of the passage quoted above is

almost identical to the values which we have identified as forming the Baha'i message as it was understood in Britain at this time.

The Brahmo Samaj was well known to people around the Baha'i Movement, not only through the pages of *Christian Commonwealth* but also through public meetings at the Higher Thought Centre. The similarity between some Baha'i beliefs and those of the Brahmo Samaj are obvious. What is also significant is that 'Abdu'l Baha added Krishna and Buddha to the list of manifestations of God recognised by Baha'is, though neither had been included by Baha'u'llah. The Brahmo Samaj was linked to the Unitarian college Manchester College, Oxford where the Rev. P.K. Sen was a Fellowship scholar and the Rev. Thomas Cheyne was a professor. Cheyne also claimed membership of the Nava Vidhan (Lahore). The leading Unitarian scholar and member of the Liberal Christian Movement, J. Estlin Carpenter, Principal of Manchester College, Oxford and a colleague of Cheyne's, was also involved with the Brahmo Samaj Society. The role of these Unitarian academics is examined when we consider the "Academic Network" in the next chapter. 'Abdu'l Baha visited the Brahmo Samaj Society in London.

### *1.9 Religious Liberalism - Islam*

During this period the first efforts to convert indigenous English to Islam were taking place. The significance of the activity of the Muslim missions is the apparent blurring of Islamic and Christian traditions, which allowed individuals to convert to Islam whilst remaining active churchmen. This was as a result of the elasticity of dogma which the teachings of Liberal Christianity, Deism and Unitarianism had conferred upon orthodox Christianity. The importance of this development is in understanding how people could choose to believe themselves to be both Baha'is and Christians at the same time. Furthermore, the apparent ability to accept the prophet-hood of Mohammed and the Qur'an and remain a Christian is relevant to many of the early Baha'is. The Western Baha'is played down any connection between Baha'ism and Islam. While there is no evidence of cross conversion the Baha'is were aware of the Ahmadiyyia Muslim mission in England led by Kwaja Kamel ud Din. The similarities between Baha'ism and Ahmadiyyia Islam are worth noting, although of course they are mutually incompatible. Kamel ud Din and 'Abdu'l Baha met on at least two occasions, at Woking Mosque and at the Conference of Religions in Paris in 1913.

The first mosque and mission was begun by a solicitor called Mr W. H. Quillam in Liverpool. Mr Quillam seems to have been a self appointed Imam until he “ran away”. The shortcomings of the Liverpool mission were described at length by Mr. J. F. Hewitt, Organising Secretary of the Church Missionary Society in Liverpool in *The Moslem World*. The visit to the “mosque” which turns out to be a “single-fronted, three storied house, rateable value £30 at the most, empty, unpainted, dirty, with broken windows.” (*The Moslem World*, Vol. 1, 1911, p. 345) The Muslim mission to England is again reported upon in a *Moslem World* in an article by H. U. Weitbrecht, entitled “A Moslem Mission to England”. The worship in Mr Quillam’s Liverpool mosque is described thus:

A Liverpool solicitor, Mr. W. H. Quillam, having first adopted Deism and then Islam, had rented a house in the West Derby Road, in the ground floor rooms of which he arranged a sort of Mohammedan worship. One service was held on Fridays, and two at eleven and seven (not Moslem hours of prayer) on Sundays. The room was furnished with chairs, the Koran was read in English and hymns were sung to a harmonium; in fact, the whole was a farrago of Moslem and Christian elements. Nothing was done to erect a real mosque, though many Mohammedan seamen and traders visit Liverpool. In 1891 Mr Quillam claimed thirty English adherents, including children; but since his repudiation by Indian leaders little has been heard of his "mosque" in Liverpool. (*The Moslem World*, Vol. 4, 1914, p.195)

Weitbrecht is correct in pointing out the curious symbiosis of Muslim and Christian religion. In a spirited attempt to defend the Liverpool mission and the British Muslim Association, Yehya-En-Nasr Parkinson, writing in response to Weitbrecht points out “A hymn was sung, selected from a list of Unitarian hymns specially compiled for the purpose. If a copy can be obtained, those hymns will, I think, be found to be purely Islamic in word and spirit.” (*Islamic Review*, 1914). Despite Parkinson’s best efforts to defend these activities hymn singing is more generally associated with Christian worship than Muslim Friday prayers. A more serious attempt at missionary work was that of Khwaja Kamal ud Din, a Pleader to the Chief Court of Lahore and follower of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad who had claimed to be the Mahdi for Muslims, Christ returned for Christians and a new avatar for Hindus. The Ahmadiyya mission was first established in

Richmond, but later took control of Woking Mosque, the first purpose built mosque in England. From Woking Kamal ud Din edited the Islamic Review. An important difference between Ahmadiyya and other forms of Islam is their insistence on the unity of religions. Kamal ud Din wrote,

This generous teaching of Al-Koran prompts me to cherish feelings of love and reverence for Moses and Jesus; it enjoins upon me also to pay my respect and allegiance to Rama Chandra, Krishna, and Lord Buddha. If with Al-Koran I accept the authentic parts of the Bible as the Word of God, I regard the Gita and other holy Scriptures of India as my joint property with other Hindu brethren. Hence, in accordance with the teachings of Al-Koran, Islam is the name of every religion, creed, or faith, which has been preached from time to time in different countries and various tribes by teachers inspired by God ...

Hindustan had its Vedic Rishis, with Krishna, Ramchandra, and Gautama to follow them, China saw its teacher in the person of Confucius. If Zoroaster came to kindle the spiritual fire in Persia, the valley of the Jordan was fertilised with the Divine stream coming down the Mount of Olives. Thus, whenever and wherever evil prevailed and man became corrupt, men were raised and inspired by God to teach and restore the same old Islam, till a new state of things arose in the world, when the laws of God began to be violated in all its corners. (*Asiatic Review*, 1914, p. 60/61)

This synthesis of religious traditions was apparent in the beliefs of individuals. Writing about an Irish peer who had converted to Islam Weitbrecht notes, "he may regard himself, as Lord Headley professes, to be still a Christian after he has embraced Islam." (*Moslem World* Vol. 4, 1914, p.201) Headley was not unique, according to his entry in the *National Biographical*, since Baron Stanley of Alderley did not allow his conversion to Islam to undermine his Anglican sentiments.

"Although he was a Mussulman, he was an ardent supporter of the Church of England especially in Wales. In the diocese of Bangor in general, and on the island of Anglesey in particular, he rebuilt or restored many churches. He also worked energetically to increase the endowments of poor parishes, himself contributing largely to this object."

The interest in Eastern religions coupled with the fairly open attitude to membership brings into the context another shared value. The unity of religion aspect of Liberal Christianity was reinforced by the concept of unity of religions across East and West, and ultimately the union of East and West. This notion might be argued to be based on now outdated stereotypes of the mystic East and the materialistic West, but at the turn of the last century such ideas were radical thinking. The East West unity concept would become important in Baha'i circles with exchanges of teachers and missionaries.

### *1.10 Social Reconstructionalism - Feminism & Socialism*

As well as overtly religious causes many of those who were involved with the Baha'i Movement had been and continued to be involved in various social movements and causes. A number of early believers can be associated with the women's suffrage movement. There were three important women's suffrage organisations. The first is The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) founded in 1897 and led by Millicent Fawcett. It was the most conservative in its approach. They refused to either break the law or to damage property. They were sometimes characterised as "Votes for Ladies". They were opposed to the removal of a property qualification for franchise. Second is The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) founded 1903 and led by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters Christabel and Sylvia. This was the most militant grouping, eventually using what can only be described as terrorist tactics. Pankhurst's genius was to launch the organisation on a single issue, that of votes for women. She refused to be drawn on such issues as universal suffrage or property qualifications. She argued that even if limited franchise was granted to women, sooner or later all women would get the vote. Membership of the organisation required withdrawal from political parties that did not support votes for women. After the 1907 split with WFL the rule by the Pankhursts was autocratic. Sylvia Pankhurst was eventually expelled from the organisation for refusing her sister's order to blow up Nottingham Castle. The third is The Women's Freedom League (WFL) founded in 1907 and led by Charlotte Despard and Teresa Billington-Grieg, which split from the WSPU over the role of the Pankhursts, preferring a constitution and accountable leaders (Mulvihill: 1989, p. 80-84). The WFL were militant but used civil disobedience rather than terror, refusing to fill in census forms and so on. They were also involved with wider issues around women and

children's rights. Many of the members of the WFL were also members of the Independent Labour Party, and the organisation had a strong socialist orientation. The nature of Baha'i teaching on women would make it unlikely that anybody actively involved in the anti-suffrage movement would have been drawn into the circle. Both the WSPU and the WFL numbered Baha'is amongst their supporters. The best known from the Baha'i point of view of the suffragists is Lady Sarah Blomfield. Both she and her daughters were involved with the WSPU. In 1914 as part of a mass protest against force feeding of prisoners, Mary Blomfield used her presentation at court to address the King. Christabel Pankhurst describes it thus:

A deputation to the King did enter Buckingham Palace after all and the King heard our petition. The deputation consisted of one girl, Mary Blomfield, daughter of Sir Arthur Blomfield, a friend in his day of King Edward, and granddaughter of a Bishop of London. As Mary Blomfield, at her presentation at Court, came before the King, she dropped on her knee, with her sister Eleanor standing by her, and in a clear voice claimed votes for women and pleaded: 'Your Majesty, stop forcible feeding.' (Pankhurst, C. 1987, p277)

Her sister, Sylvia also mentions the incident and refers to Lady Blomfield and her involvement with the Baha'is, neither of which seem to impress her overmuch,

At a Court function afterwards, Mary Blomfield dropped on her knees before the King and cried "For God's sake, Your Majesty, put a stop to forcible feeding!" She was hurried, as the *Daily Mirror* put it, from "the Presence," which, so the public was relieved to learn, had remained serene. Lady Blomfield intimated to the Press her repudiation of what her daughter had done Lady Blomfield had been enthusiastic for militancy of the most extreme kind, so long as it was committed by other people's daughters She had come to me at a Kensington WSPU "At Home," shortly after my release in 1913, expressing her delight that 'Abdu'l Baha, of whom she was proud to call herself a follower, had spoken with sympathy of the Suffragettes; he had suffered forty years imprisonment, she told me ecstatically, for preaching the unity of all religions and the brotherhood of man. Under his teaching she had lost all regard for the pomps and vanities of earthly existence (Pankhurst, S. 1977, p 554).



Also involved with the WSPU was Elizabeth Herrick. In an unpublished and anonymous biography in the Baha'i archives it is stated:

“Elizabeth Herrick placed herself as a soldier at the disposal of the Pankhursts; one day in obedience to orders went into Kensington High Street with a little hammer and broke a window. She spent her birthday that year in Holloway Prisons and when she came out her business was ruined. She had again flung material success to the winds for the sake of a spiritual idea.

Herrick's involvement with the WSPU is confirmed by mention of her imprisonment for two months hard labour in the suffrage periodical *Votes for Women*. The sentence was light because the damage inflicted on the windows of a government building was worth “not more than a few shillings” (*Votes for Women* March 15<sup>th</sup> 1912). She is also referred to under her professional name of “Madame Corelli” donating hats to WSPU fund raising sales from 1911 onward. Another important link between Baha'ism and feminism was Charlotte Despard. Mrs Despard, during her long and eventful life embraced every radical cause from vegetarianism to women's suffrage, from Sinn Fein to sandal wearing.<sup>13</sup> It is a mark of her farsightedness that most of the causes she espoused, with the possible exception of sandal wearing, have either been won or are now seen as mainstream. It is not known when she first became involved with the Baha'i Movement, or through whom, but her path criss-crossed that of others involved in the Movement again and again. Her biographer describes Sir Richard Stapley as “an old friend”. (*An Unhusbanded Life* pages 171 and 195). Stapley's name comes up repeatedly in accounts of 'Abdu'l Baha's visits to London. He was married to Elizabeth Jenner, who may have been a relative of Ethel Jenner Rosenberg. Between August 11<sup>th</sup> and the 26<sup>th</sup>, 1911, she addressed a Theosophical Society summer school, on “Some Aspects of the Women's Movement”. Wellesly Tudor Pole was also there, his topic - “Bahaism”. In September 1911 the Women's Freedom League newspaper *The Vote* ran a three part article by Despard entitled “A Woman Apostle in Persia” but this account of

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<sup>13</sup> Despard's sandals were made by Edward Carpenter, the writer on, amongst other issues, homosexual rights. He also wrote about Baha'ism in *Pagan and Christian Creeds* New York 1920

Tahirih, significantly, does not describe her as a suffragette. She addressed a meeting at the Clifton Guest House, owned by the Pole family and where 'Abdu'l Baha would stay when in Bristol, on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> March 1912. Her subject was the Women's Movement (*Christian Commonwealth* 27<sup>th</sup> March 1912). The forth International Summer School organised by the "Path" advertised Sir William Geddes, (who would play an important role in 'Abdu'l Baha's visit to Edinburgh) Despard and Stapley as speakers (*Christian Commonwealth* July 12<sup>th</sup>, 1912.) A prominent supporter of the WFL was Reginald Campbell, the minister of the City Temple, who wrote a pamphlet for the WFL. The publication of his church *The Christian Commonwealth* frequently carried reports of WFL activities and advertisements and vice versa. A number of other people within the Baha'i circle can be connected to the suffrage and feminist movements. Wellesley Tudor Pole's Clifton oratory was visited by a number of leading suffragettes including Annie Kenny and Emmeline Pethwick-Lawrence (Benham: 1993, p. 109). Mary Allen, the elder sister of Janet and Christine Allen, who with Kitty Tudor Pole formed the triad of maidens around the vessel in the oratory was deeply committed to the WSPU. She was imprisoned and went on hunger strike for political prisoner status. Constance Maud who wrote a book about the Baha'is entitled *Sparks among the Stubble*, also wrote about the suffrage cause in a book called *No Surrender*.

The other dominant strand of political ideology amongst the Baha'is was socialism. The importance of the *Christian Commonwealth* weekly newspaper cannot be over emphasised. Its editorial board included RJ Campbell, whose importance to the Baha'is is discussed at length in Chapter Two, Thomas Cheyne, who identified as a Baha'i, Richard Stapley, who met 'Abdu'l Baha on a number of occasions, as well as Philip Snowden, who would become the first Labour Party Chancellor of the Exchequer and Mrs Sidney Webb, who with her husband would play a leading role in the development of British socialism and under her own name achieve fame as a children's author. Not all the Baha'is around the *Christian Commonwealth* were committed socialists, for example Wellesley Tudor Pole does not appear to have been orientated towards the left, while Alice Buckton did have strong Labour Party connections, suggesting political opinions were not uniform within networks. Esslemont was chairman of the Bournemouth branch of the Independent Labour Party and wrote his first articles on the

Baha'i teachings in a socialist newspaper called *The Southern Worker*. Edward Hall's connection with the far left through his brother is described in the following chapter. Hall's poetry shows a strong socialistic bent, especially when dealing with concepts like "the brotherhood of man" and "the Parliament of Man". In fact the whole Manchester group with their proletarian origins and Unitarian connections suggest a left of centre stance.

### *1.11 Metaphysical Movements - Theosophy*

The other motif that of Gnostic and esoteric thought was well developed in the circles into which Baha'ism would emerge. The most important metaphysical group amongst the early Baha'is was the Theosophical Society. Theosophy had been founded in 1875 by Helena Blavatsky and Henry Olcott. Both the founders were deeply concerned with Spiritualism, in fact many Spiritualists became Theosophists. Blavatsky and later A.P. Sinnet claimed to be in contact with hidden masters who communicated esoteric knowledge through a series of hand written letters. By 1891 when Blavatsky died the Society was well established in Britain, the USA and India, and the Adyar Headquarters with its impressive library opened. Although Blavatsky was always a controversial figure, her reputation suffered when her mediumship was declared fraudulent by a Society for Psychical Research investigator. However, her works *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine* remain classics of their genre. Details of Blavatsky's life after she ran away from her husband Nicephore V. Blavatsky are obscure, perhaps deliberately so. Paul Johnson suggests in *Madame Blavatsky, the "Veiled Years"* that she may have been deeply influenced by Sufism and Gurdjieff. Wherever and whatever she was doing prior to her emergence as the founder of Theosophy (lit. Divine wisdom) she had a good grasp of occult and esoteric knowledge, a convincing career as a medium and a powerful personality. After Blavatsky's death the Society was dominated by Annie Besant, a woman who had formerly been a vicar's wife, a socialist and a secularist. Theosophy would seem to have been the path that Besant had been looking for, since she embraced it wholeheartedly and remained in the Society's leadership until her death. What then does a Theosophist believe? The Society is based upon Three Objects; -

1. To form the nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.
2. To encourage the study of Comparative Religion, Philosophy and Science.

3. To investigate unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in man.

Theosophy is not a religion. Besant said, "To me Theosophy is literally the Divine Wisdom ... It is not a religion but all religions are within its work". People of all faiths and none can join the society, the only bar to membership would come from their religious affiliation. It uses some of the terminology of a learned society. One becomes a fellow not a member and it is structured in orders and lodges along Masonic lines. In order to become a Fellow of the Society, one is only required to accept the three Objects. In reality, however, most adherents accept, at least in part, the teachings of the Masters as revealed to Blavatsky. This amounts to a Hindu - Buddhist inspired worldview which includes reincarnation. The division into orders, coupled with the strong personalities the Society attracted caused fragmentation into factions. This further complicates attempting to identify a single belief system. During the early years of this century the Theosophical Society was fairly influential in "alternative religion" circles, despite a relatively small membership;-

British Division: England, Wales and Scotland

1900	1520
1901	1680
1902	1670
1903	1814
1904	1791
1905	1725
1906	1770
1907	1860
1908	1910
1909	1463
1910	1181

England & Wales (Scotland became a separate section in 1910, Wales did not separate until 1922). Figures courtesy of the Theosophical Society.

Many of the Baha'is were familiar with the Theosophical Society and some had been or were members. The number of Theosophist venues visited by 'Abdu'l Baha provides ample evidence of the inter-connections between the two movements. He also revealed a number of tablets to the Theosophists. In an article entitled "Bahaism in

relation to Orthodoxy, Theosophy, and the Women's Movement" in the *Christian Commonwealth* (August 9<sup>th</sup>, 1911), Wellesley Tudor Pole made the following connections between Baha'ism and Theosophy;-

Mr Tudor Pole said the world owed a debt of gratitude to the Theosophical Societies for the closer contact they had brought between East and West. They had stood for Universal Brotherhood, and had familiarised us with the great religions of the East. Yet sixty years ago, in the most reactionary corner of the world, these great truths of brotherhood and Peace were being proclaimed. Here we find what was probably the inspiration and source of all the great spiritual movements in both East and West. A century ago the cry was for personal salvation; now it was for racial salvation, and that could only come through peace between nations, fellowship between man and man, and absolute equality between man and woman. But although Baha'u'llah was a spiritual focal point, the light was radiating through us all. We were not to come out of our societies but to illumine them.

This passage is instructive, as it shows that Baha'ism was perceived as a method of collective salvation. Unlike the personal development style of Theosophy, the lack of importance attached to the role of Baha'u'llah should also be noted. The repetition of the "East and West" motif (which will be considered in detail later in relation to orientalism) is reminiscent of the Brahma Samaj, as is the concept of light radiating through all.

Another major disagreement with Theosophy was the doctrine of reincarnation. Baha'ism does not accept this idea, whilst most Theosophists do. There is ample evidence that this caused some difficulties with the recruitment of Theosophists. 'Abdu'l Baha was not always outspoken in his rejection of reincarnation. In the following passage he seems to be leaving room for manoeuvre;-

Reincarnation is a very abstruse question. If one desires to give a satisfactory explanation, one must write a book, so that the real meanings may be fully revealed. This subject can only be explained through divine philosophy not through mere exposition of theories. Briefly stated the idea is as follows - Man is indestructible The man you see before your eyes has travelled through all the worlds of existence. The molecular atoms which go into the make up of the human

body were originally in the mineral world, and these atolls have had journeyings and coursings through all the various phases of the mineral kingdom, appearing under various forms and images. Stepping up into the vegetable kingdom these atoms have been transferred from mineral to vegetable. In the vegetable kingdom they have manifested under various shades, in a myriad of forms. Rising into a higher scale of life, we see them again in -the animal kingdom, expressing themselves through multitudes of forms and images. And now we see these indestructible atoms dawning upon the horizon of man . In the world of man they become evident through many pictures and forms. In brief these primordial atoms have coursings and transferences in infinite images. In every image they have had a certain peculiar virtue. Therefore, these primordial atoms, which have now appeared in man , have had their myriads of transferences in phenomena, and in each degree appearing with certain virtue and function. (*International Psychic Gazette*, February 1913)

The statement above is described as coming from an interview with ‘Abdu’l Baha held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> January, in Cadogan Gardens. It is similar in content to the address to Theosophists at Ethel Rosenberg’s home, White Lodge (a curiously Theosophical address), reported in *The Path*, and to his earlier statements in *Some Answered Questions*.

### *1.12 Religious Search - Spiritualism*

Another strand in the background to the introduction of Baha’ism was Spiritualism. The first journal to publish information about the Baha’i Cause was the *International Psychic Gazette*. A number of prominent Baha’is contributed to it including Elizabeth Herrick, who also wrote for another Spiritualist journal, *Superman*, Arthur Cuthbert and Isobel Fraser. Basil Wilberforce was a leading exponent of Spiritualism, Reginald Campbell expressed an interest and Wellesley Pole wrote whole books through channelling. Indeed the entire Pole family were involved. The importance of the *International Psychic Gazette* and the dominance of individuals who were Spiritualists would indicate that prior to the visit of ‘Abdu’l Baha most of the Baha’is would have been familiar with and many of them probably experienced in Spiritualism.

Modern spiritualism is usually dated to incidents at Hydesville, near Rochester, New York in 1848, although there is some evidence that contact with spirits in the form of native shamanism in America and Europe may have always co-existed with orthodox Christianity. Perhaps the most surprising aspect of spiritualism was its connection with socialism. Here again we find a link between the left leaning politics of Liberal Christianity, New Theology and another apparently unrelated aspect of relevance. The link between the two causes was primarily due to the embracing of spiritualism by the socialist Robert Owen, For Owen and other working class spiritualists, the communication between this world and the next was part of the development of humanity in preparation for the coming socialist millennium. Spiritualism and spiritual healing allowed ordinary people to perform acts of shamanism and healing, professional doctors and priests thus being relegated with the rest of their class to obscurity. Spiritualism was practised by all classes, as well as the proletarian socialistic arena there were professional mediums, usually working class women often working with a socially superior male “control” and amongst the middle classes family spiritualism predominated. Family spiritualism took place within the domestic sphere often contacting dead members of the family:

The tempestuous thrills and spills of public spiritualist life were more than offset for believers by the high tone and measured step of family seances. These small and intimate circles were considered to be the very best for spiritualist practice, and they represented the solidity and continuity that was lacking amongst the more ephemeral ranks of the infamous and renowned. Emphasis on the inherent morality of domestic mediumship became especially important at times when believers suffered attack and ridicule, but it expressed only what had been upheld from the early days when a dearth of public mediums had made private circles an absolute necessity. Leading spiritualists had always emphasised the importance of the domestic base as the backbone of the movement, and the home circle was revered as the focus for spiritual values and family harmony. The family represented the perfect milieu for uplifting manifestations. (Owen: 1989 p. 75)

Within the Baha’i circle the clearest example of middle class, family spiritualism can be found in the Pole family of Bristol. All the Poles seem to have been sensitive, but Wellesley and his sister Mary Bruce Wallace were particularly so. They communicated

entire books from spirit guides. Here Pole agrees with this family orientated model, rejecting the professional medium model. This clearly was a well-developed strand within Spiritualism, especially in the middle classes where fees were not an issue. (Pole: 1984, p. 68/9) The Pole family were all heavily involved in communication with spirits, his sister Mary Pole got whole books from a family friend "AB", while Wellesley conveyed messages from Private Dowding, a soldier who, having died fighting in France, made contact with Pole on the beach in Bournemouth in March 1917. Pole's spirit friends endorsed Baha'ism:

They were afar off. They nearly blinded me. The Messenger told me many things concerning the manifestations of God to man. He said a prophet of the Most High was in charge of each of the gateways to those Reservoirs of Light. When darkness and ignorance grew apace among men, the 'Word' was uttered. Then the prophet, whose turn it was to descend among men, made deep obeisance and opened wide his own gateway to the Reservoirs of Light. He descended to earthly regions that he might guide the spreading of the new illumination. The Messenger told me that one of these holy prophets fulfilled his divine mission during the last century. He said the illumination then released was about to spread through East and West. The prophet has returned to heavenly spheres - his work accomplished. His work would become manifest when the war was over. The war itself was an outward manifestation of the powers of evil in their attempt to obstruct the inflow of light. It was very interesting, but beyond me. He said a spiritual revival was destined to take place within all the great world faiths. He said that unity would become established, that universal peace would become an accomplished fact. He seemed to imply that the golden era was at hand-, nearer indeed than we could realise. (Pole: 1984, p.36)

It should be noted that the prophet is one of many that open gateways to the light and that the prophet's work will cause a revival within all the great world faiths. He is part of a much larger plan. This endorsement of Baha'u'llah by the spirits would have been of great importance to those who held spiritualism as scientific evidence of an afterlife and consequently, the entire realm of the supernatural. These words are spoken by Pole's spirit friend Private Dowding, Pole goes on to explain their meaning in relation to Baha'u'llah:



It is true that great spiritual movements were initiated last century. One of the most remarkable of these has centred in the East round the Persian prophet Baha'u'llah. This Messenger of God has returned to his own high place, but his message of brotherhood and love begins to stir the hearts of men. Many of his prophecies have already been fulfilled. The ideals of unity and brotherhood for which he stood are spreading widely, despite the war. His Book of Laws remains to be made known to the world, but the inspiration which called it forth is certainly divine in origin. Baha'u'llah's son, the explainer of the message, whose name is Abdul Baha Abbas (servant of God), still dwells among men, controlling and directing the promulgation of a spiritual movement that seems likely to encircle the globe with the great ideal of unity. And in the West many movements of a spiritual and progressive order are now developing. (Pole: 1984, p.45/6)

In his book *Baha'u'llah and the New Era*, much of which was personally authorised by 'Abdu'l Baha, Esslemont reflects similar ideas about spiritualism:-

*Oneness of the Two Worlds.*

The unity of humanity as taught by Baha'u'llah refers not only to men still in the flesh, but to all human beings, whether embodied or disembodied. Not only all men now living on the earth, but all in the spiritual world as well, are part of one and the same organism and these two parts are intimately dependent one on the other. Spiritual communion one with the others, far from being impossible or unnatural, is constant and inevitable. Those whose spiritual faculties are as yet undeveloped are unconscious of this vital connection, but as one's faculties develop, communication with those beyond the veil gradually becomes more conscious and definite.....

While admitting the reality of "supernormal" psychic faculties he deprecates attempts to force their development prematurely. These faculties will unfold naturally when the right time comes, if we only follow the path of spiritual progress which the prophets have traced for us. He says:

“To tamper with psychic forces while in this world interferes with the condition of the soul in the world to come. These forces are real, but, normally, are not active on this plane. The child in the womb has its eyes, ears, hands, feet, etc., but they are not in activity. The whole purpose of life in the material world is the coming forth into the world of Reality, where those forces will become active. They belong to that world.” (from Miss Buckton's notes, revised by 'Abdu'l-Baha).

“Intercourse with spirits of the departed ought not to be sought for its own sake, nor in order to gratify idle curiosity. It is both a privilege and duty, however, for those on one side of the veil to love and help and pray for those on the other.” (Esslemont: 1924, p. 166/7)

Although Esslemont's quotations express 'Abdu'l Baha's belief in the communication between worlds they are heavily overlaid with warnings not to tamper with the spirits. The text goes on to say prayer is the best way of helping the dead. 'Abdu'l Baha's earliest published statement concerning this subject and directed towards Westerners is in *Some Answered Questions*, published in 1903. Here he expresses doubts about the wisdom of spirit contact. It would seem that he was never really keen on the practice but could not deny the possibility of contact. Fortunately, the Spiritualists within the Baha'i group were of the sort opposed to anything other than “natural” communication, so they could condemn table tapping and professional mediums together.

### *1.13 Esotericism - Occultism*

The most important occult activities of the early Baha'is centred on the Western Esoteric tradition based upon the Glastonbury legends and this will be dealt in detail in the next chapter. Even those who were not themselves involved in occult activity knew people who were. For example, in his letter to Lutfullah Hakim of 27.10.20 Esslemont tells of Mr Young, “an astrologer”, who introduced Esslemont to Elizabeth Eagle Skinner, the founder of the Star of the East Spiritual Church, in Denmark Hill, Brixton. Mrs Eagle Skinner thought at one point that her spirit guide was Baha'u'llah and consequently a merger of her group and the Baha'is was possible. This, Esslemont gleefully reported to Lotfullah Hakim, would mean an influx of fifty or sixty people. It

seems Mrs Eagle Skinner's secretary did not share her enthusiasm for Baha'ism and was instrumental in putting her off. Whatever the reasons Esslemont's tone when describing relations with her become increasingly exasperated. One can only assume that Elizabeth Herrick's choice of name for her hat shop, "Madame Correlli's" was in deference to the occult writer Marie Correlli, which reinforces Herrick's association with the gnostic motif (her relationship with spiritualism is outlined above). Dion Fortune also used to stay at Alice Buckton's guest house in Glastonbury. Fortune, who was arguably the most important figure in the revival of occultism in Britain, wrote extensively about Buckton in her book about Glastonbury, *Avalon of the Heart*. The connection with Celtic mysticism will be examined in the next chapter.

It is impossible to assess the level of involvement of Freemasons in the Baha'i Movement but a number of public meetings were held in Masonic Halls. The deep commitment of Wilberforce to Freemasonry has been noted above. Another indication is in the following letter of Shoghi Effendi, explaining why Baha'is must withdraw from the Masonic Order:

He is fully aware that certain individuals are struck much forcibly by such requests than others. This has been the case with some of the old Baha'is in England, who have been Masons from their boyhood on ... (Hornby: 1988, p. 422)

This passage would seem to suggest that membership of Masonic Orders was not uncommon amongst English Baha'is as late as the mid-fifties. However, as membership is restricted to men, and women were so numerically dominant in Baha'i circles, it would be difficult to assess its importance.

## CHAPTER TWO

### BAHA'I NETWORKS

#### Networks as Contexts for Relevance 1907 – 1911

##### *2.1 Outline of the Chapter*

To say that someone is 'networked', in modern parlance, simply means that they are well-connected and in communication with a wide range of different people and institutions. It was precisely the formalisation of such links within academia which gave birth to the internet and the World Wide Web through a process of electronic reification. Reification is something that needs care, because not all networks are of the same order, or have the same degree of formality. They can range from a formalised institution such as the Theosophical Society, through un-formalised interest groups, to simply friends, acquaintances and relatives. Whereas in the case of the formal Theosophical Society it is possible to speak of it constituting a context of shared assumptions able to assent collectively to a new religious initiative or dissent from it, this is not the case with informal networks. The communality between the members of an informal network could simply be that they all shared the same landlady, as happened with the early Moonies in America. In terms of the theory of relevance, it is better to see the role of networks as providing the guarantee of relevance. When Lady X returns from Palestine having visited the Baha'i leadership she might then tell those friends she thinks might be interested about her experiences. Lady X thereby gives a guarantee of relevance to those friends she chooses to contact<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Academic interest in networks amongst new religious movements can be traced back to *The Doomsday Cult* by John Lofland (1977) in which the relationships between the first members of the Unification Church in the United States was explored. In this context network theory has become particularly concerned with conversion and recruitment for example Stark and Bainbridge (1980). The work of Snow has already been mentioned in the introduction to this thesis. Snow and Phillips (1980) and Snow et al (1980) are all early attempts to relate the adherence to new religious movements to pre-existing relationships with other members. Snow argues that the probability of recruitment into a movement is dependant upon two conditions, a pre-existing link to a network and the absence of a countervailing network. There has been some study of the differences between groups that allow their members to retain prior and extra-movement involvement and those that do not. In the latter case removal of networks forces them to proselytise strangers. It has been pointed out (Wallis and Bruce, 1982:104) that "recruitment strategies are not independent of movements' goals and beliefs about the world". Similar themes were

In the previous chapter the relevance of the Baha'i message was examined against the background of the society in which the early British Baha'is lived. In this chapter the importance of networks in the spread and understanding of the Baha'i teaching in the years between its introduction into the British Isles and the first visit of 'Abdu'l Baha in 1911, will be considered. In the course of this study it became apparent that different networks operated upon their own unique set of assumptions which in turn defined what was relevant for a group of individuals. Two major networks based primarily in the South of England can be identified. The earliest, from around 1902, referred to as the Central Network, was based mainly in London, dominated by women, and was predominantly drawn from the gentry and upper middle classes. From around 1908 a second network can be identified which is referred to as the Celtic Network. It was based upon pre-existing involvement in the Celtic mystical traditions as described in the work of W B Yeats and other occultists. A third major network began in 1910 in the North of England and was unrelated to the other two. As well as these three major networks a number of sub-networks can be identified amongst such diverse groups as academics, travel writers and spiritualists. In analysing each network the role of feminism within them and their attitude towards the possibility of Baha'ism as a separate religion will be considered. Most importantly, what values each network perceived relevant in the Baha'i teachings will be scrutinised. At the end of the chapter

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taken up by amongst others, Barker (1984), and Rochford (1982). More recently Rodney Stark with Roger Finke (2000) has returned to the consideration of networking. Another authority on this area is Darren Sherkat (1991), (1993) and (1997) who has produced a number of works considering switching between religions and rational theory. The role of the Internet in religious conversion has been analysed by amongst others Bernard Leach and Dave Unsworth (2003) in their very interesting article "The Sociology of Cyberspace" which explores how NRMs use the World Wide Web to recruit. Deana Hall (1998) has examined recruitment through workplace networking. Networking and network theory is now a standard component of basic courses on the study of new religious movements. Literature on the subject is too extensive to mention anything but a few works. A number of highly important works developing network theory in a general context have recently appeared, most notably Manuel Castells' work on the network society in *The Rise of the Network Society* (Castells, 2000) the first volume of his influential trilogy *The Information Age*. John Urry's *Sociology Beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Next Century* argues that traditional concepts of sociology are outmoded in an increasingly borderless world. He writes that if sociology is to make a contribution to the post societal world its emphasis must shift to the study of both physical and virtual movement. In considering the sociology of mobilities he asserts the travel of people, ideas, images and money across international; boundaries have implications for experiences of time, space, dwelling and citizenship ultimately reconstituting social life in uneven and complex ways. (Urry,1999). In Emily Martin's *Flexible Bodies* she traces Americans' changing ideas about health and immunity, and explores the implications of the relationship between medicine and the corporate world and in the course of which touches on networks from an interesting perspective, (Martin 1995).

there is a reappraisal of what it meant to be a Baha'i at the end of the first decade of the Baha'i Movement in the British Isles.

## 2.2 *The Central Network*

As already noted the first Briton to embrace Baha'ism was a Miss Marion Brown of London. She was the aunt of Kheiralla's wife. She accepted the Baha'i teachings prior to the 1898 pilgrimage. However, these two women are not usually included in the history of the introduction of Baha'ism to Britain. The generally accepted "first English believer" is Thomas Breakwell. Breakwell's claim is based upon the description of him as such by Shoghi Effendi in *God Passes By* (Shoghi Effendi: 1995, p.259). However, Ethel Jenner Rosenberg, who learnt about Baha'ism from Mrs Thornberg-Cropper, "converted in 1899" (Shoghi Effendi: 1995, p. 260), so she must have predated Breakwell, who could not have discovered the Baha'i teachings before the summer of 1901,<sup>2</sup> Another candidate is Sarah Anne Ridgeway<sup>3</sup>. She wrote to Edward Hall, "I myself have been a Baha'i the last eleven years. I took the lessons in Baltimore, Maryland, U.S.A. in 1899." (Whitehead: 1977, p.31) Clearly, Breakwell was not the first English believer, and yet he is still described as such. (Momen, W (ed.): 1991, p. 46) Writers who know otherwise repeat this assertion, or at least go to great lengths to avoid comment. For example, Whitehead refers to Rosenberg, as, "the first English woman to embrace the Baha'i Faith in her native land" (Whitehead: 1977, p.55), while Weinberg calls her, "the first Englishwoman in her native country to recognise Baha'u'llah as the Manifestation of God" (Weinberg: 1995, p.39). What is of interest is not the identity of the individual but the insistence of perpetuating the assertion that Breakwell was the first. Whitehead writes, "With his **unerring knowledge** the Guardian called Thomas Breakwell the first English believer" (Whitehead: 1977, p. 72). This would appear to be an example of officially sanctioned history and a refusal of later

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<sup>2</sup> The story of Breakwell's meeting with May Maxwell in Paris is well documented but the date is unclear. In "A Brief Account of Thomas Breakwell", in *The Baha'i World*, Vol.7. May Maxwell claims to have met Breakwell and introduced him to Bahaism on his holiday in 1891. She then goes on to explain that she was in Paris during the summer because 'Abdu'l Baha had told her to stay there while on pilgrimage. As the pilgrimage took place in 1898 her date must be incorrect.

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Ann Ridgeway has been the subject of a short biography (Hellaby, 2003) which highlights the difficulty of finding information about working class women of this period

writers to contradict Shoghi Effendi even if he is factually incorrect. Breakwell, after a short pilgrimage to Palestine, remained in Paris, where he died of consumption on June 13<sup>th</sup> 1902 at the age of thirty. He played no part in the development of the British community except as a posthumous example of spirituality and devotion to the Cause. All Baha'i Sunday Schools, in Britain, are named after him.

By 1902 there were four avenues by which the Baha'i teachings could be approached by a British seeker. They could, like Ethel Rosenberg, learn from Mrs Thornburgh-Cropper in London, or like Thomas Breakwell, they might acquire it from the American Baha'is resident in Paris. Alternatively, it was possible to encounter it in the United States, as did Sarah Ridgeway. Finally there was the possibility of investigating the literature on the subject. As discussed above, there was little literature available prior to 1910. What there was would mostly have consisted of popularised versions of Browne's work on the Babis, Phelps' book or works by Kheirella. Whilst this would seem to have been an unlikely route, the Irish clergyman, George Townshend did in fact embrace Baha'ism in 1919, through literature sent by an American friend, rather than through contact with other Baha'is in the British Isles. By 1919 there was considerably more written material available as we shall demonstrate. As noted above there was enough of a Baha'i presence in London for the American Myron H Phelps to write in the introduction to his book *The Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi* "While spending the summer of 1902 in London, it happened that through friends I heard much of Beha'ism, which has adherents in England, as well as a much larger number in the United States." (Phelps: 1912, p.xxxviii) The identity of these "friends" of Phelps is not clear but it can be asserted with certainty that in the summer of 1902 at least three women in London were connected to the Baha'i Cause.

Who then were these women who identified themselves as Baha'is? Mary Virginia Thornburgh-Cropper was called Maryam Khanum by 'Abdu'l Baha and seems to have been known as Minnie. She had married Edward Denman Cropper, son of Edward Cropper of Swaylands, Kent, JP of the counties of Kent and Lancashire on 4<sup>th</sup> June 1874. *Burke's Landed Gentry* describes her as Minnie Virginia Shepherd, daughter of William Thornburgh of Virginia and San Francisco. On the 14<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1874, the couple changed their name to "Thornburgh-Cropper" by royal license. On the 20<sup>th</sup> May

1875, Edward was commissioned as Sub Lieutenant in the West Kent Light Infantry and is listed as full lieutenant in the 1878 Military List. He later transferred to the Royal Pembroke Artillery and on 19<sup>th</sup> April 1882, he became a captain in the Reserve. His further promotion to Lieutenant Colonel would have been by seniority. Although his wife is described as a widow in most Baha'i sources (Weinberg, 1995, p.29), according to *Burke's Landed Gentry 1906*, he did not die until 1902, four years after Minnie's first pilgrimage with Phoebe Hearst. Between 1912 and 1917, she lived at 31, Evelyn Mansions, Carlisle Place, Westminster London SW1, where she is listed in Kelly's Directory and is on the electoral register. It is speculation that the close proximity of this address to St John's, Smith Square suggests she might have been a member of Wilberforce's congregation. How she came to know Ethel Rosenberg is as yet unknown. Rosenberg was an artist specialising in miniature portraits. She originated in Bristol but by 1901 was living at 5, Grafton Street, Piccadilly, London W1. Rosenberg would become "England's outstanding Baha'i pioneer worker" in the words of Shoghi Rabbani. A third woman joined Thornberg-Cropper and Rosenberg in identifying as a Baha'i around this time. She was Mrs. Clara Scaramucci, an Italian, about whom little is known. She published a short pamphlet entitled *The Baha'i Revelation* which was published by the Priory Press of Hampstead, London in 1911. She was last listed in the *Baha'i World 1935/6* at an address in Oakhampton, Devon. She was involved with setting up of the Torquay community around the artists at Dartington Hall. Hugh MacKinley, whose parents became Baha'is in 1922, remembers his mother visiting Scaramucci when they lived in Devon in the 1930's. He recalls that she and Lilian Stevens went to Madame Scaramucci for advice in the setting up of the Torquay community. These women can be described as the nucleus of the "Central Network". What is significant about this network is that it has a high proportion of lifelong Baha'is. It will be demonstrated that it was within this network that a perception of Baha'ism as a primary belief emerged and that this was a direct result of a greater understanding of the role of Baha'u'llah in this network than in others. As stated above the majority of what the early adherents to the Baha'i teachings understood them to be were values; the only belief was the acceptance of Baha'u'llah as a "manifestation of God".



The Central Network group was closely associated with the Paris group. The “Membres de la Communaute Baha’ie de Paris 1899 - 1904” lists a number of women who would play a role in the Baha’i Movement in Britain, they include Marion Jack and Beatrice Irwin. Amongst a list entitled “Visiteurs a la Communaute Baha’ie de Paris 1900 - 1914” are Ethel Rosenberg and Sara and Mary Blomfield. It is significant that shortly after accepting Baha’ism Rosenberg went to Paris to learn more from the Baha’is resident there. The membership list mentioned above has no less than twenty-seven names, including the leading Baha’i intellectual of the period Mirza Abu Fadl. Also present was Anton Haddad, whose role in the spread of the Baha’i teachings to North America has been described above, and Ali Kuli Khan, another senior translator and interpreter. The presence of these men is an indication of the importance ‘Abdu’l Baha placed upon the Paris group. Paris was the first European city to have a Baha’i presence and its importance as a cultural and political centre promised an opportunity of the wide dissemination of the new teachings. The importance of the Paris group for the Baha’is in Britain, most notably Rosenberg, was that it afforded contact with some of the most intellectually brilliant Baha’is of the time. Thus for the Central Network, for a very short period - 1899 to 1904, they were not required to make inferences from secondary and tertiary sources but they were able to find relevance in the understanding of Baha’u’llah as a new “manifestation of God” directly from people of the calibre of Mirza Abu Fadl. They were required only to infer the organisational implications of this understanding. The Paris group failed to fulfil its promise because most of the Paris Baha’is were in fact North Americans who were fairly unsuccessful in drawing native French people into the circle, since the membership list for 1904-1914 lists only nine names of which only two are French.

Most prominent amongst the American Baha’is in Paris were the Barney family. The most significant of the Barneys from a Baha’i perspective was Laura Dreyfus-Barney (1880 - 1974), daughter of Albert Clifford Barney and Alice Pike Barney, (who also became a Baha’i), younger sister of Natalie Clifford Barney and wife of Hyppolyte Dreyfus-Barney. The Barneys came from Cincinnati and were immensely rich, their fortune having been made on railways. They may have first travelled to Paris in 1883. The family moved to Washington in 1886, and in either 1886 or 1887 they made a second trip to Europe. During this trip:

“She also became particularly aware of the plight of women; for example, in Belgium she was appalled by a dog and a woman pulling a cart while the man strode alongside. “It was at that moment” she declared, “that we [Laura and Natalie] became feminists.” (Jay: 1988, p.2)

In 1898 they settled in Paris. By 1901 Alice and Laura had returned to Washington as Baha'is (Stockman: 1985, p.136). Between 1904 and 1906 Laura made frequent trips to Palestine and her “Pilgrim’s Notes” were published in 1908 as “*Some Answered Questions*”. Laura’s sister Natalie Barney (Jay: 1988 and Benstock: 1987), has been described by one biographer as “the leading Lesbian of her time”(Wilkes: 1977, p 42). It is upon her the character of Valerie Seymour in Radcliffe Hall’s classic novel of lesbianism *The Well of Loneliness* is based. Although not a Baha’i herself, Natalie is of interest for two reasons. Firstly, her sexual orientation was known to all, including her family. Laura shared an apartment building with her lover Romaine Brookes (Barney: 1992, p.232 n7) and there are letters between her and her mother on the subject. This would seem to indicate a tolerant attitude to homosexuality amongst the early Baha’is. Secondly, her salon in Paris overlapped some other Baha’i circles. For example Ezra Pound was both a regular visitor to her home in Paris and was introduced to ‘Abdu’l Baha through the London Baha’i network. The relationship between the two sisters was sometimes strained; shortly after Laura had met ‘Abdu'l-Baha in Paris, Natalie had an affair with a 'Persian' dancer and took her around Paris in Persian costume. However, as the sisters were buried together it would seem that, despite their differences, they remained close until the end of their lives.

Whilst Laura Barney was significant in her own right, it was her husband who was perhaps the most important of the European Baha’is. Hyppolyte Dreyfus was the first Occidental Jew to embrace Baha’ism. He was a lawyer by profession. The significance of jurisprudence for Muslim understanding of the distinctive nature of the Baha’i teachings, has been noted above. Perhaps it was easier for Dreyfus, brought up in another religion with a strong tradition of jurisprudence, coupled with mastery of the Code Napoleon, to gain a clearer understanding of the implications of the Baha’i Movement. Whatever the reasons, he was certainly the dominant intellect in European

Baha'i circles in this period. The following passage is taken from an article about Hippolyte Dreyfus written by Laura Barney for *Baha'i World*. It describes both her first meeting with her future husband as well as an interesting insight into the Paris group:

“The Dreyfus family used to give musicales frequented by people of taste, including many artists. It was at one of these entertainments that he met Mrs. Sanderson and her daughters, Sybil of opera fame and Edith who became later a leading Baha'i in France. It was through May Bolles that both Edith and Hippolyte entered the Faith a short time after she had given me the Message. It was really May, our spiritual guide, who started the Baha'i group in France; though the Babi and Baha'i movement was known to an elite through the writings of several distinguished French authors.

The first meeting with Hippolyte Dreyfus that I can recall was in 1900 in Paris on the threshold of May Bolles' apartment near l'Ecole des Beaux Arts. He was leaving as I was arriving to hear more of the Babi epilogue. Though I was away from France almost constantly from 1901 to 1906 I knew that he had become an outstanding Baha'i and that his father and mother, his sister and brother-in-law had all joined the Cause. Their gracious home was a centre for inquirers and followers. Their summerhouse, "Daru'l-Salam" on Mont Pelerin, Switzerland, was also open wide to people of many lands and many beliefs. It was on this mountain that he made some of his first French translations of the writings of Baha'u'llah with Mirza Habibu'llah of Shiraz.”

In 1907 the Paris group was responsible for another important woman addition to the growing Baha'i group in London. Her name was Lady Blomfield. Blomfield describes her first encounter with the Baha'is in the introduction to her book, *The Chosen Highway*. She recounts that she and her daughters were at a reception at the home of Madame Lucien Monod, when they encountered Miss Bertha Herbert. Herbert, who was previously unknown to the Blomfields interested them in Baha'i Cause and introduced them to Ethel Rosenberg who was at that time in Paris. Madame Monod is listed as a member of the Paris Baha'i community, and so is Bertha Herbert, an American artist, who would later introduce to the Baha'i Cause a fellow American,

Horace Holley. Herbert and Holley met on board ship in 1909 and later married; he became a leading figure in the American Baha'i community.

Sara Louise Blomfield was the daughter of Matthew John Ryan Esquire of Knockanevan, Borrisoliegh, Ireland. Ryan was a Roman Catholic and his wife, Sara's mother, was a Protestant. According to her daughter's account (Hall: undated, p.1), the Sara grew up in an atmosphere of religious intolerance, which profoundly affected her. Fearing her daughter would be taken from her and incarcerated in a convent, Mrs Ryan and Sara fled to England. The circumstances of this departure are obscure, but it is perhaps significant that the address of both Sara and Mrs Ryan on Sara's marriage certificate was "Campden House". This building was a hostel for women without a proper home. It appears possible that their flight from Ireland left the Ryan women destitute. However, her marriage to the elderly widower, Sir Arthur Blomfield, gave Sara not only financial security but also a title and membership of the gentry. Sir Arthur William Blomfield was the son of a former Bishop of London, Charles James Blomfield. He was educated at Rugby and Trinity College, Cambridge. He was an architect by profession, establishing his offices in Adelphi Terrace in 1856. By 1861 he was President of the Architectural Association, becoming a fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1867 and its vice-president in 1886. He was associated with the building of the London Law Courts in 1881, and two years later with the Bank of England. He designed a number of buildings of note and was responsible for restoration work at the cathedrals of Salisbury, Canterbury, Lincoln and Chichester. He died in 1899. While her husband was alive Lady Blomfield led the conventional life of a woman of her class. Her daughter's memoir points out that she was, even at this point, influenced by the work of Sir Edwin Arnold, especially his *Light of Asia* and the "scientific" but not the practical aspects of spiritualism. She was deeply enmeshed in the women's suffrage cause and in line with WSPU directives withdrew from the Liberal Party over this issue. After the death of her husband, Blomfield spent much of her time at their country home in Broadway, Worcestershire. Here she was the hub of an interesting social circle that included most of the literati of the county. Her daughter wrote that it was during this period of young widowhood in the country that her search for spiritual truth began in earnest (Hall: undated, p.6). Blomfield's spiritual quest took her into and across many networks. Influenced by Edwin Arnold she approached Eastern

religious traditions, she delved into Theosophy and her daughter remembers frequent visits from Alfred Sinnett. Apparently she was not convinced of Theosophy and continued seeking a “Great World Teacher”. Swami Vivekananda impressed her, but she decided he was “not the one”. She became more interested in the ethical aspects of religion and “admired the fearless teaching of R. J. Campbell who had dared to write a book called *“The New Theology”*. However, it was Basil Wilberforce who had the greatest impact upon her prior to her interest in Baha’ism. Hall writes “Every Sunday we would go to St. John’s Westminster to hear the enlightened Archdeacon preach. He became a much revered and beloved friend of my mother’s, ... Edwin Arnold and Basil Wilberforce were the two friends of the soul most loved by my mother, until a greater one came to outshine their brave torches by reflecting the Sun of the light of truth.” (Hall: undated, p.8). Her spiritual quest enabled Blomfield to make contacts with numerous individuals and groups exploring new religious ideas, while her wealth and social status afforded her immediate prominence within Baha’i circles. The combination of these factors would make her an indispensable hostess for ‘Abdu’l Baha when he visited London.

Also connected with the Central Network was Elizabeth Herrick (1864 - 1929) who became involved with the Baha’is in 1908. She was a milliner by trade and appears to have set up and run a number of successful business ventures. Born into the Church of England, she later joined the Pembroke Baptist Chapel in Liverpool and was deeply influenced by its minister, the Reverend William Aked. She joined Aked and his family in New York, when he accepted an invitation to become the pastor of an important church there. While in America she embraced Christian Science a move which caused her estrangement from Aked and eventual return to England. She began her millinery business again, this time from 137a High Street Kensington. She lived above the Higher Thought Reading Rooms, the address of which is given as 10 Cheniston Gardens, off Wright’s Lane<sup>4</sup>. Herrick is of particular interest, as although she connects to the Central Network, she is from a very different social background. She seems to have been

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<sup>2</sup> Both these streets back off Kensington High Street at the site of number 137. It is possible that 137a was a side entrance to 137 and that it connected to the Cheniston building at the rear. It is impossible to tell with certainty as the whole site has been redeveloped. A number of accounts describe Baha’i meetings taking place in her workshop, while the Cheniston Gardens address is the “official address” of the London Assembly given in the *Star of the West*.

involved with Spiritualism, writing in both the *International Psychic Gazette* and *The Superman and Psychic Monitor*. She appears throughout the history of the Baha'is in London as being something of a maverick. She may have been the first to identify Baha'ism as her primary belief, since when imprisoned for her part in direct action concerned with women's suffrage, she gave as her religion "Baha'i". A number of references to her frustration at the perceived inaction of others and her independent organisation of meetings will be encountered below.

Higher Thought, or at least the use of its building, would seem to be a unifying factor in the Central Network. We have noted above that Herrick lived at the same address as the Higher Thought Centre and Rosenberg organised meetings there. It is possible that they met through Higher Thought, which is possibly the link between Rosenberg, Cropper and Scaramucci, so it is necessary to consider what impact, if any, it had on Baha'ism. Higher Thought (or New Thought from 1914 in the USA) is a metaphysical system based on a method of spiritual healing founded by Phineas P. Quimby. Quimby cured Mary Baker Eddy who later used his system as the basis of her much more influential Christian Science Movement. Higher Thought is a world affirming movement that promises its adherents that: "Through mental training and discipline, this mental control may be directed consciously and intelligently to the end that peace and poise of mind will be manifested in physical health and ease. Disease is primarily mental, and every mental inharmony manifests itself by way of physical discord or disease. And, as the cause or the mental inharmony is changed, the physical effect of bodily harmony shows forth and manifests proportionately." (Dobbs: Undated.) The most prominent member of the Higher Thought group in the early years of the century was Judge Thomas Troward, (1847 - 1916). Troward returned to London after a successful career as a judge in India. He soon discovered Higher Thought and threw himself enthusiastically into its work. He wrote a number of books on "mental science" and lectured extensively on the subject. He was a close friend and influence on Basil Wilberforce, in an article on Wilberforce in *New Light on Thomas Troward Vol. 6* Heather Andrews Dobbs, writes, "F. L. Rawson's "Active Service" showed that hardly a week passed without some communication taking place between Thomas Troward and Basil Wilberforce. Wilberforce admired and often made reference to Thomas Troward's

works which exposed the church to Troward's metaphysical ideas". Thus yet another connecting factor comes back to Basil Wilberforce.

It has been noted that the Central Network had the best contact with the Paris group and consequently access to information from sources close to 'Abdu'l Baha. It is significant that the literary output of this group is meagre; they were not involved with campaigning journals such as the *Christian Commonwealth* but content to restrict themselves to the production of simple pamphlets outlining the Baha'i message as they understood it. There is no indication of a common political or social stance amongst this network. The single unifying factor is New Thought and the influence of this "metaphysical" system, as a context for relevance, should not be underestimated. At first sight this philosophy would appear to have little in common with modern Baha'i thinking, but it must be remembered that in the first decade of the twentieth century there is much evidence of belief in 'Abdu'l Baha as a spiritual healer amongst the Western Baha'is. The stress on harmony and well-being linked to inner peace and ultimately outer peace is actually central to the Baha'i message. Amongst the Central Networkers the absence of involvement in diversionary political and social activity allowed the values of harmony, both religious and racial, equality, both sexual and social, to be afforded a more spiritual interpretation. This in turn led to a greater focus on the single belief of Baha'ism, the role of Baha'u'llah.

The Central Networkers were predominantly female and as was discussed in the last chapter there is evidence of active membership of the WSPU. The style of the WSPU is reflected in the Central Network. There is no overt interest in the feminine aspect of God, nor in goddess cultures. There is an autocratic style of leadership and a culture of "at home" style meetings. There is no reason to suppose that during the period in question any of those who identified themselves as Baha'is considered themselves to be anything but Baha'i Christians as they styled themselves. Certainly all the Central Networkers were regular church attendees, mainly Anglicans, and as far as records exist, most seem to have been buried according to the rites of the Church. It was, however, amongst this group that transference of allegiance to Baha'ism as a primary belief system took place. This study seeks to demonstrate that this was because there was a greater level of relevance in the belief than in the attendant values.

### *2.3 The Celtic Network*

The Celtic Network is the term used to describe those who adhered to the Baha'i Movement from the perspective of the Celtic Mystery tradition or the Western occult systems. The dominant figures of this network were Wellesley Tudor Pole and Alice Buckton. Members of this network were mainly known to each other prior to their involvement with Baha'ism. Their interest in Celtic mysticism is the bond between them and consequently the context in which they found relevance in the Baha'i teachings. The Celtic Network held meetings at the Passmore Edwardes Settlement in Holborn, independently of the Central Network meetings in Kensington. The two groups appear to have operated exclusively until shortly before the visit of 'Abdu'l Baha.

In 1902 Wellesley Tudor Pole experienced a dream which was to have a profound effect on him and incidentally initiate the second of the networks around Baha'ism. Pole dreamt that he was a monk at Glastonbury Abbey. So powerful was the experience he felt compelled to travel to Glastonbury, he claimed he found the town just as he had seen it in his dream. Pole became convinced that Glastonbury was his spiritual home and that something awaited him to discover it there. He also received an impression that he would need a "triad of maidens" to find the relic (Benham, 1995, p.56).

Pole was one of the five children of Thomas Pole and Kate Wansborough. Thomas Pole was an unconventional man involved in Fabian socialism, Theosophy and the Garden Cities movement (Benham, 1995, p.53). This latter interest was shared by Sir Patrick Geddes, who would play an important role in the Baha'i activities in Edinburgh. The children were Mary, Dorothy (who died as a child), Katherine, Wellesley and Alexander. The spiritualist activities of the Pole family have been described at length in the previous chapter. In September 1906, Wellesley with his sister Katherine and her friends Janet and Christine Allen, discovered an artefact in St. Bride's Well in Glastonbury. Their find was a curious blue glass bowl. Dr John Arthur Goodchild had placed the bowl in the well in 1899. Goodchild was an English medical practitioner. He spent the winters in Bordighera, treating the many English tuberculosis



patients resident there. His summers were spent either in Hampstead or Bath. In February 1885 he purchased the glass bowl and platter in a tailor's shop in Bordighera. The vendor claimed these items had been found bricked up in the walls of an old building which was being demolished in Albegna, a village between Bordighera and Genoa (Benham: 1995, p.6). Goodchild took the items back to London. He showed his find to Sir Augustus Franks, Keeper of the British and Medieval Antiquities at the British Museum. Franks' findings were inconclusive. The bowl was unlike any other known example. He thought it was probably ancient and could not explain the process of its manufacture. The bowl and dish were locked away in a cupboard in the Goodchild home in Hampstead, where they remained for the next ten years.

Goodchild was not merely a physician. He wrote books of poetry and prose but he was also engaged on a much higher quest: to seek out the true roots of spiritual life in the West (Benham: 1995, p.12). Whilst much mystical seeking at this time was directed towards the East, there was also a movement to rediscover the Western mystical tradition. Much of the emphasis of this movement centred on the pre-Christian Celtic culture of the British Isles. Goodchild believed that a high culture had existed in Ireland prior to the coming of Christianity. He began to write up his theories in a work that would eventually bear the title *The Light of the West*. In *The Light of the West* Goodchild outlined a history of Ireland, which he claimed was a matriarchal, goddess worshipping society. Central to this scenario is the figure of Bride, whose traditional role as the foster mother of Christ is recounted to integrate both the Pagan and Christian aspects of Celtic culture. Goodchild's understanding of Celtic religion was intensely feminist. He argued for the restoration of the feminine in all aspects of life. Goodchild summed it up:

“The Light of the West is the beauty of womanhood. It inculcates the hatred of warfare, and of empires established by the greed of nations or rulers. It preaches woman's desire for the empire of love.” (Goodchild, quoted in Benham: 1995, p.19)

In 1897, shortly before the publication of his book, Dr Goodchild was staying in Paris on his way back to Italy. He experienced an intense psychic experience in his hotel

room. He heard a voice telling him that Jesus once carried the bowl in the house in Hampstead. It was also to be important in the century to come. The voice told Goodchild to hide the bowl in St Bride's Well, Glastonbury, where a woman would find it. The bowl was to be cared for by a woman. Thus Pole, his sister Kitty and her two friends eventually found the bowl. The Poles knew Goodchild. He was a very close friend of William Sharpe, a man who wrote novels about the Celtic past under the name of Fiona Mcleod. Sharpe claimed the spirit of this Highland woman possessed him when he wrote. The nature of Fiona was a secret even from Goodchild, whose friendship with Sharpe began with a correspondence with his non-existent "cousin" Fiona. Ms Mcleod's publisher was none other than Thomas Pole's friend in the Garden City Movement, Sir Patrick Geddes. Sharpe was also friends with WB Yeats whose connections with both the Golden Dawn and the politics of the Celtic Revival are well known. Yeats refers to Sharpe's work on several occasions.

The meeting of the Allen sisters with Basil Wilberforce in London and subsequent meeting in Deans Yard in July 1907 has been described in Chapter One. About forty people were present at this meeting amongst them R.J. Campbell and Alice Buckton. Both of these people would play an important role in the growth of Baha'ism. Alice Buckton, a writer and educationalist was to become deeply involved in the Celtic network around the vessel and Glastonbury. Alice Mary Buckton was born in Hindhead, Surrey in 1867. She was one of the eight children of the polymath and scientist George Buckton. From her youth Alice was interested in helping others. As a young woman she was involved with Octavia Hill's Southwark Women's University Settlement. She was deeply impressed with the work of Hill in the field of housing. In 1878 she married Joseph Estlin Carpenter in Mill Hill Unitarian Chapel. Arthur J. Long in his essay "The Life and Work of J. Estlin Carpenter" describes the marriage as "a particularly close and happy union. He and Alice had many interests in common, not least the love of the open air, mountain scenery and foreign travel. Throughout the whole of Carpenter's subsequent career, Alice remained his loving companion and helpmeet." (Long: 1986, p.273) Whatever the nature of their relationship, they certainly spent much of the time apart and Buckton was always titled "Miss". Although herself childless, Buckton was deeply concerned about mother-hood, children and education. Benham writes "She saw woman pre-eminently as mother, but a mother-hood not confined to the raising of her

own children. It stood for a power to feed and nourish and support life, wherever and however that life required it.” (Benham: 1995, p146) Buckton seems to have been well acquainted with feminine notions of spirituality based on the concept of the universal mother. The German Frederick Froebel influenced her in the field of education. Buckton visited the Pestalozzi-Froebel Haus in Germany. She persuaded the Principal, Annet Schepel to join her in England and work in the Sesame Garden and House for Home Life Training in St. John’s Wood. Buckton and Schepel were life long partners. They lived together until Shepel’s death in Glastonbury in 1931. Alice Buckton was already a well-established playwright and poet when she accepted Wilberforce’s invitation to hear Pole explain about his Glastonbury bowl. The meeting changed her life. She wrote to Pole describing her feelings about the bowl on August 8<sup>th</sup>, six days later he met her. On 20<sup>th</sup> September 1907 Buckton made her first visit to the Clifton Oratory. The emphasis on women’s’ spirituality and the role of the bowl in the reinstatement of the feminine in the religions of the west were totally in line with her own ideas (Benham: 1995, p.158). On the 23<sup>rd</sup> September, the members of the Triad took her to visit the well. The next day Buckton met Dr Goodchild for the first time. Buckton expressed her belief that a community of women should eventually be formed in Glastonbury around the spiritual beacon of the Cup. To this end Buckton purchased the Chalice Well and the former Catholic seminary in whose grounds it was in 1912.

Despite her unconventional ideas Buckton remained firmly within the Church of England. Benham writes, “Unlike a lot of other people working for social change and recommending new ideas, Alice had never forsaken the Anglican Church of her upbringing. She certainly transcended the *status quo*, embracing a kind of mystical pantheism while keeping hold of the essential tenets of the faith. The small fly-leaf dedication to *Eager Heart* summarises her view perfectly: “Inscribed to all who see and worship the One in the Many.” Buckton was however committed to Baha’ism as part of her understanding of Christianity. She made at least two pilgrimages to visit ‘Abdu’l Baha prior to his visits to the West. In *Baha’i News* (June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1910. Vol. 1 No. 6 Rahmat) she and Schepel are reported to be back from pilgrimage. Buckton is described as an active “clubwoman” disseminating the “Glad Tidings” through her comprehensive contacts to those who would otherwise not have heard them. Some months later *Baha’i News* (November 23rd, 1910. Vol. 1 No. 14 Qawl) tells of her addressing the friends of

Montclair, New Jersey. The theme of her discourse was her recent trip to Acca. She was also in Boston that year. In the December *Baha'i News* (December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1910 Vol. 1 No. 16 Sharaf) there is an account of her address to the Boston Assembly concerning her visit to Acca. Further mention of her visit to Boston is made in *Star of the West* (March 21<sup>st</sup>, 1911 Vol. 2 No. 1 Baha) where she is said to have presented the Baha'i teachings to "hundreds of eager listeners." In all reports of meetings held to describe her conversations with 'Abdu'l Baha she stresses his insistence that Baha'is remain within their existing religious traditions. For example in *Star of the West* (June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1911 Vol. 2 No. 5 Nur), Arthur Cuthbert writes, "Miss Buckton has just returned from her second visit to Abdul-Baha. The following are a few of the words she brings back from him: "A Bahai is known by his deeds The Kingdom of God is not in any society; but some seekers go through many societies as a traveller goes through many cities, till he reaches his destination. *If ye belong to a society already do not forsake your brothers.*" "The highest and most successful way to spread the Cause of the Kingdom is by deeds. This is open to all. Join yourselves to those who work for the poor, the weak and the unfortunate; - this is greatly to be commended. *To spread the knowledge of the Kingdom by teaching requires the skill of the physician; - a wise physician does not offer help to those who do not need treatment!*" This is a particularly interesting passage. It represents the understanding of Baha'ism within the Celtic network. Influenced as they were by New Theology and Christian Socialism this stress on helping the poor and needy dovetailed with their pre-existing outlook. Pole, Buckton and their friends were all enmeshed in brotherhoods, fellowships and organisations promoting spirituality and they had no desire to withdraw from these groupings. Furthermore the slightly esoteric emphasis of the final sentence would have been familiar from their interest in "lost wisdom and hidden knowledge" around the Glastonbury legends. Pole described his introduction to Baha'ism in an interview in the *Christian Commonwealth* of 28<sup>th</sup> December 1910. He said "I first heard of the movement when on a visit to Constantinople prior to the Turkish revolution in 1908 ... When I returned to London I found very little was known about the movement and I determined to visit 'Abdu'l Baha." Pole goes on to reinforce his point "And it is extraordinary that so little should be known of the movement in England". What is significant about this passage is the fact that as far as Pole was concerned Baha'ism was virtually unknown in England when he discovered it in Constantinople in 1908. Pole was known to Buckton, Campbell and

Wilberforce from mid 1907, clearly none of them knew about Baha'ism at that time. Consequently it can be asserted with confidence that Pole and his Celtic network were well established prior to their discovery of Baha'ism. This means that they found relevance in their understanding of Baha'ism by fitting it into established ideas about religion, mysticism, spiritualism and the role of the spiritual in history.

The more esoteric motivations of the Celtic Network have been the subject of a number of articles by Alan Royce. In *Avalon Magazine*, Summer 1998, he wrote, "To summarise the whole thing in a few words: it was an attempt by a loose group of people to use a powerful occult structure to transform the consciousness, the spirit, of their "race". The idea of race was very prevalent then, as were various speculations on spiritism, the Israelite origins of many European peoples and royal houses, and Celtic culture as a reviving and unifying force. Druidry and Masonry were popular, social reform movements proliferated and were very influential. In Glastonbury all this began to crystallise into what is basically a magical "Engine", an empowered symbol built into the landscape to change the awareness of anyone attuned to it in any way." Royce goes on to argue that the activities of Pole and the Triad were deliberate attempts to open up a spiritual channel in preparation for the changing of the Age. Their activities were not restricted to Glastonbury, Pole the Triad and David Russell planned to "awaken the three Heart Centres of the British Isles." These were perceived to be early centres of Celtic Christian spirituality that needed to be reawakened to revitalise spiritual renewal throughout the British Isles in preparation for the Aquarian Age. If Royce is correct in his assertion that Pole and his circle were attempting to use magic in order to achieve their ends then a whole new layer of relevance is revealed. Royce hypothesises that the placing and finding of the bowl was done on dates of significance and in such a way as to fit elements of the Golden Dawn tarot design based upon decans in the zodiac<sup>5</sup>. This

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<sup>5</sup> The details of this system are outlined in *Ancient Magics for a New Age* by Alan Richardson and Geoff Hughes. Very simply the Decans, subdivisions of the Zodiac are each related to a card of the Minor Arcana of the Tarot and attributed to this pairing are two angels which represent the duality of day and night, in accordance with the tradition of the Qabalah. Much of the magical "Engine's" structure can be deduced, claims Royce, from the Pilgrimage Route around Glastonbury which Buckton initially inherited from the Triad but which she later elaborated. Royce's article "Alice Buckton's Pilgrimage Papers" appeared in the *Chalice Well Messenger*, February 1998, it is based upon a guide to the pilgrimage route she wrote for Felicity Hardcastle which she wrote in the 1920's. This guide contains a number of references to King Arthur, Bride, various archangels and central to its structure, spirit beings known as "the Watchers." new Aquarian Age. The symbolism can be read on a number of different levels including that of the Kabbalistic Tree of Life.

means that effectively they were attempting to manipulate the relevance that others would find in their activities.

Some of the actions of Pole and his circle may have been directly influenced by the teachings of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. On 18<sup>th</sup> June 1910 Pole met Neville Gauntlett Tudor Meakin, a member of the Stella Matutina Temple, an offshoot of the Golden Dawn presided over by Dr Robert Felkin. Meakin feared he would die without an heir, for he was suffering from tuberculosis, and was actively seeking a possible replacement for the Grand Mastership of the Order of the Table Round. Finding Wellesley Tudor Pole was the fulfilment of his best hopes, Pole not only also claimed the Welsh royal blood, but also was intimately linked with the grail legends. Meakin was drawn into Pole's circle and incorporated some of his ideas about the reopening of the Celtic sites into his Arthurian scheme within his Order. Meakin visited the Oratory in September 1910 and soon after began to initiate Pole into the Order of the Table Round. Meakin's premonition of his death before he could secure the succession of the Order came true; the day before he was due to initiate Pole and Felkin, he died. Felkin consulted AE Waite another Golden Dawn practitioner about the matter. Eventually, Felkin settled in New Zealand and took all the signs, symbols and rituals of the Order of the Table Round with him. Wellesley Tudor Pole no longer gave the matter serious consideration (Benham: 1995, p.101 - 104). The importance of this interlude is that it provides evidence of Pole's acquaintance with people who had passed through some of the highest grades of the Golden Dawn magical system. It is hard to believe that Goodchild would have been ignorant of these matters but the exact nature of his involvement with the group around Pole is hard to ascertain, while the correspondence between Pole, Meakin, Felkin and Waite provides a tangible link.

An interest Goodchild shared with many of the Oriental Baha'is was that of Gematria, the relating of numbers to letters and the reading of hidden symbolism within. This use of letters is very common in the Muslim world, especially amongst Shi'a Muslims who believe the Quran is freighted with hidden meanings. For example, some surahs of the Quran begin with a sequence of letters the meaning of which is often obscure; the numerical values of these letters are considered by some to have esoteric importance. That letters have numerical values is widely accepted, and can be found in a

number of cultural and traditions. This importance placed on numbers was and is also part of the Baha'i hermeneutic, with particular emphasis on the numbers nine and nineteen. Yet again here was a Baha'i concept which could be found immediately relevant to those around Goodchild and his interpretation of Celtic mythology.

Interestingly the Celtic network does not seem to have attempted to place Baha'ism directly within their "Western mystical tradition". This would have been to go beyond relevance into a syncretisation of systems. This has since been attempted by Christiane Roy in *Le Roi Artur, Figure prophetique et le Graal Universal*. In this short work Roy puts forward the thesis that the British legend of Arthur as the "Once and future King" is synonymous with the expectation of the return of the Twelfth Imam in Shi'a Islam and that The Bab is the fulfilment of both. While Baha'u'llah is the Grail itself - "Tel est Baha'u'llah, le Graal universel" (Roy: 1986 p.18). In a letter to the *Christian Commonwealth* dated October 17<sup>th</sup>, 1910 Wellesley Pole outlines his understanding of his Glastonbury vessel in the scheme of things. First he dismisses the suggestion that his vessel is the Holy Grail, pointing out that the Grail was a mystic thing without material form. He then goes on to explain that the vessel found at Glastonbury is indeed mysterious. The cup he claims is an important symbol in all great world faiths. Moreover "Creeds and dogmas have crystallised within and around all world religions, and ... stifled the ... Divine truths ... (on) which these great movements were originally founded." He goes on to explain that the Glastonbury vessel was placed in the Clifton Oratory as a focus for "bringing into sympathetic touch one with another the followers of all the great religious teachers in East and West". He goes on to describe how people from many different religions have "found their way to this humble shrine to pray together for the great ideal of a universal church and a world wide brotherhood on earth". Pole then makes a point which is very significant in his understanding of Baha'ism: "It should be possible for such focus points to be established all over the world without in any way interfering with the work and influences of the churches, mosques, and temples belonging to the different world religions." (*Christian Commonwealth*, October 19<sup>th</sup>, 1910) In other words there is a new spiritual force which unites, without merging, existing religious traditions. This is in essence the same message as Buckton's continued adherence to Anglicanism. The Celtic network were concerned with re-establishing (or introducing, depending upon your

viewpoint) the Divine Feminine, pantheism and elements of paganism within the western Christian tradition. Whilst their ideas might have been unusual within the context of accepted standards of Christian belief, they remained within the churches because they considered them to be the modern versions of the institutions to which people like St. Bride had belonged. This was taken to its logical conclusion by one of the Triad of Maidens. Janet Allen entered the enclosed community at Starbrook Abbey, Worcestershire, as a novice in November 1921. She was received under the name of Sister Bridget, the English form of Bride (Benham: 1995, p.130). If they were rekindling the flame of western mysticism, without disturbing the administrative structures of Christianity, then Baha'ism could do the same.

Like the Central Network, the Celtic Network was committed to feminism and women's suffrage. It was to the Women's Freedom League that the Celtic Networkers adhered, through their involvement with *Christian Commonwealth* and its attendant radical causes. The feminine aspect of the Divine and goddess culture was a prominent feature of the ideology of this network.

#### *2.4 The Northern Network*

Somewhat later than the Central and Celtic Networks a third Network began in the North of England. It will be recalled that one of the candidates for being the first British Baha'i was Sarah Ann Ridgeway. She probably returned to England from the United States in 1906 and settled in her hometown of Manchester. Whatever the exact date of her return, Ridgeway played no part in the London networks; she was isolated in Manchester until her introduction to Edward Hall. Ridgeway was certainly known to Rosenberg by 1910, as she wrote to Hall, explaining his letter to Pole had been passed to Rosenberg and thence on to her. Prior to the visit of 'Abdu'l Baha Ridgeway, Hall and Hall's friend Craven would form the nucleus of the North of England network which was very different from the other networks, based as it was on family ties, Unitarianism, Socialism and being almost exclusively working class. The Northern Network began because of a letter by Wellesley Pole in the *Christian Commonwealth*. In *Baha'i Dawn, Manchester* Edward Hall wrote, "Although an omnivorous reader and a continual searcher, he had never yet heard of the Baha'i Movement. Towards the end of Oct.



1910, however, after reading a letter from the pen of Mr. Tudor Pole (Bristol), which appeared in the columns of the "Christian Commonwealth", he (Mr Hall) wrote to Mr Pole asking for further information. This soon came in a package from Miss E. J. Rosenberg, with whom Mr. Pole had been in communication." (Hall: 1925, p.4). The letter in question must have been the one quoted at length above as there was no other correspondence from Pole in the *Christian Commonwealth* during October of 1910. Perhaps the final sentence was what had particularly caught Hall's eye. Pole had concluded "Brotherhood in the religious, social, and political life is surely the watchword for the present century." Hall was deeply interested in the concept of the brotherhood of man.

Edward Theodore Hall was the seventh and last child of Spencer Timothy Hall and Mary Julia Grimley. He was born in December 1879. When he was five years old Hall's father died. He and his mother and remaining siblings went to live with his elder brother Leonard in Lancaster. Leonard Hall had rejected religion for socialism and in 1887 became secretary of the Amalgamated Labourers' Union in Manchester. The departure of her elder son caused Mrs Hall, with the help of friends to send Edward to Ripley Hospital, a school for the children of poor but respectable widows (Whitehead: 19xx, p.34). Edward remained in the school for six years and was confirmed into the Church of England there. When he left school Edward joined his family in Manchester and at first earned his living as a joiner. In 1901 he was lodging in the home of his friend John Craven in the Broughton district of the city. In 1902 Hall married Craven's sister Rebecca. They sent up home with Hall's mother in Higher Broughton and were joined a year later by their first child, Lucy (Whitehead: 1983, p.35). In 1906 Hall joined his brother Leonard in a lubricant business. This changed his life considerably, firstly by doubling his income and secondly by causing him to travel widely. Hall was always a writer, he wrote both poetry and prose. He recorded the history of the Baha'i Movement in Manchester in *Baha'i Dawn, Manchester* and consequently the construction of the North of England network is entirely visible. However, it is in his poetry that his beliefs are expressed. It was through his poetry that Hall became acquainted with the Theosophists Mr and Mrs Dean and it was in their house that he read Pole's letter. The Deans, although sympathetic, never embraced the Baha'i Cause. However, Hall's wife, her brother John Craven and his wife all became involved.

Hall's description of Sarah Ann Ridgeway gives an interesting insight into the life of this isolated Baha'i: "Of spare but hardy build ... the first to stand solely and purely for the Baha'i Cause in the neighbourhood of Manchester. A native of Pendleton, a working class district, she had been brought up in the craft of silk weaving. ... While residing in her humble little cottage, a spinster and very careful of habit, obtaining her living by working at the loom in a neighbouring factory, she occupied her spare time by attending religious Services here and there; also in corresponding with her various friends, to some of whom she wrote in French; taking every opportunity to spread the Glad Tidings and the Principles of the Baha'i Movement. Never attempting to gather around her a group of believers, she simply gave the Light by example in the factory or by conversation after meetings and Services such as she attended in the city. By nature gentle and intellectual, she would have been, if not animated by the Baha'i faith, of a retiring disposition. Her Pendleton friends were all of the humble and unassuming type, good working women like herself - unpretentious. Her teaching seemed a little too unusual to their minds, but they trusted and admired her good qualities." (Hall: 1925, p.3) Hall became acquainted with Ridgeway through his letter to Pole and subsequent response from Rosenberg. Hall narrates that they could meet "but seldom". Ridgeway lent them books about Baha'ism and they bought more.

In January 1911 Ethel Rosenberg visited Manchester for a few days. She spoke to a meeting of the Theosophical Society as well as informing the Halls and the Cravens more about the history and principles of the Baha'i Cause. Hall writes that in 1911 there were some in Manchester who were attracted to the Cause, but preferred to suspend judgement, while others were actively hostile. "Meanwhile" wrote Hall, "the true friends continued their studies". He went on to describe Ridgeway's cottage, where the seekers studied; "One would find a warm fire burning brightly; a vase of daffodils upon the table and near it several Baha'i books, including an American book of coloured views of Acca. Over the fire, upon the front of the light brown coloured mantelpiece, were several geometrical figures that possessed, to her, mystical meanings - the central figure being a square, painted in neat black lines. One day when Mrs Hall asked her what this figure signified she replied with a smile that she had painted it there so that, whenever she looked in that direction, she would be reminded to meet life "four square." Her life

was just like that.” Thanks to Hall there is a very clear picture of the genesis of the Northern Network. The socialistic Edward Hall and his extended family join the weaver Miss Ridgeway, who had served the Cause by “living the life” amongst her fellow mill workers, rather than attempting to build a group of followers. The spark is Pole’s letter about a Brotherhood of Man and the instrument of connection is the *Christian Commonwealth*. Rosenberg is the correspondent providing both literature and support in person. When Ridgeway went to London to meet ‘Abdu’l Baha in 1911, the Baha’i group in Manchester comprised her, Mr and Mrs Hall, and Mr and Mrs Craven.

Relevance for the Northern Network was the appeal of brotherhood and unity understood through the perspective of socialism. Hall and Craven were both committed socialists and they were also deeply religious. They attended Cross Street Chapel, the largest Unitarian church in Manchester. They were unconnected with the Unitarian academics, but shared their interest in the unity of religion. The Northern Network was probably the one with the greatest interest in social change. Furthermore, the Manchester Baha’is were working class; Hall and Craven both appear to have been highly intelligent although not particularly well educated. Hall’s writing, both poetry and prose, indicate both sensitivity and a clear grasp of the Baha’i teachings insofar as they were available to him

It was socialism, not feminism, that was the driving force in the North. The Independent Labour Party of which they were members, supported the enfranchisement of women, so they were certainly not adverse to feminism, but rather they saw the rights of women bound up with the wider cause of universal suffrage and more equal distribution of wealth. It is interesting that the Northern Network alone is dominated by men. The women in the Manchester group were predominantly the wives of men involved, but this was not the case elsewhere. The difference in the role of women in this group is probably a reflection of the status of women in working class culture of the period rather than any difference in understanding of Baha’i ideas. Like the Celtic Network it was Baha’ism as a unifying force which appealed to the Northern Network. There was no understanding of Baha’ism being either a new religion or a potentially new religion. In fact, the commitment to Unitarianism and Liberal Christianity meant

that for the Manchester group there would be greater resistance to any emergent separatism.

### 2.5 The Sub Networks

A number of smaller, interlinking sub-networks can also be identified around people who might be described as having a professional interest in the Middle East or some aspect of East-West relations. There were those with an academic interest in Babi and Baha'i activity. The foremost of these was Edward Granville Brown who played little part in the Western Baha'i community and whose work has been discussed at length above. There were however other orientalists who played a minor role in the development of Baha'ism. The other strand in these sub-networks was people involved in colonial administration in some form or other. These are referred to as the Orientalist and Academic Sub-networks. The other grouping which interacts with the sub-networks mentioned above as well as with the Central Network was one based around the rather grandly titled *The International Psychic Gazette*. *The International Psychic Gazette* was a periodical which published news of spiritualism and other related occult matters. During 'Abdu'l Baha's visits to England it was second only to the *Christian Commonwealth* in providing coverage and disseminating information. It is also noteworthy for being devoid of any input by Wellesley Tudor Pole, an unusual feature in an occult journal of this period. The Baha'is who wrote for the *IPG* were Elizabeth Herrick, who was part of the Central Network and who also wrote for other spiritualist and metaphysical publications, Constance Maude and Arthur Cuthbert.

One the most prominent male Baha'is of this era was Arthur Cuthbert. Cuthbert lived in Balgreggan House, a large house that dominated the Freugh and Balgreggan estate south of Stranraer in Wigtownshire. Local residents<sup>6</sup> still remember the house as being "set in lovely gardens and there were some good walks around it. The house was also a place where local girls were able to go into service." A number of the Baha'is visited his home in the early 1900's. Arthur Cuthbert was unique amongst the Baha'is in

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<sup>6</sup> Recollections of Miss Nesbit of Sandhead, as told to Mrs Jean Dennison of Stranraer Local History Society and recounted in private e-mail to writer

having actually seen Baha'u'llah (Momen, M: 1981, p.234). This sighting took place when he was visiting Laurence Oliphant's home on Mount Carmel. His friendship with Oliphant, a prolific writer on occult matters, indicates a long-term involvement in alternative spirituality. He was deeply interested in spiritualism and wrote extensively in *The International Psychic Gazette* as well as being the principal correspondent to *Baha'i News* and *Star of the West*. He also wrote a short pamphlet entitled *Baha'i Philosophy and Reincarnation* in response to a negative article in *Theosophical Review* of July 1912 concerning 'Abdu'l Baha's teachings on reincarnation. How Arthur Cuthbert discovered the Baha'i teachings is unclear. In an article in *The International Psychic Gazette* of January, 1913 Felicia Scatcherd wrote, "One day in February, 1907, I met that earnest Baha'i, Mr Arthur Cuthbert. He introduced me to his companion, Mr Sidney Sprague, as one who had come from America to spread the Baha'i teaching. Mr Sprague had been sometime in England, but progress had been slow and he was somewhat disheartened." From this passage it can be inferred that Cuthbert was aware of Baha'ism and Sprague by at least late 1906. He may have learnt of it from Sprague who became a Baha'i in Paris about 1902 through Charles Mason Remy (Stockman: 1995, p.258). In 1904 Sprague had made a pilgrimage which had resulted in 'Abdu'l Baha sending him on a mission to India. The result of his visit was the publication, in London, in 1908, of a small book entitled *A Year With the Baha'is of India and Burma*. Sprague, who was also known as Iskander Khan, travelled extensively in Persia, India and the Middle East teaching about Baha'ism, but perhaps more importantly as a living link between East and West. This linkage was made even more apparent when in 1910 Sprague married Farahangiz Khanum, the daughter of Mirza Asadu'llah and sister of Dr Aminu'llah Farid. This liaison was to have far reaching consequences.

The article mentioned above is entitled "A Wise Man from the East" and is interesting in that in it Scatcherd outlines her objections to the Baha'i Movement. She begins by pointing out that the "useful enough form of hero worship for those to whom it appealed" caused her initially to refuse all invitations to visit 'Abdu'l Baha. That while she recognised the value of the Baha'i Movement and promoted it in London and Paris she felt no desire to meet its leader. She continues, "from time to time I attended a Baha'i assembly, but remained as aloof from its influence as ever. In European Turkey where it was most needed it made little progress. ... I was somewhat indignant that the

drawing rooms of London, Paris and New York, were coquetting with this newer faith, instead of endeavouring to spread it amongst the peoples from which it had sprung, who were in sore need of its enlightenment.” Scatcherd does make two very good points; she is not alone in being put off by the antics of some of the Baha’is, Pole makes a similar point about the “lionising” of ‘Abdu’l Baha, obscuring the importance of the Manifestation, in *Star of the West*. Her dislike of the privileged of the developed world usurping the spirituality of the developing world is much more in line with modern thinking than the patronising ethnocentricity of many of her contemporaries. She then goes on to recall how she did meet ‘Abdu’l Baha in Cadogan Square in 1911, and how she “realised the true greatness of the man in whose presence I found myself.” Scatcherd does not appear to have ever identified as a Baha’i; she met with ‘Abdu’l Baha again in Egypt in 1912, in the company of Dr and Mrs Platon Drakoues and later in London in January 1912 with CW Child the palmist. She was certainly a close friend of Sidney Sprague and Arthur Cuthbert. She definitely visited the latter in his home in Scotland after his rift with the Baha’is, as a poem by her was published in the Wigtownshire Press, 18<sup>th</sup> May 1916. She mentions Constance Maud warmly in her articles, Maud also wrote in *The International Psychic Gazette*, but does not reveal the identity of the “dear friend” who compelled her to meet ‘Abdu’l Baha, but refers to “her”. Maud certainly did identify as a Baha’i and wrote a short book about it entitled, *Sparks Amongst the Stubble*.

There were other authors involved with the Baha’i Movement shortly before ‘Abdu’l Baha’s visit. One of these was Maud M Holbach. She wrote travel books, her publications including *Bosnia and Herzegovina, some wayside wanderings* and *Dalmatia, the land where East meets West*, both include photographs by her husband Otto and were published by John Lane of London in 1910. The relevance of Baha’ism for Holbach would appear to be the East-West unity value, the appeal of which would have been obvious to someone deeply interested in the Balkan region. Holbach lived in Oxford and the correspondence between her and her daughter Dorothy, held in the London Baha’i Archives, reveals she was well acquainted with Cheyne and attended both Anglican and Christian Science worship.

Another early Baha'i concerned with the East was Ethel Stefana Stevens. Stevens was, at the time of her involvement with the Baha'i movement, an author of romantic fiction, much of which was set in the Middle East. The first indication of her interest comes in her 1909 work, *The Veil. A Romance of Tunis*. Here she has two of her characters describing Babism, although the death of the Bab is incorrectly stated to have taken place in a shop and by stabbing (Stevens: 1909, p. 162). The character continues, "The question then arose as to upon whom the mantle of the Bab had fallen. ... However, one of the rival Babs ceded to the other eventually and the present Bab, Abbas Effendi, is a most curious personality. His magnetism is marvellous; his gentleness and charity are undenied even by his enemies. He is the author of one of the most extraordinary religious philosophies which has ever come from East or West." (Stevens: 1909, p. 163) Clearly Stevens' knowledge is slight and the omission of Baha'u'llah from the history of Baha'ism appears extraordinary, although it probably represents a not uncommon understanding based on a combination of popularised versions of Browne's work cobbled together with contemporary accounts of 'Abdu'l Baha. Stevens was clearly drawn further into Baha'ism, for her later book *The Mountain of God*, 1911, was written with the approval of 'Abdu'l Baha. This novel is set on Mount Carmel and a number of the characters are Baha'is. The Persian family with whom the central character lodges are based upon Mirza Asadu'llah and his son Dr Aminu'llah Farid, with whom Stevens herself stayed whilst writing the novel. Stevens wrote thirteen novels between 1909 and 1927; she also wrote extensively about her travels in the Middle East. But it was after 1923, whilst living in Iraq where her husband was Judicial Adviser between 1921 and 1946, that she began her research into the Mandaean. Under her married name of Ethel Stefana Lady Drower she became the foremost authority on the Mandaean, publishing numerous works of scholarship. It may have been through her husband that she came into contact with Francis Henry Skrine another high-ranking member of the British imperial service. Skrine had published numerous books on India, including *The Heart of Asia* with Sir E Dennison Ross in 1899. In 1912 he published *Baha'ism, the Religion of Brotherhood*. In the introduction to this little book he writes "Through the kind offices of Miss E. S. Stevens (Mrs. E. M. Drower) ... I was able to submit my manuscript to 'Abdu'l Baha during his short stay in Paris" (Skrine: 1912, p.12). Conversely, Stevens acknowledges Skrine in the introduction to *The Mountain of God*

Another sub network of academics interested in the Baha'i experience can be identified. Most of these were Unitarians and overlap Liberal Christianity and the *Christian Commonwealth*. Academic interest in the Baha'is had shifted from Browne's Cambridge to Oxford, and in particular to Manchester New College. This institution was connected to the Unitarian form of Christianity. Like many colleges, its students were involved in settlement work amongst the poor, in this instance the Passmore Edwards Settlement in Bloomsbury which Alice Buckton's husband, J. Estlin Carpenter, a foremost Unitarian intellectual and Vice President of Manchester College had helped the author Mary Ward found in 1890 (Sutherland: undated, p.8). The first warden of the settlement was another Unitarian academic, Philip Wicksteed. The most prominent of the Manchester New College men to be involved with Baha'ism was Thomas Kelly Cheyne. Cheyne was an important scholar of the Old Testament and had been Oriel Professor of the Interpretation of the Holy Scripture from 1885 to 1908. Cheyne was totally eclectic in his religious life, being both a Baha'i, a Hindu (a member of the Nava Vidhan of Lahore) a Quaker and an Anglican priest simultaneously. He was also a member of the editorial board of *The Christian Commonwealth*. Cheyne wrote *The Reconciliation of Races and Religions*, which contains much Babi and Baha'i historical information and attempts to put them into a context of religious unity. Estlin Carpenter was more concerned with Indian religious traditions. He was also involved with the Liberal Christian Movement (*Christian Commonwealth* 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1910, interview with CW Wendte) and the Brahma Samaj Movement. A Fellowship scholar of Manchester College, prominent in the Brahma Somaj was Rev. P.L. Sen, who was the nephew on one of its most revered leaders Keshub Chunder Sen (*Christian Commonwealth* 12<sup>th</sup> October, 1910, interview with TL Vaswani). Estlin Carpenter and Wicksteed published a book of lectures in 1903 entitled *Studies in Theology*. Most of these lectures concern Liberal Christianity and the historical criticism of the Christian Scriptures. In his Essex Hall Lecture for 1895, "The relation of Jesus to his age and our own", Carpenter spoke extensively about Babism, quoting Browne's work. In its published form the lecture has the following footnote; "The late Master of Balliol once told me he thought that Babism might prove to be the most important religious movement since the foundation of Christianity" (Carpenter & Wicksteed: 1903, p.254).



The values which made Baha'i relevant for each sub-network depended upon the context on which it was based. For the travel writers Holbach and Stevens the East-West unity value would have been paramount. This would have been particularly the case for Stevens trying to make sense of life as an imperial administrator's wife, whilst being drawn into study of the culture in which she was immersed. For the academics, relevance would have been defined by their pre-existing commitment to Unitarianism and Liberal Christianity. The relevance for the *IPG* grouping is harder to ascertain; they would appear to share with the Central Network an interest in spiritual inner growth and they also had links to Paris through Sprauge. They do not, however, appear to have been overtly concerned with Baha'u'llah as a manifestation of God, or at least this does not come across in their writings. The sub-networks indicate a number of feminists: Constance Maud wrote a book entitled *No Surrender* about the suffrage movement and Drower's books show both interesting and independent female heroines as well as an interest in female representations of the Divine. Cuthbert's friend Scatcherd also wrote as Felix Rudolph, an indication that like Sharpe and Mcleod she was of no fixed gender. As might be expected there is no indication that any of the sub-networkers consider Baha'ism to be a separate or independent religion. Clearly, prior to the visits of 'Abdu'l Baha the people who identified as Baha'is in the British Isle believed a number of very different things upon which they hung their preferred version of Baha'ism. Pole who believed he was being guided by spiritual forces when he encountered Baha'ism for the first time in Constantinople would have been able to fit it into his vision for the ushering in of a new age. Buckton would have been comfortable with its emphasis on female equality, although it is very interesting that no mention is made of female imagery within the Baha'i writings, for example that of the Holy Maiden and the Maid of Heaven, which might easily have been incorporated into the Bride symbolism which was basic to much of her thinking. Many of the Central Network women would have been keen on the sex equality emphasis. For the socialistically orientated the Baha'i teachings spoke of equality, brotherhood and world peace. At this stage the understanding of Baha'i teachings was vague enough to run through pre-existing networks reinforcing already held beliefs. The isolation of the networks is an indication that individuals preferred to stay within friendship groups where their understanding of Baha'ism would not be challenged. Some, like Wilberforce, were able to span many of the networks, while others would appear to have had little in common with those outside

their immediate circle. It is significant that this widely diverse group could find much to agree upon in the Baha'i teachings and very little to challenge them. Some may have worried over reincarnation, as it seems to have been an issue which had to be addressed at some length, but by and large they seem to have been happy to incorporate what they understood to be Baha'ism into a wide range of different beliefs. It is hard to imagine what they would have made of each other had their paths been more intricately linked, but the point was that, safe in their networks, they were unlikely to encounter direct confrontation from others calling themselves Baha'is but with differing outlook.

By the time 'Abdu'l Baha reached British shores his father's teachings had been known there for at least a decade. However, this raises the question as to what did these early Baha'is actually believe? This was considered by Philip R Smith in his article "What were the Baha'i concerns of the British Baha'is 1900 -1920" (1988). In this article Smith asserts that the Baha'is of this period had three major concerns: history, millennialism and the unity of religions. This is a slightly different emphasis from the motifs outlined in chapter one. Philip Smith, like Berger and Peter Smith before him uses the system of motifs but does not attempt to place believers within the motifs or explain how they worked. His millennialism and religious unity concerns can be placed within the chiliastic motif, whilst the interest in history would seem to be merely a means of placing the new teachings in a pre existing context. Smith does not mention the gnostic motif at all and seems unaware of the Baha'is in the west of England. Smith's work actually demonstrates the limitations of the motif construct, because the motifs are constructs imposed upon cultural output, and they miss altogether the personal experience of individuals. The ordering of religious history by motif leaves no place for the individuals' own subjective understanding and beliefs, which, as we have seen above, are often quite different from those imputed by these motifs.

Smith argues that the Baha'is repeatedly outlined their history in order to contextualise Baha'ism as the latest in a line of progressively revealed religions. Their history tended to be the histories of the Baha'i prophets, presented without much analysis. The Bab, Smith argues, was assigned a much lower status than Baha'u'llah. He points out that the only source of information available to the Baha'is was *Traveller's Narrative* and the purpose of this book was to support the claims of Baha'u'llah rather

than provide an objective historical record. The emphasis is on the Bab as the forerunner of Baha'u'llah. In fact the Bab's role becomes parallel with that of John the Baptist. (Smith: 1988, p.225) Smith goes on to point out the lack of knowledge of both the teachings and the life of the Bab and the emphasis on his death. Baha'is now accept the Bab as the co-founder of their faith but for the first British Baha'is he was only a forerunner, with little teaching of his own. Smith continues that while Baha'u'llah was accepted as the founder and inspiration of the Movement there was considerable confusion as to the exact nature of his station. The British Baha'is had never been exposed to Kheiralla's doctrine that Baha'u'llah was God in human form and that 'Abdu'l Baha was a reincarnation of Jesus. However, Smith points out that Myron Phelps who became aware of Baha'ism in London in 1902 came to similar conclusions. Alter in his 1924 thesis "reached the conclusion that Baha'u'llah was not merely regarded by them as a prophet, but was worshipped as a God." (Smith: 1988, p.231) This confusion Smith argues may have come from the use of Christian terminology. The difference between the manifestation of God's power and an incarnation of God would have been difficult for those reared on the incarnation of Jesus to grasp. 'Abdu'l Baha was perhaps the most important factor in the understanding of Baha'ism for many of the British Baha'is. Although never seen as a reincarnation of Jesus, he was constantly referred to as Christ-like. Smith goes on to argue that this led on to their understanding of millennialism and this impacts upon the polar motif.

According to Smith for the Baha'is the arrival of a new revelation from God to mankind signalled the dawn of a great era or millennium. This new era would be that of the "Most Great Peace". This would be the result of the process begun by the manifestation of Baha'u'llah. This era of peace and plenty would arrive gradually. The Baha'is saw in material and social progress the hand of God and ultimately the proof of the claims of Baha'u'llah. Their's was an intensely optimistic worldview. The Most Great Peace was inevitable because the spiritual forces unleashed by Baha'u'llah were irresistible. People who had never heard of the Baha'i Movement could do its work by contributing to the sum of human good. The progress of the new era could be enhanced by the actions of Baha'is in spreading the teachings of Baha'u'llah. This, Smith points out "did not mean a search for converts. Their aim was to hasten the arrival of the Most Great Peace by proclaiming the existence of its prophets, and by spreading their ideals"

(Smith: 1988, p.240). Smith does not refer to any of the social and political causes in which the Baha'is were enmeshed. For most of the Baha'is the understanding that they were dealing with a new religion was at best obscured and in many cases positively denied.

Unity of religion was the third concern identified by Smith. Whilst modern Baha'is understand this to mean unity **within** the Baha'i Faith, the early British Baha'is remained within their churches, some in paid positions, and looked for some kind of trans-faith unity. This was of course perfectly in line with the doctrine of Liberal Christianity, Unitarianism and Theosophy which many of the Baha'is were involved with. Smith's analysis is essentially correct, but in using this system of motifs he is reduced to compiling information from published sources without considering what lay behind it, and thus he is forced to consider "concerns" rather than the values which shaped them. The understanding of millennialism and religious unity for individuals was imbedded in the network through which they approached Baha'ism. Having considered Smith's study of what it meant to be a Baha'i and identifying its limitations it is clearly necessary to take the theory a stage further and consider the role of the networks as conduits for relevance. In the table below the motifs are set out against the background context and the network stance. Obviously the table is simplified and many people were interchangeable across networks, but the point it seeks to demonstrate is that the motifs were based upon a background context, which in turn were picked up by various networks. The network becomes the context in which the motif is perceived as relevant.

	Identified by	Background Context	Network
The Chiliastic Motif	Berger	Unitarianism,	Academic:New College Carpenter/Cheyne
Millenarianism	Smith P	feminism	Central: WSPU Celtic: WFL
Social Reconstructionalism	Smith P	socialism.	Celtic: Christian Commonwealth, ILP Campbell/Buckton
Religious Liberalism	Smith P	Ecumeniism,	ChristianCommonwealth
Unity of Religions	Smith PR	Liberal	New College
History of religions/	Smith PR	Christianity	

<b>The Polar Motif</b>	Smith P	Developed by	Central Network, links
Obedience & devotion	Smith PR	contact with	with Palestine & Paris
		'Abdu'l Baha	
<b>Gnostic Motif</b>	Berger	Theosophy,	Celtic: links with occult
Esotericism	Smith P	Spiritualism &	& Western mysticism.
Religious Search	Smith P	Occultism	Central: New Thought
Metaphysical Movements	Smith P		

## 2.6 *The Convergence of the Networks*

Before the 1911 visit of 'Abdu'l Baha, the Baha'is in Britain numbered less than fifty, mainly located in London, but with a few isolated individuals elsewhere. There was no attempt at formal organisation. One became a Baha'i by writing to 'Abdu'l Baha and receiving a "tablet" in response.<sup>7</sup> The most important consideration was to "live the life", that is to follow the teachings of Baha'u'llah and the example of 'Abdu'l Baha in everyday life. But how was a Baha'i to learn this? Throughout the first decade of the twentieth century the literature available to those who wished to study Baha'ism was scant and the majority of what was available simply reiterated the history of the movement. In 1900, Anton Haddad had translated the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* into English which was not published, but circulated in typescript form. Whilst it might not have been available to all Baha'is, it is clear from correspondence that some British believers, at least, were familiar with it. A collection of translated writings of Baha'u'llah entitled *Tablets, Communes and Utterances*, was published in the United States in 1900 and a year later the first introductory book to Baha'ism, *The Truth of It*, by Arthur Pillsbury Dodge appeared. In 1902 the first edition of Myron Phelps' *Abbas Effendi, His Life and Teachings*, was published, which was heavily revised for its second edition in 1912. Also in 1902 *Baha'i Proofs* by Mirza Abu'l-Fadl-i-Gulpaygani was produced in response to an attack by Peter Z Easton, a Christian missionary. Mirza Abu'l-Fadl-i-

<sup>7</sup> 'Abdu'l Baha's letters are always referred to as "tablets". *Star of the West* gives a list of "unclaimed tablets" suggesting that some individuals may have reconsidered their applications.

Gulpaygani was one of the foremost oriental Baha'i thinkers and this work represents an important step in the development of Baha'i theology. In 1906 two important works of Baha'u'llah were translated, *The Hidden Words* and *The Seven Valleys*, and these would be included in *The Splendour of God*, an introductory book by Eric Hammond, published in London in 1911. An important addition to the body of work on Baha'ism was *Some Answered Questions*, made up of table-talks given by 'Abdu'l Baha between 1904, 1905 and 1906. His words were collected by Laura Barney, and published in London in 1908. This book is the only example of a work not actually revealed by the Bab, Baha'u'llah or 'Abdu'l Baha to be included in the canon of Baha'i scripture. It is also significant in that it addresses questions from Western believers and consequently outlines their concerns, which include strikes and the right method of treating criminals. A companion volume by Barney's husband Hippolyte Dreyfus entitled *The Universal Religion: Baha'ism* was also published in 1908 which introduced for the first time the theme of science and religion being compatible which would later emerge a "principle" of Baha'i belief. Dreyfus reasserts, "Bahaism is not a new religion; it is religion renewed" (Dreyfus: 1908, p.24) and "it goes without saying that it does not demand its adepts abjure their old religion" (Dreyfus: 1908, p.25). By 1912 at least seventy Baha'i books and pamphlets had been published in English (Smith). Most of these would have been translations of tablets and introductory works. Another significant development was the launch of *Baha'i News*, later *Star of the West* in April 1910. It was published in Chicago, on the first day of each Baha'i month. The magazine details the activities of the American Baha'is. Articles from the British community also appear spasmodically and from these the activities of the group become apparent.

In the articles by and about the Baha'is in Britain at this time it becomes clear that not only has an embryonic community life begun but an interesting use of terminology has started to emerge. The first mention of the London group is in the June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1910 (Vol. 1. No. 6) edition of *Baha'i News*, where it is reported that Dr Fisher of Trentishoe Mansions had held two feasts with Baha'is from "Eastbourne, Surrey, Hornsey and Essex". The report continues that, "Dr Fisher has also been giving a series of lectures on the "Seven Valleys" suggesting that some kind of formal study of the writings was in progress. Dr Fisher was a native of New York. His removal to London was reported in the *Baha'i News* of 9<sup>th</sup> April 1910. The report in the June 1910 edition

ends with the words “The Assembly is splendidly harmonious and growing healthily”. Thus, in this short report there are two examples of Baha’i terminology which must have been used differently from their modern definitions. The “Assembly” would seem to refer to the entire group, as it is “growing”. An assembly in modern usage would describe the nine-person committee elected by adult Baha’is in a defined geographical area. Subsequent editions of the *Baha’i News* and *Star of the West* include London in the list of “Assemblies in the Occident”. The London Baha’is had “Regular meetings of assembly Friday, 8:15 p.m., at 10 Cheniston Gardens, Wright’s Lane, Kensington High Street.” (*Baha’i News* February 7<sup>th</sup>, 1911 Vol. 1 No. 16). These meetings were advertised and reported in the *Christian Commonwealth* where the term “assembly” was not used. Perhaps then, specific terminology was restricted to internal Baha’i publications. The meetings were open to enquirers and many public meetings were held at the Higher Thought Centre in 10, Cheniston Gardens, Kensington. The other interesting feature of the June 1910 (Vol. 1 No. 18) report is that the Baha’is were holding the Feasts. Again, this is precise terminology for modern Baha’is but it cannot have had the same meaning in 1910. Today the Nineteen-Day Feast includes a period in which the administration of the community is discussed. Consequently the gathering is restricted to Baha’is. Should a non-Baha’i be present, the gathering is declared a “unity feast” and its function is radically altered. No administrative business can be conducted at such a meeting. As there was no formal administration and scant regard to any concept of “membership” in 1910, whatever Dr Fisher’s feasts consisted of they cannot have been the same as modern Baha’i feasts. There is nothing to suggest the dates of these feasts coincided with the start of Baha’i months. However, *Baha’i News* always published the Baha’i calendar so it can be assumed they were aware of it and at least something of its significance. The use of existing terminology and revising its meaning during the much later period of organisational construction creates an illusion of continuity. A casual perusal of this early literature might suggest that Baha’i feasts and assemblies in their present form existed in Britain as long ago as 1910, when in fact this is not the case. However, it can be asserted that several types of meetings were taking place. The most frequent of which seem to be informal gatherings in the homes of individual Baha’is.

The networks only began to converge shortly before the arrival of 'Abdu'l Baha. On December 31<sup>st</sup> 1910 Wellesley Tudor Pole addressed a meeting about his trip to see 'Abdu'l Baha; about eighty people were present, "it was the largest meeting we have had in London" (Blomfield: 1940, p.153). This meeting is extremely important in the development of the community. It would appear to be the first time the Baha'is meeting at the Higher Thought Centre met Pole. This means that it is the point of convergence of the two main networks. It is interesting to note that while many photographs exist of Baha'i meetings, none of them include Pole or Buckton. By 1910 the Pole-Buckton Baha'is were meeting at the Passmore Edwards Settlement in Tavistock Place. This emphasises the separateness of the networks prior to the visits of 'Abdu'l Baha. Lady Blomfield's description of Pole also indicates that he was perceived as someone from outside of the Central Network who had a deeper insight into the Baha'i teachings than that which they had previously experienced. She wrote "Mr. Wellesley Tudor Pole, who had visited the Master in Alexandria, with the clear insight of a student of things sacred and mystic, had recognised the inspiring influence which emanated from 'Abdu'l Baha. Mr. Tudor Pole had helped us to understand something of the power of Baha'u'llah working in the realm of thought, to awaken the hearts and minds of those who, through inner training, had attained capacity. These explanations were very illuminating to us, who were waiting and hoping for the coming of 'Abdu'l Baha".

As well as exclusively Baha'i activities we can locate the Baha'is in numerous other causes and lobbies in which they espoused the Baha'i Cause. The Baha'is were involved in all manner of activities which they perceived as complementing, or at least not contradicting, Baha'ism. In some areas they were quite aware that they were using a situation to promote Baha'ism. For example *Star of the West* carried a number of articles on the Universal Races Congress, held in London July 26<sup>th</sup> - 29<sup>th</sup>, 1911. The main promoters of Baha'i involvement in this event were Pole and Buckton. As described above the Celtic network of which these two were the most prominent members was committed to the promotion of Baha'ism through "good works". Both Pole and Buckton had visited Acca between 1910 and 1911 and returned with the message that 'Abdu'l Baha wanted Baha'is to work within their pre-existing social groupings. It had been hoped that 'Abdu'l Baha would attend this conference but in the event he was unable to attend and instead sent an address to be read out by a prominent



American Baha'i. In the week leading up to the Congress four Baha'i public meetings on related topics were held. Clearly the Baha'is saw racial unity as an issue which would attract the type of people who would be interested in Baha'ism. This raises the question, to what extent did Baha'is participate in other organisations and interest groups because they were Baha'is. In other words, did one become a Baha'i and then learn Esperanto because Baha'u'llah had prophesied a "universal auxiliary language"? Or did one learn Esperanto and through internalising its universalist message embrace Baha'ism? These factors add to the idea that many of the early Baha'is may have felt that Baha'ism was familiar and that they had "always" believed in it. Pole and Buckton were both happy to spread the news that 'Abdu'l Baha wanted continued involvement in social activity, but to what extent he was influenced by their enthusiasm for such projects can never be known.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE VISITS OF ABDU'L BAHA TO BRITAIN

The Baha'i Message made Relevant in the West 1911 – 1913

#### *3.1 Outline of the Chapter*

The purpose of this chapter is not to repeat the story of 'Abdu'l Baha's visits to Britain but rather to consider relevance in the context of his visits. Two main issues will be addressed: first, what 'Abdu'l Baha actually said, or at least what people at the time considered valuable enough to record and publish; second, the relative importance of the networks in the organisation of the visits. The chronicling of the visits exposes interesting divisions between the networks. Moreover, there is evidence that the message delivered by 'Abdu'l Baha was made relevant for the particular context or network he was addressing. The visits made by 'Abdu'l Baha to the British Isles in 1911 and again in 1912 – 1913, were eagerly anticipated by the Baha'is. They used all their influence and contacts to ensure that the opportunities afforded by the physical presence of their Master realised their full potential. In analysing the British Baha'is, these visits present a unique snapshot of their concerns and activities or to put it another way – what was relevant to them. The British Baha'is organised the itinerary, arranged the meetings and ultimately set the agenda for 'Abdu'l Baha. He was required to answer their questions, meet the people they thought important and address the issues that concerned them. Consequently he was required to expound Baha'i teachings in new contexts and to expand on areas which had hitherto not been explored. In this way the British Baha'i Movement contributed to a widening of the area of his guidance and to a clarification of emphases.

The major sources of information about the visits are: Blomfield's *The Chosen Highway* (London 1940), a rather confused narrative that does not always clarify the dates and circumstances of events; Hassan Balyuzi's *'Abdu'l Baha the Centre of the Covenant of*

*Baha'u'llah* (Oxford, 1971), in which the visits are documented; *'Abdu'l Baha in London*, a collection of addresses and notes of conversations by several authors, edited by Eric Hammond and published in 1912; *Seven Candles of Unity*, a detailed account of 'Abdu'l Baha's stay in Scotland written by Anjam Khursheed (London, 1991), which draws upon numerous articles in *The Christian Commonwealth*, *Star of the West* and *International Psychic Gazette* as well as other local and national newspapers. Rob Wienberg's biography of Ethel Rosenberg gives a good overview of the visits as well as some discussion concerning the content of speeches. A compilation entitled *Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l Baha* published in 2000 brings together in one volume most of the public speeches made by 'Abdu'l Baha in the West. It is this work which has been used to reference most of the quotations given below.

### 3.2 *The First Visit – What did 'Abdu'l Baha Say?*

In considering relevance it is of paramount importance to consider what 'Abdu'l Baha said in public during his visits to the British Isles. The public meetings of his first visit as well as some private conversations are recorded in *'Abdu'l Baha in London*; these and *Paris Talks* have been used for analysis. The latter is important because they took place immediately after the visit to London and would have reflected the concerns raised there; furthermore the talks were recorded by British Baha'is and were quickly published in London.

A table of the content of 'Abdu'l Baha's speeches (See appendix One) reveals a fairly simple outline of the teachings of Baha'u'llah. Some of the talks of 'Abdu'l Baha are innocuous to the point of being bland. Rather than having to search for relevance, the question arises how anyone steeped in the alternative religious milieu could fail to find something relevant. He deliberately avoided anything that might be controversial and spoke to the sympathies of his audience. His message can be summed up as follows:

- There is single unknowable God.
- The prophets are all reflections of that single unknowable God.
- All religions are ultimately one as they stem from that single unknowable God
- The implicit inter-relationship of religions should make them a force for the unity of humanity.
- The fact that religion is often a cause of disunity is due to the gathering of superstitions and ignorance around them.
- Spirituality is the core of civilisation. Spiritual teachers differ from philosophers.
- Religions come from the East but inspire the West.
- There is a symbiotic relationship between the spiritual and the material; between the East and the West.
- Based on the above there is a social program which promotes unity of humanity, universalism, equality of races and sexes. This program is described as the Principles of Baha'u'llah.

**There is a single unknowable God.**

From the point of view of relevance and more importantly inference the concept of an unknowable God is a gift to the speaker. Where something is “unknowable” the listener can simply infer whatever they choose. If the listeners believe themselves to have some knowledge of the “unknowable” they can enrich the utterance and in the case of religious

utterances they can congratulate themselves on understanding the esoteric. It is hard to disagree with something that is unknowable. The transcendent nature of God was a familiar Christian doctrine, but the immanent nature of God, represented in the Christian tradition by the Christ, Son of God, aspect of the Trinity, was expanded to include other “manifestations of God” as well as Jesus.

‘Abdu’l Baha expounded his teachings on the nature of God at some length in one of the Paris meetings. He described the incomprehensible nature of God:

“In the Old Testament we read that God said, ‘Let us make man in Our own image.’ In the Gospel Christ said, ‘I am in the Father and the Father is in Me’. In the Quran, God says, ‘Man is My Mystery and I am his’. Baha’u’llah writes that God says, ‘Thy heart is my home; purify it for my decent. Thy spirit is my place of revelation, cleanse it for my manifestation.’

All these sacred words show us that man is made in God’s image: yet the Essence of God is incomprehensible to the human mind, for the finite cannot be applied to this infinite Mystery. God contains all: He cannot be contained. That which contains is superior to that which is contained. The whole is greater than its parts.” (*Utterances of ‘Abdu’l Baha p.706*)

‘Abdu’l Baha goes on to explain that just as a vegetable cannot comprehend an animal, an animal cannot understand human thought and humans cannot understand God:

“All superior kingdoms are incomprehensible to the inferior; how therefore could it be possible that the creature, man, should understand the almighty creator of all? That which we imagine, is not the Reality of God; He is the Unknowable, the unthinkable, and is far beyond the highest conception of man.” (*Utterances of ‘Abdu’l Baha p.706*)

**The prophets are all reflections of that single unknowable God.**

The idea that religious leaders are all manifestations of God is a constant theme in 'Abdu'l Baha's pronouncements:

"To man is given the special gift of the intellect by which he is able to receive a larger share of the light Divine. The Perfect Man is as a polished mirror reflecting the Sun of Truth, manifesting the attributes of God.

The Lord Christ said, 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father'-God manifested in man.

The sun does not leave his place in the heavens and descend into the mirror, for the actions of ascent and descent, coming and going, do not belong to the Infinite, they are the method of finite beings. In the Manifestation of God, the perfectly polished mirror, appear the qualities of the Divine in a form that that man is capable of comprehending" (*Utterances of 'Abdu'l Baha* p.707)

"The reality of all is One. Truth is one. Religions are like the branches of one tree. One branch is high, one is low and one is in the centre, yet all draw their life from the one stem. One branch bears fruit and others are not laden so abundantly. All the prophets are lights, they only differ in degree; they shine like brilliant heavenly bodies, each have their appointed place and time of ascension. Some are like lamps, some like the moon, some like distant stars, and a few are like the sun, shining from one end of the earth to the other." (*Utterances of 'Abdu'l Baha* p.1242)

"All the prophets of God came for the love of this one great aim.

Look how Abraham strove to bring faith and love among the people; how Moses tried to unite the people by sound laws; how the Lord Christ suffered unto death to bring the light of love and truth into a darkened world; how Muhammad sought to bring unity and peace between the various uncivilised tribes among whom he dwelt. And last of all, Baha'u'llah has suffered for forty years for the same cause-the single noble purpose of spreading love among the children of men-and for the peace

and unity of the world the Bab gave up his life.” (*Utterances of ‘Abdu’l Baha* p.786)

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of ‘Abdu’l Baha’s public statements was the emphasis he placed upon Christ (notably he nearly always speaks of Christ not Jesus) and Christianity. The table analysing the content of shows that Christ was mentioned in a high proportion of the sample.

“A friend asked how the teachings of Baha’u’llah contrasted with the teachings of Jesus Christ. “The teachings are the same” declared ‘Abdu’l Baha” (*Utterances of ‘Abdu’l Baha* p.1256)

So closely identified with Christianity is ‘Abdu’l Baha that professional Christian Reginald Campbell has difficulty in seeing any difference of purpose:

“We, as the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is to us and will always be the Light of the World, view with sympathy and respect every movement of the Spirit of God in the experience of mankind, and therefore we give greeting to ‘Abdu’l Baha in the name of all those who share the spirit of our Master, and are trying to live their lives in that Spirit. The Baha’i Movement is very closely akin to, I think I might say is identical with, the spiritual purpose of Christianity.” (*Utterances of ‘Abdu’l Baha* p.1221)

The idea of Christ as part of a sequence of bringers of esoteric knowledge is found in a number of contemporary writers on religious and esoteric matters. Dion Fortune in her understanding of the Master Jesus expresses similar concepts as well as a knowledge of Baha’ism:

“Each Christos who comes to the world has a special mission to fulfil in relation to the evolution of humanity. Osiris taught his people the arts of civilisation, Krishna

taught them philosophy, Buddha taught the way of escape from the bondage of matter, Abdul Baha taught social morality. If there are those who object to these Great Ones being ranked with Our Lord as manifestations of God<sup>1</sup> and Saviours of mankind, then esoteric science must agree to differ from them ...initiates of the Western Tradition will not agree to Our Lord being swept aside as merely a good man who taught according to his lights, nor yet as a medium who was used by the by the Christ.” Fortune Dion *Aspects of Occultism* Aquarian Press 1978, p. 24

Fortune was well known to the Celtic Network Baha'is and the above passage (written about 1930 but reiterating concepts developed earlier) would indicate that their relevance for people seeped in Western occult tradition would be obvious.

In contrast Muhammad is hardly mentioned at all and when he is it is to stress his acceptance of Christ.

“Muhammad recognised the sublime grandeur of Christ ... the people of Islam who glorify Christ are not humiliated by so doing.” (*Utterances of 'Abdu'l Baha* p.719/20)

### **All religions are ultimately one**

Another teaching that was honed for maximised relevance was the idea that all religions are ultimately one. The question that was never raised was: – What would that one religion be? The idea that all religions had a single source was not original and many of 'Abdu'l Baha's audience would have been very familiar with Theosophy and Liberal Christianity, both of which had similar ideas. What is particularly interesting from the perspective of relevance was the deliberate obscuring of the possibility of the Baha'i Movement as a separate religion. To suggest such a thing would almost certainly have caused many of 'Abdu'l Baha's hearers to reject his message outright.

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<sup>1</sup> The description 'Manifestation of God' is a peculiarly Baha'i term and may indicate Fortune was familiar



A Student of the modern methods of the higher criticism asked 'Abdu'l Baha if he would do well to continue in the church with which he has been associated all his life, and whose language was full of meaning to him. 'Abdu'l Baha answered: "You must not dissociate yourself from it. Know this; the Kingdom of God is not in any Society; some seekers go through many Societies as a traveller goes through many cities till he reaches his destination. If you belong to a Society already do not forsake your brothers. You can be a Baha'i-Christian, a Baha'i- Freemason<sup>2</sup>, a Baha'i-Jew, a Baha'i-Muhammadan. The number nine contains eight, and seven, and all other numbers, and does not deny any of them. (*Utterances of 'Abdu'l Baha* p.1259)

Thus the organisational consequences of accepting the Baha'i teachings appear to be nothing more than joining a sort of multi-faith club, where liberal adherents of a number of traditions can meet in fellowship.

**The implicit inter-relationship of religions should make them a force for the unity of humanity.**

The one unknowable God is, therefore, understood to be reflected in his/her messengers and they are ultimately responsible for what can be understood to be a single unified message that permeates all religions. If humanity can but see past the divisive labels they have put on the messages they can be unified through the force of religion.

"Religion should unite all hearts and cause wars and disputes to vanish from the face of the earth, give birth to spirituality, and bring life and light to each heart. If religion becomes a cause of dislike, hatred and division, it were better to be without it, and to withdraw from such a religion would be a truly religious act. ... Any

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with Baha'i terminology and writings

<sup>2</sup> Shoghi Rabbani would later specifically prohibit Baha'is membership of Masonic orders. (Hornby 1975 p. 422)

religion which is not a cause of love and unity is not a religion. All the holy prophets were as doctors to the soul; they gave prescriptions for the healing of mankind; thus any remedy that causes disease does not come from the great and supreme Physician.” (*Utterances of ‘Abdu’l Baha* p.764)

**The reality that religion is often a cause of disunity is due to the gathering of superstitions and ignorance around them.**

Religion is never the cause of disunity argued ‘Abdu’l Baha, but the superstitions and ignorance which develop around them are. He went on to explain:

“The chief cause is the misrepresentation of religion by the religious leaders and teachers. They teach their followers to believe that their own form of religion is the only one pleasing to God, and that followers of any other persuasion are condemned by the All-Loving Father and deprived of His Mercy and Grace. Hence arise amongst peoples, disapproval, contempt, disputes and hatred.” (*Utterances of ‘Abdu’l Baha* p.718)

**Spirituality is the core of civilisation. Spiritual teachers differ from philosophers.**

A term which ‘Abdu’l Baha frequently used was “spirituality” but no definition of this term was ever given. Spirituality is at best a vague concept, however, it seems reasonable to assume that many if not all of ‘Abdu’l Baha’s audience would have considered themselves to be “spiritual”. Thus the use of this term would have offered plenty of scope for inference, enrichment and relevance.

**Religions come from the East but inspire the West.**

'Abdu'l Baha pointed out that although all the great religions began in "the East", in the case of Christianity at least the West had surpassed the East in its enthusiasm for that tradition. The Celtic network might not have been too pleased with his failure to acknowledge the Western mystical tradition, but they would have been aware that much of what they designated "Western" was rooted in Egyptian and Judaic sources. Relevance might have required a rather elastic approach to where the line between East and West was drawn.

"Abraham appeared in the East. In the East Moses arose to lead and teach the people. On the Eastern horizon arose the Lord Christ. Muhammad was sent to an Eastern nation. The Bab arose in the Eastern land of Persia. Baha'u'llah lived and taught in the East. All the great Spiritual Teachers arose in the eastern world. But although the Sun of Christ dawned in the East the radiance thereof was apparent in the West, where the effulgence of its glory was more clearly seen. The divine light of His Teaching shone with a greater force in the Western world, where it has made a more rapid headway than in the land of its birth." (*Utterances of 'Abdu'l Baha* p.704)

**There is a symbiotic relationship between the spiritual and the material; between the East and the West.**

Having reassured his audience that Westerners were perfectly capable of grasping Eastern religious thought 'Abdu'l Baha went on to congratulate the West for its technological progress. The idea the East was somehow spiritual and the West materialist was commonly accepted as it fitted with benign concepts of imperialism that would have been familiar to his listeners.

"In these days the East is in need of material progress and the West is in want of a spiritual idea. It would be well for the West to turn to the East for illumination, and

to give in exchange its scientific knowledge. There must be this interchange of gifts.” (*Utterances of ‘Abdu’l Baha* p.705)

The interrelationship of east and West would have been familiar to the audience from Theosophy and numerous other Indian inspired philosophies fashionable at the time.

**Based on the above there is a social program which promotes unity of humanity**

The social program is described in the Principles of the Teachings of Baha’u’llah. Eleven of these were outlined by ‘Abdu’l Baha in Paris. These principles became the basis of many of his public speeches although they tended to vary slightly depending upon the audience. They do not form any kind of belief system; rather they are aspirations and values - most of which would have already been held by the kind of people who would have attended a meeting addressed by ‘Abdu’l Baha. The original list of principles is given below:

1. The Search after Truth
2. The Unity of Mankind
3. Religion should be the Cause of Love & Affection
4. The Unity of Religion & Science
5. Abolition of Prejudices
6. Equalisation of the means of existence
7. Equality of Men before the Law
8. Universal Peace
9. Non-interference of Religion & Politics
10. Equality of Sex - Education of Women
11. The Power of the Holy Spirit

This short social program became the centre of Baha’i teaching activities, versions of it are still used as introductory material on the Baha’i Faith at the time of writing.

Although most of the points are hard to disagree with and would certainly have been appealing to his listeners, one principle might have been slightly less acceptable and ultimately played a part in the retreat from relevance. The non-interference of religion with politics must have been of slightly dubious relevance to some of his listeners:

“Religion concerns the matters of the heart, of the spirit, and of morals. Politics are occupied with the material things of life. Religious teachers should not invade the realm of politics; they should concern themselves with the spiritual education of the people; they should ever give god counsel to men, trying to serve God and humankind; they should endeavour to awaken spiritual aspiration, and strive to enlarge the understanding and knowledge of humanity, to improve morals, and to increase the love for justice. This is in accordance with the Teachings of Baha’u’llah. In the Gospel also it is written, ‘Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s, and unto God the things which are God’s.’” (*Utterances of ‘Abdu’l Baha* p.779)

Superficially this does not appear to pose a problem to those brought up in the Christian tradition, but there is a contradiction for the acceptance of the Baha’i teachings. ‘Abdu’l Baha repeatedly commented upon the women’s suffrage question, and addressed a meeting of the Women’s Freedom League. What was this if not commenting upon a political issue? In fact many of the Principles of Baha’u’llah have a political facet: racial equality, education, fairer distribution of wealth and so on. ‘Abdu’l Baha’s apparent readiness to embrace progressive movements would have stilled any concerns from his more politicised supporters but as the Baha’is gradually adopted a more Quietist approach to politics, this contradiction would become more apparent and there would be a subsequent loss of relevance as they were unable to engage with radical movements. The quotation from the Gospels is particularly ironic as it is the basis of the division between the secular and the sacred in Christianity and ultimately between Church and state; some Baha’is would later argue against such divisions<sup>3</sup>.

### 3.3 *The Second Visit – The maximisation of Relevance*

The public addresses of the second visit were less reported than those of the first visit. This might have been because publication of material was disrupted by the outbreak of war or simply that the reportage in *Star of the West* and *Christian Commonwealth* was considered sufficient; at least no second volume of *'Abdu'l Baha in London* was produced. There were fewer 'set piece' public meetings and more addresses to interested groups mainly Esperantists and Theosophists, where 'Abdu'l Baha showed an ability to tailor his message to his audience in an effort to enhance relevance.

The first meeting of the second visit took place on December 14<sup>th</sup>, and was an address to the Theosophical Society in Liverpool; the next day 'Abdu'l Baha spoke at the Pembroke Chapel in the same town. Both the accounts of these meetings in *Star of the West* are by Isobel Fraser and are brief; they suggest the talks were short and were basically about peace and unity. The one to the Theosophists praises Theosophy and declares both Baha'is and Theosophists are those who have rejected dogma for truth. In the Pembroke Chapel rather more Christian imagery is invoked 'God is the Real Shepherd – all are His sheep. There is no difference whatever among the members of the flock'. It would appear that during his sojourn in America 'Abdu'l Baha had become very adept at tailoring his message for maximum relevance.

The first public meeting of this visit was a grand set piece held at the Westminster Palace Hotel, on December 20<sup>th</sup>. Isobel Fraser for *Star of the West* also reported this meeting. She describes an overflowing hall packed with 'scientists, diplomats and the leaders of great movements of the day'; Sir Thomas Barclay chaired the meeting. Barclay's opening remarks included the observation 'I wonder if I have understood the Revelation of Baha'u'llah. If I have it has a singularly good Christian ring and I should interpret its meaning as "Be a real Christian and you will be a good Baha'i"' Thus the assertion was clearly made that Baha'ism and Christianity were not merely compatible but actually

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<sup>3</sup> For an interesting article on Baha'i ideas about the division of church and state see S. McGinn "A theology

synonymous. The address given by 'Abdu'l Baha is longer than any he gave during his first visit. He started by outlining the importance of peace and unity to all the great world religions with particular emphasis on the role of Jesus – 'The foundation of all religion as taught by all the divine messengers has been love and affinity'. He went on to expound the 'Principles of Baha'u'llah', numbering each teaching as he spoke. His confidence seems to have increased as he referred to the situation in the Balkans and his meetings with Jews in America, which had inspired hope for improved relations between Christians and Jews. There is nothing significantly new in this speech, except a more developed ability to include references to international news and personal experience in the message. More interesting is the choice of supporting speakers. Alice Buckton addressed the hall; she read from the *Hidden Words* and described the circumstances of their revelation. She talked about peace and a recent peace conference and then 'emphasised the fact that this was no new religion, it sought the unity of all religions, shutting out none of them, but finding a common meeting place for all. She likened it to a garden of flowers where vast variety did away with monotony and made an interesting unity.' The next speaker was Charlotte Despard, President of the Woman's Freedom League. Mrs Despard spoke of 'The Master' and the message he was bringing the world. Despard referred to the unrest in the world but concluded it was a healthy symptom of change and that the "mighty movements-the women's movement, the religious movement, the spiritual movement" were all part of a unifying force for change. It is clear that for Despard "Abdu'l Baha is relevant as "one of the great Masters" in other words, not unique, and the leader of one of the great movements. Another interesting point she made was to refer to "the presence here in our western isle of this eastern Master" a reference to the revival of the Western magical traditions in which she and the Celtic Network were seeped.

Another meeting where relevance was clearly an issue was held at Ethel Rosenberg's home, White Lodge, Wimbledon on January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1913. This was not a public meeting and 'Abdu'l Baha's speech was tempered for its audience of Theosophists. There is no simplistic social program but rather a philosophical discourse relating to

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of the State from the Baha'i Teachings," *Journal of Church and State* 41.4 (1999): 697-724

reincarnation. Reincarnation was a stumbling block for many Theosophists when they encountered Baha'ism as the doctrine is expressly denied in the Baha'i teachings. In his talk at the White Lodge 'Abdu'l Baha seems to be addressing this issue in a circuitous way:

“This single cellular element travels and has all its coursings through all grades of existence. I wish you to ponder over this carefully. This single element has been in the realm of the mineral kingdom. While staying in the mineral kingdom it has had its coursings and transformations through myriads of images and forms. Having completed its travelling through the mineral kingdom it has ascended to the vegetable kingdom and in this kingdom it has again its travellings and transformation through myriads of images; sometimes it has been a grain, again it was in the form of a leaf, anon it was a flower or an animal, a tree, or a blossom! Then it attains to the stage of fruition and is a fruit. This single primordial element has had its transformations through these infinite forms and images. Again in the human kingdom it has transferences and coursings through a multitude of forms. In short, this reality or this single primordial atom has had its numerous travellings through every stage of life, and in every stage or form it was endowed with a special and peculiar virtue.” (*The Path* Vol. 3, July 1912 – June 1913 p.288)

The tone and content of the speech given to this audience is very different from that used in a public meeting; relevance is the key to his utterance and it is dictated by the context. Whilst 'Abdu'l Baha does not accept the doctrine of reincarnation, his utterance leaves the hearer with an inference which can be disambiguated or enhanced as a kind of acceptance. In his public meeting on January 16<sup>th</sup> at the Clifton Guest House in Bristol, 'Abdu'l Baha returned to familiar themes, however, there is a sharpening up of the language used to record his speech. He gave the customary introductory lecture outlining the principles of Baha'u'llah's teachings. The meeting was written up in *Star of the West* by Isabel Fraser. Whilst it is fair to point out that it is her language which is analysed below, her article would have been subject to editorial controls similar to those exerted over *Paris Talks*. Thus significant changes in terminology and style cannot be dismissed as



the whims of the writer but indicate developments in the emphasis placed on various components of the teachings and show how the dialectic of relevance became part of the process of teaching the Baha'i message.

The first principle was as before the search after truth, which would result in the realisation that "reality is one". The second principle formerly 'the unity of mankind' is now referred to as 'the unity of the race' while 'International Peace' has replaced the more longwinded 'Religion ought to be a cause of love and affection'. The fourth principle the unity of science and religion is little altered, as is the fifth concerning the abolition of prejudice. However, the sixth principle is now referred to as 'Equality of Sexes' the same name which had previously been given to the tenth principle. This is a clear indication of how this matter had risen in importance. The seventh principle which had previously been called the 'Equality of Men' is now called 'The Social Plan' whilst its content is almost the same as the earlier version although the new title indicates a slightly more secular almost political stance. 'Universal Peace' is later called 'The Parliament of Man'. Whilst it had always described the role of a 'supreme tribunal', the new title reflects a tightening up of ideas and a desire to be more relevant to those who already subscribed to this doctrine. The ninth principle is now referred to as 'Universal Education', which is very similar in content to the old tenth principle 'Equality of Sex' which was to be achieved primarily through education. The new tenth principle was 'Universal Language', which was presumably included to appeal to Esperantists. The original ninth principle, 'Non interference of religion with politics', was dropped. It may be assumed that the importance of the women's suffrage movement to the Baha'is would have made a totally apolitical stance hard to justify. Overall the revised version of the principles seems to suggest a rather more sophisticated and politicised audience. It would appear that the principles of the teachings of Baha'u'llah were fairly open to adaptation. In a meeting addressed by 'Abdu'l Baha in New York, America on 12<sup>th</sup> December, 1912 the tenth and eleventh principles are given as 'solution of the economic problem' and 'Organisation of the House of Justice' respectively.

Another utterance of 'Abdu'l Baha which is also dated 16<sup>th</sup> January was reported twice in *Star of the West*, first on March 21<sup>st</sup>, 1913, and then again on 12<sup>th</sup> December, 1913. This statement is totally different in tone and style from that apparently made the same day at Clifton Guest House. In the March version it begins by discussing some of the problems of the rapid growth of the Movement and continues to exhort the believers to "Teach the Cause!" The first paragraph is omitted in the second publication, perhaps because it seemed too negative: - 'People all around the world are entering the Cause; people of various tribes, nations, religions and sects. It is most difficult to administer to such heterogeneous elements'. It is impossible to suppose that these words were spoken to the public meeting at the guest house; it would seem more likely that they were directed to a close circle of committed believers. Thus it would appear that there was a different emphasis in public and private meetings. The command to teach would be the cornerstone of *The Tablets of the Divine Plan*, a series of letters from 'Abdu'l Baha to the American Baha'is extolling the virtues of teaching. This seems to be the earliest recorded statement of this kind made to British Baha'is and the repetition of its publication indicates the importance attached to it. "Teaching" was a loose translation of "tabligh" used in the Arabic original, which is usually rendered as "missionizing" or "propagandizing"; as proselytizing was forbidden, the term teaching was used.

Thus three clear demonstrations of the way in which relevance was maximised in the utterances of 'Abdu'l Baha can be demonstrated. In the most public of meetings the Baha'i message would primarily consist of rather vague theological statements followed by a clear social programme. Where the audience comprised of a particular interest group or networks the utterance was contextualised for enhanced relevance.

### 3.4 Network Activity during the first visit of 'Abdu'l Baha

In the preceding chapter it was asserted that the Baha'i teachings spread through networks. The visits of 'Abdu'l Baha expose the interplay between these networks and how they were brought together. In the table below the activities of the various networks are analysed to assess their importance and influence.

The first visit of 'Abdu'l Baha to England was from Monday, the 4<sup>th</sup> of September to Tuesday, October the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1911. This was a total of twenty-nine days.

Analysis of Network Activity during the First Visit<sup>4</sup>

Date	Place	Network Connection	Reference
Mon. 4 <sup>th</sup> Sept '11	'Abdu'l Baha arrived by steamer at the Port of London and went directly to 97, Cadogan Gardens. SW1	London home of Lady Blomfield. Central Network	AL p.45 CC Oct. 4 <sup>th</sup> 1911 GPB p. 280 SW Vol. 2 No.11 p. 3
Tues. 5 <sup>th</sup> Sept 1911	Interview with Albert Dawson, editor of the <i>Christian Commonwealth</i>	Christian Commonwealth Network	SW Vol. 2 No.11 pp. 2, 4 - 8.
Fri. 8 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 1911	He visited the home of Ethel Rosenberg for a Unity Meeting, The White Lodge, 8, Sunnyside, Wimbledon.	Ethel Rosenberg Central Network	
Fri. 8 <sup>th</sup> Sept 1911	'Abdu'l Baha spoke at the Passmore Edwards Settlement Centre	The settlement was connected to Manchester College Oxford Academic Network	
Sat. 9 <sup>th</sup> Sept 1911	Visited "Vanner's" in Byfleet, Surrey and walked in the village.	"Vanner's" was the home of Buckton and Schepel Celtic Network	AL p.84

<sup>4</sup> Key to codes used:  
 AB = 'Abdu'l Baha the Master  
 AL = ' Abdu'l Baha in London (Hammond, 1912)  
 BA = 'Abdu'l Baha (Balyuzi, 1971)  
 CC = Christian Commonwealth  
 CH = Chosen Highway (Blomfield, 1940)  
 GPB = God Passes By (Rabbani 1995)  
 JBS = Journal of Baha'i Studies  
 SEBW = Some Early Baha'is of the West (Whitehead 1977)  
 SW = Star of the West

Sun. 10 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 1911	'Abdu'l Baha spoke at the City Temple Church	RJ Campbell's church, translation read by Pole Celtic and Christian Commonwealth Networks	CC 13 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 1911 p. 850 SW Vol.2, No. 11 pp. 7 - 8
Tues. 12 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 1911	Mrs Thornburgh-Cropper gave a reception at 31, Evelyn Mansions, Carlisle Place SW1	Thornburgh-Cropper, Central Network	SW Vol.2 Oct 16 <sup>th</sup> , 1911, p.4
Wed. 13 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 1911	'Abdu'l Baha again visits Mrs Thornburgh-Cropper's home	Thornburgh-Cropper, Central Network	AL pp. 37 - 8
Sun. 17 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 1911	'Abdu'l Baha spoke at St. John's Church Westminster	Basil Wilberforce's Church Central Network	CC 20 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 1911, front page AL pp. 6 - 12 SW Vol. 2. No. 12 p.2
Sun. 17 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 1911	Niketon Institute, 20, South Hill Park Gardens Hampstead	Centre run by Rev. P.L. Sen, Fellow of Manchester College Academic Network	CC
Fri. 22 <sup>nd</sup> Sept. 1911	Visited the home of Miss Herrick and Miss Jack 137a Kensington High Street for a unity meeting. This address housed both Herrick's hat shop and the Higher Thought Reading Room	Herrick and Jack Central Network	SW Vol. 2, No. 12 p. 5
Fri 22 <sup>nd</sup> Sept 1911	'Abdu'l Baha visited the Hostel of the Pioneer Preachers, 28, King Sq. Goswell Rd. EC and the Home of Service 36, King Sq.	Campbell Christian Commonwealth Network	CC 27 <sup>th</sup> Sept 1911

	Both connected with the City Temple. Campbell was the warden of the former.		
Sat. 23 <sup>rd</sup> Sept 1911	'Abdu'l Baha left London by train for Bristol. He stayed at the Clifton Guest House owned and run by the Pole family.	Pole Celtic Network	CC 27 <sup>th</sup> Sept 1911 SW Vol. 2, No. 12 p.7 8 - 11
Mon. 25 <sup>th</sup> Sept 1911	Returned to London		
Thurs. 28 <sup>th</sup> Sept 1911	'Abdu'l Baha returned to Byfleet. His entourage stayed at the Queens Head, 2, High Street, Byfleet. He met Ezra Pound.	Buckton and Schepel Celtic Network	AL pp. 85 - 6
		Probably a contact of Buckton, through GRS Mead & <i>The Quest</i>	Elthan Afnan, Journal of Baha'i Studies, Vol.6 No.2 June - Sept. 1994
Fri 29 <sup>th</sup> Sept 1911	Farewell mtg. at the Passmore Edwards Settlement, organised by Thornburgh-Cropper	Thornburgh, Central Network Venue, Academic Network	AL pps. 19 - 20 and 117
Sat. 30 <sup>th</sup> Sept 1911	Addressed the Theosophical Society at the request of Besant.	invitation through Blomfield, Central Network	AL pps. 13 - 14
	19, Tavistock Sq. WC1		
Sun. 1 <sup>st</sup> Oct 1911	Visited the Higher Thought Centre, 10, Cheniston Gardens	Central Network	AL p 31
Mon. 2 <sup>nd</sup> Oct 1911	'Abdu'l Baha breakfasted with the Lord Mayor at the		SW Vol. 2 , 13, 4 CH 163 - 4

	Mansion House	
Tue. 3 <sup>rd</sup> Oct	He left London for	SW Vol. 2. 12, 6
	Paris from Victoria	AL p 117
	Station	

During this visit 'Abdu'l Baha also visited Richmond Park where he walked through Palewell Common and on through the Sheen Gate. He went to the home of Ethel Rosenberg's relatives, Mr and Mrs John Henry Jenner of 47, Vicarage Road, East Sheen. This was the address of the Unity Press and the Baha'i Publishing Society until the Jenners removal to Tasmania. He also walked in Hyde Park and on the downs outside Bristol.

The input of the Central Network during the first visit was primarily the organisation of meetings in private homes. The foremost of these was Blomfield in whose home in Cadogan Gardens 'Abdu'l Baha stayed and where he received numerous visitors, enquirers and acolytes. The influence of Lady Blomfield was enormous, she seems to have been instrumental in securing a number of important interviews, as well being involved with recording and publishing accounts of the visits to Europe in *Paris Talks* and *'Abdu'l Baha in London*. She also wrote *The Chosen Highway* in which the spoken chronicles of the women of the Holy Family are collected, as well as descriptions of the visit to the British Isles of 'Abdu'l Baha. She describes the visitors to her house to meet 'Abdu'l Baha:

Ministers and missionaries, Oriental scholars and occult students, practical men of affairs and mystics, Anglican-Catholics and Nonconformists, Theosophists and Hindus, Christian Scientists and doctors of medicine, Muslims, Buddhists and Zoroastrians. There also called: politicians, Salvation Army soldiers, and other workers for human good, women suffragists, journalists, writers poets, and healers, dressmakers and great ladies, artists and artisans, poor workless people and prosperous merchants, members of the dramatic and musical world, these all came; and none were too lowly, nor too great, to receive the sympathetic consideration of this holy Messenger, who was ever giving His life for others' good. (Blomfield: 1940, p.150)

Numerous individuals are mentioned amongst them, the trade unionist turned Theosophist Annie Besant:

Mrs Annie Besant visited the Master one day, also Mr A. P. Sinnett, who came several times, and they each invited 'Abdu'l Baha to address the Theosophical Society. (Blomfield: 1940, p.154)

The leader of the Women's Social and Political Union, Emmeline Pankhurst visited Cadogan Gardens. This was a particularly stressful time for her as she was facing conspiracy charges, which carried a severe penalty of three-years hard labour. Blomfield describes her visit:

Another interesting visitor was Mrs Pankhurst, who was much cheered by her interview, for the Master told her to continue her work steadfastly, for women would very shortly take their rightful place in the world. (Blomfield: 1940, p.155)

Blomfield lists eighteen believers by name who visited Cadogan Gardens, Mrs Thornburgh-Cropper, Miss Ethel Rosenberg, Miss Annie Gamble, Miss Elizabeth Herrick, Mrs Clara Scaramucci, Miss Elsie Lee, Mr Catanach, Mr Cuthbert, Miss Juliet Thompson, Mr Mountfort Mills, Mr Mason Remy, Mrs Claudia Coles, Miss Maude Yandell, Miss Julia Culver, Mrs Louise Waite, Rev. Cooper Hunt, Miss Drake Wright and Mrs Movius, interestingly, only five are male. This reinforces the assumption that the early Baha'i community was female dominated, although a number of these names were visiting North Americans and a number of English Baha'is, for example, Sarah Ridgeway and Daniel Jenkyn, who Hall records as meeting 'Abdu'l Baha at this time are not mentioned, so clearly the list is not exhaustive and consequently may not be representative.

Another Central Network member to host a meeting in her own home was Ethel Rosenberg. The event was described as a "Unity Meeting" and took place in her

Theosophical sounding residence, The White Lodge. The talk seems to have attracted a mainly Theosophical audience and the subject addressed is reincarnation, it was written up in the Theosophical magazine *The Path* as well as later in *Star of the West*. Also hosting a "Unity Feast" were Elizabeth Herrick and Marion Jack, in the room above Herrick's hat shop in Kensington High Street. About eighty people attended this meeting and heard 'Abdu'l Baha speak on unity, particularly between East and West. *Star of the West* describes the meeting in Mrs Thornburgh-Cropper's flat on the 12<sup>th</sup> September as 'her second "At Home" to the friends of 'Abdu'l Baha'. Apparently about forty-five persons were in attendance. There is no record of her first "At Home". According to *'Abdu'l Baha in London* he spoke at Cropper's flat again on the 13<sup>th</sup> September, however, as it would seem he said exactly the same as the report dated 12<sup>th</sup> September so this may be an error in dating between the two sources. It does seem reasonable to assume, however, that at least two of this type of meeting took place in Mrs Thornburgh-Cropper's flat. The only events connected to the Central Network which could be described as public meetings were a "Farewell Meeting" organised by Mrs Thornburgh-Cropper at the Passmore Edwards Settlement. This was also the venue of meetings of the Celtic Network Baha'i group under the secretaryship of Miss Schepel, and a visit to the Higher Thought Centre the venue of the meetings of the Central Network Baha'i group under the secretaryship of Arthur Cuthbert.

The overlapping *Christian Commonwealth*, Celtic and Academic networks had a very different emphasis in their role during this visit. The events which can be connected to them are much more public in nature and there is no record of "At Homes" or "Unity Meetings" in their places of residence. The *Christian Commonwealth* was probably the most important organ for the visit, so it is not then surprising that its editor was granted an interview with 'Abdu'l Baha the day after his arrival in Britain. 'Abdu'l Baha's first public appearance in the West was in the City Temple Church, the pulpit of *Christian Commonwealth's* spiritual mentor Reginald Campbell. 'Abdu'l Baha also visited two of Campbell's projects, the Hostel of the Pioneer Preachers and the Home of Service. His second major public appearance was at Basil Wilberforce's church, St. John's



Westminster. Wilberforce was connected to the Central Network and probably numbered some of them amongst his congregation. However, it should not be overlooked that he was on the editorial board of *Christian Commonwealth* and had written a book entitled *New Theology* in support of Campbell's book of the same title, consequently he can be perceived as the overlap between all of the networks. Another member of the *Christian Commonwealth* editorial board was Thomas Cheyne of Manchester College Oxford. Cheyne was associated with the Brahma Samaj Hindu group, whose Niketon Institute run by the Rev. P. L. Sen, a Fellow of Manchester College, was visited by 'Abdu'l Baha. Manchester College was closely connected to the Passmore Edwards Settlement mentioned above. 'Abdu'l Baha also met with a number of working women of the Passmore Edwards Settlement when he made the first of two visits to Vanners in Byfleet, a little farm house on the old royal manor dating from the time of Edward II. Vanners was the country home of Alice Buckton and her partner Annet Schepel, and the Settlement women were spending their holidays there. Buckton was connected to the Settlement and Manchester College through her husband Estlin Carpenter. There is a fairly long section on the two visits to Vanners in *'Abdu'l Baha in London*, presumably penned by Buckton. There is no suggestion of formal "At Home" style meetings, but rather informal discussion with a very mixed group of people who had just turned up and were waiting at the gate. He seems to have walked around in the village, admired boy scouts and generally mingled with the crowd. On his second visit he stayed overnight and went on to visit the motor car racing track at nearby Brooklands. It is also mentioned that "a well known poet" came to visit him. This would be Ezra Pound whose relationship with 'Abdu'l Baha is described in an article by Elthan Afnan (*Journal of Baha'i Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2, June - Sept. 1994). There is no firm evidence concerning how they came to be introduced, but Pound was acquainted with GRS Mead the editor of *The Quest* magazine, who was known to Buckton, and it is thus likely that he was the contact. However, Pound was at this time living in a cottage close to Kensington Church which was only minutes away from the Higher Thought Centre, so it is possible he simply stumbled upon the public meetings and the reading room.

During this visit 'Abdu'l Baha made one trip outside the Home Counties, to Bristol and the home of the Pole family. The Poles ran a guest house in Clifton, which was regularly advertised in the *Christian Commonwealth*. The Poles did not simply offer bed and breakfast, they seem to have pioneered the concept of themed weekend breaks. Their advertisements point out the delights of the countryside, and add the promise of thought-provoking meetings and interesting company. In fact each weekend a different speaker was booked to be the highlight of the weekend guests' stay. Less publicised but doubtless not the least part of the weekend was a visit to the Oratory, a room at the top of the building where the vessel found by Wellesley and Kitty Pole and their two companions was housed. According to Benham (1995, p.107) 'Abdu'l Baha visited the Oratory and blessed the vessel, apparently, and perhaps significantly, in silence. His visit caused the women of the triad to compose prayers for him, which are preserved in the Oratory service book in the Chalice Well Trust archive. It is therefore interesting that no mention of this event is made in any Baha'i publication. The account of the visit to Bristol recorded in *'Abdu'l Baha in London*, signed by Thomas Pole may hold a clue to this matter. Pole mentions that on the third day of his stay in Bristol, 'Abdu'l Baha was joined for breakfast by 'a Canon of the Anglican Church'. This presumably was Basil Wilberforce, who was a firm supporter of the Oratory and seems to have believed the Vessel was the actual Holy Grail. Two things, which may be entirely coincidental but deserve consideration, emerge. The first is that there was a deliberate policy of silence concerning the visit to the Oratory; the second is that this coincided with the disappearance of Wilberforce, for there is no further mention of him on this visit or the next. Another puzzling issue of this visit is that apart from the meeting at the guest house and "a walk on the downs" there is no detailed record of 'Abdu'l Baha's itinerary. He left London on Saturday the 23<sup>rd</sup> and there is no information about the time of his departure, but, as Thomas Pole records his comments on a drive during the afternoon, it can be assumed he arrived around midday. The "general reception" attended by about ninety people took place on the Saturday evening. On the following day there was more driving and walking on the Downs, then 'Abdu'l Baha went "over the Guest house and blessed it as a centre for pilgrims from every part the world, and said it would indeed become a House of Rest." (Hammond, 1912 p.83) This is clearly a reference

to the Oratory and the Vessel, although for anyone unaware of their existence it would be cryptic and possibly passed off as a rather over enthusiastic endorsement of a bed and breakfast establishment. It would seem that a great deal of the weekend was taken up with driving and walking, which raises the question, was this aimless meandering or was there a destination? Given its close proximity and the importance his hosts attached to the place it is possible that 'Abdu'l Baha visited Glastonbury.

The first visit to England seems to have been considered a successful "dry run" for the second longer visit to the West to be arranged. This would include a long interlude in North America and 'Abdu'l Baha must have felt confident that he could cope with the larger audiences he would encounter there.

An incident of major significance to the British community took place after 'Abdu'l Baha left their homeland. It was in Paris on Sunday the 19<sup>th</sup> November 1911 that 'Abdu'l Baha outlined his plans for the development of the Baha'i Movement in Britain to Ethel Rosenberg. Rosenberg's notes of this conversation are held in the London Baha'i archive. Rosenberg begins by thanking 'Abdu'l Baha for the instructions sent to her through Lady Blomfield concerning the setting up of a small committee in London which is to have "absolute power to decide what is to be done - with regard to the collection (of funds) - and publication of the English notes." Rosenberg adds that in another letter sent directly to herself, 'Abdu'l Baha had stated that this committee was to control all publications undertaken by the Baha'is. She continues to quote the letter which she describes as "Lady Blomfield's letter written on instructions from the Master to E.J.R.". "The Master wishes this duty to be undertaken by a committee formed of Miss Rosenberg, Mrs Cropper, Mrs Alexander Whyte, Miss Buckton, Lady Blomfield, Mr W Tudor Pole, and Hamsayih, Mrs Enthoven". Rosenberg records the first remark made in response to her thanks was "many beautiful things about Lady B: that she was entirely sincere, pure-hearted of a single intention and mind: that in her there was no division (or difference) of any kind: that I was to value her friendship." This suggests that there may have been some tension between Blomfield and the others. Cropper and Rosenberg had been involved in the Baha'i

Movement from the start. Whyte was also an associate of Cropper. The two women had visited 'Abdu'l Baha in Akka in 1906, and on His second visit 'Abdu'l Baha would stay with the Whytes in Edinburgh. Gabrielle Enthoven was called "Hamsayih" meaning neighbour by 'Abdu'l Baha, and she lived in the same block of flats as Cropper. 'Abdu'l Baha seems to have held her in high regard and it was she who he suggested wrote a play, which she declined to do. Mary Basil Hall eventually took up the suggestion. Enthoven disappears from the records almost immediately and it would appear her interest was fleeting. However, it is noteworthy that Rosenberg, Whyte and Enthoven are all contacts of Cropper's and at least the first two probably predate her involvement in the Baha'i Cause. Conversely, Blomfield was unknown to the others until her involvement with Baha'ism in 1907. 'Abdu'l Baha's strongly worded support of her cements her into the leadership of the Central network. The other two members of the Committee are Pole and Buckton of the Celtic network, which would appear to make the composition of the committee a conscious attempt on the part of 'Abdu'l Baha to fuse together the two main currents within the Movement.

The composition of this committee is of great significance in its inclusion of women. In fact the gender balance is six women and one man or eighty five percent female. This is startling because women had not been allowed to serve in the administration of the American Baha'i community. The full account of this and the implications of the change and as well as the possible reasons for them is discussed below<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> To assess changes in the role of women in the Baha'i Movement and the teaching on sexual equality it is necessary to consider the acceptability of women's membership on Baha'i administrative institutions. Originally there does not seem to have been any prejudice against women, they served on the Chicago Council Board until the reorganisation of the Chicago Baha'is by Mirza Asadu'llah in 1901 (Stockman, 1995, p.43). Asadu'llah had written to 'Abdu'l Baha in the spring of 1901 urging the election of a House of Justice in Chicago. In response he received detailed instructions concerning the election and functioning of consultative bodies. Stockman quotes a document by Thornton Chase listing pertaining to the functioning of the board. "The election was to be "Reorganisation - not organisation", which stressed the continuity of the new Board with the old. It was to consist of "not less than nine men". Should the women object, "Let them also have a Board composed of ladies, and let the two Boards act together in matters of especial interest to both". Stockman goes on to point out that no reason is given for the exclusion of women but suggests it may have been awareness of Baha'u'llah referring to members of the House of Justice as "men" or simply the assertion of patriarchy standard in their culture (Stockman, 1995, p.46). The latter explanation does not explain why they should have reverted to this patriarchal attitude, when they had previously not objected to females on the Board. Perhaps the prompting of Asadu'llah was responsible. The women did in fact elect their own Board which was referred to as the Women's Auxiliary Board, indicating

its subordinate role to the all male House of Justice. The two consultative bodies disagreed over a number of issues and ultimately the women began to query the legitimacy of the House of Justice. Corinne True wrote to 'Abdu'l Baha about the subject. The House set up a committee to re-examine the statements from the Aqdas upon which the body was organised. They reported back on February 9<sup>th</sup>, 1902 that they could find nothing to indicate how long they should remain in office nor that any rules had been broken. As a result the House moved "that we stand by Mirza Assad Ullah in the establishment of this House of Justice in accordance with the instructions of the Master and that we ignore all attacks made against the same (Stockman, 1995, p.64). The tension was not resolved, the women were not placated. The main point of contention was the desire of the women to hire a hall in the town, the House was reluctant due the cost. Eventually the women went ahead with the plan and hired a room in the Masonic Hall they held regular Sunday meetings there. The effect of this was to split the community in two. 'Abdu'l Baha changed the name of the Chicago Board from House of Justice to House of Spirituality, no reason was given but many felt they had been stripped of the title because they had proved unworthy. This change of name was highly significant. In the autumn of 1902 Frances Roe and Corinne True received tablets from 'Abdu'l Baha. Roe's tablet encouraged further efforts at organising women's groups. The tablet to True responded to her concerns about the exclusion of women from the House,

Know thou, O handmaid, that in the sight of Baha, women are accounted the same as men, and God hath created all humankind from His own image, and after His own likeness ... from the spiritual viewpoint there is no difference between them ... The House of Justice, however, according to the explicit text of the Law of God, is confined to men; this for a wisdom of the Lord God's, which will ere long be made manifest as clearly as the sun at high noon. ('Abdu'l Baha)

True did not let the matter rest she continued to question the exclusion of women, especially since the Chicago House no longer had the title House of Justice. In 1909 she received another tablet which reopened the question, this tablet read,

According to the ordinances of the Faith of God, women are the equals of men save only that of membership of the Universal House of Justice, for, as hath been stated in the text of the Book, both head and the members of the House of Justice must be men. However, in all other bodies, such as the Temple Construction Committee, the Teaching Committee, the Spiritual Assembly, and in charitable and scientific associations, women share equally in all rights with men.

According to Stockman (1995, p.323) the Chicago House of Spirituality was unclear to the definition of "Universal House of Justice" and "Spiritual Assembly", hence on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1909 they refused to add women to their membership and refused to publish True's tablet - in fact they demanded it retranslated, and wrote to 'Abdu'l Baha requesting clarification. The situation was further confused when the Kenosha Baha'is wrote to Chicago asking for information concerning True's tablet. Chicago responded with information from all the tablets they had received on the matter and suggested Kenosha voted on the issue. The Kenosha Baha'is had also written directly to 'Abdu'l Baha, his response received in March 1911, urged the Board to maintain its organisation, but added "you have a spiritual Assembly of men and you can establish a spiritual Assembly for women". This reply seems to have been understood to mean that Assemblies should be gender specific and no women were added to the Kenosha Board. Thus as late as March 1911 women were excluded from Baha'i administrative bodies in North America. Against this clearly misogynistic background it is startling that in November 1911 the committee suggested for the organisation of the Baha'i Cause in the British Isles should have been massively dominated by women. Whilst it must be stressed that this committee was not designated either a House of Justice or Spirituality nor a Spiritual Assembly the importance of the role it was set up to play makes the inclusion of women a sharp contrast to the American experience. It would in fact have been hard to find enough Baha'i males in the British Isles in 1911 to make up a committee, however this incident does mark a significant change in attitude. Some months later in August 1912 during 'Abdu'l Baha's visit to North America women would finally be admitted to all areas of the Baha'i committee structure. Why this change took place is unclear, certainly the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* refers to 'men (*rijal*) of the House of Justice' and it is this passage which still excludes women from the Universal House of Justice. Why the Chicago Board was first called a House of Justice and then a House of Spirituality is uncertain, as is the implications of this name change for its composition. The 1909 tablet to True seems to indicate that only the then non-existent Houses of Justice were closed to women, while the 1911 tablet to the Kenosha Board suggests that the administration should remain gender specific. Whatever the earlier confusions by 1912

Another development which took place between the two visits was the introduction to the Manchester group of Daniel Jenkyn, 'a spiritual Baha'i from St. Ives in Cornwall' (Hall: 1925, p. 7). Sarah Ridgeway had gone to London to see 'Abdu'l Baha in September 1911, and she had met Jenkyn in London and suggested he wrote to Hall and Craven. Jenkyn had become a Baha'i in the middle of 1910. He was introduced to Baha'ism by Dorothy Hodgson and taught by Lotfullah Hakim. In the summer of 1911 he had walked from St. Ives to Liverpool talking about Baha'ism to anyone who would listen. He had a Baha'i colleague in St. Ives, a fisherman called Mr R Wright. Wright had heard about the Bab in 'an odd and cheap volume of an old encyclopaedia ... since reading this he had longed to hear how matters went on after the martyrdom of the Bab. He became exceedingly happy when Daniel had narrated the remainder of the History of the Cause.'(Hall: 1925, p.10) Jenkyn was a supporter of the *Christian Commonwealth*, the journal which had first sparked the interest of Hall and Craven in the Baha'i message. The importance of this journal for these isolated Baha'is cannot be overestimated. It is interesting to note that even in this most remote part of Britain an unlettered man like Wright was aware of the Bab and his ministry.

A further development between the two visits was an extension of the activities of the oriental network. In *Star of the West Vol. 2 No. 16*, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1911, Arthur Cuthbert writes, 'Mr Honore Jaxon, Miss Yandell and the writer have lately been much occupied in a movement started by us and some East Indians to bring together the people of the East and West into closer social contact - especially, the some two thousand Indian students in London. The purpose is to improve their social position here, to create popular bonds of knowledge and friendship between them. 'Abdu'l Baha, when here, expressed the greatest love and concern for the Indians sojourning among us and wanted us to do what

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'Abdu'l Baha was prepared to clarify the situation in favour of women's participation in person. It seems very possible that 'Abdu'l Baha's experiences in the West and Britain in particular may have caused him re-evaluate the role of women and realise that the numerical dominance of women made the proposed 'auxiliary' concept unworkable. The continuation of the exclusion of women would have undermined the commitment to equality and ultimately alienated much of the membership.

we could for them.’ Jaxson (1861 - 1952) was a Canadian, born William Henry Jackson. He was greatly influenced by Louis Riel, a Catholic Metis who stood up for the rights of the most dispossessed of Canadian society (Van den Hoonard: 1996, p.18). Riel eventually became an aboriginal separatist, while Jackson remained committed to inter racial co-operation. Jackson was tried for treason - felony in 1885, but was acquitted on grounds of insanity. He fled to the United States after escaping from an asylum in Manitoba. He claimed to be a Metis and dedicated himself to aboriginal causes and anarchism. In 1885 he had become a Catholic to bring himself closer to the Metis cause and in 1889 he changed his name to Honore Joseph Jaxson. By 1893 he was organising a World Congress of Anarchists and was falsely accused of plotting to bomb the White House in Washington. In 1897 he married and discovered the Baha’i Movement. According to Van den Hoonard (1996, p.19), Jaxson did not discriminate amongst his various causes, including Baha’ism, and blended the ideas of Marx and Kropotkin into his own synthesis. What Jaxson was doing in London and how long he stayed is unknown, but it is interesting that he found an outlet for his interest in ethnic minority issues during his sojourn.

### *3.5 Network activity during the second visit of ‘Abdu’l Baha*

The second visit of ‘Abdu’l Baha to England was from Friday, the 13<sup>th</sup> of December 1912 to Tuesday, January the 21st, 1913. This was a total of thirty-nine days.

#### Analysis of Network Activity during the Second Visit

Date	Place	Network Connection	Reference
Fri. 13 <sup>th</sup> Dec. 1912	‘Abdu’l Baha arrived in Liverpool on the White Star Line’s Celtic. He stayed in the Adelphi Hotel in Lime Street.	All Networks	Mahmud’s Diary, Liverpool Echo, Dec 13 <sup>th</sup> & 14 <sup>th</sup> 1912 The Daily Post, Dec 14 <sup>th</sup> & 16 <sup>th</sup> 1912 SW Vol. 3, 17, 2 – 5 SW Vol. 3 ,17, 2 ET Hall’s description

Sat. Dec 14 <sup>th</sup> . 1912	Addressed the Herrick Theosophical Society at 18, Colquitt Street, Liverpool			Herrick Bio. SW Vol. 3, 17, 3 – 4 BA p. 343
Sun. Dec 15 <sup>th</sup> 1912	'Abdu'l Baha visited the Pembroke Baptist Chapel, Pembroke Pl. Liverpool.	Herrick		Herrick Bio. SW Vol. 3, 7, 3 –4 BA p. 343
Mon. Dec 16 <sup>th</sup> 1912	Left Liverpool, Lime St Station and arrived London, Euston. He was met by Blomfield who took him to Cadogan Gardens.	Blomfield,	Central Network	SW Vol. 3, 19, 4
Tues. Dec 17 <sup>th</sup> 1912	Reception at Caxton Hall Westminster	Hostess,	Mrs Thornburgh - Cropper, Central Network	SW Vol. 3, 19, 4
Wed. Dec. 18 <sup>th</sup> 1912	'Abdu'l Baha visited Hyde and Regents Parks by taxi. Met with EG Browne	Central & Academic - Orientalist Networks		SW Vol. 3., 19, 4 BA p.346
Fri. Dec 20 <sup>th</sup> 1912	Reception for 'Abdu'l Baha at the Westminster Palace Hotel, Victoria St., first public meeting of 2 <sup>nd</sup> visit.	Sir William Barclay in chair connected to Central network via Blomfield		SW Vol. 3, 19, 4 CC Jan. 1 <sup>st</sup> 1913
Sun. Dec 22 <sup>nd</sup> 1912	'Abdu'l Baha attends performance of Buckton's play <i>Eager Heart</i> at Church House, Gt. Smith St. Westminster. Mary Blomfield in main part.	Buckton,	Celtic network; Blomfield, Central network. Venue, connection with Basil Wilberforce.	BA p.348 CC Jan 1 <sup>st</sup> 1913



Wed. Dec. 25 <sup>th</sup> 1912	Visited a children's home, no address known.	Lamington was an	BA p. 351
	Visited Lord Lamington's house in Wilton Cres. SW1 for a meeting.	officer of the East India Assoc. – Orientalist network	Mahmud's Diary BA p. 351
	Had dinner at the Salvation Army Hostel for the destitute at Gt. Peter St.	This may have been a result of a chance meeting in Smith Sq., after his address to St. John's Church Sept. 17 <sup>th</sup> 1911. Blomfield had connections with the SA, but possibly as a result of this meeting.	SW Vol. 3. 18, 8 Tudor Pole, <i>Writing on the Ground</i> p.146
Thurs. Dec 26 <sup>th</sup> 1912	Visited the home of Misses Jack & Herrick, Higher Thought Reading Room, 137a Kensington High Street	Central Network	Mahmud's Diary
Fri. Dec 27 <sup>th</sup> 1912	Went with Mrs Thornburgh-Cropper in her car to Hyde Park.	Central Network	Mahmud's diary BA p. 352
	Evening reception in the home of Lady Blomfield	Central Network	BA p.352
Sun. Dec 29 <sup>th</sup> 1912	'Abdu'l Baha visited Miss Annie Gamble's home, 25, Highbury Hill, for an "at home" meeting.	Central Network	Mahmud's Diary
	Then attended evening service at Kingsweight House, Methodist Pulpit, in Queen St., Mayfair.	Christian Commonwealth Network	Mahmud's Diary

	Nineteenday Feast at the home of Mr & Mrs Robinson, 28, Evelyn Mansions, Carlisle Place. SW1	Central network, re venue connection with Thornburgh-Cropper	Mahmud's Diary, BA gives date as 30 <sup>th</sup> Dec, this seems likely unless Methodist evening service is very short..
Tues. Dec 31 <sup>st</sup> 1912	Went by train to Oxford, visited the home of Prof. & Mrs. Cheyne, "Santa Lucia" 11, Oakthorpe Road, Oxford. In the evening he addressed the Manchester College, Oxford. Returned to London, (Paddington).	Academic network, both Cheyne and Estlin Carpenter prominent.	Mahmud's Diary, SW (for a letter) Vol. 4, 17, 286 - 7, 290. <i>Christian Commonwealth</i> 22 <sup>nd</sup> Jan., 1913
Wed. 1 <sup>st</sup> January 1913	'Abdu'l Baha attended a meeting at Thornburgh-Cropper's flat in Evelyn Mans. In the evening he had a meal at the home of Mr Sidley. Present were Sir Richard Stapley and Mr Felix Moscheles.	Central Network  Stapley was a friend of Despard, his wife's maiden name was "Jenner" which may indicate a connection with Rosenberg. Moscheles was a leading member of the Esperanto Movement.	Mahmud's Diary  Stapley: mentioned on p 171 & p195 of <i>An Unhusbanded Life</i> ,
Thur. 2 <sup>nd</sup> January 1913	Impression taken of 'Abdu'l Baha's hands by CW Child  Afternoon, he spoke at The Cedars Mission	Child accredits Miss Scatcherd with his introduction, she was a close associate of Cuthbert  The Cedars was a settlement run by	IPG Feb 1913  SW Vol 3.,18, 9-10



	Esperanto Society in the Freemason's Hall. Dr Kelman presided and Dr Coleman & Prof. Geddes spoke.		7 Candles p.6
Wed 8 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1913	A meeting was held at Celtic Rainy Hall, New Connection College (School of Divinity) arranged by Prof. Geddes. He may have been present at Handel's Messiah at St. Giles Cathedral. In the evening he met with eastern university students at the Manse.	Network CC, Jan. 22 <sup>nd</sup> 1913	Edinburgh Evening News, Jan 9 <sup>th</sup> , 1913 p.4 Not confirmed  Mahmud's diary BA p. 364
Thurs. 9 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1913	During the day a meeting was held in the home of Dr & Mrs Whyte. In the evening 'Abdu'l Baha spoke at a public meeting arranged by the Theosophical Society. He also visited an orphanage called Children of the Cannongate.		Mahmud's Diary  Edinburgh TS, Mr Graham Pole, family connection of W T Pole, Celtic Network CC Jan 1 <sup>st</sup> 1913 p. 254 7 Candles p. 10
Fri. 10 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1913	'Abdu'l Baha returned by train to London Kings Cross and went back to Cadogan Gardens.		
Sat. 11 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1913	'Abdu'l Baha spoke at	This appears to have	

a public meeting in Caxton Hall, Westminster. He was driven there in Thornberg Cropper's car

been a cross-network effort. Speakers include Mrs Cobden Sanderson Bishop Bacon Cap't St. John Alice Buckton (Celtic) Mrs Sidley, Prof. Margolionth (Academic) Maharajah Rana of Jalawar (Oriental)

Sun. Jan 12<sup>th</sup> 1913

Addressed the New Congregational Church, 18, Parsons Hill, Woolwich. In response to an invitation from it's pastor, the Rev. JJ Hall. Meeting started at 6:30 pm

Hall and his church were part of Campbell's New Theology group. Christian Commonwealth 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1913.

He also spoke at the Friends Meeting House, 52, St Martin's Lane WC. His subject was "Divine Light and meditation".

Unity Triumphant p119

In the evening he dined with Sir Richard and Lady Stapley at 33, Bloomsbury Square.

The Stapleys were friends of Despard and may have been kin of Rosenberg.

BA p369

Mon. Jan 13<sup>th</sup> 1913

Before dinner he spoke to some Turks about the Faith in a carpet shop.

Mahmud's Diary

In the evening a party was given in honour of 'Abdu'l Baha at the

Official Persian

Mahmud's Daiary

	Persian Legation, 36, Queens Gate Terrace.		
Tues. Jan 14 <sup>th</sup> 1913	He had dinner with the Persian minister in London, Mushiru'l Mulk at the Persian Legation.	Official Persian	BA p. 368
Thurs. Jan 16 <sup>th</sup> 1913	He arrived in Bristol at midday and stayed at the Pole family's Clifton Guest House. In the evening he addressed a meeting of 150 people there.	Celtic	SW Vol. 4, 1, 4. & SW Vol. 4, 15, 256 <i>Christian Commonwealth</i> 29th January 1913
Fri. Jan 17 <sup>th</sup> 1913	He returned to London on the noon train from Bristol.	Celtic	SW Vol. 4, 1, 4.
Sat. Jan 18 <sup>th</sup> 1913	He travelled from London, Waterloo to Woking by train. He visited Woking Mosque.	A large cross-network contingent and various dignitaries attended. Including: Orientalists Lord Lamington Sir & Lady Arundel Dr L Pollen Persian Officials Shah Mahmed Yehya Naimutullah Shah H.H. Memet, former PM of Persia Central Network Lady Blomfield Lady Barclay Sir & Lady Stapley Celtic Miss Buckton	Asiatic Quarterly Review, April 1913 <i>Christian Commonwealth</i> 22 <sup>nd</sup> January 1913 BA p. 370 Woking Observer Jan 22 <sup>nd</sup> 1913

GRS Mead (of Quest  
Magazine)

Sun Jan 19 <sup>th</sup> 1913	Lunched with RJ Campbell, Christian Campbell at 28, King Commonwealth St., Goswell Rd. Network 4pm Attended an "At Mr & Mrs Moscheles, BA p. 371 Home" at Mrs Esperantists, Central Moscheles, 80, Elm Network connection? Park, Chelsea.	BA p.371
	5pm visited the Dore Dore Gallery connected BA p. 371 Gallery, 35 New Bond to the Higher Thought St. Centre, Central Connection.	
Mon. Jan 20 <sup>th</sup> 1913	‘Abdu’l Baha held his Central last meeting at the Higher Thought Centre. In the evening he had dinner with a Rajput Prince, no name and address traced.	BA p. 371  BA p. 371
Tues. Jan 21 <sup>st</sup> 1913	In the morning he left All England for the last time on route to Paris from Victoria Station.	<i>Christian Commonwealth 22<sup>nd</sup> Jan 1913 BA p. 371</i>

The second visit is in many ways different from the first. ‘Abdu’l Baha left Ramleh, Alexandria on Monday, March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1912. The boat docked a few days later in Naples before sailing on to New York. He arrived in New York on Wednesday, April 10<sup>th</sup>, 1912. The visit was originally planned to be fairly short and to cover only Chicago and the East Coast. However, he eventually stayed until Thursday, December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1912, when he boarded the *Cedric* and set sail for Liverpool. During his stay in North America ‘Abdu’l Baha had travelled many thousands of miles, addressed meetings nearly every day, sometimes three a day and met countless people. The stamina and fortitude exhibited by

the elderly man was truly remarkable. A new tone had developed in his addresses - a command to teach the Baha'i message.

When 'Abdu'l Baha arrived in Liverpool, he was met by a number of the Baha'is from both Manchester and London. However, his arrival seems to have generated some tension in the community. Elizabeth Herrick was dismayed that no arrangements had been made for 'Abdu'l Baha to address the people of Liverpool and she and Isabel Fraser decided to rectify this situation. The story is best taken up by Herrick's biographer, 'They arrived at night, went straight to a hotel and commandeered the hotel typewriters, and drew up notices which they carried round in a cab to the various newspapers of the City after midnight. They succeeded in getting the notices inserted, then arranged at Miss Herrick's old church, The Pembroke Chapel, for a meeting of welcome. Long before the doors were open, people from Liverpool and even from Manchester assembled. 'Abdu'l Baha addressed two meetings in the chapel. Miss Herrick was therefore directly responsible for spreading the Baha'i teachings in those two great cities. She and Mrs Fraser travelled back to London in the same train as 'Abdu'l Baha, but were not invited by His committee to lunch with them. It is strange that although she worked so devotedly for the Cause she was never invited to break bread with the Master. This was a bitter grief to her, and a short time before her death she exclaimed weeping, "Only once, if only once I might have eaten with Him, just to sit at the same table with Him" (anon, p.8 -9). Clearly Herrick's maverick action did not go down well with the "Committee" and the fact that she felt she had to do it indicates her frustration at their perceived inaction. There seems to have been disagreement over the number of meetings which should have been held and Cheyne hints at poor attendance through over-exposure in *Reconciliation of Races and Religions*.

Thus, the second visit got off to a somewhat shaky start. Some features of this visit remain the same as on the first; again, a high proportion of "At Home" style meetings are held by members of the Central Network which reinforces the contention that their preferred method of outreach was by word of mouth through personal contact. The other networks are still more reliant on meetings in churches or academic institutions, indicating



a preference for working through organisations and established bodies. These differing perspectives underlie a difference of understanding. The Central Network were already operating in terms of individual conversion, while the others look to the merging of brotherhoods as whole groups grasp higher meanings. Greatly increased since the first visit are contacts with prominent people and the official Persian representation in London. A reception was given for 'Abdu'l Baha at the Persian Legation on January 13<sup>th</sup> and he returned to dine there the next day; such contacts were entirely absent from the first visit. A number of new names appear, notably Felix Moscheles, a leader of the Esperanto movement, Lord Lamington and Sir Richard Stapley

The visit was written up in the *Christian Commonwealth* and a number of people and venues connected to that organ are apparent in the itinerary. It is significant that although 'Abdu'l Baha was not invited back to the City Temple, he did address two congregations connected to the Christian Commonwealth Fellowship. The first was the Kingsweight House Methodist Pulpit in Queen Street Mayfair, and the second, the New Congregational Church, Parsons Hill, Woolwich. Although the former was a prestigious venue, the latter was not and neither of them had anything like the significance of "The Great White Pulpit" of the City Temple. 'Abdu'l Baha did meet Campbell again, but only for lunch. This took place not in Campbell's home but in the Hostel of the Pioneer Preachers, which he had already visited. This suggests, if not a cooling in the relationship between the two men, a reluctance on Campbell's part to be too publicly associated with the Baha'i Movement.

The most prominent person associated with the Christian Commonwealth Fellowship to sponsor an event was Charlotte Despard. 'Abdu'l Baha seems to have spent most of Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> January with her. First he visited The Cedars, an institution for working women and their children situated in Battersea High Street. The Cedars was a practical manifestation of her interest in the concept of motherhood in both the spiritual and physical senses. The purpose of the club was to provide a meeting place, advice and practical help to the poor families of Battersea. Despard's thinking on the woman question

most closely coincides with that of 'Abdu'l Baha. She was well aware of the Baha'i Movement, but to what extent she considered herself a Baha'i is unclear. She was a convert to Catholicism and a prominent Theosophist, as well as a leading feminist. Despard threw herself wholeheartedly into just about every radical cause possible and she does not seem to have concerned herself with any possible contradictions between them. She does not seem to have paid much attention to the Baha'i Cause after 1913 but as she threw herself enthusiastically into anti-war, pro Soviet and Sinn Fein causes Baha'ism may simply have been overtaken by events. On the evening of 2nd February 'Abdu'l Baha addressed a meeting of the Women's Freedom League in the Essex Hall, Essex Street, of which Despard was president, and she chaired the meeting.

Another person connected to the Christian Commonwealth Fellowship was Professor Thomas Cheyne, who was on the editorial board of the *Christian Commonwealth* as well as being one of the most outstanding academics to embrace the Baha'i Cause. He was the first person 'Abdu'l Baha met on his visit to Oxford on December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1912. According to Blomfield (1940, p. 168) the meeting was 'fraught with pathos'. 'Abdu'l Baha was impressed with both Cheyne's devotion and continued academic output despite his increasing infirmities and he kissed and stroked his head several times. He also praised the angelic qualities of Elizabeth Gibson Cheyne, a poet, married to Cheyne and his principle carer. 'Abdu'l Baha accorded Cheyne the epithet Ruhani "spiritual" and addressed him as "my spiritual philosopher"; furthermore he reckoned him unique among the professors in entering the "world of the Kingdom" (*Star of the West* Vol. 4 No. 16). The decline in his abilities as a scholar are outlined in the following passage "After becoming a Baha'i and though in very poor health, he continued to write several works of Biblical scholarship championing a North Arabian /Jerahmeelite theory ... becoming further "renowned for his extreme and unconventional views". Uninformed by Baha'i Biblical exegesis and in a large measure the eccentric products of his philological genius, they were generally very badly received. His Baha'i status was largely ignored or played down, though his thirst for knowledge and his kindly, gargantuan scholarly spirit was much respected. Doubtless referring to his Baha'i activity and writing rather than his ultimately

bizarre Biblical scholarship, 'Abdu'l Baha in a tablet to Thomas Cheyne wrote, "It is .. my hope that in the future the East and West may become conscious that thou wert a divine philosopher and a herald of the Kingdom" (Lamden.). After this private meeting with Cheyne and his wife 'Abdu'l Baha addressed a meeting of Manchester College, the Unitarian institution with which Estlin Carpenter and Philip Wicksteed were associated. Both these men, as well as Cheyne were involved with the Brahmo Samaj Movement and indirectly with the Indian student population the importance of which to the Baha'is was noted above. This visit to Oxford was the turn of the Academic sub-Network to fete 'Abdu'l Baha.

The next day 'Abdu'l Baha dined at the home of Mr (?) Sidley with another member of the *Christian Commonwealth* editorial board, Sir Richard Stapley (1842 - 1920.) Stapley was a Liberal politician, contesting Brixton, Lambeth and Holborn, Finsbury for his party. He was a member of City of London Council and a Justice of the Peace. He was knighted in 1908. He was also involved with the publication of the *Asiatic Quarterly Review*. His wife's maiden name was "Jenner" which may indicate a connection with Rosenberg's family, and he was certainly a close friend of Charlotte Despard. Also present was the artist Felix Moscheles, (1883. - 1917) a leading Esperantist and peace activist. According to Mahmud's diary Moscheles "became a Baha'i" at this meeting. 'Abdu'l Baha would dine with the Stapleys again on January 12<sup>th</sup> at their home in 33, Bloomsbury Square, when he spoke about the unacceptable use of corporal punishment on children and attend an "At Home" at the Moscheles residence in Elm Park, Chelsea on January 19<sup>th</sup>. Immediately after his visit to the Moscheles home Abdu'l Baha went to the Dore Gallery in Bond Street which was connected to the Higher Thought Centre. It is likely that Moscheles, an artist, was the host at this venue, which places him directly into the Higher Thought strand of the central network.

One of the most interesting public appearances of the second visit took place on Friday, 17<sup>th</sup> January and was at Woking Mosque. Woking is a town in Surrey, where the Necropolis Company had purchased much land in order to establish overflow burial

areas for the hugely increased population of London. The Necropolis Company had encouraged the Royal Dramatic College to be built in 1860 but by the 1870's the College was in financial trouble which resulted in its sale. In 1884 it passed into the hands of Dr Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner, (1840 - 1899). Leitner, a Hungarian, had a prodigious talent for languages and by the age of ten he could speak most European languages, plus Turkish and Arabic. At fifteen he was appointed interpreter (1<sup>st</sup> class) to the British Commissariat in Crimea with the rank of colonel. After the war he came to study at King's College, London. At nineteen he was a lecturer in Arabic, Turkish and Modern Greek and four years later he was appointed Professor of Arabic and Mohammedan Law. In 1866 he became Principal of the Government University of Lahore (now the University of the Punjab). He set up numerous schools, literary associations and newspapers in India to help in the education of the poor. In the late 1870's he returned to Europe to work at the University of Heidelberg. By this time, he decided to set up an Oriental University in Europe. This institution would serve three purposes, to help teach Asians living in Europe the learned professions, to allow Europeans wishing to travel to the East a chance to learn about the Oriental way of life and to provide "a refuge for Orientals of good family or high caste to live their own way of life without interference of European culture." ( *Woking History Journal*, Vol. 1 1989) Leitner also published a number of journals from Woking, including the "*Asiatic Quarterly Review*." The Institute did not survive the death of its founder in 1899 and the small mosque which Leitner had built in its grounds closed with it. The mosque was the first purpose built structure of its kind in Britain. Work had begun on the mosque in 1889. Its largest benefactor was the Begum-Shah Jehan, ruler of Bhopal and it is still known as the Shah Jehan Mosque. The building is of Bath and Bargate stone, designed by W. I. Chambers, and based on drawings of various mosques, since Chambers had never actually seen a mosque in person.

The mosque opened in 1889 but after its closure ten years later it was only used occasionally. According to the *Woking History Review*, "In 1912 the Muslim missionary, Kwaja Kamel ud Din, came to this country and re-opened the mosque". Kwaja Kamel ud Din, was a member of the Ahmadiyyah sect of Islam and he is still revered as one of their

finest missionaries to the West. Ahmadiyyah Islam is in many respects similar to Baha'ism, both being rooted in Shi'a messianic tradition, both including religions beyond the traditional "People of the Book" as true faiths founded on Divine revelation. The Ahmadiyyah attribute to their founder, Ghulam Ahmed, a status similar to that which Baha'u'llah holds for Baha'is. As both men could not be the fulfilment of Shi'a messianic prophecy, Ahmadiyyah Islam and Baha'i beliefs are mutually exclusive which makes the following statement from Blomfield rather puzzling: "Members of the Muslim community of Great Britain came to pay their respects, and at their request 'Abdu'l Baha visited the mosque at Woking, where an important gathering of their friends gave an enthusiastic welcome to Him Who, albeit the bearer of a new Message to all the religions of the world, was descended from the ancient line of nobles in Islam." (Blomfield: 1940, p.152) Whoever invited 'Abdu'l Baha and why is unknown but the event was of major importance since, being a Friday, the prayers said by the Muslims present would have constituted *Jumah Salah*, the weekly congregational prayer. It is unclear if 'Abdu'l Baha's speech was made from the *mimbar* but it does seem to have constituted the Friday sermon, which would have been of considerable significance to the Muslims present. In addition the Baha'is' commitment to East/West relations through the medium of the Royal Asiatic Society was on display; all their most important contacts, Lamington, Stapley and Arundel, were present, along with Asian students whom it will be recalled had been targeted by Arthur Cuthbert and Maude Yandell after the first visit of 'Abdu'l Baha. Alice Buckton and her friend GRS Mead were there, although she was not generally present at events concerning Eastern aspects of Baha'ism, so perhaps the close proximity of Woking to her home in Byfleet explains her interest. The Woking News and Mail of Friday 24<sup>th</sup> mentions a banner on display at the event representing an Eastern and Western woman with a globe between them and the word "Concordia". The reporter goes on to point out, "This banner, which by the way, was worked by poor women in London, has just been returned from the Peace Congress in Rome." Whilst no further information concerning this banner has emerged it is suggestive of Buckton's relationship with the women of the Passmore Edwards Settlement.

The purpose of this meeting was not simply to provide a platform for ‘Abdu’l Baha since also present was Mr H. Leitner (the son of the founder) who declared that henceforth the mosque would be “open for Mohammedans to worship at any time.” In 1913 major changes were underway for the *Asiatic Quarterly Review* which had been founded in 1885 by Demetrius Boulger. In 1891 it had become the *Imperial and Asiatic Quarterly Review and Colonial Record*. In 1896 Dr Leitner and the Oriental Institute took it over. By 1913 the editors were W MacCarthy Mann (who wrote the report on the ‘Abdu’l Baha visit) and Gilbert Lyne. It was renamed *The Asiatic Review* and published from Victoria Street not Woking, so it would seem the newly reopened mosque severed its links with the old Institute.

The Celtic Networks intervention in this visit shows them as being more integrated in the community. There are three events of major significance for this subgroup during the second visit. The first was ‘Abdu’l Baha’s introduction to drama, when he watched Alice Buckton’s play *Eager Heart* at Church House Westminster, a venue associated with Basil Wilberforce whose absence is significant. Mary Blomfield played the eponymous heroine who awaits the coming of the Messiah. The play is almost entirely Christian in content but overlaid with Celtic and feminist imagery, although this is not as explicit as in Buckton’s other drama *The Coming of Bride*. It was the first time that censors allowed the Holy Family of Christianity to be depicted on stage, albeit in tableau form. ‘Abdu’l Baha was apparently greatly moved by this scene and later spoke to the cast and musicians about Old Testament prophecy concerning the coming of the Messiah. Meeting the performers who played angels he recommended they be angels as long as they lived. The involvement of Mary Blomfield in the production shows a drawing together of the community. The play had been privately performed in the Blomfield country house during ‘Abdu’l Baha’s visit to North America as it is mentioned in a letter from Dorothy Holbach to her mother Maude.

The longest period ‘Abdu’l Baha spent outside of London was the week he spent in Edinburgh from Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> January to Friday 10<sup>th</sup> January. This visit to the capital of a

Celtic nation was naturally of great significance to the Celtic Network. The hostess in Edinburgh was Jane Elizabeth Whyte, who had visited Akka in 1906 with Thornburgh-Cropper. Khursheed describes her understanding thus: "She believed in the divine nature of the Baha'i Faith and was struck by its universality. Her vision of unity within the Christian churches had expanded to encompass unity between religions, between East and West. While her husband worked for unity of the churches, Mrs Whyte, through her association with the Baha'i Faith was to work for the unity of religions." (Kursheed, 1991, p.51) Her husband Dr Alexander Whyte was a leading figure in the ecumenical movement and is mentioned as an early influence on Reginald Campbell by his biographer. The Whytes were known to Thornburgh-Cropper by at least 1905 when Jane Whyte's sister, Margo invited Jane and her friend to winter with herself and her husband in Egypt. Cropper had an invitation to visit Akka and suggested Whyte joined her. Interestingly, before accepting the invitation Whyte contacted Edward Browne who told her "do not refuse so great an opportunity." (Kursheed, 1991, p.47) Thus although Whyte knew Cropper she was clearly not familiar with Baha'ism, beyond the fact that Browne was an authority, prior to her visit to Akka. Consulting authorities seems to have been in character, when she was dissatisfied with a report on Baha'ism presented to the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910, she wrote directly to 'Abdu'l Baha to get an accurate response to her questions (Kursheed, 1991, p.51). The Whytes had hosted a number of meetings to disseminate the Baha'i teachings in their home, which are recalled in the memoirs of Florence Atlas who first heard of Baha'ism there in 1912.

Interest in the Baha'i teachings had also been kindled by the publication of articles in the journal *Theosophy in Scotland*, edited by Graham Pole, a member of the Pole family. He had met 'Abdu'l Baha on four occasions in London during the 1911 visit. Another Pole family connection to meet 'Abdu'l Baha in Edinburgh, was Sir Patrick Geddes, President of the Outlook Tower Society, town planner, biologist and educationalist. He was a friend of Jane Whyte as well as being connected to John Sharp/Fiona Mcleod and Dr Goodchild. Like Sharp and Goodchild, he was almost certainly a Freemason and his colleague, the artist John Duncan, married Christine Allen, one of Tudor Pole's Triad of Maidens in

1912. Duncan's work was almost exclusively based on the Celtic revival and includes such famous paintings as the Marriage of St Bride in the Scottish National Gallery. Geddes had set up the Outlook Tower in an old observatory on Castle Hill. The building had originally been a four-storey tenement owned by the Laird of Cockpen. In 1852 it was bought by Maria Short who added an extra floor and a Camera Obscura. Geddes purchased it in a public auction in 1892 and he renamed it the Outlook Tower because he claimed he wanted to change people's outlook. He described it as the world's first sociological laboratory and hosted many cultural and public meetings there. It was here that Lord Lamington had spoken on political reform in Persia. Geddes showed 'Abdu'l Baha around his Outlook Tower on the morning of Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> January. The building is crowned by a dome which houses a 'Camera Obscura' which conveys views of the whole of Edinburgh. The city can also be viewed more conventionally from the balconies of the Prospect and Gallery floors immediately below the dome. The exhibition within the Tower begins on the sixth floor with models of the planets and solar system, the next five floors contained exhibitions devoted to the study of different geographical regions and historical items. These started with the Edinburgh Room and progresses downwards to exhibits on Scotland, the British Empire and the world. This was meant to represent the connectedness of the local and the global which was an important concept in Geddes' philosophy and in the Baha'i understanding of East/ West unity.

After his visit to the Tower 'Abdu'l Baha was driven around the city to see the various places of interest. In the afternoon he met a number of Oriental students studying at the university, and discussed with them the unity of religions. In the evening he addressed the Esperanto Society; the venue, the newly built prestigious Freemasons' Hall, indicates another link with Freemasonry. The meeting was presided over by the Reverend Dr John Kelman<sup>6</sup>. The following day Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> January, after he had received his visitors Mrs

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<sup>6</sup> The nature of Baha'ism was raised a number of times by critics in the course of 'Abdu'l Baha's visits. For Baha'ism to be relevant the idea that it was not a new religion but rather religion renewed was repeatedly stressed. The changing perception of Baha'ism would later have to be addressed. It is interesting to note that later Baha'i writers would be required to imply that their earlier co religionists had misunderstood. For example Khursheed's description of Kelman at the meeting he chaired in Edinburgh is very revealing, he writes: "Although he spoke with conviction and showed signs of being familiar with the Baha'i teachings (by using phrases such as 'sun of truth', commonly used in Baha'i writings to refer to the Prophets of God), he



Whyte took 'Abdu'l Baha to visit an orphanage and technical school. He made his second public appearance in the city in the afternoon at the Rainy Hall in a meeting organised by the Outlook Tower Society and chaired by Geddes. In the evening 'Abdu'l Baha attended a charity performance of Handel's Messiah in St Giles Cathedral. The next day 'Abdu'l Baha spent the morning receiving visitors and enquirers, and the question of the relationship between Baha'ism and Christianity seems to have dominated the proceedings, as it had already attracted much interest in the local press. In the afternoon a large meeting was held at the Charlotte Square manse on the rights of women. In the evening he addressed a meeting of the Theosophical Society, chaired by Graham Pole. The following day, Friday 10<sup>th</sup> January, 'Abdu'l Baha returned with his entourage to London. The visit to Edinburgh had stirred up more controversy than any other part of his British tour. There were numerous hostile responses in the press, mainly from orthodox Christians, one of whom, writing under the title "Old Paths" suggested Baha'ism was little more than New Theology with a touch of Eastern mysticism.

Also in connection with the Celtic Network 'Abdu'l Baha made another trip to the Clifton Guest House in Bristol, leaving London on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> January. He addressed a meeting of about one hundred and fifty persons that evening and returning to London the following day.

A striking feature of both visits is the energy of 'Abdu'l Baha in fulfilling up to three engagements a day. He clearly believed his presence in the West to be of the utmost importance and was determined to utilise the opportunity to the full. The visits of 'Abdu'l Baha give a clear indication of the milieu in which the early Baha'is operated. There are significant differences between the two visits but the narrowness of the membership of the Baha'i group is apparent on both occasions. At the beginning of the first visit there were

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displayed a few fundamental misconceptions. For instance he stated that the Baha'i Faith was not a new religion." (Khursheed: 1991, p.76). This was hardly a misconception, it was what almost all of those who called themselves Baha'is in the British Isles also believed and more importantly it was precisely the same as the public utterances of 'Abdu'l Baha. Khursheed goes on to explain that due to their understanding of the finality of Christ the concept of a new religion was difficult for Christians to understand. This is a clear example of an attempt to reconstruct the historical narrative in order to backdate the existence of the Baha'i Faith

two poles of attraction in the London Baha'i group. The *Christian Commonwealth* of August 9<sup>th</sup>, 1911, relates that regular Baha'i meetings had been taking place at the Passmore Edwards Settlement Centre, 37, Tavistock Place, London, from Friday, the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 1911, with Annett Schepel as Secretary. There is no mention of the Friday night regular meetings held at the Higher Thought Centre, which were running throughout 1910 until at least the outbreak of the First World War, under the secretaryship of Arthur Cuthbert. The latter would seem to be the more "official" meeting as it was that which was listed in the *Star of the West* while the other was not. Whilst there is no suggestion of rivalry between the groups it would appear that the links between them were not particularly close until they were strengthened by the visits of 'Abdu'l Baha.

The visits strengthened the community by drawing together the networks and creating a structure, but at the same time the context for relevance narrowed as the networks merged. The message was now more clearly defined and honed for maximum relevance. However, ironically, one of the strengths of the message prior to the visits had been its vagueness, and clarification, however delicate, removed at least for some, the opportunity for finding relevance through idiosyncratic disambiguation and enrichment. Nevertheless, the opportunity to be in the physical and spiritual presence of 'Abdu'l Baha must have more than compensated for any loss occasioned by greater clarity amongst the British Baha'is overall.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE FINAL YEARS OF CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP

Relevance Recedes and Charisma Wanes 1913 – 1921

#### *4.1 Outline of the Chapter*

In this chapter the development of the British Baha'is through the years of the First World War is considered. The breakdown of the networks, the existence of a simplified message and its effect on relevance, will be considered in relation to the publication of the *Divine Plan* and the new directive to teach rather than 'live the life'. The attitudes of the Baha'is to the Great War and the spiritual significance they perceived in it, as well as the practical effects of the war upon them are examined. The relationship between the Baha'is and the Save the Children Fund is discussed in some detail to ascertain if the theory of relevance can be applied. It is argued that by the time hostilities cease and the plan can be implemented the message is already outdated and many of the movements which had sustained the Baha'i networks were obsolete, consequently relevance begins to recede. The death of 'Abdu'l Baha and the end of charismatic leadership compound this loss of relevance. However, the British Baha'is had every reason to be confident at the beginning of 1914. The visits of 'Abdu'l Baha, whilst not causing mass conversions, had certainly brought Baha'ism to public attention. London and Manchester had functioning groups, Oxford, Edinburgh and the West Country all had a Baha'i presence. A small number of Persian Baha'is had settled in Britain and links with the much larger and more developed community in North America were enhanced. Within the Baha'i community the first steps at formal organisation had been established by the Master himself. Most importantly the visits had given them a sense of community and a message and the networks had begun to merge into a single strand, which, although by no means homogeneous, allowed them to think of Baha'ism as a group activity rather than the actions of individuals. The simplified message, based upon the principles of Baha'u'llah, was part of the bonding process. By reducing the message to a social program, everyone would be able to agree upon both the program and what they should be teaching. Those who believed they had a "deeper" knowledge or perceived esoteric meanings were not required to dismiss such

ideas but were able to enrich them within their own private context or what remained of their network.

#### *4.2 The Dispute over 'Amin'u'llah Farid*

However, before the outbreak of war which would change forever the face of Europe, the nascent Baha'i community in Britain was faced with its first important internal dispute. By the middle of the year, the defection of Amin'u'llah Farid, a translator and interpreter, became publicly known. Amin'u'llah Farid was the son of a sister of Munirih Khanum, 'Abdu'l Baha's wife. Farid had arrived in North America in 1901. He had joined his father Mirza Asadu'llah-i-Isfahani in Chicago. However, Phoebe Hearst, who had been supporting Asadu'llah financially, was angered to discover that she was now expected to provide for two people, apparently without being asked. (Stockman: 1995, p.68) Consequently in late April she informed Asadu'llah that she would no longer provide for him but would pay for his ticket to Egypt if he left before June. He left on the 12<sup>th</sup> May and he was sorely missed by the Chicago Baha'is. Mirza Aminu'llah Farid studied homeopathic medicine and English. He soon became a competent and trusted translator but his behaviour was not to everyone's taste, as this passage from Stockman reveals:

"The 'devotees' were admirers of Ameen Fareed, who at this time was renting a room from Mrs Eva Russell and Dr Susan Moody. Now twenty-three, Ameen Fareed had mastered English and was adjusted to life in the United States. He was a handsome young man who was discovering that Oriental costume, a foreign accent and the 'spirituality' of being a Baha'i from the same country as Baha'u'llah produced a remarkable effect on the Baha'i women of Chicago. Fareed was often invited to speak at the Sunday meeting. Dressed in full Persian costume, he began his talk by exclaiming the Greatest Name aloud and frequently chanted Baha'i prayers in Persian and Arabic in his presentations. Some were fascinated but the House of Spirituality unanimously agreed that the spectacle put off more visitors than it attracted and made the Baha'i Faith look excessively foreign. It requested Fareed to change his style of presentation but he refused. No longer invited to present the Faith at the Sunday meetings, he, with Russell and Dr Moody, started a meeting on Sunday mornings where, Chase noted, 'he wore the robes and chanted to his heart's content'. As a result,

Chase added, although the Fareed ‘devotees’ were kind to the House of Spirituality, a ‘lack of warmth’ existed. Chase also expressed concern about Fareed’s growing egotism.” (Stockman: 1995, p. 174/5)

Farid was well known to many of the Western Baha’is. In *Star of the West* October 16<sup>th</sup> 1910 a letter from Sydney Sprague to Susan Moody is reproduced. The letter dated, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1910, is Sprague’s detailed account of his marriage to Farahangiz Khanum, daughter of Mirza Asadu’llah and sister of Aminu’llah Farid. He relates that “the Holy Mother” (Munirih Khanum) had “prepared” his bride for marriage, saying that she was her daughter, which, Sprague points out, was a unique honour. Clearly the relationship between the Holy Family and Farid’s family was exceptionally close at this point. It was with Asadu’llah’s family that Ethel Stevens stayed whilst writing *The Mountain of God*, whose two central characters are based upon Asadu’llah and Aminu’llah. In early 1911 ‘Abdu’l Baha cabled instructions for Lua Getsinger and Farid to “conquer California” (Piff-Metelman: 1997, p.123). This teaching tour appears to have been successful and the exploits of Getsinger and Farid were reported in various editions of *Star of the West*. However in the long term this mission was to have disastrous consequences for both of them. Gossip about the nature of their relationship would besmirch Getsinger’s reputation, finally resulting in her husband, Edward, filing for divorce, naming Farid as one of her adulterous lovers (Piff-Metelman: 1997, p. 322). Farid himself was accused of dishonestly collecting donations. It would seem that he solicited money apparently on behalf of ‘Abdu’l Baha, which he then kept for himself. Whatever the truth of the matter ‘Abdu’l Baha decided that his rather flamboyant nephew would best serve the Cause under close supervision and refused him permission to return to the West. Farid disobeyed and left for Europe, setting in motion a chain of events which would result in a number of prominent Western Baha’is disassociating themselves with the movement. Hassan Balyuzi wrote:

“Farid was travelling in Europe in defiance of ‘Abdu’l Baha, announcing his arrival beforehand so that meetings would be organised for him. In London the Kingsway (sic) Hall had been booked and the meeting was advertised... However, the timely intervention of Dr Lutfu’llah Hakim prevented Farid from speaking. Some of the Baha’is were badly shaken by the incident and a few fell away. Annie Gamble, at whose home the issue was decided and the community

was saved, proved a rock of strength. George Latimer and Charles Mason Remy were also present at this time.” (Balyuzi: 1971, p. 407).

This is an interesting passage in that on the one hand the incident is downplayed, (“a few fell away”), while, on the other, “the community was **saved**”, suggests the possibility of total disintegration. The presence of Latimer and Remy in this context can be explained by an article in the *Star of the West*, of October 16<sup>th</sup> 1916. The article is entitled “I never ask anyone to send me money” A Talk Given by ‘Abdu’l Baha to Mr Remy and Mr Latimer at Haifa, October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1914’. The thrust of the talk is summed up in its first paragraph, “When you return to America say to all the believers on my behalf that whenever a person comes to that country, no matter to what nationality he may belong, and tries to collect money in my name, know that it has no connection with me. I am free from it. Whosoever asks for money for me does so of his own volition. There are some people who desire to collect money under all kinds of pretexts. I desire to impress upon your minds that I have nothing to do with such affairs. I never ask anyone to send me money.” Clearly Remy and Latimer had been entrusted with a damage limitation mission to counter Farid’s activities. *These statements related only to the West. In Iran financial contributions from Bahais were obligatory.*

How does the dispute over Farid relate to relevance? Superficially it does not appear to be related to relevance, but two points are worth consideration. First, a number of Western Baha’is did support Farid which suggests that there was something about him or at least his behaviour which they found more relevant than the accusations of dishonesty. This effectively means they sided with him against ‘Abdu’l Baha. Second, the loss of these people caused the disintegration of at least one network and thus the narrowing of context. Farid’s support may have been generated by a sense of outrage on his behalf that he was being refused permission to travel. This would seem unlikely as obtaining ‘Abdu’l Baha’s permission for foreign travel was common practice even amongst Western Baha’is (Pole (1987: p. 78 and Stevens: 1911 p.5). Farid’s father, who had been entrusted with the duty of bringing the Bab’s remains to Haifa, went to reason with him and went over to his side. His brother in law, Sidney Sprague, also took up his cause, and only returned to the Baha’i Faith in 1937. Sprague’s friend Arthur Cuthbert also left the movement over this issue, as did Ethel Stevens/Drower. The two women who seem to have been associated with Drower also disappear around this time. While there is no evidence to connect Constance E Maud

and Maud Holbach to this dispute there is no further mention of them in Baha'i circles. Why Farid should have mustered such support is unclear; perhaps his friends and relations simply could not accept he could be guilty of fraud. However, his insistence on stating his case publicly left 'Abdu'l Baha no alternative but to question his and his supporters' loyalty and ultimately declare them outside of the community. Whilst only "a few fell away", they were an important few. Cuthbert was not only a very wealthy man but also the key to the orientalist network and the *International Psychic Gazette*, Drower would become an internationally renowned scholar. The loss of Cuthbert and Drower must have damaged links with the Indian student community and Royal Asiatic Society. This was a massive reduction in the contexts in which the Baha'i teachings could be found relevant. Perhaps the incident caused a loss of relevance for some of Farid's supporters. The tough stance of 'Abdu'l Baha may have surprised those who had perceived him as a kindly Christ-like figure and caused them to disambiguate and ultimately reconsider the nature of leadership in the Baha'i Movement. Or perhaps in was a convenient exit for some whose interests were already beginning to wander.

#### 4.3 *The War*

When the war broke out in the summer of 1914 the Baha'i community was further split by their reactions to events. This is in itself highly significant, for a group of people whose avowed belief system centred on concepts of peace and unity to be unable to present a united front on such an issue is a clear indication that their doctrinal position was very far from complete. Wellesley Tudor Pole saw a spiritual significance in the hostilities and despite being in a "reserve occupation" he volunteered for the army. During the war period he published a number of small books he called "The Deeper Issues Series". These uniformly bound little volumes included "Deeper Issues of the War" in which he outlined his understanding of spiritual conflicts being enacted in the physical realm. This was not surprising, since Pole was convinced of the mystical importance of Britain so any conflict was of major spiritual significance. During the Second World War he initiated a "silent minute" a daily national period of meditation on overcoming the enemy. He also produced "*The Passing of Major P.*" and "*Private Dowding*" both books claiming to be the work of soldiers already killed in the conflict. The series also included two books penned by his sister Mary Bruce Allen but apparently originating from a dead family friend described only as "AB". Also in the

series was "*The Coming of Christ*" to which no author was attributed. However, on the dustjacket a quotation from Alexander Whyte, 'Abdu'l Baha's Edinburgh host, reads: "I am not able, I am not worthy, to write a forward to such a book. I have not attained to its teachings: nor am I within a thousand miles of them. But I follow after."

Edward Hall's attitude was very different. He did not volunteer but waited for conscription and then he took a non-combatant role. The following passage from a letter he wrote to *Star of the West* indicates some of the tension he was experiencing before embarkation:

"Dear Friends, I am enclosing a cheque for two pounds and five shillings which I want you to separate into two parts. One part, twelve shillings and sixpence to go towards sending copies of *Star of the West* to my sister, and one pound and seven shillings to go to the Mashrak-el-Azkar fund from the Manchester friends. The remainder to go to the *Star of the West* to help against any expenses. I know you will do these two things for me, if at all possible.

"I know not where I shall be sent after New Year's day (January 1<sup>st</sup>), for I am a conscript and under military law, and the war is, perhaps, not nearly over. But I am a follower of Abdul-Baha and a true believer in God, and meet the future with resignation and peace of heart, for with all my faults and mistakes, I have come nearer and nearer the love of God and the radiance of Abdul-Baha. God be praised! I shall hope to do good wherever I go" (Letter from E T Hall, dated 22<sup>nd</sup> Dec. 1916, published in *Star of the West* Dec 31<sup>st</sup> 1916).

Some of the Baha'is, most notably Rosenberg, seem to have been involved with the peace movement<sup>1</sup>. But this attitude towards the war does not appear to have been unanimous. There was much dissent at meetings:

"Mother George strongly felt that the war should only be discussed from a spiritual point of view and that: "the Germans should not be mentioned". Elizabeth Herrick, who believed free expression and freedom of speech was more desirable than any restrictions, demanded to know what exactly the spiritual

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<sup>1</sup> Esslemont letter to Lutf'u'llah Hakim 30 06 15, refers to a peace conference and Miss Rosenberg being on the committee of the organisation



standpoint was. "Exactly", interjected Eric Hammond, "that is the question." Eventually the Council resolved that the war should not be discussed during any Baha'i meetings". (Weinburg: 1995 p.166)

In 1942 at the request of the National Spiritual Assembly Florence "Mother" George wrote her memoirs entitled "Notes on the early days of the Baha'i Faith in London". This unpublished article provides valuable and unique information about the activities of the community just prior to the outbreak of war and its duration. George returned to England from France in 1913. She had been thirteen years in France. In Paris she had studied painting with an American artist, Edwin Scott. Scott was a Baha'i and, in 1910, he introduced her to the movement by way of some lectures which began with first aid instructions before passing on to Baha'ism. George admitted that at first she went only because a friend of hers wanted to meet the French doctor who gave the first aid instructions, but that soon she was interested in the Baha'i Cause. Her enquiries resulted in her being taught more by Hippolyte Dreyfus. Florence George first met 'Abdu'l Baha in London in 1911 when they were both visiting that city. In Paris she recalled she saw him every day for some weeks. It was during one of these interludes that she felt urged to return to England. She told 'Abdu'l Baha and reports that he was very pleased. On her return to England she was included on the Baha'i Council which had been set up by 'Abdu'l Baha. She writes:

"'Abdu'l Baha had made two visits and had chosen a small committee for carrying on the work called 'The Publishing Committee' - Mrs Thornborough (sic) Cropper, Miss Rosenberg, Miss Gamble, Lady Blomfield and Mr Eric Hammond. - and I was put on it as soon as I came to London. I was able to work on it as a kind of deputy for Miss Rosenberg (who was old and often ill) in choosing a room for our meetings, looking after the lending library etc. I myself had a weekly meeting and a Sunday school class<sup>2</sup> at my own house which I conducted myself.

We were only a small group of Baha'is and there were only "fireside" meetings for a long time".

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<sup>2</sup> These Sunday school classes were still recalled by Mrs Rose Jones who attended because some friends' parents were in service at the home of Mrs George. It seems that due to the lack of children amongst the Baha'is many of the Sunday school pupils belonged to their servants.

This final sentence suggests that the regular public meetings at the Higher Thought Centre and Passmore Edwards Settlement had already waned by 1913, (although she mentions meetings in the former venue in 1915). She continues:

“Everything stopped during the war of 1914. Lady Blomfield and her daughters went to Paris to work in the hospitals. No one kept the Baha’i meetings except myself; and I felt this was the most useful “war work” I could do. Of course Zeplins prevented going out after dark. Before the war there had been five meetings a week at the houses of different Baha’is!

Mrs Stannard came to England in 1919 and roused us up by two very good public lectures, and I urged Miss Rosenberg to begin regular public meetings”.

George goes on to explain how she hired the Lindsay Hall in Notting Hill for public meetings, a practice which continued until a more permanent meeting place was rented in Walmer House, Oxford Circus in 1929.

#### *4.4 Doctor John Ebenezer Esslemont*

Perhaps the most important positive event for the British Baha’is during the war years was the inclusion in their number of John Ebenezer Esslemont. He was born on May 19<sup>th</sup>, 1874, the youngest son of John Esslemont of Fairford, Cults, Aberdeenshire. He was educated at Ferryhill public school, Robert Gordon College and Aberdeen University. He graduated in 1898 as a Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery and gained a Philip Research Scholarship at the University. He spent the second half of 1899 in Berne and Strasburg where he produced research papers. Returning to Scotland at the end of the year he took up the position of assistant to Professor Cash at Aberdeen University, a post he held until 1901 when he moved to Australia. During his two-year sojourn in Australia he married. His health, which was always poor, caused him to leave Australia and eventually to relocate in South Africa where he lived for five years, returning to the British Isles in 1908. On his return he obtained the post of resident medical officer at the Home Sanatorium, Southbourne, Bournemouth. He remained in this position until the closure of the establishment in 1923.

What was it about the Baha'i teachings which was relevant for Esslemont? It may well have been the social program because Esslemont was a convinced Socialist and Chairman of the Bournemouth branch of the Independent Labour Party. He was involved with a number of other medical professionals in the setting up of a state medical service and in 1914 he read a paper on this subject to the British Medical Association. It was through this work he became acquainted with the Baha'i Cause. The wife of a colleague, a Mrs Parker (Esslemont - Hakim correspondence, 20 01 21) had met 'Abdu'l Baha in 1911. In December 1914 she lent Esslemont some Quaker pamphlets in which Baha'ism was described. He seems to have been immediately impressed with the Baha'i teachings and began to study them diligently. By 1915 he was directing Mrs Parker as to what she should read on the subject, although there is no evidence she ever identified as a Baha'i. Florence George recalls Esslemont's entry into the Baha'i circle, "In 1915 the Baha'is were holding meetings in the Higher Thought Centre; a letter by a doctor in Bournemouth was sent by him [Esslemont] to the committee. It was brought to me by Miss Yandell. I was in bed with bronchitis then but I answered his letter at once and a lively correspondence ensued. Then he came up to see me and I found his difficulty was that he believed in absolute pacifism. But he gradually gave that up. (It was mention of the Baha'i Faith in a Quaker pamphlet that set him enquiring about it. His sympathies were with the Quakers.)" (George: 1942, p.4) Thus, Esslemont's background can be summed up as Socialism, The Peace Movement and the Quakers. His involvement with the Baha'is led him to reject absolute pacifism and presumably the Quakers, but the social program would have been entirely relevant for him as a committed socialist. It is an example of the way in which relevance is inferred, enriched and disambiguated that the first action Esslemont took after embracing the Baha'i Cause was to write an article for *The Southern Worker* a socialist newspaper in which he describes Baha'i belief in socialistic terminology. He was drawn into the Baha'i Movement independently and consequently cannot be tied into any of the pre-existing networks. This independence is of immense significance because he would eventually be required to perform a delicate balancing act holding together the discordant London and Manchester factions.

In 1915 he began a correspondence with Lutfu'llah Hakim which was to last the rest of his life. Copies of Esslemont's letters are in the archives of the NSA of the UK and they provide an important source of information on the activities of the Baha'is of

this period. Esslemont was fluent in Esperanto. He encouraged Hakim to learn it and together they translated the *Hidden Words of Baha'u'llah* into Esperanto. It was in that language he first wrote of his intention to write a book about Baha'ism, "Mi jam komencis skribadon de libro pri Bahaismo" (Esslemont-Hakim correspondence, 24 10 16, quoted in Momen: 1975 P.11) Esslemont's book, *Baha'u'llah and the New Era* would eventually be published in 1925 and is still in print. It was for many years the main text in Baha'i introductory literature. During the war years, Esslemont seems to have quickly become an important figure amongst the Baha'is. There was something of a vacuum of leadership at this time, with Pole, Blomfield and Hall all busy with the war. Florence Pinchon remembered Esslemont's teaching:

"I remember that it was a sad, grey afternoon during the second year of World War I that I first had the privilege of meeting Dr John Esslemont. I was attending a lecture to be given in the Theosophical Lodge, Bournemouth ... the shadowy room seemed to light up for me when the speaker on the Baha'i Movement (as it was then called) rose to address us. He was a man in the prime of life, modest but confident in bearing, with a fresh complexion, fair hair and a gay carnation in his button hole."

Pinchon goes on to recollect how he outlined the history of the Bab and Baha'u'llah and points out that he "was always careful to provide his audience with some adequate historical background, thus relating the teachings directly to their spiritual source and inspiration." Pinchon's description of Esslemont's teaching is important because it gives a clear picture of the sort of beliefs predominant amongst the Baha'is of the time. She recalls, "Here there were no philosophical theories, however interesting, or cold intellectual arguments. Here were portrayed strong Sons of God, personalities possessing a magnetic power to attract and subdue hearts, and actually create the brotherhood in which I believed. Although no longer adhering to the dogmas and rituals of institutional Christianity, I had still cherished the hope that the Spirit of Christ, as promised in the Bible, might some day come to earth again. ... At the close of the meeting I approached the Doctor and going straight to the point questioned: "Do you think this could be what is called the Second Coming?" "I do", he replied firmly. (Pinchon: undated, p. 2) Esslemont's sitting room in the sanatorium at Southbourne became a meeting place for seekers after Truth. He would discuss the Baha'i teachings

but in referring to what Pinchon describes as “controversial subjects, such, for instance as reincarnation, he would offer the Baha’i explanation, and leave it to us to grasp more clearly as our knowledge of these mysteries deepened, thus avoiding much useless discussion.” ((Pinchon: undated, p. 2). Southbourne became something of a Baha’i colony during the war years. Tudor Pole’s family lived there and a Baha’i Sunday school was held in their house. It was on the beach at Southbourne that Pole first encountered the shade of Private Dowding.

#### *4.5 The Divine Plan*

Meanwhile, the Baha’i colony in Palestine had moved to a Druze village called Abu-Sinan, where they were more or less cut off from the outside world. They returned to Haifa in May 1915. ‘Abdu’l Baha worked tirelessly to relieve the suffering from food shortages not just for the Baha’is but for the entire Haifa community. He also revealed numerous tablets including fourteen which are collectively known as the Divine Plan, which were to form the bases of the development of the North American Baha’i community. The Tablets of the Divine Plan were <sup>made</sup> known to the Baha’is of the United States and Canada between 1916 and 1917. They elaborate on the call of the Bab to the “people of the West” to “issue forth from their cities and aid His Cause” and on intimations in the writings of Baha’u’llah. These are specific prophecies about the destiny of America and to “the signs of His dominion which would appear in the West”. These tablets reiterate the instruction to teach which, it was noted in the previous chapter, was first outlined in Britain in Bristol in January 1913. What were the Baha’is to teach? This is clearly answered in a tablet received by Edward Hall. The tablet begins by commending the work of the Manchester group and making the following observation, “All your talks must be confined to spreading the Divine Principles and not about your religious belief, because the people are still weak”. This would appear to be a warning not to expose the theological implications of accepting Baha’u’llah as a manifestation of God, but to concentrate on the social teachings expounded by ‘Abdu’l Baha. This is one of very few written examples of what seems to be a conscious strategy to appeal to that which would be found relevant and to avoid any issue which might raise complications concerning the nature of Baha’ism as a separate religion.

While centrally organised missionary activity would become a distinctive feature of Shoghi Effendi's Guardianship, it is clear that the basis of his "Plans" and "Crusades" are contained in these Tablets, written by 'Abdu'l Baha. Five of the Tablets were published in *Star of the West* 8<sup>th</sup> September 1916 before hostilities severed all communication between the United States and Palestine. After the war all fourteen Tablets, translated by Ahmed Sohrab, were published to coincide with the "Convention of the Covenant" held at the Hotel McAlpin in New York on April 26<sup>th</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup> 1919. The first eight Tablets were penned between March 26<sup>th</sup> and April 22<sup>nd</sup> 1916, at the height of the war. The final six between February 2<sup>nd</sup> and March 8<sup>th</sup> 1917 - a month before the United States entered the war. The first eight Tablets consist of three tablets addressed to the Baha'is of the United States and Canada and one each to the five regions into which 'Abdu'l Baha divided the North American continent. Of the final six tablets, one is addressed to each of the five regions and the last to the Baha'is of the United States and Canada. The basis of all fourteen tablets is the command to spread the Baha'i teachings into areas which they have not previously penetrated. The War it is argued will ultimately lead to a desire for peace and reconciliation, which in turn will create an atmosphere conducive to the introduction of Baha'ism. This stress on teaching had been gradually becoming more apparent in the pages of *Star of the West*. While spreading the teachings had always been important it was not always overt. In *'Abdu'l Baha in London* the following strategy is outlined:

"When asked by an American friend: "Which is the best way to spread the teaching?" he ['Abdu'l Baha] said: "By deeds. This way is open to all, and deeds are understood by all. Join yourselves to those who work for the poor, the weak and the unfortunate; this is greatly to be commended. To teach by words requires the skill of a wise physician. He does not offer help to those who do not want treatment. Do not press help on those who do not need your help. The work of teaching is not for all." ('Abdu'l Baha: 1912, p.98).

In contrast, the editorial of the *Star of the West* which published the first of the Tablets, introduced them thus:

“The stirring Tablets published in this issue of *Star of the West*, urging the Baha’is to illumine those sections of the United States and Canada that have not yet received the Light, are a trumpet call to action.

It is evident that ‘Abdu’l Baha in his love and wisdom is now giving each and all the American Baha’is a special opportunity to awaken to their responsibilities and to arise in love and sacrifice for this “superhuman service.” (*Star of the West*: 8<sup>th</sup> September, 1916)

The implications of this change in strategy are enormous in the terms of the theory of relevance. Hitherto the Baha’i teachings had been inferred, vague, inconclusive utterances to be enriched and disambiguated by the hearer. Now a clearly defined version of the teachings based upon the social principles, deliberately shorn of religious implications, was to be the message. Thus the emphasis on teaching has changed from selective approaches to like minded people encountered through charitable and social networks, to what would become known as travel teaching and pioneering. Another unique feature of these fourteen tablets is the detailed instruction of how the work is to be carried out. Baha’is in each of the five geographical areas identified by ‘Abdu’l Baha are instructed in the tablets as to which areas they should concentrate their efforts. Thus:

“Although in some of the Western States, like California, Oregon, Washington, and Colorado, the fragrances of holiness are diffused and numerous souls have taken a share and a portion from the fountain of everlasting life, ... yet in the states of New Mexico, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Utah, Arizona and Nevada, the lamp of the love of God is not ignited in a befitting and behoving manner, and the call of the Kingdom of God has not been raised. Now, if it is at all possible, show ye an effort in this direction. Either travel yourselves, personally, throughout those states or choose others and send them, so that they may teach the souls” (‘Abdu’l Baha: 1977, p.21-22).

Significantly, the British Baha’is did not receive any such communications; they were neither numerous enough nor well enough established to participate in missionary work, although in Tablet 7.15 Britain was a suggested destination for

Americans wanting to teach the Baha'i Cause. So the British group were considered to be in need of overseas teaching aid. ('Abdu'l Baha: 1977, p.43)

#### 4.6 Major Pole "saves" 'Abdu'l Baha

Throughout the war the Baha'is were in some danger, particularly during the period that Jamal Pasha commanded the Turkish 4<sup>th</sup> Army Corps. His mission was to drive the British out of Egypt. Throughout 1915 and 1916 Palestine was under his martial law. He declared he would crucify 'Abdu'l Baha on his triumphal return from Egypt. As it turned out his return was in full flight, having been routed by the British, and he was unable to enact his threat. That Pole saw a spiritual significance in the war has already been noted. However, the Baha'is would later see a spiritual significance in Pole's role in the war. Pole was wounded during an attack on Jerusalem in 1917. After this he was transferred to Intelligence, first in Cairo and later at Ludd, Jaffa and Jerusalem. In 1918 he received news that 'Abdu'l Baha was again in danger. Through chance Pole was able get a message through to the Foreign Office in London. Through his Baha'i contacts in London Pole was also able to alert senior government figures. Lord Balfour and Lord Curzon were advised of the situation and Pole names Lord Lamington as being of particular help. The Foreign Office sent a despatch to General Allenby instructing him to ensure the safety of 'Abdu'l Baha and his family. A demand for information concerning 'Abdu'l Baha was circulated through British Intelligence in the Middle East. This eventually ended up on the desk of Major Pole who was able to furnish General Allenby with details of the life and teachings of 'Abdu'l Baha.(Pole: 1984a, p. 152-5). A recent Baha'i publication, *The Servant, The General and Armageddon* (Maude: 1998) recounts the story of the Allenby's campaign in Palestine, heading most chapters with a quotation from Revelations Chapter 16, since the authors argue that the Biblical prophecies were fulfilled at this time. Pole's assistance in safeguarding 'Abdu'l Baha is given prominence, as is 'Abdu'l Baha's relationship with Allenby. Both Allenby and Ronald Storrs, British Governor of Jerusalem, placed a great deal of trust in the Baha'i leader. Storrs who had met 'Abdu'l Baha in London asked for help in finding reliable people to fill administrative posts and consequently a number of Baha'is found themselves in 'positions of confidence' in the British administration of Palestine. Allenby settled in Haifa for a while and paid a number of



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No need to film

visits to 'Abdu'l Baha. Maude writes: "On 7 August 1919 Allenby forwarded a recommendation that 'Abdu'l Baha be awarded a knighthood (KBE) for the help and advice given to the civil administration of Palestine. The Baha'i leader accepted the offer as 'a gift from a just king but never used the title".<sup>3</sup>

The belief of many ordinary Baha'is is that the conflict was of spiritual significance, with Allenby and Pole playing out preordained roles in an apocalyptic scenario. This is further demonstrated by Hall's poem *The Isles Unveiled*, presumably thus entitled as a pun on Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled*. The poem is a peon of praise to the civilising mission of the British Isles in world history. However, it is in no way simply a tribute to British imperialism, rather it portrays a spiritual mission.

“At length the hour, the darkest she had known -  
The harvest-hour of ill the world had sown -  
Heaped woe on woe; and facing thunderous hate,  
She warred her way towards her destined fate  
To be a servant of the Will Divine  
In building up a prosperous Palestine.  
Search through the world and nothing stands so clear  
As this event foreseen by sage and seer.  
Indeed, through war the Holy Land was freed  
By British hand from negligence and greed,  
And one who dwelt serene on Carmel's height  
Proclaimed the day as of Prophetic Light,  
The Persian sage and British general met  
For one brief hour that none should e'er forget,  
For he, the Servant of the Lord was sign  
Of that great day that marked the Will Divine,  
How strange! The Jews - those exiles of the world  
Like loosened leaves the eddy winds have swirled  
By these strong Isles are granted friendly aid  
To now return where none need be afraid.

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<sup>3</sup> Maude ; 1998, p.130, cf. Balyuzi: (1971)p.443. As he was not a citizen of the Commonwealth or British Empire, 'Abdu'l Baha would not have been able to use the title if he had wished to do so.

If Zion smiles, if Bethlehem gives praise,  
Say 'tis of God - and great are all His ways:  
These Western Isles from nothingness grew great  
To serve the Lord in opening wide his gate."

(Hall ET: undated, *The Isles Unveiled* first published 1935 *John o' Groat Journal*)

The poem stresses "Let no one think Britannia chants her pride ... she chants no pride ... Her singer loves the country of his birth, but not less his kind in all the earth." Britain is only a tool in the hand of God, used to fulfil the prophecy of the return of the Jews to the Holy Land. This theme may indicate the influence of Pole and the Celtic network since the notion of the British Isles as sacred land was central to their Glastonbury/Grail beliefs, but it also echoes the British Israelite theory which was popular at the time and certainly known to the Baha'is. Edward Hall's dismay at the war is evident in his poems. His earnest desire for a brotherhood of man and international parliament remained strong. He wrote a number of poems during his period in France, which address these issues. While in Cambuslang War Hospital, Glasgow, around Easter 1918, he wrote how he attempted to teach Baha'i principles of brotherhood amongst his comrades in his poem "The woods of Blavincourt." 'Abdu'l Baha responded by sending Hall a tablet that ran "The poem entitled "The Woods of Blavincourt" has been perused. It was eloquent and consummate. Its perusal has stirred the heart, and has set forth the evils of war and conflict in the world of existence." Curiously both Pole and Hall seem to have had their viewpoints confirmed by their military experiences. Pole's occult union with the newly dead and minor miraculous occurrences such as the mysterious loss and reappearance of a ring given to him by 'Abdu'l Baha (Pole: 1987, p. 24-26) reinforce his mystical individualism and belief in the supernatural, while Hall's time in the ranks seems to enthuse him with comradeship and love of his fellows. It is perhaps significant that Pole, unlike Hall, chose to fight the war as a commissioned officer. His military title of "Major" was retained amongst Baha'is long after the war and after Pole had discontinued using it. It is possible that along with the hyphen, which also appeared in his name, this was a way that Baha'i

sources unconsciously attempted to raise Mr Pole, biscuit salesman, to Major Tudor-Pole, officer and gentleman in their quest for “people of prominence”<sup>4</sup>.

#### 4.7 Lady Blomfield's War

Since her introduction to the Baha'i Movement in 1907, Lady Blomfield's services to the Baha'i Cause were not exclusively limited to the shores of Great Britain. She had spent much time - for instance - with 'Abdu'l-Baha in Paris and her copious notes of his many talks and conversations formed the substance of the book, *Paris Talks*, first published in 1913. It was, however, on 12 February 1912, shortly after arriving in Egypt where He had returned after His exhausting first visit to Europe, that 'Abdu'l-Baha addressed a letter to Lady Blomfield and encouraged her to establish a Baha'i centre on the shores of Lake Geneva. Within one month, she had arrived in Switzerland and received another communication from 'Abdu'l-Baha praising her for her sacrificial services.

“Thou hast taken in hand a most brilliant lamp and art erasing and dispelling the darkness of ignorance from the heart,' He wrote, 'In every city be it Paris or London or the cities of Switzerland whereat thou mayest arrive, turn to the Beauty of Abha and seek confirmation from the Holy Spirit and open thy tongue. Know thou assuredly that new significance's will flow from thy lips! At every Hotel wherein thou are invited, go, and to whatsoever conferences thou art summoned present thyself. The Blessed Beauty is with thee, rest thou assured.” (Letter from 'Abdu'l Baha to Lady Blomfield, 29<sup>th</sup> March 1912, cited in Hall: undated)

Abdu'l-Baha was clearly aware of Lady Blomfield's social status and its importance in spreading His Father's teachings, and realised that her presence in Geneva would be a key to attracting many to the Baha'i Cause. When the war broke out, she and her daughters were staying in Switzerland but shortly afterwards, they moved to Paris to assist the French Red Cross in the Haden Guest Unit at the Hospital Hotel Majestic. For Lady Blomfield, the experience was traumatic. “Any kind of suffering touched my

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<sup>4</sup> In Stockman (1995) Pole is credited with a knighthood, which he never received.

mother profoundly," recalled Mary Basil Hall, "but the sight of young men maimed for life, and the new and horrible experiences she had to endure during the dressing of wounds, her mental agony reflecting their pain, tortured her beyond words. After that first heartrending morning in the wards, we were silent as we walked back to the Hotel d'Jena for luncheon. We imagined ourselves unable to touch any food. But my mother's courage and strength of mind prevailed. She said quietly: "We must eat, or we shall be ill ourselves. Then we shall not be able to help" (Hall: undated, p.3). In March 1915, the hospital unit moved away from Paris and the Blomfields returned to London in April. For the duration of the War, Lady Blomfield offered her services at several hospitals. She served on a number of committees and kept open house for the convalescing soldiers from Australia and New Zealand. Despite the demands of these humanitarian duties, she never neglected the sparsely attended Baha'i meetings which were held when and where circumstances permitted and kept in touch with the 'Abdu'l Baha and Baha'is overseas whenever correspondence was possible. Lady Blomfield spent much of the war in Paris with her daughters. After the war she and Jean Stannard were based in Geneva where the latter set up the Baha'i European Office. This was to have an important role in the development of the Administration.

Lady Blomfield who had spent much of the war in Europe now dedicated herself to work around the League of Nations and the Save the Children Fund. The importance of this from the theoretical perspective of this work is that the relationship of the Baha'i Movement to the Save the Children Fund demonstrates how relevance is a two way process; here relevance is perceived in the Baha'i Movement by those who wish to develop their charitable work. Eglantyne Jebb (1875-1928) and her sister, Mrs Buxton, had founded the Save the Children Fund. Jebb was an associate of Charlotte Despard. Blomfield may have known Jebb through Despard who was also involved with Save the Children. The following information comes from an article written by Rob Weinberg for the UK Baha'i Centenary and distributed by the Baha'i Information Office. 'Abdu'l-Baha was swift to praise the work of Jebb and Buxton and hoped that Lady Blomfield might influence them in accepting the Bahá'í teachings. "My hope is that thou mayest be confirmed in the great cause (of saving children), which is the greatest service to the world of mankind, for the poor children are perishing from hunger and their condition is indeed pitiable. This is one of the evils of the war" (Letter from 'Abdu'l Baha to Lady Blomfield 11<sup>th</sup> March 1920). In a letter to Blomfield, dated 11 March 1920, he wrote:

“The English Lady who has established this committee is assuredly confirmed by the favours of the Kingdom. This lady, Eglantyne Jebb and her sister, Mrs Buxton, are really serving the teachings of Baha'u'llah and thus I beg for them attraction to His teachings.” (Letter from ‘Abdu’l Baha to Lady Blomfield 11<sup>th</sup> March 1920)

'Abdu'l-Baha sent two pictures of Himself to give to the sisters and asked Lady Blomfield to say to them:

“Ye are serving the world of mankind and the Divine Sacred Threshold. Ye are glorified by His Holiness Baha'u'llah for ye are acting in accordance with His teachings. My hope is that ye may become two resplendent torches of the world of mankind, may serve Divine civilisation, may attain everlasting life and may be favoured in the Divine Kingdom.” (Letter from ‘Abdu’l Baha to Lady Blomfield 11<sup>th</sup> March 1920)

Here is an example of the two-way nature of relevance. The Baha’i teachings are relevant to the Save the Children Fund founders and may have directly influenced them, while the Baha’i organisation was used to promote the Save the Children Fund. A month later, on 6 June 1920, 'Abdu'l-Baha wrote to Lady Blomfield praising God that such an,

“Association for the education of destitute children and the relief of orphans (had) been formed, in which almost every nation and religion is represented.” And continued: “My hope is that, through the especial Graces of God, this Association would be confirmed; that it would, day by day, progress both spiritually and materially; that, in the long run, it would enter under the Heavenly Uicoloured Pavilion; that it would be accommodated in the Ship of the Real Existence; that it would be protected from every danger, and the oneness of the world of humanity may (thereby) raise (its) Banner at the zenith of the world.”

*All correspondance quoted above is from Weinberg's article and is from the NSA archive.*

Lady Blomfield thus became intimately involved with the work of the Save the Children Fund and returning to London maintained her friendship with Eglantyne Jebb. One major contribution Blomfield made to raising awareness of the Fund's work was the publication of a small booklet entitled *The First Obligation* in which she called upon the Baha'is in particular to support the Fund's work and ideals. "The First Obligation," she quoted Baha'u'llah, "is to strive by all means ... to instruct the children. Endeavour with all your soul... to train and educate all children, boys and girls alike; instruction and education are not optional, they are definitely commanded." (Blomfield: 1921)

Lady Blomfield wrote that for Baha'is this duty should consist not merely in giving children food to eat, but in training them to earn food for themselves in later years by their own works. "Wherever there is impoverishment", Lady Blomfield wrote, "there is a menace to child-life, and the Save the Children Fund, reinforced by the Baha'is of the world, should be the Ark to carry the children safely through this time of stress and strain." (Blomfield: 1921) "Give to the children a manual profession," advised 'Abdu'l-Baha, "something whereby they may be able to support themselves and others." (Blomfield: 1921) "Children must receive moral and physical training at the same time and (so) be protected from temptations and vices, for upon the children of today, - whether boys or girls, depends the moulding of the civilisation of tomorrow." (Blomfield: 1921)

"It is for this reason that education and training of children is a SACRED OBLIGATION, and not a matter of voluntary choice. Those who neglect this obligation shall be held responsible and worthy of reproach in the presence of the stern Lord. This neglect is a sin unpardonable, for without training the poor babes are wanderers in the Sahara of ignorance. The babe, like unto a green tender branch, will grow according to the way it is trained. If it is rightly trained, it will grow rightly, if it is wrongly trained, the growth will be crooked and deformed, and thus it will remain until the end of life." (Blomfield: 1921)

"Nothing less than the happiness of every human being is the ideal for the Baha'i, he must not loiter by the way on the road to this ideal, he must: 'Strive and work, work and strive, until all the regions of the earth shall become resplendent.' He must work until the Christian virtues, often found in

individuals, shall be manifested in the Institutional, Political, National, and International Life.” (Blomfield: 1921)

The international travel-teacher Charles Mason Remey offered to send out large numbers of the pamphlet to the Baha'is in America while a friend in Geneva who was attracted to the Teachings offered to translate it into French. Lady Blomfield firmly believed that joining the Baha'is with the work of the Fund would give to the world a practical demonstration of the Baha'i Teachings on child education. The Baha'i response is not clearly ascertainable. While the community was not yet strong enough to provide widespread institutional support, some individuals were no doubt moved by her appeal. Blomfield's work for Save the Children was consistent with the "traditional" Baha'i approach of spreading the Baha'i teachings through the example of charitable works. The involvement of Remey in America suggests that this approach was not yet considered incompatible with the new emphasis on overt teaching. In October 1920 'Abdu'l-Baha urged Lady Blomfield to return to Switzerland "to render benevolent services and become a kind mother to these orphan children". (Letter from 'Abdu'l Baha to Lady Blomfield, October 1920) He asked her to "convey on my behalf respected greetings to Miss Eglantyne and say "Thou art not serving people, thou art serving God; thou art not taking care of the orphans, thou art taking care of the children of God. This desire is that the Banner of Universal Peace may be raised. This is the first of the Teachings of His Holiness Baha'u'llah. I congratulate thee on this aspiration." (Letter from 'Abdu'l Baha to Lady Blomfield, October 1920) Lady Blomfield returned to Geneva in May 1921 with Eglantyne Jebb whom she said was greatly encouraged and strengthened in her work by the messages sent to her by 'Abdu'l-Baha in his tablets. Jebb and Blomfield, pondering over the Tablet in which education as well as feeding the children is enjoined, decided to concentrate Blomfield's efforts on instituting workrooms in connection with children's establishments where they would be taught manual work and useful trades so that they could earn their own living. Meanwhile these children would receive food and a small wage in return for their work. Lady Blomfield learned of a Hungarian woman, Julie Eve Vajkai, who had already successfully started such workrooms in Budapest for the poor children who without them would have been "wandering the streets in summer's heat or winter's cold, with nobody to care whether they lived or died." (Blomfield: 1921). A Captain Pedlow, well known for his work in Hungary with the American Red Cross, wrote to Lady Blomfield



commending the workrooms there. "Any action," he wrote, "which equips the young people, physically or mentally, so that they can earn their own living, is the best means of providing a lasting benefit for the Community." (Blomfield: 1921) Lady Blomfield established a special appeal called the Blomfield Fund, which aimed to finance the workrooms for children and other relief work of a constructive character. On 23 July 1921 'Abdu'l-Baha wrote to Lady Blomfield in Geneva, that:

"contribution, protection and care of these children are the greatest altruism and worship, and the cause of satisfaction to the Most High, the Almighty; for these children have no father, no mother, no kind nurse, no home, no clothing and food, and no ease and quiet. In every respect they are worthy of kindness, merit help and deserve mercy and pity. The eyes of every sensitive man are weeping and the heart of every conscientious man is burning. O society, compassion! O concourse of the wise, attention! O nobles, benevolence! O wealthy people, contribution! and O men of ideals, manliness! So that these helpless ones may obtain some comfort. On my behalf, extend utmost affection to Miss Eglantyne Jebb, I am very pleased with her because she strives so much and renders such service to the world of humanity." (Letter from 'Abdu'l Baha to Lady Blomfield 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1921).

Lady Blomfield's eagerness to rally the Baha'i community to assist in the work of the Save the Children Fund was also manifest in an article she prepared for the Baha'i magazine, *Star of the West*, published in February 1924. She wrote: "It is "an international effort to preserve child life wherever it is menaced by economic conditions of hardship and disaster" without political or sectarian bias. Its purpose is to save from starvation the homeless children of central, eastern and southern Europe and the Near East. It has saved multitudes from starvation, Christians, Muslims and Jews, and started thousands on the path of self-support. Today it is the only hope of many children, fatherless and motherless, who wait day after day in the bitter cold to receive their daily ration". (*Star of the West* Vol. 14 no. 11, February 1924) In the first two years of the existence of the Save the Children Fund, a million pounds was raised to care for orphans, provide food and facilities to children's hospitals, and establish welfare centres and clinics. Although Eglantyne Jebb died in 1928, and Lady Blomfield's international activities became more limited as old age set in, she remained active in the work of the

Save the Children Fund until shortly before her death on the last day of 1939. In her last years she served on the Council of the Save the Children Fund in Britain and was for a time its vice-president. Just two months before her death she attended a Council meeting having offered earlier in the year to give up her seat to make way for a younger candidate. The other Council members pressed her to remain a member until after the Second World War. During the January 1940 Council meeting, affectionate tribute was paid to her memory. In the March 1940 issue of *The World's Children*, the magazine of the Save the Children Fund, one and a quarter pages were dedicated to an obituary tribute to her.

“With the passing of Lady Blomfield,” it was written, “the Save the Children Fund was deprived ... of a devoted and inspiring friend..... she gave herself to a variety of humanitarian causes with an ardour which persisted to the last days of a long life. With a personal courage which had led her to give active service to the movement for the enfranchisement of women in its least popular days, and an invincible faith in the inherent good in all men which made her oblivious of all the sundering distinctions of race and creed and 'colour', she found deep spiritual affinity with the teaching of Baha'u'llah, the Persian mystic. She remained a loyal member of the Church of England in which she was nurtured (her husband's father was the famous Bishop Blomfield of London), but what came to be known as the Baha'i movement had in her one of its most faithful disciples. She was proud to recall that she entertained its leader the late 'Abdu'l-Baha during his visits to London and Paris before the Great War, she cherished the name; 'Sitarih Khanim' (sic), by which she was known in the community, she published many of the prophet's words in English and the Baha'i Centres in London and in Geneva (where she lived for many years) owe much to her self-denying generosity...”

At the funeral service at Hampstead Cemetery on January 4<sup>th</sup>, the chaplain said this friend to whom “Jesus was the inspiration of her life” had “left behind her an example of hard-working beneficence to the end of her days, a wonderful kindness of spirit and breadth of sympathy.” (*The World's Children* March 1940). The wide range of Lady Blomfield's sympathies was expressed at her funeral by the presence of representatives of not only the Save the Children Fund but also the Hampstead

Auxiliary Fire Service (to whom she had offered accommodation for the care of children found straying during air raids), the Animals' Defence and Anti-Vivisection Society and the Baha'i community, two leaders of which read special prayers after the Church of England service. "Lady Blomfield," concluded the tribute, "will always be remembered, not only for her uncompromising devotion to the causes which she espoused, but - on the more personal side of life - for a singularly beautiful, deep voice in which she loved to declaim passages from her favourite prophet and from Holy Writ, and for a warm maternal sympathy which took under its wing all sorts and conditions of men." (*The World's Children* March 1940).

#### 4.8 Post War Changes

Blomfield's work with Save the Children was in keeping with the tradition of networking, but many changes had overtaken the Baha'i Cause. In London many important figures had departed, the oriental network was gone and Pole was beginning to diverge. The Manchester community, whilst depleted by enlistment and the internment of the German Chessel family, were able to continue much as before. The most important development was the stirrings of community development in Bournemouth. However, the death of Daniel Jenkin in the first few days of 1914 curtailed the promise of a Baha'i group in the far west of England. Thus, the post war Baha'i Movement was dramatically different from the group at the start of the war. It was now no longer network driven, but rather geographically defined. By the end of the war the situation for the Baha'is was very different from that which had existed at the start of hostilities. While many of the Baha'is were optimistic that the "Lesser Peace"<sup>5</sup> was about to break out, the reality of the situation in the British Isles was objectively rather less promising. Many of the networks which the Baha'is had been parasitic upon had split over the war. The WSPU had thrown themselves wholeheartedly into the war

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<sup>5</sup> The Lesser Peace or Great Peace (to distinguish it from "The most Great Peace") is a period of political peace which Baha'is believe will be established by the nations of the world in order to bring about an end to war. The event of the Lesser Peace will, according to the Baha'i teachings, prepare the way for the Most Great Peace, which will be an era of permanent peace and world unity based upon the spiritual principles and institutions of Baha'u'llah's 'World Order'. The establishment of this epoch is the basis of action by Baha'is. The belief in a coming "golden age" causes speculation on the spiritual import of conflicts and political change. As we have already noted Pole and Hall both wrote extensively about hidden meanings in world events. Here again the theory of relevance can be applied: assumption of a process of peace leads to the inference of the reality of such a process finding relevance in issues which uphold the assumption.

effort, while the WFL had spawned the Women's International League which worked for peace. Conversely, their former ally, RJ Campbell surprised many by supporting the war. In fact, much of the networking which had welcomed 'Abdu'l Baha, had disintegrated by the end of the war. Basil Wilberforce had died 1916. In the same year RJ Campbell renounced his creation, New Theology, and rejoined the Church of England. This had far-reaching consequences; all the fellowships and brotherhoods that had centred on New Theology were in disarray, none more than the *Christian Commonwealth*, which became the *New Commonwealth* a "socialist newspaper".<sup>6</sup> This and the loss of the *International Psychic Gazette* with the departure of Cuthbert effectively lost the Baha'is their opportunity for regular publicity in journals with a sympathetic if small, readership. In 1915, Cheyne died and a year later Estlin Carpenter left Manchester New College and the Baha'i foothold in Oxford academic circles was no more. In 1917 Alexander Whyte suffered a serious heart attack and left Edinburgh for semi retirement in the Buckinghamshire village of Penn. Charlotte Despard continued to embrace radical causes. She visited the new Soviet state in Russia and became caught up in the movement for Irish independence (despite her brother being British Governor). She finally returned to Ireland where she lived with Maud Gonne until her death. Despard lived to be almost a hundred and remained involved in revolutionary causes until the end. However, there is no indication she had any involvement with the Baha'is after the visit of 'Abdu'l Baha.

Many of the causes which the Baha'is had espoused before the war had been either won or lost popular support. The suffrage movement is a good example. In 1921 women were granted the right to vote in the United Kingdom. For many of the Baha'is this was of spiritual significance, "Isn't it fine about the women's franchise? The word of Baha'u'llah is triumphing wonderfully in the world today", wrote John Esslemont to Lutfu'ullah Hakim (Esslemont correspondence 19 01 18) on hearing that the law was to be changed. However, the single-issue nature of the suffrage campaign meant that on achieving its aim, its energy dissipated. The cause of women's rights consequently faded from the national agenda. On the other hand, those of the Celtic network who had been happy to challenge Saxon cultural dominance of the British Isles were less at ease

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<sup>6</sup> The *Christian Commonwealth* started as an organ of the Baptist Spurgeon Movement, it ran under its original title October 1881 - Sept 1919, when it became *The New Commonwealth, a Socialist Newspaper* and ran Oct 1919 - Jan 1922. It was latterly dominated by the Independent Labour Party and Fenner Brockway was on its staff.

with the triumph of political nationalism by violent means. With the exception of Charlotte Despard, who supported Sinn Fein, none of them were included in the nationalist cause. On the contrary the dominant figure of the network, Pole, was a serving officer in the British Army at the time of the 1916 Easter Rising.

In fact the weakening of British imperialism and the resulting upsurge in nationalism by subject peoples had significant consequences for the Baha'is in Britain. Although the orientalist network had been extinguished, the call for "East West Unity" was still strong. While the primary manifestation of this was support for Anglo-American educational establishments in Iran, there was also an emphasis on teaching the Cause in India and Burma. Both Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l Baha had forbidden involvement in Persian politics and nationalist movements, however 'Abdu'l Baha was supportive of Western Baha'is involvement in issues such as suffrage. For British Baha'is, too, closer identification with things "oriental" was fraught with the danger of appearing unpatriotic or unsupportive of the Empire. This tension between political quietism and social radicalism was sharpened by the changed circumstances of post war society. Universal suffrage and the emergence of the Labour Party meant that the Baha'i social teachings which had been radical before the conflict were overtaken by those with an overtly political agenda. Here again we can see the issue of relevance. The tension between radicalism and quietism caused some individuals to infer less relevance in the Baha'i teachings. The reduction of the teachings to a social program reduced the contexts in which relevance could be inferred. The Baha'is were doubtless unaware of it but their relevance had begun to recede. Where their original vague message had had something for everyone, they were now attempting to teach a narrow message, without access to the people most likely to be interested in it because of the restrictions on political activities. The Baha'is were convinced of the importance of the League of Nations to the "Lesser Peace". Part of the prophecies concerning the coming era of peace spoke of supra national institutions and ultimately world government. The potential for inference of relevance in the establishment of the League is obvious. Lady Blomfield saw the possibilities of Baha'u'llah's revelation genuinely influencing the work of the League of Nations, set up to promote international co-operation and peace from its headquarters in Geneva. While the League had no power to enforce policies in cases of war waged by important nations, it did achieve some success in settling a few minor disputes between countries, rehabilitating refugees, and solving international

labour problems. She returned to Geneva and, from her base at the Hotel d'Angleterre, she wrote to 'Abdu'l-Baha telling him of her arrival and subsequent meetings with individuals who were working to send help to the famine hit areas of Central and Eastern Europe. The Baha'is set up a European Office in Geneva, which was initially run by Jean Stannard. The League of Nations drew many people interested in peace and progressive issues into its orbit and the Baha'is were keen to expose such people to their beliefs. Lady Blomfield held regular parties at her home in order to reach receptive souls.

The London group comprised the rump of the Central network. Age and infirmities increasingly incapacitated Ethel Rosenberg, although she was still active. Blomfield spent much of her time abroad and much of the practical administration of the group fell to Florence George. According to George's memoirs the reconstituting of public meetings in London in 1919 was due to the intervention of Jean Stannard, who was now based in Europe. Pole and Buckton were also still involved but increasingly preoccupied with their work at Glastonbury. Buckton had managed to purchase the Chalice Well in 1909 and she and Schepel had relocated to Somerset. She bought the Chalice Well in order to build an open air theatre there, which was established in 1912, and with the Glastonbury and Street Players, who performed her plays there, it was quiet successful. Buckton was an important figure in the artistic life of Glastonbury and the present day Glastonbury Festival owes much to her influence. She became closely associated with Dion Fortune<sup>7</sup> who stayed with her until she purchased her own home in the town. Her involvement with Fortune may have played a part in her growing more distant from Pole who abhorred ritual magic. There is little evidence of further active involvement, by Buckton as Balyuzi notes "The present writer met ... Alice Buckton sometime in the early thirties, at the home of Lady Blomfield, ... (she was) by then noticeably aged. Alice Buckton was still active, particularly for the Chalice Well, Glastonbury." (Balyuzi: 1971, p.355n) Pole was deeply committed to Glastonbury as well as attempting to raise awareness about the plight of the Church in Russia. He was developing new ideas about cosmic matters and was less interested in the Baha'i Cause. Although Buckton was fairly distant, Pole still commanded a great deal of respect in the

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<sup>7</sup> A indication of the importance Fortune placed upon the work of Alice Buckton at Glastonbury is shown by her dedication of an entire chapter (Chapter XIV, Glastonbury of To-day - III) of *Avalon of the Heart*, (1934), to a description of Buckton's attempts to set up a women's craft centre.

Baha'i community, however, the Celtic network's influence within Baha'ism had almost withered away.

The Manchester group continued to grow; its leadership in the hands of Edward Hall and John Craven. The Manchester group was very different from any of the networks. Shortly before the war had ended, through letters of introduction from Lutfu'llah Hakim, Hall and Craven met with Jacob Joseph a carpet merchant who had settled in the city some four years earlier. By the middle of 1920 Mr and Mrs Birch and Mr Heald joined the community and the Chessel family returned to Manchester from Kent. Meetings of the Manchester group are described by Hall in his *Baha'i Dawn in Manchester* pamphlet. He recalls that from 7<sup>th</sup> August 1920 weekly meetings were held in Jacob Joseph's office in Mosley Street. About fourteen people would attend and the basement room was electrically heated and lit. Hall writes, "this small comfortable room could hold about thirty people. Since he did not own many chairs, before each Baha'i gathering, he was accustomed to place rolls of cloth all around the floor for the friends to sit on". The meetings always opened with a prayer, followed, after a few moments of silence, with letters from friends abroad and a paper about some aspect of the Baha'i Cause. There would then be a discussion and the meeting would close with a prayer. Towards the end of 1920 the group included Ibrahim and Shaban Joseph, Mr Jarvis and his daughter Olive, Edward Hall's sister, Lucy Sugar, Mrs Dean, Mr J. Hazlehurst and Mr King. The Manchester group was also characterised by their relationship to the Unitarian Church. In May 1920, Hall addressed the two hundred strong congregation in Cross Street Chapel, the leading Unitarian church in Manchester. He was granted this opportunity by the Reverend H. H. Johnson who gave a talk about the history of the Baha'i Cause. Johnson had met 'Abdu'l Baha in London in September 1911 and as a result of his association with Baha'ism had become a Unitarian minister. He was one of two Unitarian clergy who played an important part in the development of the Baha'i group in Manchester. It is significant that both he and Reverend A.H. Briggs are referred to as "Friends of the Cause" rather than members; it would appear they were aware of possible conflicts of interests. Also in May 1920 the Manchester Baha'is organised a public meeting addressed by Mason Remey in the Raglan Cafe in Mosley Street, near the Joseph brothers' office. It was as a result this meeting Mrs Norah (Nonie) Crossley became a Baha'i. Nonie Crossley's sale of her hair for the Baha'i Temple Fund was to make her an instant Baha'i celebrity. Crossley was a colourful

figure even by the standards of the Baha'i community of the time. She was born in Old Trafford, Manchester in 1893, the daughter of a ladies underclothing manufacturer and a headmistress. According to her memoirs her wealthy family disowned her when she married her uncle's apprentice. Her husband seems to have been disinclined to work for money, since, when he was demobbed in 1917, he refused to go back to his trade of bookbinding and preferred to remain at home "making little books to give to friends, repairing hymn books for a church ... He also had a real soul for music and was a wonderful organist. He would give his services to any church that asked him; but again, he would not give his services for any kind of payment" (Crossley: Undated, Unpaginated). Crossley goes on to explain she later realised her husband was a schizophrenic and it was this dysfunctional domestic situation which caused 'Abdu'l Baha and Shoghi Effendi to take such an interest in her.

Meanwhile in Bournemouth, John Esslemont was drawing together a small group of interested people. By 1920 Esslemont was the only prominent Baha'i who might be considered to have an academic background. Although his training was scientific rather than theological this may have made him more rather than less suited to the task he was to undertake. Both the Baha'i Faith and Baha'ism before it emphasise private religious practice with no intermediation by clergy. God is held to be unknowable except through the medium of His manifestations, whose books and lives should be studied by individuals with no recourse to interpretation by others. Consequently, Baha'i thought developed in the direction of personal belief rather than institutional practice. Arguably the presence of theologians such as Cheyne or Whyte might have caused tensions in the development of the Baha'i Movement. Esslemont was a talented writer and his grasp of Baha'i ideas was swift and sure. His articles in the *Southern Worker*, although similar to many other introductory articles, shows a more highly developed understanding of the station of Baha'u'llah than was usual. His social and professional background made him acceptable in the Kensington drawing rooms of the London group, while his Socialist political and Non Conformist religious credentials gave him credibility with the Manchester group.

Another important figure entered, or rather, would have liked to enter the Baha'i group at this time. His story is of particular interest because it illustrates changing Baha'i attitudes to other religious traditions and suggests that membership was not



always made publicly known, reflecting the Shi'a tradition of *taqiyya*. George Townshend was born on June 14<sup>th</sup>, 1876. He was the eldest of the seven children of his father's second marriage. The Townshends were a well-established family amongst the Anglo-Irish gentry and like most of his class George was educated at an English public school and later at Oxford. He returned to Dublin after graduation and was articled to a law firm. In 1903 he was called to the Bar, but he does not seem to have ever practised law. He had become disenchanted with both his profession and life in Ireland, so his father offered him two years' support and the fare to whichever part of the world he chose. George Townshend went to North America and eventually settled in Salt Lake City, Utah. According to a statement by his daughter Una, in his biography, (Hofman: 1983), until this period he had not been particularly religious. However, when he chanced upon a copy of the *Bhagavadgita* he became determined to "devote his life to finding out more about God, to search for the knowledge of God and the Divine Truth." (Hofman: 1983, p.20) Thus in 1905 he became a deacon and a year later was ordained as a priest of the Episcopal Church of America. He served as a priest in Provo, Utah, for four years and then took up a teaching post at Sewanee. His retreat from the church at this point appears to be connected with a movement called "The Great Work". The basic teachings were a pseudo Hindu amalgam of the laws of nature evolving individuals to higher levels of consciousness through reincarnation and karma. Willing conformity to the laws of nature would, it was claimed, lead to self-mastery, poise and happiness. (Hofman: 1983, p. 27) How he came to be involved with this movement and what he did to serve it is unknown. According to his letter to 'Abdu'l Baha he continued to work for it until 1916, which is seven years after he gave up working as a priest, during which time he earned his living by teaching. His break with the movement was as a result of 'financial mismanagement' in its headquarters becoming apparent. In 1916 he returned to Ireland and the clergy. Why he again took up a parish is unclear, his biographer, David Hofman, suggests "The Church of Ireland had in its gift the rectorship of a great many country parishes. Perhaps, if he could be given the incumbency of one in some remote part of the island, the duties of a priest would not be too burdensome, but would allow him to continue his private and professional pursuits in one effort" (Hofman: 1983 p.43). This suggests a somewhat cynical motive in his return to the Church. In the winter of 1916 he received some pamphlets about Baha'ism from a friend in the United States. He was interested and wrote for further information. When he got no reply he wrote again and in July 1917 and received three books. On

June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1919, Townshend wrote a letter to ‘Abdu’l Baha which explains his acceptance of what he understood at that time to be the Baha’i Teachings. Townshend received two tablets from ‘Abdu’l Baha, the second included the phrase “It is my hope that thy church will come under the Heavenly Jerusalem.” Townshend took this to mean that he should make every effort to convert others in his church to the Baha’i Cause. Hofman writes:

“Scarcely had he established himself in his rectory... than he wrote his first letter to ‘Abdu’l Baha, clearly revealing that his search for Truth had not ceased with his settling down. Eighteen months later he was accepted as a Baha’i by ‘Abdu’l Baha. No immediate dilemma arose from his professional commitment to a church that had taken not the slightest notice of Baha’u’llah. ... George conceived it his duty to inform those of his own ministry. “It is my hope that thy church will come under the Heavenly Jerusalem.” became his mandate and he set himself to its achievement. Without the least neglecting his parochial duties, or those of higher office as they were laid upon him, he began a deliberately planned campaign to bring not just a few fellow priests but the whole Church of Ireland with all its hierarchy of priests, bishops and archbishops, with the entire foundation of a Christian community, to the recognition of the fulfilment in Baha’u’llah of the central promise of Christ’s message, His return in the glory of the Father.” (Hofman: 1983, p.95)

At this stage Townshend perceived himself a Baha’i. He was aware of other Baha’is in the British Isles but remained isolated in Ireland. He was to remain a one man “fifth column” in the Church of Ireland for many years to come.

Another major development in July 1920 was the arrival in England of ‘Abdu’l Baha’s grandson, Shoghi Rabbani. He had completed an undergraduate degree in the American University of Beirut and was to undertake further study at Balliol College Oxford. The ultimate purpose of his studies was to achieve a proficiency in English to enable him to translate the Writings of Baha’u’llah. He arrived with letters for Lord Lamington, Lady Blomfield and Tudor Pole who were entrusted with his well being and the setting up of meetings with Oriental scholars from London and Oxford Universities.

Shoghi was well-known to Esslemont who in November 1918 had written to him: "I secured your address from Capt. Tudor Pole and I now hasten, altho late at night, to open a correspondence with you which shall be continuous, inspiring and regular". This proved indeed to be the case. Although he was based throughout his stay in England in Oxford<sup>8</sup>, Shoghi seems to have had a particularly close association with the Manchester group as well as Esslemont. An interesting insight into the role of Shoghi Rabbani in the British community is the story told about him and Elizabeth Herrick in Esslemont's letter of 25<sup>th</sup> July 1920. He wrote:

"Miss Herrick was disappointed that it had not been possible to arrange a unity meeting while the Obers, Shoghi and I were in London. She feels very much the need for some organisation and co-operation to deal with such opportunities. She had tried hard to bring about a unity meeting but found it impossible and wept with disappointment on Saturday morning. I went in to town and met Shoghi, and as he had no other engagement, I carried him off to Miss Herrick's. We had a fine talk together and she became much happier." Esslemont goes on to describe how the three had a picnic where:

"We decided that Miss Herrick should see Miss Rosenberg and some of the others and try to arrange a unity meeting for Tuesday ... Shoghi suggested that a meeting of the council of the London group should be held at a time when as many of the members as possible could attend, when some of the more definite arrangements could be agreed upon with regard to the holding of feasts for the year and a committee appointed to see to the details."

The maturity of Shoghi Rabbani's suggestion as well as his sensitivity in dealing with the delicate egos of people twice his age is remarkable. What is perhaps even more remarkable is the apparent failure of the largest of the Baha'i groups to maintain even the most basic of organisational functions. It is clear from the descriptions of meetings and feasts that by this period a convention of how meetings were to be run had developed, although there was little which could be perceived as religious practice. The meetings would appear to have been rather more discussion groups than religious rituals. Both Baha'ism and the Baha'i Faith have little in the way of ritual (although <sup>SA</sup> *in the West*,

<sup>8</sup> Shoghi Rabbani's life in Oxford has been the subject of *Shoghi Effendi in Oxford*, by Riaz Khadem, George Ronald, Oxford, 1999.

<sup>8A</sup> for a full account of Bahai ritual see Rituals in Babism + Bahaism by Denis Macesin

they are not totally devoid of it) and while prayer is of major importance it is a private activity. However, if there was little development in religious practice there was organisational development. The most important development in the British community during the last few years of the life of their Master, was the reconstitution of the Baha'i Council for England. It will be remembered that this body was first suggested by 'Abdu'l Baha and that a group comprising . Eric Hammond, Ethel Rosenberg, Minnie Thornburgh-Cropper, Annie Gamble, Florence George, Elizabeth Herrick, Lut'fullah Hakim and Mrs Crosby met on November 14, 1914. For reasons which are now unknown the Council did not meet again until the 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 1920, when Rosenberg, Gamble, George, Herrick and Hammond, were joined by Esslemont, Musgrave and Simpson. At the meeting of 7<sup>th</sup> December, 1920, Helen Grand, Mrs Crosby and Minnie Thornburgh-Cropper were included. Thus the Council in 1920 was made up of all the 1914 participants except Hakim, who was not in London, plus Esslemont, Musgrave, Simpson and Grand. This suggests not only a continuity of membership and leadership but also an active desire to organise and promote the Baha'i community. In March 1921 Mrs Crosby went to the United States of America and Miss Grand to Canada. They were replaced on the Council by Miss Fry and Yu'hanna Davud, clearly showing the importance placed upon keeping the Council active and at full strength. It will be noticed that there was no representative from Manchester and this may indicate tensions between London and Manchester. To suggest that the Baha'is at this period opposed all forms of organisation is clearly untrue but it must be stressed that there was no attempt to formalise religious belief or lay down conditions for membership at this stage.

Whilst the social teachings were now at the fore of Baha'i activity, without the suffrage movement to give it a political shape the Baha'i interface with feminism became more spiritually orientated. Throughout 1920 Esslemont writes at first excitedly about a Mrs Elizabeth Eagle Skinner, "she seems very spiritual and enlightened". She was the founder of the Star of the East Spiritual Church based in Denmark Hill, Brixton. She had heard of the Baha'i teaching through a Mr Young and seems to have been associated with Elizabeth Herrick. She was believed by her followers to be 'a prophetic being whose special mission it is to reveal the "Motherhood aspect of God" (Esslemont correspondence 02 09 21). She was apparently somewhat perplexed by the words "He is God" at the top of a tablet sent to her. Her interest in Baha'ism seems to have fizzled out by 1921. Another of the Baha'i circle exploring the Motherhood aspect of God was

Alice Buckton, who was immersed in the Celtic traditions and writing plays and poems about St Bride.<sup>9</sup> Tudor Pole was also concerned at this time with the “feminine mysteries” although he would later become involved with the intensely patriarchal St Michael aspects of the Holy Grail and the Glastonbury legends. Whilst sex equality might be argued to be integral to the social teachings of ‘Abdu’l Baha, the involvement of the Baha’i Movement with women’s issues at this point was dependent upon the existence of organisations and ideology external to Baha’ism. The demise of these external factors was not replaced by any developments around feminism/womanism within the Baha’i hermeneutic. In fact those who were interested in the feminine aspects of the divine seem to have become increasingly peripheral to the community as the development of the administration emerged as the most important internal consideration of the community. It is interesting to note that in this second phase of development there is an increasing domination by males: Hammond and Hakim in London, Hall and Craven in Manchester and Esslemont in Bournemouth. Although women still numerically dominated the community overall, the decline of informal networks seems to reduced their status.

#### *4.9 The Death of the Master*

In the autumn of 1921, Ethel Rosenberg began her fourth pilgrimage to the Holy Land. She arrived in Port Said on 1<sup>st</sup> December and boarded a train for Haifa. It was while she was on the train she learnt of the death of ‘Abdu’l Baha on the 28<sup>th</sup> November. She arrived for the fourth time in Haifa at noon on the 2<sup>nd</sup> December and was met by Lutfu’llah Hakim. The death of their Master was a devastating blow to the Baha’i community in Haifa. Rosenberg was joined by Stannard and a number of other prominent Western Baha’is during the period of mourning.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> November Pole had received news of the death of ‘Abdu’l Baha by cable<sup>10</sup> in his office in St. James’s. He immediately set about informing the British Baha’i community. He also sent for Shoghi Rabbani, without informing him of the

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<sup>9</sup> see Buckton, A. *Daybreak and other poems*, London, Methuen & Co. 1918, this book includes “The Coming of Bride” a play written for the Students of the Chalice Well, first performed in Glastonbury 6<sup>th</sup> August 1914

<sup>10</sup> It is of note that he was at this time considered to be the obvious recipient of such news and indicates his stature in the international Baha’i community

reason for his call. Shoghi Rabbani arrived that afternoon and accidentally read the cable left on Pole's desk. He collapsed and was taken totally distraught to the home of Helen Grand where he remained bedridden for a number of days. On the 16<sup>th</sup> December Lady Blomfield, Shoghi Rabbani and his sister Ruhangiz left for Egypt. They arrived in Haifa on the 29<sup>th</sup>. However for Shoghi Rabbani the ordeal was not over, as Weinberg writes: "A few days after his arrival, Shoghi Effendi received yet another shock. The Greatest Holy Leaf and other members of the family shared with him the contents of 'Abdu'l Baha's last Will and Testament. The Will was addressed to Shoghi Effendi but had already been scanned by the Greatest Holy Leaf, and probably other members of the family, following the Master's Ascension to see if he left any instructions as to where his mortal remains should be laid rest. What they discovered was the announcement of the appointment of Shoghi Effendi as Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, a sacred institution of which neither he nor the Baha'is had any previous knowledge." (Weinberg: 1995, p.193).

The era of charismatic leadership was over. Shoghi Rabbani would, after a short time, take up the mantle passed to him by his grandfather and become Shoghi Effendi, <sup>the first</sup> Guardian of the Baha'i Faith. Berger makes an interesting point in comparing the role of the Guardian with that of a Shi'a Imam. The Imam he points out was a result of the Shi'a reluctance to accept the end of revelation, while the Guardianship was a way of coping with the end of revelation: "he does not reveal he only protects and explains" (Berger: 1954, p.105) Berger describes the Guardianship as existing in the "manifestational night" [of the] "occultation" (Berger: 1954, p. 168). He argues that the Will was a conscious attempt at the routinisation of charisma by 'Abdu'l Baha. The Guardian's authority was in the office not the person. While there was a hereditary element, only males in direct line of descent from Baha'u'llah were eligible, the first born son did not inherit as a right (Berger: 1954, p. 105). Perhaps the most important factor in the role of the Guardian was that his interpretation of Baha'i Scripture was infallible and binding upon all who called themselves Baha'is. The Baha'i understanding of the concept of infallibility is two-fold. The doctrine of the 'Most Great Infallibility' enunciated by Baha'u'llah in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* and expanded upon in the Tablet of Ishraq is the inherent and exclusive right of the Prophet, who can confer infallibility on others. Thus Baha'u'llah was always infallible, but Shoghi Effendi only became infallible through the Will of 'Abdu'l Baha. His infallibility was limited to

‘matters which are related strictly to the Cause and interpretation of the teachings; he is not an infallible authority on other subjects such as economics, science, etc.’<sup>11</sup> Infallibility was also conferred upon the Universal House of Justice, with the same limitations.

It is interesting to note that despite the Baha’i teachings on the equality of men and women, both the infallible institutions, the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice, were restricted to males. Immediately after the death of ‘Abdu’l Baha and during the earliest years of the Guardianship, when Shoghi Effendi absented himself from Haifa, the leadership of the entire Baha’i Cause was in the hands of Bahiyiyih Khanum (1846-1932). Known as ‘The Greatest Holy Leaf’<sup>12</sup> she was the daughter of Baha’u’llah and sister of ‘Abdu’l Baha and an important figure in her own right. Baha’i sources describe her as ‘the only woman ever to be Head of a world religion’ (Adamson, H & Hainsworth P: 1998 p. 124). While it might be debatable that Baha’is constituted a world religion in the early 1920’s, her leadership is none the less remarkable. However, she was not only unique in her sex, she was also the only leader of the Baha’is not to have infallibility conferred upon them. This would appear to confirm the supposition that for Baha’is it is infallibility not leadership that is a male preserve.

Not everyone in the Baha’i community either understood or accepted the role of the Guardian immediately and Shoghi Effendi’s task was not only to impose the administration, but also to explain the office of the Guardian within it. *The Guardianship was in fact rooted in the concepts of succession in Shia Islam (the imamate) with which it is identical (Bahai - vilayat and Shia - vilayat) and less closely to the Sunni caliphate.*

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<sup>11</sup> From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 17<sup>th</sup> October 1944. Quoted in Hornby (1988), no. 625

<sup>12</sup> Female members of the Baha’i Holy Family are all titled “leaves” while male members are “branches”. Descendants of the Bab’s wife and maternal uncles use the name Afnan, meaning twigs.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE TRIUMPH OF THE ADMINISTRATOR

The Routinisation of Charisma and the Retreat of Relevance 1921 - 1930

#### *5.1 Outline of the Chapter*

In this chapter, the mechanism by which relevance recedes and ultimately vanishes is discussed. The period in which this happens corresponds with the development of Baha'ism from the death of 'Abdu'l Baha to the termination of correspondence with the Guardian at the end of 1930. This period is one of transition, during which the inclusive Baha'i Movement, based initially upon the enrichment of vague and often ambiguous teachings, declines and is ultimately superseded by the exclusive Baha'i Faith based upon a clear program with a unique administrative structure. The purpose of this work is not to consider the emergence of the Baha'i Faith, which would require a further study, but rather the decline of the Baha'i Movement. There is overlap between the two as some individuals span both. Ironically, the dissolution of the pre-war networks that has already been discussed eased this process because the engine of enrichment, the context in which relevance was found, was curtailed. This period is totally dominated by the effort to build the Baha'i administration, an activity which was relevant to none except Baha'is, and marks the final retreat from relevance. Those who still identified as Baha'is at the time of 'Abdu'l Baha's death, were primarily those who had been connected to the Central Network. These were people for whom Baha'ism had always been closer to a primary belief, as they had the least well developed scaffolding of an alternative context on to which to hang their understanding of Baha'ism and closest connections to 'Abdu'l Baha.

Some of the British Baha'is played important roles in the events immediately after the death of 'Abdu'l Baha. This may have been because of the close relationship between prominent members of the community and Shoghi Rabbani, forged during his time in Oxford. Ethel Rosenberg was present in the Holy Land at the time of the death of 'Abdu'l Baha and Lady Blomfield accompanied Shoghi Rabbani and his sister back to Haifa. They arrived in Haifa on the 29th December 1921. Shoghi Rabbani and Lady



Blomfield produced *The Passing of Abdu'l Baha* a short work explaining the circumstances of the death of 'Abdu'l Baha and the contents of his will. The latter was particularly necessary because like the succession of the Bab and Baha'u'llah, the will of 'Abdu'l Baha was disputed. The first area of controversy was the claim of 'Abdu'l Baha's brother under the terms of Baha'u'llah's will<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, 'Abdu'l Baha's will extended the concept of the Covenant to create and include the office of Guardian of the Faith. This was an entirely new office against insubordination with the ultimate sanction of excommunication. A further consideration was the setting up of the Universal House of Justice<sup>2</sup>. The terms of the will made it clear that this institution was to be created and explained its relationship to the Guardianship, however it did not specify when it should be formed. Most Baha'is seem to have assumed that it would be set up immediately after the death of 'Abdu'l Baha. In March 1922 Shoghi Rabbani met with a group of leading Baha'is from America, England, France, Germany and Persia to consider the future. Tudor Pole, Ethel Rosenberg and Lady Blomfield were present, representing the British Baha'is. The outcome of these deliberations was the decision to postpone the creation of the Universal House of Justice until the establishment of administrative systems had been achieved.

Thus it was the development of the Baha'i Administration which was to preoccupy Baha'is for the next three decades. This unique administrative system is a distinctive feature of the modern Baha'i Faith and it is from this period the emergence of the Baha'i Faith, as opposed to the Baha'i Movement, can be seen. Before she left Haifa Ethel Rosenberg was given instructions by Shoghi Rabbani to prepare lists of Baha'is who would be eligible to vote for spiritual assemblies. She was told to write immediately to Mrs George in London, Mr Hall in Manchester and Dr Esslemont in Bournemouth and request lists of those who considered themselves to be Baha'is. Rosenberg asked if she were to inform them of the purpose of this information gathering and Shoghi Rabbani emphatically replied she was on no account to mention they were for the preparation of voting papers (Weinberg: 1995, p.212). Rosenberg prepared the

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter One

<sup>2</sup> The Universal House of Justice is the supreme administrative body of the modern Baha'i Faith. It is referred to by Baha'u'llah in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*. Its exclusively male membership is elected every five years by members of elected national spiritual assemblies at an international convention for the purpose. Baha'is believe the Universal House of Justice to be infallible.

letters, submitted them to Shoghi Rabbani for approval, and, in the presence of Lutfu'llah Hakim, posted them to England the same day.

The election of the delegates to the Spiritual Assembly (All England Baha'i Council) took place in June. Those elected to the Assembly were Ethel Rosenberg, Lady Blomfield, Mrs Thornburgh-Cropper, Claudia Coles, Yu'hanna Davad, Miss Fry, Mrs George, Eric Hammond, George Simpson and Miss Grand from London, with Edward Hall and John Esslemont representing Manchester and Bournemouth respectively. In his letter to Hakim of 18<sup>th</sup> June, Esslemont lists those who were not elected as Herrick, Musgrove, Cather and Gamble. As the voting list from this election no longer exists it is impossible to tell if these sixteen names represent the entire electorate, a self-selecting or nominated group, or simply only those who received votes. The membership of the new assembly was sufficiently similar to that of the Baha'i Council that it superseded for it to be considered a continuation rather than a new departure. The assembly met for the first time on 17<sup>th</sup> June 1922. Most of the minutes of the assembly indicate a preoccupation with publishing, public meetings and the persecution of co-religionists abroad. However, in the December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1922 minutes an issue arises which is of considerable interest in determining the nature of the Baha'i community at the time. The new Baha'i assembly was faced with a question which they had previously avoided "Who was a Baha'i?" The 2<sup>nd</sup> December meeting is the first attempt of the British Baha'is attempting to formulate a definition.

### *5.2 Who is a Baha'i?*

Elizabeth Herrick raised a complaint from Annie Gamble that the election of the assembly had not been properly conducted. It would seem that as well as sending a list of her friends and contacts to Mrs George to forward to Rosenberg in Haifa, Gamble had also sent a later and longer list directly to Shoghi Rabbani. Rosenberg had produced the voting list from the earlier list and consequently several names, including Gamble's, had been omitted. The minutes record that Esslemont agreed to see Gamble and explain the situation. There is no reason to suppose this error was anything more than a genuine mistake, however the motives of Herrick in raising it six months after the event are questionable. Herrick was elected to the next assembly by a large margin so others may have felt she had cause for concern. The debate led on to the far more serious question,

who was a Baha'i and how could they tell? Mrs George proposed that a simple letter should be prepared by the assembly for potential new members to sign. Mr Simpson seconded this. Dr. Esslemont proposed an amendment that two members of the assembly should subject new members to an informal interview. They "would explain to them what is regarded as necessary to be accepted by members of the Movement and what would be their responsibilities if they decided to join it". The question was then put by the Chairman to the meeting - after Mr Davad, Mrs Coles and Ziaullah had explained that a written formula was very undesirable, and as stated by Mrs Coles, certainly disallowed by 'Abdu'l Baha himself. It may be significant that two of the three opposing a written formula were Persians and that Coles based her dissent on 'Abdu'l Baha. It suggests that the implications of such a move were more apparent amongst the Persian Baha'is. The Assembly unanimously accepted the amendment and decided against any written letter or formula (*Minutes of the London Assembly 2<sup>nd</sup> Dec 1922*).

At the next meeting the above minute was challenged by Mrs George who "explained that the proposed letter, which was not read at the last meeting, did not in anyway suggest or contain any written formula of the Faith - and she wished these words deleted. Mrs Coles also remarked that had she known the contents of Mrs George's proposed letter she would not have spoken as she did at the last meeting. The words objected to by Mrs George were deleted and the minutes passed." (*Minutes of the London Assembly 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb 1922*). It is the term "formula" which is objected to, not the idea of a letter, and it is this that Claudia Coles accepts she had misunderstood. However, there is no reason to suppose that she was mistaken in asserting that 'Abdu'l Baha had specifically objected to such a move. Thus the Baha'is were in agreement not that a membership letter was inherently bad, but that their beliefs should not be committed to paper in a test of membership. Thus the criteria for membership were deliberately left vague with all the implications for relevance that entails.

### *5.3 The Assemblies are Formed*

Also around this time the British community was joined by a prominent Persian Baha'i teacher first promised by Shoghi Effendi in a letter of 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 1922 (Shoghi Effendi: 1981, p.104). The teacher in question was Abdu'l-Husayn Avarih who was the first important Persian teacher to be sent to the British Isles. Avarih spoke in

numerous public meetings, including the Manchester Linotype Works where John Craven along with two thousand others was employed. Under the direction of Avarih two more spiritual assemblies were formed: Manchester on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1923 and Bournemouth on 11<sup>th</sup> April. Avarih was expelled from the Baha'i community a few years later but the reasons for this were unconnected with his work in Britain and the British NSA acknowledged this in their minutes.

At its meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1923 the assembly studied a letter from Shoghi Effendi outlining the organisation and election of spiritual assemblies. They were in disagreement with his instruction that assemblies were to be elected annually and wrote back to the effect that such a system would be "too disruptive". An emergency meeting was called on 28<sup>th</sup> April in response to a communication from Shoghi Effendi, which made clear that the directive of annual elections was not open to amendment. As a result of this meeting Rosenberg was instructed to compile voting lists. These lists no longer exist but an analysis of the votes cast written by George Simpson does and is very enlightening. Eighty ballots were distributed of which sixty-six were returned, of those one was blank and four were spoilt. Thus the highest possible vote was sixty-one. Although the election was for the "London" Assembly and a Bournemouth Assembly had been constituted earlier in the month, John Esslemont, who was resident in Bournemouth, appears on the list having received seven votes. The result of the election was as follows:

Lady Blomfield - 55 votes  
Mrs Thornburgh-Cropper - 50 votes  
Mrs George - 45 votes  
Miss Rosenberg - 45 votes  
Mr Hammond - 43 votes  
Mrs Coles - 42 votes  
Mr Simpson - 41 votes  
Miss Herrick - 33 votes  
Mr Asgharzadih - 32 votes

Blomfield is clearly the dominant personality at this point scoring ten more votes than Rosenberg who might have been expected to lead the poll. The nine elected

persons represent a clear leadership, as the next highest recorded vote is only nineteen. It would appear that delegates were also elected to form a convention which would in turn elect the National Assembly; at this stage, local assemblies were represented on a proportional basis, six from London, two from Manchester and one from Bournemouth. It would be some years before it was understood that all members of the community whatever their location were eligible for direct election to a National Assembly.

On Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> October 1923 the first meeting of the National Spiritual Assembly took place. The body, which had been elected by postal ballot, comprised Eric Hammond, Marion Thornburgh-Cropper, Ethel Rosenberg, George Palgrave Simpson, Sarah Blomfield, Florence George, from London, Edward Hall and Jacob Joseph, from Manchester and John Esslemont from Bournemouth. The minutes of the first meeting show that Blomfield was absent and John Craven, from Manchester was in attendance to assist Jacob Joseph with language problems. The meeting discussed its 'Rules of Debate' and elected its officers and a report was taken from the London, Manchester and Bournemouth Assemblies, some details from which are illuminating. Hall spoke of good progress being made and mentioned the help of two Unitarian ministers, one of whom allowed the sale of Baha'i literature in his church and the other lent his schoolroom for meetings and had gatherings in his church. Clearly, the links with Unitarianism in general and with Cross Street Chapel in particular were still very strong in Manchester. He also mentioned tension between new adherents and more established members of the group, which could be a reference to the claims of Norah Crossley.<sup>3</sup> Esslemont also reported some lack of harmony but thought that the resignation of one individual would solve the problem.

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<sup>3</sup> Crossley's relationship with the rest of the Manchester Baha'is was at best difficult. In July 1922 Esslemont wrote to Hakim, "Mrs Crossley has written to say she has been asked to rejoin the Group" which indicates she had either left or been asked to leave. In July the following year Esslemont wrote, "I am sorry to hear that Mrs Crossley is again in trouble, her husband has been sentenced to a months imprisonment with hard labour for neglecting his wife and children. She says she applied to the Guardians for relief and the Guardians brought the action against her husband. She says her husband's intention is to go abroad when he comes out of prison. Where the money is to come from to send him abroad, I do not know. She says she has a chance of getting a cottage in the country with a small business attached that might be the best thing for the children and her, and might make matters easier for the Manchester friends." In August Esslemont was able to report an upturn in the Crossley fortunes, "Mrs Crossley has now started a shop at 61a Palatine Road, Northenden, Cheshire, a few miles from Manchester and she and her family have gone to live there. When she last wrote, they were very happy. The husband when he came out of prison seemed very penitent and she has taken him back to live with her, but she will not now be dependant on him as she now has the shop. I do hope they will now make a fresh start and that both of them will become true and steady Baha'is." In his letter Esslemont fails to mention the fact that it was he who installed the Crossley family in the fancy goods shop in Northenden.

The report from the Bournemouth group shows they had also considered the vexed question "Who is a Baha'i?" They had introduced the practice that all new members would be proposed and seconded by members of the Spiritual Assembly who could vouch for the applicant's knowledge of what membership of the Baha'i group entailed and their intention to live according to the Baha'i teachings. This was not a test of belief, but rather of intent.

#### *5.4 Membership*

The attempt to consolidate membership lists allows a snapshot view of the membership at this period. In his letter of 12<sup>th</sup> April 1923, Esslemont list the membership of the Bournemouth group. It consists of twelve names, four males and eight females, giving a 33% - 66% split. There would appear to be only one couple, a Mr and Mrs King. The Kings and their three children had arrived in Bournemouth in 1920 from Boston in the United States. Esslemont mentions that King had been an Orthodox Jew until his mid thirties when he became a Freethinker and finally a Baha'i. All the other women on the list are titled "Miss", except for Mrs Dunsby, of whom Esslemont wrote in his letter of 13<sup>th</sup> August 1922, "it will be three years tomorrow since her husband died". Thus the membership was predominantly unattached women, many of whom had been or were patients at the sanatorium where Esslemont worked. Geography seems to have been interpreted rather freely as "Miss Martyn and Miss Yates (not living here now but like to consider themselves part of the group)" were included, despite Miss Martyn living in Wimbledon, close to Rosenberg and Ginman.

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In her memoirs Crossley acknowledges his help and the distress she felt in telling him the venture had failed, due she states to her ill health.

According to Crossley's memoirs she was forced out of the Baha'i group in 1923, by the insane jealousy of a long established Baha'i. She recalls, "One of the things which attracted me to the Group in the first place, was the love and harmony and peace which prevailed among the group. My domestic life being in turmoil, this peace and harmony was something vital to me. ... How then, could I stand by and see that harmony destroyed by insane jealousy, caused by ME, of all people. Try as I could I could only see ONE way out; that was to remove the bone of contention - namely myself. So, although they meant everything in the world to me - I had NOTHING else to console me - I disappeared, leaving no trace - as I knew that if the friends knew where I had gone, they would never have rested until I was back among them again." In September 1923 Esslemont wrote to Hakim ather different version of her departure, "Mrs Crossley is in trouble again. Her husband has deserted her again and she is at present in the workhouse. She seems to have given a great deal of trouble to the Manchester Baha'i group and for a considerable time they have had no dealings with her. She writes to me now and again. I think she tries to be a Baha'i, but she does not as yet seem to have attained a real grip of he teachings and her life is a sadly chequered one."

Although no list of the London Baha'is for 1923 can be found, voting lists for the 1924 election to the London Spiritual Assembly and for the election of twelve delegates to elect the six London members of the National Spiritual Assembly are available:

Voters in the election of the London LSA April 1924

Male	Male paired	Female paired	Female
Mr Ruhi Afnan			Miss Ainslie Miss Arnoup
	Mr Z Asgarzadeh	Mrs Z Asgarzadeh	Miss Baldaro
	Mr E Bedingfield	Mrs E Bedingfield	Miss Bevan Lady Blomfield
Mr Brodsky			Mrs Arthur Brown Miss E Buckle Miss A Buckton
Mr S Bull			Miss Cather Miss A Cather Mrs Champion Mrs Chaudri Miss Cheape
Mr CS Cole			Mrs C Coles
Prof. Darab (male?)			
Mr J Dawad			

			Miss Draper
	Comd. TR Fforde	Mrs TR Fforde	
Mr Froughi			Miss Isobel Fry
			Miss Gamble
			Miss Garrard
			Mrs George
			Mrs Ginman
			Miss Gladish
			Miss Grimshaw
	Mr Grimwood	Mrs Grimwood	
	Mr MS Hakim	Mrs MS Hakim	
			Mrs Basil Hall
	Mr E Hammomd	Mrs E Hammond	
			Miss Haybittel
			Miss Herrick
			Miss B Irwin
			Mrs E Kellgren
			Mrs RD Knight
Mr Scott Lane			
			Miss Lay
			Miss Lay
			Miss E Lea
			Miss Mackeith
	Mr JL Marshall	Mrs JL Marshall	
			Mrs Carteret Maule
	Mr Carey Morris	Mrs Carey Morris	
			Miss N Musgrave
Mr El Nochougati			



Miss P Platt  
Miss R Rabbani  
Mrs Redfern  
Mrs Roberts  
Miss E Rosenberg  
Mrs Scaramucci  
Miss Schepel  
Mrs Slade  
Miss Slade

Mr GP Simpson

Mrs Tanner  
Mrs Thornburgh-Cropper  
Mrs Tovey  
Miss Valentine

Mr Wellard

Mrs Wellard

Miss A Woods  
Miss M Yandell

Of the 77 names

19 are male

58 are female

25% are male

75% are female

13 % are single male

12 % are coupled male

12 % are coupled female

63 % are single female

The list comprises seventy-seven names. It will be recalled eighty ballots had been despatched in 1923 and three of the names on the voting analysis from that year do

not appear, so there had been a small change in membership. Of the 77 names nineteen are male, fifty-eight are female, giving a 25% - 75% split. Twelve percent of the names indicate married couples. Thus, 13 % of the membership are uncoupled males and 63% are uncoupled females. It is impossible to be certain as to the marital status of these uncoupled people. Eighteen of the women have titles that indicate marriage but where information exists a large proportion of widows is indicated. The statistics suggest that London, like Bournemouth, was dominated by unattached women and that the proportion of coupled to uncoupled men may indicate that married men were introduced to Baha'ism by their wives. The electors of the London Assembly included all Baha'is not living in Manchester or Bournemouth and of the seventy seven names eighteen indicate they live too far from London to serve on the Assembly. These include Buckton and Schepel in Glastonbury, Knight in Brighton, Scaramucci in Devon and the Marshalls in Birmingham.

The Manchester group reflects a rather different composition. In his booklet *Baha'i Dawn in Manchester*, Edward Hall includes a list of "Members of the Spiritual Council, The Assembly and The Garden of Glad Tidings" at February 27<sup>th</sup>, 1925. Nine people are identified as members of the Spiritual Council by an asterisk, thus indicating the term Assembly was still in use for the entire group. "The Garden of Glad Tidings" refers to the younger members of the community, three of whom are listed before the others and two of the three are shown as members of the Spiritual Council suggesting that although considered youth members they were accorded some degree of adult status and responsibility. There are twenty-seven people listed, including the three younger ones mentioned above. Of these fourteen are female and thirteen are male, making an almost equal gender split. Furthermore, twelve people can be identified as married couples, two others are children of two of these couples, and there is also a single male parent and daughter, and the two Joseph brothers. Thus of the twenty-seven, eighteen are related to each other. The Manchester group was unique in this family dominated infrastructure and its high proportion of children.

Thus it can be concluded that in the early nineteen twenties the Baha'is numbered no more than eighty in London and the rest of the country, with about a dozen in Bournemouth and a further thirty or so in Manchester. There is no longer any sense of networks around ideological understandings or interest groups, all attention

being fixed upon the building of the Administration. The Central Network has become the London Assembly and Rosenberg, Blomfield and Thornburgh-Cropper dominated the leadership, as they had from the beginning.

### *5.5 The End of the Celtic Network*

It was around this time Wellesley Tudor Pole formally left the Baha'i community, Robert Weinburg describes his departure:

“Sadly Major Tudor Pole declined membership of the Assembly saying that he thought he could render more valuable service in an unofficial capacity. From that time onwards, Tudor Pole more or less distanced himself completely from the Movement, claiming that after consultation with Shoghi Effendi, he had reached the decision that he would be more effective assisting the Cause as a non-member which would give him more weight in Diplomatic circles. After this period there is little mention of Tudor Pole in Baha'i documents. It is well known that he went on to pursue other esoteric interests and gained considerable fame as a spiritual teacher in his own right, exploring his own mystical approach to Christianity.” (Weinburg, 1995, p.58)

This is misleading, since, while it is true that Pole withdrew for the reasons stated - a letter to this effect is in the London archives - it is not strictly true that he “went on to pursue” because he always had had other esoteric interests. It is perhaps fairer to conclude that both Pole and the Baha'is had been, for a while, on a similar spiritual trajectory, based largely on his own enrichment. Pole continued in the beliefs he had held prior to and during his involvement with the Baha'i Movement. It was the Baha'is who changed not Pole. When Pole was faced with the formal organisation of the Baha'i Movement he was perceptive enough to realise that this was effectively the founding of a new religion, something which he entirely opposed. As late as 1968 he wrote ‘At that time over half a century ago, it did not seem to me that ‘Abdu'l Baha envisaged the establishment of a new separate ‘Religion’. All the stress of his teaching was laid on the leavening effect of the Baha'i message on the religions already in existence and which were themselves in such urgent need of spiritual regeneration from within. The Master made it clear that to create an entirely new and separate religious

organisation at that time should be resisted vigorously.’(Pole: 1984a, p. 147) Pole had always been the most outspoken advocate of the unity of religions; all his *Christian Commonwealth* articles stress this point. It would appear that he had got to a point with the Baha’is that he simply could enrich no further and was honest enough to withdraw. His association with Buckton seems to have become less close since he later recalled: “The Belgian Order of the Sacred Heart sold the Chalice Well property as a whole in 1909, after it had been empty for a while. Alice Buckton bought it and ruled there for many years. Results were mixed and ultimately the good lady became deranged and eccentric to a degree” (Pole: 1979, p.138). Pole puts this derangement down to the spiritual void created by the Roman Catholic deconsecration of the site when the Belgian nuns departed. Eventually Buckton leased the property to two schoolmasters and they bought it from her executors. Pole purchased the property on 1959 and set up the Chalice Well Trust. Pole remained friendly towards the Baha’is and at no point attacked the development of the Baha’i Faith publicly. His departure was arguably a positive step for both himself and the community, as his stature as a mystic and military hero would have made him a focal point of any opposition to the administration. Unfortunately, his home in Landsdowne Road, London was gutted in an air raid in 1942 and “all my old silver, tapestries, Persian cups and Eastern possessions went up in flames” making any further investigation impossible.

### 5.6 *Unity Triumphant*

Another important event in 1923 was the publication of Elizabeth Herrick’s *Unity Triumphant*. Herrick’s book was beset with problems; her failure to transliterate and correctly accent some of the Persian and Arabic terms caused her to destroy the first print run. According to her biographer this led to severe financial problems for some time. Herrick’s unpopularity with other senior members of the community suggests that not only was her spelling carefully checked but that the content of this curious volume would also have been subject to vetting to ensure there was no deviation from orthodoxy. Consequently we can assert with some confidence that whatever the stylistic limitations of *Unity Triumphant* it represents an accurate snapshot of Baha’i beliefs in Britain in 1923.

*Unity Triumphant* is a collection of essays on a variety of social problems and their solutions; recollections of talks by ‘Abdu’l Baha, some maybe from Herrick’s own notes but many taken from other published sources; translations of tablets revealed by Baha’u’llah and ‘Abdu’l Baha; potted histories of the Baha’i Movement and descriptions of the building work in progress of the American Mashriqu’l-Adhkar, jumbled together in no particular sequence and no discernible structure. Herrick does, however, attempt to outline basic Baha’i beliefs in two sections of her book. In chapter eight the twelve “Universal Principles of Baha’u’llah” are expounded.

1. The Oneness of Mankind
2. Independent Investigation of Truth
3. The Oneness of the Foundation of all Religions
4. Religion must be the Cause of Unity
5. Religion must be in Accordance with Science and Reason
6. Equality between men and women
7. Prejudices of all kinds must be forgotten
8. Universal Peace
9. Universal Education
10. Solution of the Economic Problem
11. An international Auxiliary Language
12. An international tribunal

In chapter thirty-two there is a further list of “Baha’i Precepts”, the compilation of which is attributed to Ethel Rosenberg, since it suggests a familiarity with the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*. These add to the principles above, the abolition of warfare, the compulsory nature of gainful employment, the prohibition of begging, asceticism, and clergy. Monogamy and charity are encouraged, while gambling, alcohol, opium, cruelty to animals and slavery are forbidden. Herrick makes no attempt either to consolidate the two lists or to comment upon them. Neither list specifically mentions God, nor has any theological content. It would appear that these lists are a development of the teachings consolidated during the visits of ‘Abdu’l Baha. If this manifesto is considered against the withdrawal of Pole, the changes of emphasis and the decline of relevance become apparent. The list of principles does not form a religious belief system, but merely reinforces pre-existing views. In terms of relevance it adds little but does not detract;

anyone who accepted the need for universal education (and most people who came around the Baha'i Movement would have) could concur their belief was divinely approved. However, the reinforcing of such principles does not equate with the loss of relevance for someone like Pole. Pole's complex world view, freighted with complex symbolism and occult meanings, could be disentangled from Baha'ism as the more esoteric elements were discarded in order to present a simplistic program of bullet points.

Herrick's understanding of religious unity is very clear:

"[The Baha'i] Revelation comprehending all previous Revelations is given to the world by Baha'u'llah. The quintessence of which is: that all Revelations of the Truth, past and present, are in harmony."  
(Herrick: 1923, p.5)

She goes on to explain the mechanism of this unity:

" There are millions of Jews, Christians, Muhammadans in the world, and it is not possible, either by argument, persuasion, or the sword, to get them to reject one religion for another. But it is possible for them all to arrive at the understanding that the aim of the Founders of all these Religions is One and the same; and that they each serve specifically an Age in the progressive order of the Divine Plan to create Harmony in the world." (Herrick: 1923, p.8)

The role of the Baha'is is outlined and it is interesting that she does not stress remaining within an existing religion, while there is no mention of the Baha'is being a separate religion:

"The Revelation of Baha'u'llah is not exclusive. Coming to those who worship God under different Names, and to those who accept no Religion, it fulfils the Prophecies of God, and meets the highest social aspirations of Humanitarianism." (Herrick: 1923, p.22)

Apart from a passing nod at Muhammad as a champion of Temperance “Christians cannot deny that Muhammad has on His own ground, dealt more ably with the liquor traffic than they in some countries have yet done.” (Herrick: 1923, p.136) Herrick’s tone is exclusively Christian. However, her devotion to Jesus does not conform to Christian orthodoxy. She quotes a book entitled *The Truth of Being* by Grace Western. This book appears to have profoundly influenced her and some of her circle: “We thought we had found the “Truth of Being”, and were happy in saying a joyful good-bye to the “worm” and “miserable sinner” ideas which had too long hampered our spirit in the name of theology.” (Herrick: 1923, p. 28) She espouses the opinion that all humanity is divine, a theological proposition she attributes to Mrs. Eddy, “the question - “Divine, or not divine?”- which has been the bone of contention between Unitarians and Trinitarians, for centuries. One party practically denying their own divinity, and the other denying the Divinity of Christ! Whatever have theologians imagined divinity to be? Mrs Eddy, thanks be to her, settled that matter for Christian Scientists by claiming divinity for all God’s children.” Herrick strays further from Christianity when she writes: “Mankind has indeed been lost to reason and common sense, in supposing that God *wanted* His own beloved Son crucified - in order that He might be enabled to forgive sinners! ... such error and gross superstition ... no simple child would have invented such an idea.” (Herrick: 1923, p.138-9) Such an overt attack on basic Christian belief was a new departure in Baha’i literature.

Herrick’s social and political ideas are eclectic; she is principally concerned with the concepts of peace and unity, which she equates with Esperanto and a universally accepted calendar. She also discusses at length animal rights, temperance and hygiene, her lifestyle politics “no boots and shoes which cripple us. Pure food and no substitutes: beautiful fruit, nuts and other sun kissed foods, which will make everyone forget alcohol” (Herrick: 1923, p.39) were in keeping with the radicalism of the time. Although something of a maverick within the Baha’i Movement, Elizabeth Herrick was in some senses the quintessential Baha’i, unmarried, feminist, Socialistic, but disenchanted with the materialism of Socialists. She was a lover of Jesus outside of the Church, passionate about causes, human, women’s and animal rights, anti-competitive and pro-co-operative. She is a perfect example of the theory of relevance in practice, Herrick was a Baha’i waiting to happen.

### *5.7 Relations with other Religions*

The work of the new National Assembly and consequently their correspondence with Shoghi Rabbani was dominated by preparations for the conference on 'Living Religions within the British Empire' which was being organised by the University of London's School of Oriental Studies. The event, which took place between 22<sup>nd</sup> September and 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1924, was held at the Imperial Institute in Kensington. Some of the communications from Haifa indicate that Shoghi Effendi was not entirely convinced of the ability of the London Baha'is to cope with the situation. In a letter dated 6<sup>th</sup> January, 1924, the British Baha'is were informed that their presentation would be prepared in the United States, a copy of a letter to American Baha'is explaining the nature of the event was enclosed. It read: "I feel the necessity of entrusting this highly important and delicate task to a specially selected committee, to be appointed, most carefully by the National Spiritual Assembly of America". The letter went on: "It is rather unfortunate that the United States of America should have to be excluded, as the speakers at the conference must necessarily be subjects of the British Empire" (Shoghi Effendi: 1981, p.22). Despite the concerted effort to make a memorable contribution the Baha'is were somewhat overshadowed by the Ahmadiyya Movement whose leader, Khalifat-ul-Masih, addressed the conference. The Baha'is, however, organised a very well attended reception for delegates at Claridge's, hosted by Lady Blomfield, which was highly praised by Shoghi Effendi. The tactic proposed for the intervention at this event was in line with the networking methods of the pre War Baha'i Movement.

The British community was however about to lose one of its brightest stars. In 1924 John Esslemont went to work in Haifa as an assistant to Shoghi Effendi. It was hoped that a warmer climate would be beneficial to his delicate health. It would seem that he was already terminally ill, for he died on the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1925. His death was a real blow to the British community, since there was no other member of the community approaching his stature either as a writer or an organiser.

In 1925 a court case took place in Egypt which was to have far reaching consequences for the entire Baha'i world. A number of Baha'i men were accused of apostasy and as a consequence their marriages to ostensibly Muslim women were to be declared invalid. A number of the women concerned refused to be rescued from their



situation, pointing out their husbands were good to them and if that was the consequence of their being Baha'is then they wanted to be considered to be Baha'is too. The ecclesiastical court was forced to declare the Baha'is heretics, outside Islam, and refused them the application and benefits of Muslim law. Whilst this created problems for the Egyptian Baha'is, many of which still persist, it opened up the possibility of the recognition of independent Baha'i courts in Egypt. Under Muslim law recognised religious communities have, in matters of personal status such as marriage, divorce and inheritance their own ecclesiastical courts. Baha'i courts had been established and granted official recognition in Isfahan. Shoghi Rabbani enthusiastically received news of these events. Writing in *The Baha'i World* he describes the approach of the Egyptian Baha'is to this situation: "Their petition is chiefly concerned with the a formal request for recognition by the highest civil authorities in Egypt of the Egyptian National Spiritual Assembly as a recognised and independent Baha'i court, free and able to execute and apply in all matters of personal status such laws and ordinances as have been promulgated by Baha'u'llah in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*." No such court as yet exists in Egypt but the significance of freeing the Baha'is from the status of a sect of Islam was of fundamental importance. The Egyptian Ruling, ultimately confirmed by the Al Azhar Mosque, the highest authority in the Muslim world, had effectively declared the Baha'is a separate and independent religion. Given his approval of the disassociation of Baha'ism from Islam an interesting insight into the attitude of Shoghi Rabbani and his cousin Ruhi Afnan towards the West and Christianity, at around this time, can be found an interview in with A. E. Suthers of the Ohio Wesleyan University.<sup>4</sup> Suthers reports Afnan as saying:

"We find youth to be not interested at the present in true religion (i. e. Bahaism). It is a discouraging aspect of the age. Our youth today are making two blunders: they think it is necessary to imitate the West in everything, and believing the West to be unspiritual they think it fitting to become irreligious to be in fashion"

"But there was nothing, I was assured, to prevent a man from being a Moslem and a Bahaist at the same time "provided he accepts the status of

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<sup>4</sup> Muslim World, Vol. 25, 1935 *Baha'i Pontiff in the Making*

Baha'u'llah as the divine Son of God and fullest and final revelation from God" - rather high for an initial hurdle, I thought."

Suther goes on to quote Shoghi Rabbani in response to the question "how many Baha'is are there?" As saying, "We cannot say. We keep no records of membership, in the sense that the Christian Church does. The lines between Bahaism and Christianity are not yet clearly demarked. It is sometimes difficult to tell who are and who are not Bahaists, so much do they merge. We also find that many people assent to our teachings, even join our communion, but refrain from active loyalty to us". Unfortunately there is no date attached to this interview, but as it was not published until 1935 it almost certainly took place after the Egyptian ruling, which means that although the line was clearly drawn between Baha'i and Islam, it would still be several years before a similar break with Christianity would be publicly declared.

The setting up of assemblies reflected a move towards greater exclusivism, although it is interesting to note that as late as 1927 the Reverend A. H. Biggs a Unitarian minister from Cheshire was elected to the National Assembly. This provoked the following response from Shoghi Effendi:

I trust that the choice of the Rev. Biggs signifies his unreserved acceptance of the faith in its entirety - a condition which we must increasingly stress in years to come. (Shoghi Effendi: 1981, p.71)

The election of Biggs is in contrast to the role of George Townshend who visited London in 1925 and 1927. He was apparently disappointed with the Baha'is he met, perhaps because of their lack of enthusiasm in helping him find secular employment. The death of John Esslemont left the British community without a dominant character whose influence could affect the wider community. Rosenberg went yet again to Haifa to assist Shoghi Rabbani and while she was there she and Townshend helped in the preparation of a Baha'u'llah's *Hidden Words*, which was published in 1929 and ascribed to "Shoghi Effendi and some English friends" in order to maintain Townshend's anonymity. An attempt to find Townshend convivial gainful employment was made when it was suggested he should run the Baha'i Bureau in Geneva. He visited the city in 1928 and was enthusiastic but his participation in the project never came to

fruition. His contribution to the Baha'i Cause would be primarily literary for many years yet.

### *5.8 The Formation of the Administration Continues*

Most of the original Baha'is, whose prestige is evident from the high vote they received in the election, were too old and infirm to really take on the mantle of leadership. The ever-resourceful Elizabeth Herrick suggested in 1928 that some of the more frail members of the National Assembly should be considered as "Honorary Members" so that they would be able to vote when able to be present but in the event of their absence alternate voting members would take their place. This suggestion was rejected as unacceptable within the concepts of Baha'i administration, which is doubtless correct but does nothing to ease the frustration of inquorate meetings. Herrick seems to have become somewhat bitter and seems to remain peripheral until her death the following year in October 1929.

The progress of the administration was slow and uneven. Ada Williams who became a Baha'i in 1929 recalls a number of interesting points in her memoirs. She came into contact with the Baha'is through Alice Deakin and Olive Dunn, friends of her sister, who went to Australia in 1928. "Before going they gave us a copy of the *Hidden Words*. I then thought that I was a Baha'i. My sister attended assembly meetings and feasts and I went with her to firesides and public meetings, but it must have been a year later when I said that I wished that I could attend the Feasts and Alice said that I must sign a card. After that I was elected on to the Local Spiritual Assembly and attended the Nineteen Day Feasts:

"When I became a Baha'i we did not know about the Fast, but we did know that the Local Spiritual Assembly was ordained by Baha'u'llah and that it was a great privilege to serve on one.

"We had a Local Spiritual Assembly meeting every Monday evening at 7.30pm. A copy of the minutes of every meeting was sent to the National Spiritual Assembly." (Williams, undated)

Thus, it is clear that in Manchester by 1930 the basis of the administration was well established although there were still notable gaps in knowledge, for example of the Fast. The card which she mentions was not a registration card as these were only introduced in 1939 and even then with much opposition especially from the Manchester group. This is the only reference to a card at this time. Mother George's recollections also suggest that the rules of administration were imperfectly understood, "But we did not understand the laws of administration and made many mistakes. It was not until 1936 that Mr George Spendlove<sup>5</sup> came among us and taught us faithfully to follow the laws laid down for conducting the Baha'i Cause by the Administrative Code given to us by 'Abdu'l Baha himself." (George: 1942).

A more immediate concern to the Western Baha'is was the claim of an American woman Mrs Ruth White that the will was a forgery. In her book *The Baha'i Religion and Its Enemy, the Baha'i Organisation*, White argued that independent expert opinion, namely that of Dr Ainsworth Mitchell of the British Museum, had concluded, "The alleged will of 'Abdu'l Baha was not written throughout by the same person. No part of the will has the characteristics of the writing of 'Abdu'l Baha, as shown in the authenticated specimens" (Zimmer: 1973, p.16). The main objection raised by White was the institution of the "Guardianship" and its organisational consequences for Baha'ism. Superficially she would have appeared to have a reasonable point. There had never been any mention of this role in any utterance of 'Abdu'l Baha prior to the will. Furthermore the concept of hereditary leadership did not sit well with the egalitarian emphasis of Baha'ism as it was perceived by Western Baha'is with a background in Socialism or New Theology. This may be an example of the decline in relevance for some of the American Baha'is, the loss of charismatic leadership and consequent administration building leading to a disambiguation and loss of inferred relevance. *Iranian Bahais familiar with the Shia imamate accepted the role of hereditary leaders.*

White actually attracted little support simply because the authenticity of the will was unquestioned not only by the rest of 'Abdu'l Baha's family, including his brother who had every reason to want it declared a forgery, but also by leading Western Baha'is. Ethel Rosenberg was present at the reading of the will and was totally supportive of Shoghi Rabbani's claim. A later opponent of Shoghi Rabbani, Ahmed Sohrab, who was closely connected to the Baha'i leadership at the time of the death of 'Abdu'l Baha,

<sup>5</sup> Spendlove, F. St. George (1897-1962) An early Canadian believer. He spent some time in London and served on the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles

always upheld the authenticity of the will. Another weakness in White's claim was her total inability to speak or read Persian the language in which the will was written. Doubtless most Western Baha'is simply assumed that the terms of the will meant that Shoghi Effendi was going to take over where his grandfather had left off. Although the formalisation of hereditary leadership was an innovation, 'Abdu'l Baha had been the son of Baha'u'llah so in practice the leadership passing through the family was well-established. This was in effect the first test of the extended Covenant, and was of major importance in the development of the Baha'i Faith. If the extension of the Covenant was the first public demonstration of the leadership's intention of organisational independence in the West then the acceptance of the terms of 'Abdu'l Baha's will was the failure of a large proportion of the membership to perceive the implications of it. Arguably White and later Sohrab did grasp the fact that major change was inevitable and chose to reject it, holding to the Baha'i Movement's perspective that the Baha'i Cause could not be organised.

The dispute was of little importance in Britain as Alma Gregory recalled "After Shoghi Effendi's return to Haifa, the Master's Will was read and we learnt of the appointment to the station of Guardianship. I remember how delighted and relieved the friends were - those with whom we were in close contact. I know of only one who could not accept this and who quietly left the Faith."(Gregory, undated) White's pamphlet was however discussed at the fortieth meeting of the London Spiritual Assembly, held on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1929. Rosenberg was asked to recall the reading of 'Abdu'l Baha's will. This she did and the Assembly was easily convinced that no further action needed to be taken on the pamphlet. White visited Britain later in 1929 in order to further her cause. While she met with no success, she was doubtless encouraged in her belief that Baha'i Cause could not be organised by the disunity she claimed to have witnessed at the National Spiritual Assembly and the remark she claimed Lady Blomfield had made to her that: "there was practically no longer a Baha'i Cause in England". While White obviously had her own agenda and consequently a biased perception, there is no reason to totally dismiss her assessment of the situation in Britain, particularly as it would appear to be substantiated by events.

1929 also saw the opening on 19<sup>th</sup> September of the first Baha'i Centre. This was situated at Walmer House in Lower Regent Street, London W1. It was not only a

regular venue for Baha'i meetings, but at its inception it was envisaged that the Centre would be kept open from ten until six each day for literature and information to be made available to seekers. In 1930 the first British National Convention was held at Walmer House on the afternoon of April 26<sup>th</sup>. It would appear that the new National Spiritual Assembly was aware of the magnitude of the tasks before it and the limitations of previous Assemblies. In a letter by Claudia Coles in the *Baha'i Newsletter*, July 1930 this "must try harder" approach is apparent, "as we look forward we realise how tremendous are the opportunities and responsibilities lying before us - opportunities which we can never cope with until we obey more consistently the teachings of the Master".

### *5.9 The End of the Baha'i Movement*

This Assembly was the first not to have amongst its members Ethel Rosenberg, whose failing health finally prevented her from taking an active role, and on the 17<sup>th</sup> November 1930, aged 72, she died. A telegram from Shoghi Rabbani in response to the news reads "Deeply grieved passing Rosenberg England's outstanding Baha'i pioneer worker. Memory of her glorious service will never die. 'Abdu'l Baha's family join me in expressing heartfelt condolences to her brother relatives and urge Friends hold befitting memorial service. Shoghi". Rosenberg was truly an outstanding worker for the Baha'i Cause. From the moment she accepted it in 1899 she worked tirelessly in its promotion until her death thirty years later. She was one of the dominant figures of the Central Network, not perhaps as publicly visible as Lady Blomfield, but the leading teacher within the Movement. She made five visits to Haifa, worked alongside Shoghi Rabbani in some of his most important translation work and acted as his secretary. She alone of the British Baha'is had the total trust of 'Abdu'l Baha: it was to her all instructions concerning administration and organisation was passed for dissemination to the wider community. She seems also to have had the friendship of many of the women of 'Abdu'l Baha's family.

The death of Rosenberg marks the beginning of the end of the Baha'i Movement. The disunity reported by White and the problems hinted at by Coles seem to have undermined further development. On the last day of 1928 Shoghi Effendi wrote to the British NSA, "Not until harmony and concord are firmly established among the

friends of London and Manchester will the Cause advance along sound and progressive lines” (Shoghi Effendi: 1981, p.85). Relations with Shoghi Effendi became strained and throughout 1929 correspondence was exchanged concerning the publication of *Hidden Words*. Shoghi Effendi requested that publication should be delayed until the large stock held in the USA was sold off but his request was ignored. From the end of 1930 to early 1934 the National Assembly met only five or six times a year and the minutes of these meetings are very brief. There is no record of any cables or letters from the Guardian during this period and the minutes contain few references to him. This is a clear indication that the role of the Guardian had not been fully accepted.

A stalwart few continued to promote The Cause and endeavoured to construct the Administration. The break in communication in 1930 is the point at which the balance tips and the supplementary religious movement, the Baha’i Movement, gave way to an exclusive religion, the Baha’i Faith. When correspondence resumed in 1934 the emergence of the Baha’i Faith became both rapid and irresistible. Ironically, the weakness of the Baha’is in the United Kingdom allowed this transition to take place smoothly. In the United States resistance to the new Administration and increasing exclusivity took the form of a dispute over the New History Society. This was an organisation set up by Ahmad Sohrab (c1893-1958) and Julie (Lewis Stuyvesant) Chandler (1882-1961) to propagate the Baha’i teachings. When they refused to place the venture under the control of the Local Spiritual Assembly, a confrontation with the National Spiritual Assembly ensued. Sohrab and Chandler were excommunicated in 1930. Both White and Sohrab and Chandler opposed the development of an Administration, claiming that it was a deviation from the teachings of ‘Abdu’l Baha. They represent an organisational challenge by the Baha’i Movement against the development of the Baha’i Faith. In Britain no such formal rebellion took place because the Baha’i group was so small and disorganised. Pole, who also felt that ‘Abdu’l Baha would not have agreed with developments, had dropped out, and he was probably the only person capable of mustering an opposition. Dissatisfaction seems to have taken the form of ignoring requests and failing to communicate with the Guardian and simply dropping out. Thus supporters of the Baha’i Movement numerically declined while those who were inclined towards the new developments had their numbers supplemented by new members. That the growth and development of Baha’ism in Britain entered a new phase is noted by Moojan Momen (1998): “After the death of

'Abdu'l Baha in 1921, the Faith suffered a decline in activities and numbers in the UK until the mid-1930's. A revival in the community appears to date from an influx of young Baha'is including Hasan Balyuzi who came to England in 1933; Dorothy Cansdale (later Mrs Dorothy Ferraby) who became a Baha'i in 1934; and David Hofman, who became a Baha'i in Montreal in 1933 and returned to his native England in 1936. These three were elected to the National Spiritual Assembly and together with John Ferraby, who became a Baha'i in 1941, were to form the core of the community's national administration for the next two decades." These new Baha'is were of a different stamp to those who preceded them. They knew no other version of Baha'ism than the Baha'i Faith of Shoghi Effendi. They were fully aware that it was a separate religion and had no difficulty distinguishing themselves from the Christian milieu around them. They were committed to the centralisation and administration of the Baha'i Faith. However, this development was not without its detractors. There were still supporters of the old style Baha'i Movement within the community but they were declining both numerically and in influence.

Although membership and activity declined in the 1930's some stalwarts did keep the community together and functioning. Madam Gita Orlova seems to have worked very hard to revive the tradition of drama begun by Alice Buckton. Orlova seems to have been aware of the importance of this art form to young people and concentrated her efforts on building a drama group amongst the Baha'i youth. When she left the United Kingdom in 1939 the *Baha'i Journal* expressing the thanks of the community said it was hard to recall that she was a visitor to the country because of her commitment to the British community.

Another American Baha'i who gave their services to the British community around this time was Helen Bishop, who left the United Kingdom in 1937 to work in the European Bureau in Geneva which had been founded by Mrs Stannard. Her service there was not, according to Anne Lynch who worked at the Bureau for eighteen years, a particularly happy or successful period. Writing to Laura Barney in 1946 she recalls: "Mrs Bishop not only resented but definitely refused every attempt at consultation, saying that we were there "to execute her orders". Neither would she accept any help in understanding of the European mentality to which she addressed herself. The result was much misunderstanding and antagonism in the field and a slowing down to a minimum



of the Geneva Bureau service ... Most of our time was spent in writing interminable letters, trying to explain that we wanted to help her, and not, as she said, “to undermine her international position”. Thus we felt (and many others too) that Mrs Bishop had completely missed the point of her service in Europe.” (Letter from Anne Lynch to Laura Barney 02.08.46). What role Bishop played in Britain is not clear, but she does not seem to have evoked the animosity that her role in mainland Europe provoked, nor the affectionate tone which Orlova inspired. Some of the active Baha’is of this period were of course, natives. Two women who span the periods in question are Kathleen Hornell and Mary Basil Hall. Hornell (1890-1977) recalled her entry into the Faith in 1966 “I was fortunate enough to have been allowed great freedom of thought and no prejudices were encouraged. I was never a member of a religious organisation until I met the Baha’i Faith on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1922 in London. My spiritual mother was Elizabeth Herrick, author of *Unity Triumphant*. I was accepted as a believer at Ridvan 1923 and became a voting member of the Faith. There were no formal declarations in those days” (*Baha’i World* 1976-79 Vol. XVII). Hornell is listed on the 1924 voting list as Mrs Arthur Brown. Her spiritual mother was Herrick and her physical daughter, Molly, married Hasan Balyuzi, which connects her to both the earliest phase of the Baha’i Movement and to the emergence of the modern Baha’i Faith. Mary Basil Hall was the only child of Lady Blomfield to remain a Baha’i. She worked with Orlova on the drama group project and some of her notes on this subject are preserved in the London Baha’i Archives. She married Commander Basil Hall of the Royal Navy but they had no children.

That the Baha’is had declined numerically is clear from the recollections of Philip Hainsworth who became a Baha’i in 1937. “I came across some old records and was able to work out that there could only have been eighty registered believers in England, and none in the whole of Ireland, Scotland and Wales at the time I became a Baha’i.” (Hainsworth: undated). This would be substantiated by the *Baha’i Journal* of February 1938 which lists only thirty-five “isolated believers”, that is Baha’is outside of the two towns of London and Manchester, which had functioning assemblies.

#### Isolated Believers 1938 By Geographical Area

Students

Mr Behraves, University of Oxford

Mr Mohtadi, University of Birmingham

Mr Mukhless c/o NSA

The West

Mrs Frazer, 173, Charlestown Road, St. Austell, Cornwall

Mr Hansford, Dartington Hall, Devon

Mrs Langdon-Davies, 6, Huxhams Cross, Dartington Devon

Mrs McKinley, Roseland, Ashburton, Devon

**Mrs Scaramucci, South Zeal, Devon**

Mrs Stevens, Three Hills, Hampton Ave., Babbercombe Devon

Mr Tobey, Dartington Hall Devon

**Mrs Ginman, 2, All Saints Terrace, Cheltenham, Glos.,**

Mrs Weeks, 53, Hill View, Bristol

The North

Mr & Mrs Busby, 12, Norwood Ave, Bramhall Cheshire

Mrs Cooper, Feniscowles Old Hall, Pleasington, Blackburn Lancashire

Mrs Naylor, Feniscowles Old Hall, Pleasington, Blackburn Lancashire

Mrs Kenworthy, 23, Arran Place, York

Mr & Mrs Norton, 41, Cranbourne Road, Bradford, Yorks.

Mr & Mrs Pegg, 19 Harcourt St., York

Mrs Wilkinson, 20 Southey Place, Bradford Yorks

The South

Miss Brown, "Rizwan", Broadstone, Dorset

**Miss Challis, , "Rizwan", Broadstone, Dorset**

**Mr Marlow, c/o , "Rizwan", Broadstone, Dorset**

**Mr & Mrs King, 31, Ophir Road, Bournemouth Hampshire**

The Midlands

Mr Lalazari, 10, Second Ave., Birmingham

**Mr Marshall, 67, Nansen Road, Birmingham**

Mrs Harrison, 2, Blanquette Ave., Droitwich, Worcs

The East

Mrs & Miss Stokley, Munford, Brandon Suffolk

The Home Counties

Mrs Leitch, Fairfield Lodge, Farnham Surrey

## **Mrs Slade, Mallards Court, Stokenchurch**

This list is of interest because of the low number of people, only eight, whose names are familiar from earlier lists. These are shown in bold type above. They are the rump of the old Bournemouth Assembly around Nurse Challis now living in Dorset and the King family still residing in Bournemouth. Mr Marshall is still in Birmingham, although his wife is no longer indicated. Ginman and Scaramucci have moved to the west, while Mrs Slade remains just outside London in Stokenchurch. Thus there has been something of a turnover of membership since the 1920's and an important new geographical trend. Nine of the names are in the west with a significant cluster in Devon, principally around the artist community at Dartington Hall.

### *5.10 The Start of the Baha'i Faith*

The influx of new believers and consequent resurgence of activity led to the creation of an internal newsletter, the *Baha'i Journal*. The *Journal* was an important and self-proclaiming organ of consolidation. Repeatedly its status as the mouthpiece of the National Assembly is stressed; all Baha'is were urged to study it with diligence and to be aware that it represented an "official line". It is significant that in the first issue of the *Baha'i Journal* published in January 1937 what it meant to be a Baha'i was clearly defined. Shoghi Effendi's guidance about what was required for a person to register as a Baha'i:

Full recognition of the station of the Forerunner, the Author, and the True Exemplar of the Baha'i Cause, as set forth in 'Abdu'l Baha's Testament; unreserved acceptance of, and submission to, whatsoever has been revealed by their Pen; loyal and steadfast adherence to every clause of our Beloved's sacred Will; and close association with the spirit as well as the form of the present day Baha'i administration throughout the world.

Thus anyone who became a Baha'i now had to sign a "declaration card" that stated they understood and accepted all the above beliefs and conditions. In 1939 the National Assembly took the concept of registration further by imposing them upon people who had become Baha'is prior to the new definition. Ostensibly this was to allow

the issue of membership cards that would allow the bearer to be conscripted to non-combatant service during the war. It also had the effect of bringing long-term Baha'is into line and forcing them to accept the authority of the National Assembly. The ever-present tensions between London and Manchester came to a head with this initiative, as described by David Hofman:

“When war was declared, Scotland Yard came down to see us at 46 Bloomsbury Street - two senior inspectors I think. Hasan and I were there. ... They were quiet satisfied with our bona fides and it was then they said, ‘It would be useful if you could keep a record of every one of your members’ so then we began issuing cards. I was the secretary of the NSA then so I gave Grace Challis number one. I knew nobody would fight about that! I took number thirteen for myself and I think I gave Hasan number two. The friends didn’t like it, especially in Manchester, but they had to do it. There was a certain jealousy between the friends in Manchester and London. I remember one of the first courageous decisions of the NSA had to make was to disband the Manchester Assembly. We all went up there and told them why and how to do it.” (Hofman: undated)

With the disbanding of the Manchester Assembly a link to the earliest days of the Baha’i Movement was lost. The Manchester Baha’is with their family ties and Unitarian connections were the most continuous of the Baha’i groups, although this was not a major disruption and few members seem to have been lost over it. It would appear to be the last twitches of the old Baha’i Movement. With dissent in Manchester quelled the way was clear for the Hofman - Balyuzi axis to consolidate their hold on the national community. This is reflected in the continuity of membership of the National Assembly over the next twenty years. Another feature of the new developments was the emphasis on teaching the new Faith. The National Convention of 1938 declared that the year from April 1938 to April 1939 would be entirely and exclusively dedicated to teaching. Like the introduction of registration cards this was argued to be a short-term measure, but in fact neither issue had ever been formally addressed.

As well as administrative development, the Baha'is were also developing religious practices. The original meetings and Nineteen-Day Feasts seem to have had little in their content that could be described as "worship". They seem to have comprised mainly discussion and social intercourse, with perhaps the reading of a tablet or a few prayers. Philip Smith makes the following pertinent observation:

Although no changes in religious practice took place, the reduction of overall numbers may have had the effect of concentrating the existing practices within the community. In its loose inclusive stage the Baha'i Movement had encompassed a wide range of beliefs and opinions. Its members came from Socialist, New Thought, Theosophist, and Christian Science backgrounds as well as the more traditional Quaker and Anglican. For some of these Baha'ism was only an addition to their other more central beliefs. For others, the most committed of the Baha'i activists, Baha'ism already held a central place. It was this latter group who were more likely to use the Baha'i prayers and writings in preference to other scriptures. It was also these persons who were more likely to remain Baha'is in the years to come (Smith: 1992, p.181).

Although the Fast was not well known, and it seems few British Baha'is kept it, some Holy Days and Festivals seem to have been celebrated from the earliest days. The *International Psychic Gazette* of May 1913, gives a detailed account of "The Feast of the Rizwan, its history and celebration in London" as took place at the home of Lady Blomfield on April 21<sup>st</sup>, 1913. Rites of passage were also celebrated. The first Baha'i wedding in Britain was conducted by 'Abdu'l Baha himself, although it could not have been legally binding. Baha'i weddings do not seem to have been common until the 1940's when the new administrative order included procedures for them. The first Baha'i funeral which took place in Britain was in 1941, when Fu'ad Afnan, a cousin of Shoghi Effendi, was killed in an air raid. Baby naming ceremonies were popular with the early Baha'is. Esslemont's letter of 4<sup>th</sup> May 1922, which describes the adoption of Margaret Dunsley<sup>6</sup>, speaks of, "having a feast next Saturday evening when the baby will

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<sup>6</sup> In an attempt to raise the number of Baha'i children in this spinster driven movement, Baby Margaret was adopted as a joint project of the Bournemouth Baha'i Assembly; she was looked after by Mrs Dunsley until her death. Baby John of whose fate there is no mention in Esslemont's letters replaced her.

be named". In April 1939 another important development was realised, the incorporation of the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Baha'is. This was achieved after long and difficult negotiations with the Board of Trade. In a letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated February 1939, the importance of this issue is stressed, "The Guardian would urge your Assembly to strain every nerve to bring the task to a speedy completion, and wishes me to reassure you and your fellow-members that he will continually and most fervently pray that your renewed efforts in this connection may be crowned with full success." (Shoghi Effendi: 198, p.124). This move to incorporate further indicates the desire to be officially recognised as an independent body.

On the last day of 1939 Lady Blomfield died. She was the last of the first leadership. The three women who had dominated the Central network, Rosenberg, Thornburgh-Cropper and Blomfield were now all gone. There were still some who had been present at or near the beginning; Florence George and Dia'u'llah Asgharzadih for example would continue to be members of the London and National Assemblies for years to come. But the leadership would never again be dominated by those who had been part of the Baha'i Movement, instead Baha'is committed to the Baha'i Faith and no other religious or spiritual path would control the Nation Assembly for decades to come.

"1<sup>st</sup> January 1940,

Profoundly grieve passing dearly beloved outstanding co-worker Sitarih Khanum memory of her glorious services imperishable advise English community hold befitting memorial gatherings assure relatives of my heartfelt sympathy loving fervent prayers.

Shoghi Rabbani"<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Unfolding Destiny p.136

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION

#### The Production of Relevance

##### *6.1 Outline of the Chapter*

In previous chapters it has been possible through the use of archival material, newspapers, books and pamphlets, to identify practically all those who identified as Baha'is in the course of the period under review, and to show how they came to do so by means of the theory of relevance. They have been shown in most cases to be many-sided colourful characters, linked by networks which have also been identified. In fact, the Baha'i Movement itself could be thought of as a network because it was only towards the end of the period that there was any institutional structure to which an individual could belong. The justification for describing the Movement as a supplementary religious movement has been adequately demonstrated, as has the manner in which the inchoate message of early British Baha'ism was able to be found relevant to a range of different interest groups and individuals. Just as it has been shown how the Movement arose, so it has also been shown how, with the loss of relevance, it came to an end, with virtually no continuity between the Baha'i Movement in Britain and the Baha'i Faith which followed. It might seem, then, that the main task of this thesis, to study the hitherto unstudied early British Baha'is, has been completed. But to leave it at this point, relying on reception theory alone without taking account of the producer of relevance, would not only be Hamlet without the Prince, it would be Hamlet without Shakespeare as well. This chapter will therefore examine the question of the production of relevance, and show how the dimension of transcendence can be accommodated within the theoretical model, not only without any loss of adequacy, but with a considerable gain in both adequacy and elegance.

But first it will be recalled that one of the contextual effects that give rise to relevance arises when the new material contradicts or challenges existing assumptions. While this can result in a change of mind or attitude, more often than not it will generate a defensive reaction. The first part of the chapter therefore begins with an examination

of the criticisms and accusations made against the Baha'is, ironically largely on the grounds that they were too relevant!

## *6.2 Bahaism –East and West*

There is no evidence that Kheirella's journey to the West was part of a concerted missionary effort. On the contrary, Ibrahim George Kheiralla's incomplete grasp of the teachings and his idiosyncratic methods would make him an extremely unlikely choice to lead such an important missionary venture. It would seem more likely that both he and Anton Haddad were economic migrants to North America. That Ibrahim Kheiralla's teaching methods and what he taught proved so successful and created a nucleus of an American Baha'i community, was serendipitous, or divinely ordained, depending upon one's opinion. However, the rift between Ibrahim Kheiralla and 'Abdu'l Baha meant that the latter was forced to establish control over his American supporters or risk the development of an "alternative" version, led by Kheiralla and possibly allied to his half brother Muhammad Ali. What is highly significant is that 'Abdu'l Baha did not attempt to immediately assert theological orthodoxy, merely loyalty to himself as his father's heir. It is a demonstration of 'Abdu'l Baha's genius that he allowed his Western supporters to develop a version of Baha'ism that was relevant to them and then use it to bring them into contact with the Baha'i teachings<sup>1</sup>.

The introduction of Baha'i teachings into the British Isles and Europe was clearly accidental, being entirely due to members of Ibrahim Kheiralla's pilgrim group having social contacts in London and Paris. No Persian teachers or missionaries were sent to England; Baha'ism arrived simply because Marion Thornburgh-Cropper was living in London and was known to Phoebe Hearst. Consequently, for the first decade at least those who identified themselves as Baha'is in Great Britain were left to enrich and disambiguate the partial information they derived from the vague and limited sources available to them. As we have demonstrated the pre-existing beliefs of those drawn to the Baha'i Movement made them particularly receptive to what they believed to be its

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<sup>1</sup> A similar example is that of Black Muslims and more latterly Nation of Islam in the United States. It is arguable that mainstream Sunni Islam would have had little relevance and consequently little support in the American ghettos in the 1960's, however, Elijah Mohammed's idiosyncratic, localised version was found relevant by many. Perhaps most interestingly some of the most high profile supporters, Malcolm X and Mohammed Ali, went on to adopt orthodox Islam.



message. In fact their very lack of hard information and the consequent apparent vagueness of the message allowed massive scope for enrichment and the development of a supplementary religious ideology that was significantly different from the Baha'ism of Persia. This contradiction was apparent to Christian opponents of the Baha'is and one they hoped to exploit to prevent the spread of Baha'ism in the West.

### 6.3 Christian opponents define relevance as hypocrisy

It has been noted above that Christian missionaries in Persia had at first perceived the Baha'is as an improvement upon Muslims, in some cases as a possible bridgehead for large-scale conversion. In one of the earliest mentions of Baha'ism in the West at the Chicago Congress of Religions in 1893, the missionary, Rev. H. H. Jessup referred to the Baha'is as "that vast reform party of Persian Moslems, who accept the New Testament as the word of God and Christ as the deliverer of men."<sup>2</sup> However, by the time of 'Abdu'l Baha's visits to the West a number of missionaries had reconsidered the nature of Baha'ism and saw it not only as a rival creed, but one which used duplicity to lure the gullible away from Christianity. The charges of these opponents amount to accusing the Baha'is of passing off a debased form of Shi'a Islam as the fulfilment of Christian prophesy by repackaging it in Christian terminology. Furthermore, they had added a social program which never existed in the original doctrine and pandered to the eccentricities of sensation-seeking individuals on the fringes of religious orthodoxy. The key to these accusations is one which is repeated by a number of authors, not all of them Christian missionaries: that the Baha'ism of the East was not the Baha'ism preached in the public meetings and drawing rooms of the West. They also claimed that there were hidden teachings only divulged to initiates and that the method of conversion followed a traditional Ismail'i pattern utilising the self-delusion of the convert.

The assertion that Baha'ism was different in East and West is found in numerous works. In the introduction to *Bahaism and its Claims*, (probably the most comprehensive of the attacks) Samuel Wilson remarks, "The Rev. H. H. Jessup, D. D., compares it [Baha'ism] very aptly to the town clock in Beirut, which has two kinds of dial plates. The face turned towards the Moslem quarter has the hands set to tell the

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<sup>2</sup> "Parliament of Religions," p. 640; I. G. Kheiralla, "Beha Ullah," p. ix. Quoted in Wilson: 1915 p. 265

hour according to the Moslem reckoning; the face towards the Christian quarter, according to the European day.” (Wilson: 1915, p. 15) Dr Shedd claimed “Bahaism, as offered to a Jew, a Christian or a Mohammedan varies greatly” (Shedd quoted by Wilson: 1915b p180, n.). Canon Sell, whose attack on the Baha’is is primarily from a historical analysis, points to the lack of interest in the “two great family quarrels” shown by European Baha’is and suggests this may be because “the practice in the highest circles of Bahaism has been so strangely in contrast with the statements put forth for the approval of Europeans and Americans?” (Sell: 1912, p. 48). This accusation was made also by the respected orientalist A. L. M. Nicolas, who wrote: “I speak from the point of view of Persian Bahaism and not from the American fantasy which bears its name” (Nicolas, “*Beyan Persan*,” Vol. 1, p.11, quoted by Wilson: 1915a, p. 264).

The second accusation, the existence of secret doctrines known only to initiates is also made by a number of authors. Sell links it to a concept similar to enrichment: “Probably like other mystical sects and off shoots of the Shi’ah system, Bahaism has an esoteric doctrine for the initiated and others hear very much what they desire to learn” (Sell: 1912, p.44n). Frame makes a very similar point related to the doctrine of the existence of individual souls after death; he points out that the exposition of teachings found in Barney’s “Table Talks” is not the same as that he has encountered from Persian Baha’is. He concludes that: “It is hard to reconcile these two statements, both proceeding from the present head of the sect, without assuming what is currently believed in Persia, that the Baha’is reveal their real teaching to the initiated, while others are allowed to believe largely what their hearts long for” (Davidson Frame: 1912, p. 240).

The technique used by Baha’i missionaries came under attack both as duplicitous and also for being in the tradition of Ismaili missionaries, who allowed the hearer to assume his preconceptions were correct by never contradicting them. The following quotation highlights the overlap of the criticism with the concept of relevance. “Even their propaganda is carried out in the same deceitful spirit. The Baha’i conceals from the one he approaches his status and beliefs, insinuates himself into his confidence, suits the substance of his message to the preconceptions and prejudices of his hearer and leads him on, perhaps omitting to mention the real essentials of Bahaism” (Wilson: 1915b p. 180).

In the introduction to his *Materials for the Study of the Babi Religion*, E. G. Browne wrote describing the content of some notes on Khayru'llah's lessons: "[they] show very clearly the adaptation of the Baha'i doctrine to its new environment in a manner which can hardly fail to remind the Orientalist of the old Isma'ili propaganda"(1918). This comparison is reasserted and embellished by J. Davidson Frame, another Christian missionary in Persia. He writes, "Professor Browne's description of an Ismaili missionary applies so aptly that I quote it with scarcely a change: "He commonly adopts some ostensible profession, such as that of merchant, physician, or oculist, or the like, and in this guise arrives at the place where he proposes to begin operations. Having found acquaintances, he begins to gradually expound to them his doctrines, striving especially to arouse the curiosity of his hearers, to awaken in them a spirit of inquiry, to impress them with a high opinion of his wisdom, but ready at any time to draw back if they show signs of restiveness or suspicion. We have not space to dwell upon the many little arts and tricks by which he plays on the susceptibilities of his hearers. He is all things to all men." (Davidson Frame: 1912, p. 242, quotation from Browne, *Literary History of Persia*, Vol. 1 p.411). The comparison is succinctly made by Canon Sell, who wrote, "The Baha'i missionary has all the tact of the Da'i of the ancient Shi'ah sect of the Ismailians, who accommodated the instruction given to the opinions of his hearers and only gradually led on to the esoteric doctrines of the system." (Sell: 1912, p.37).

It is certainly true that 'Abdu'l Baha in his visits to the West was careful never to be confrontational. In fact he is reputed never to have responded to a statement from an enquirer with "but..." only with "and...". He seems to have gone to great lengths to be courteous and respectful to Theosophists and others with whom he must have had serious disagreements. There is in fact no reason to suppose he rejected the methods of the Ismail'i missionaries outlined by the Christian missionaries and Browne, since these were, after all, part of his cultural background. Browne's description of Ismail'i missionaries fits Kheiralla so exactly it might have been penned with him in mind. It seems perfectly reasonable to assume that these methods were utilised by 'Abdu'l Baha and other Baha'i teachers. In fact 'Abdu'l Baha not only admits quiet freely to tailoring his message to suit his hearers but points out that the technique was one he had learn from Baha'u'llah:

“Later in life, ‘Abdu’l Baha is reported to have said, in responding to his retinue’s admiration for the effectiveness of his talks in America, that they were effective because he took the exigencies of the time and the audience’s perspective into consideration. This report also suggests, however, that ‘Abdu’l Baha learned from Baha’u’llah that this meant not simply respecting the audience by repeating the terms and assumptions of its cherished discourse, but including a quality of transcendental truth.” (Lewis, 2002 p. 53)

Lewis then goes on to quote at length passage from Mirza Mahmud-e Zarqani, which is Zarqani’s recollection of what ‘Abdu’l Baha recalled Baha’u’llah to have said decades earlier.

“Discourse must accord with the taste of the audience and the exigencies of the time. Elegance of expression and temperance is required in presenting meanings and ideas, it is not merely speaking. In Akka, Mirza Mohammad-e ‘Ali always repeated on occasions what he heard from me, but he was not aware that great wisdom and much consideration are needed, not just talk. Shaykh ‘Abd al-Hosayn had said that in the days in Baghdad and Sulaymaniyyah the Blessed Beauty attracted the Kurds by discoursing in the terms of gnostics and Sufism. This poor Shaykh went and found a copy of the *Futuhāt-i Makkiya*, memorized its terminology, and used it everywhere. He found no one would listen and was greatly puzzled as to why people did not listen. The Blessed Beauty said, “Tell the Shaykh that we do not read the *Futuhāt-i Makkiya* but recite the verses of civilization. We don’t speak from the text of the *Fusus* of the Shaykh, rather we speak of the divine texts.” (Lewis, 2002, p.54)

In other words far from hypocrisy this is a method of teaching divine truths, wrapped up in such a way the hearer can understand them. The fact that Westerners were so susceptible to these methods may have been because they were not familiar with them and would have rejected any analysis of ‘Abdu’l Baha’s methods that in their cultural perceptions smacked of hypocrisy - even if in his cultural perceptions they did not. The nature of “truth” is subtle as Lewis points out:

“If ‘Abdu’l Baha did enter into discussions from the frame of reference of his audience (whether Shiite, Babi, Sunni, Christian or secular western), then it is necessary to avoid facile conclusions about the propositional truth of each and every premise that he states. When ‘Abdu’l Baha employs a particular discourse, he may not necessarily intend to validate it, as a “fact” or historical or physical reality, because the logical conclusions of a particular discourse do not of necessity point to absolute truths. By analogy a novel can reveal emotional, spiritual and social truths, though it is entirely fictional: its truths are therefore propositional and metaphorical. Zarqani<sup>3</sup> quotes ‘Abdu’l Baha as saying that the talks he gave in the churches and gatherings of America were in accordance with the receptivity of souls and the requirements of the age, at which point a poem is cited:

The father sings la-la to lull his babe to sleep

Although his mind encompasses a world of knowledge.” (Lewis, 2002, p. 57/58)

Furthermore the assumption of cultural and racial superiority which was endemic to European thinking during this period of massive imperialism would have made the hearers very open to the notion that they “understood inner meanings” and unsurprised that their teachers, even the Master himself, agreed with their views. This is a perfect example of relevance.

#### *6.4 Hidden Meanings*

The charge that esoteric teachings existed is harder to prove or disprove. If it is assumed to mean there were secret rituals and dogma known only to initiates into certain grades or orders on the lines of the Freemasons or the Golden Dawn, this would seem to be unlikely. Firstly, one of the key beliefs of the Baha’is was that there was no further need for such doctrines, hence the symbolic unveiling of Qurratu’l -‘Ayn. It is improbable that people drawn to such an anti-ritualistic doctrine would then embrace its esoteric opposite. Secondly, over the last century and a half there have been numerous schisms and defections from the Baha’i ranks, and it is impossible to believe that if such

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<sup>3</sup> Mirza Mahmud-e Zarqani, accompanied ‘Abdu’l Baha on his trips to the West, his account of the visit

doctrines ever existed they would not have become public knowledge by now. However, if it is asserted that perhaps the entire truth about the nature of the Baha'i Revelation was not always fully expounded, then further consideration is required. The modern Baha'i Faith is an independent religion, but this was not the understanding of the Baha'is 'Abdu'l Baha met in the British Isles.

It could be argued that the failure to admit that a new religion was the aim of the Baha'i Movement was tantamount to a hidden teaching. During his visit to Scotland a letter appeared in the "Evening Despatch" of 8<sup>th</sup> January 1913, condemning the Baha'i teachings as anti-Christian. On the 11<sup>th</sup> January the same journal published a response from a "Baha'i Christian", which sought to explain the Baha'i attitude to Christianity, "The Baha'i faith might well be called the Spiritual Esperanto, corresponding to the universal auxiliary language which we are told will taught in all the schools in the world in addition to one's native tongue. There are Baha'i Christians, Baha'i Mohammedans, Baha'i Jews, Baha'i Zoroastrians. ... Again and again 'Abdu'l Baha has expressed his desire that no one should leave his particular religion in which he has found satisfaction and comfort; but he asks us to join ourselves to this movement for universal brotherhood and service to our fellows that the day of unity and peace on earth may be hastened" (Khursheed: 1991, p.114). This claim that 'Abdu'l Baha repeatedly told people to remain within their religious traditions is valid and numerous examples can be found to substantiate it. In a public meeting held to explain the relation between the Baha'i teachings and other social and religious movements, the *Christian Commonwealth* (August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1911) reported Miss Buckton "dealt with the fear of disloyalty that many members of orthodox churches feel in regard to the movement. She herself was a member of an orthodox church, and she reassured the audience that Baha'ism did not mean the refusal of anything that had gone before." This stress on not having to "refuse anything which had gone before" is important. It meant that an individual could adopt Baha'ism without breaking with tradition or culture. The emotional link with the "faith of one's fathers" could be retained, while a new and wider worldview can be embraced. This was particularly important at a time when the traditional view of Christianity was being questioned and society was becoming more pluralistic. This means either, 'Abdu'l Baha believed Baha'ism was a "spiritual

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to America is published as *Mahmud's Diary*

Esperanto”, in which case he did not foresee the emergence of the independent Baha’i Faith, or he was aware of the implications of his teaching but chose to refrain from making public pronouncements explaining them. This is an important consideration because the attitude of ‘Abdu’l Baha seems to have been unclear. It has been noted that Pole was adamant that ‘Abdu’l Baha had insisted that Baha’ism was not to become another sect. Pole’s speech to the Universal Races Congress in 1911 is quoted by Stockman (1995, p. 402) to differentiate between the American Baha’is, who he argues had a greater understanding than the British, of the independent nature of the Baha’i Faith. Stockman then goes on to say of ‘Abdu’l Baha:

‘Abdu’l-Baha’s own statements tended to create further confusion about the independent status of the Baha’i Faith. He continued to urge that Baha’i communities be organised. He wrote Portland and Cincinnati encouraging them establish consultative boards. He closely supervised the consultative bodies of both Chicago and New York and ordered them re-elected and reorganised when He visited North America in 1912. His Tablets continually stressed teaching the Baha’i Faith and firmness in covenant. He also urged the Baha’is to follow the Baha’i fast, say the obligatory prayers, observe the Holy Days and attend the Feasts. He instituted the review of manuscripts by Baha’is that mentioned the Baha’i Faith, first by Himself, then by the local governing bodies. In addition, He expelled disobedient individuals from the Faith. However, in His public talks ‘Abdu’l-Baha played down the sectarian nature of the Faith, possibly to broaden in appeal to non-Baha’is as much as possible. When people asked Him about their own religions, He often urged them to remain active in their churches and to strive to live out the principles of their religions to the fullest. Rarely would He offer specific criticisms of churches or their teachings. Inevitably, some Baha’is placed more reliance on His public statements than on the guidance in His Tablets - which often were not published in any case - and did not make an effort to reconcile the two (Stockman: 1995, p.403).

In other words, according to Stockman, there was a public and a private stance on the matter. This dual membership did not only apply to Christians in Europe and America, since *The Baha’i World 1928-1930* (p. 233) shows a picture of a Baha’i Zoroastrian wedding. Jewish Baha’is in Iran were organised by the Hebrew Assembly

and the term Baha'i Christian<sup>4</sup> was freely used. It is significant that when 'Abdu'l Baha laid the foundation stone for the Wilmette Mashriqu'l – Adhkar, after representatives of the various American communities had taken part in the ceremony, He asked members of his retinue to step forward to represent Baha'is of Muslim origin and of Zoroastrian origin (Balyuzi: 1971, p.187). 'Abdu'l Baha, like his father, was a regular attendee at Muslim Friday prayers. Both of them observed Ramadan as well as the Baha'i fast. To external observers they would have appeared to be practising Shi'a Muslims. The Western Baha'is had no difficulty in distinguishing 'Abdu'l Baha from a Muslim<sup>5</sup>. They seem to have been able to explain his adherence to Islamic practices by arguing that to have rejected them whilst living in a Muslim society would have been at best shocking at worst dangerous. They were undoubtedly correct in the latter assumption. However, they do not seem to have drawn any conclusions from this behaviour in relation to their own situation. This implies that although they were, in the main, content to perceive themselves as Christians who had entered a multifaith dialogue through Baha'ism, they rejected the notion that 'Abdu'l Baha was a Muslim who had done the same.

Whilst it has been suggested that Baha'ism is or was a sect of Islam, there is nothing to suggest the early British Baha'is perceived themselves as Muslims. In fact the Muslim connection seems to have been deliberately played down. There is very little mention of Mohammed in 'Abdu'l Baha's public utterances in the West except as one of many manifestations of God. In the Muslim world the distinction between the Babi and Baha'i religions would have been clearer. Even if the exact nature of The Bab and Baha'u'llah was ambiguous, the revelation of books of law which abrogated the *Shari'a* would have been unequivocal proof of a new religion. This is borne out by the number of Christian Arabs who became Baha'is. In the Egyptian Baha'i community the proportion of Baha'is from Coptic backgrounds exceeded that of the population as a whole, which would not have been the case had there been any suggestion that Baha'ism was a sect of Islam.

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<sup>4</sup> For example by E.T. Hall in his poem 'Reflections of a Baha'i-Christian' in *The Poems of E. T. Hall* and in the *Memoirs of Nora Crossley*, (unpublished) "Everywhere I went I was always known as a Baha'i Christian (as were Mr. Hall, Doctor Esslemont and other early Baha'is."

<sup>5</sup> Cheyne writing in *Christian Commonwealth* 29<sup>th</sup> January 1913 begins "'Abdu'l Baha is not a Mohammadan, and it is a mistake to describe Baha'ism as a Mohammadan sect".



In fact, the formal separation of Baha'is from Christian institutions can be dated from a letter written by Shoghi Effendi on June 15<sup>th</sup> 1935 (Shoghi Effendi: Message to America, p. 4-5) in which he requests the Baha'is of the United States to terminate their membership of churches. This new rule took about twenty years to be universally adhered to in the United States; in other parts of the world dual membership continued for much longer, for example in Scandinavia until the late 1950's and in some places it still unofficially exists. While modern Baha'is insist that the Baha'i Faith is an independent religion the early British Baha'is did not. In fact over and over again the contention that it was a new religion was publicly denied.

Whilst it could be argued that this would in effect amount to a "hidden" or esoteric teaching, this is in line with the Baha'i principle of gradualism based upon the concept of *hikmat* or wisdom, allowing people to come gradually to an understanding of Baha'i teaching whilst taking into account cultural norms, and accounts for the claim that Baha'ism differed between East and West. To return to Jessup's analogy of the Beirut town clock, the faces may have told the time in different ways, but ultimately the same mechanism measured the same passing day. Even Wilson was forced to admit that doctrinally Baha'ism was the same in East and West. There was most certainly a difference in emphasis, but then different questions were being addressed. Perhaps the most important aspect of 'Abdu'l Baha's journeys to the West was the development of Baha'i social program based upon a symbiotic relationship with radical social thought. It is clearly absurd to suggest that a conscious attempt was made to adapt Baha'i teaching to entrap gullible Western converts. Rather it would appear Kheiralla's erroneous doctrines were genuine misunderstandings, which serendipitously held wide appeal; had 'Abdu'l Baha been totally cynical he could have quietly removed Kheiralla as a threat to his leadership without changing either his doctrines or his methods. In fact 'Abdu'l Baha risked losing the entire American community in order to purge it of Kheiralla and his teaching.

'Abdu'l Baha's conformity to traditional Ismaili/Shi'a missionary technique in refusing to contradict the previously held beliefs of his followers and their cultural attitudes reinforced the process of enrichment. The symbiosis of some of the pre existing ideas of the Western Baha'is with 'Abdu'l Baha's teaching, most notably on the subject of women and the harmony of science and religion, led to the phenomenon of

the enriched understanding passing back into and becoming part of the corpus of belief. However, the presence of 'Abdu'l Baha in the West meant that his followers were exposed to orthodox Baha'i teachings, so that whilst their enriched concepts reinforced Baha'i ideology, simultaneously the relevance was reduced by greater understanding. This loosening of relevance is demonstrated by the disaffection of some members during the dispute over Amin Farid.

The War destroyed most of the networks which had bound the Baha'i Movement together. The ranks of the Baha'is were reduced by death and disaffection. The remaining membership was too small and ineffectual to capitalise on the upheavals that followed the conflict and were unable to adapt to the changed circumstances. Before the War the Baha'is had been connected to some of the leading radical thinkers of the day, the break-up of networks and consequent loss of key individuals left them marginalised and diminished their influence. Three tiny communities were formally established when administrative procedures were introduced in 1923. The most fragile of these, in Bournemouth, lasted only a few years. There were serious tensions between the London and Manchester groups and they would seem to have had somewhat different perspectives. Although the Movement accepted the establishment of the Guardianship and the Administration in theory there seems to have been considerable tension between them. These led to a breakdown in communication with the Guardian and the demise of the Baha'i Movement. The emergence of the Baha'i Faith some years later was dominated by new members, based on different principals and organisational structures.

### *6.5 Peter Berger's Thesis and the Relevance of Transcendence*

Berger's approach was discussed in the Introduction and found unsuitable for the study of the British Baha'is on a number of counts. It will have been observed that, in the examination of the British Baha'is, there was not a single case of conversion in Berger's use and definition of the term. If anything, people, on contact with the 'message', more often than not considered they had been Baha'is all along. Berger's sociological approach is not finely tuned enough to be able to account for individuals and their subjective experiencing, which is unfortunate as it means a significant element of religion is simply ignored. The theory of relevance, with its three types of contextual effect, has proved a much more suitable instrument than the young Berger's sociology

to handle the British experience of Baha'ism in the period under review. But there is one quotation from Berger, given and discussed in the Introduction, that needs to be recollected, and that is where he speaks of the effect of 'Abdu'l Baha's presence.

Hitherto the discussion of relevance has been in terms of cognition and communication, as in the sub-title of Sperber and Wilson's book, but now a further modification of the theory is needed. It is here argued that epistemological and cognitive relevance are not the only kinds of relevance, there is also ontological relevance which is not 'known' but is felt, sensed and experienced. There is the relevance of what and how people are, as well as what they know and assume. Spirituality is a mode of being not a kind of knowing. Being words often end in -hood or -ity, such as prophet-hood or materiality and seniority. It was quite clear to those who met 'Abdu'l Baha that he was a highly spiritual person, as is evidenced by the effect of his presence. Berger is perceptive here, for he writes that it was not what 'Abdu'l Baha actually said that mattered but how, or, more importantly, who it was that said it. The man was the message as much as his words; indeed, to some it is likely that it was the sensed spirituality of the person that was relevant rather than what he said.

There is a subtle but pernicious reductionism in a number of contemporary sciences, especially those concerned with consciousness studies, which presumes that human experience is solely cognitive and epistemological. Such a presumption is like saying that H<sub>2</sub>O is always water, when everybody knows that H<sub>2</sub>O can be liquid like water, solid like ice, or gaseous like steam, depending upon the energy present. This failure to make being differentiations results in the depressing 'scientific' model of the human being as a functional mechanical automaton, whose consciousness is solely cognitive, which has no selfhood, let alone a soul, and no will or source of individual initiative. It is unsurprising therefore that science is still unable to account objectively for the subjective experiencing of everyday human consciousness, let alone the transcendent states of mysticism. A recent academic debate on mysticism had Katz and his followers argue that there can be no unmediated experience and that mystical experience was arrived at by epistemological processes, and Foreman and his followers arguing the opposite, citing pure content-less consciousness, the regular meditator's goal, in support of their case. It is puzzling that their respective notions of what constitutes experience were so limited to either the epistemological or the ontological

that they were unable to see that all concrete experience encompasses both the epistemological and the ontological and more besides, because, certainly for mystics, the disposition of the will is a crucial element also. The Islamic mystical tradition of Sufism differentiates between two types of knowing, *'Ilm-e Ḥusūlī*, knowledge of apprehension, that is, knowing through epistemological processes, and *'Ilm-e Ḥuḍūrī*, knowledge of presence, that is, direct seeing with the eye of the heart. In this latter mode, the faculty referred to, even in an undeveloped state, is able to sense and detect a high level of spirituality in a person, or whatever else might be their ontological condition.

From the point of view of the modified theory of relevance when used in religious contexts, it is very important to recognise both types of relevance, the cognitive and the ontological. It is here argued that the Central network, which held the sole Baha'i belief, that of the Manifestational status of Baha'ullah, survived the longest because for them the relevance of Baha'ism was primarily ontological. It was the members of this group who had the greatest experience of being in the presence of 'Abdu'l Baha, and who maintained the closest contact with him. Nor should one assume that the relevance of members of other networks was solely cognitive; it is likely that any Baha'i would have found some degree of ontological relevance from being in the presence of 'Abdu'l Baha. In these cases, the relevance would be some combination of the two types. The final sentence of the opening section of this thesis referred to 'emptying pews' and the mismatch between relevance as seen from the pulpit and as seen from the pew. The message to Church authorities from the Baha'i experience is simple: the relevance that endures is ontological relevance, so place in the pulpit people more in the stamp of Hume and Ramsay, whose spirituality was almost palpable, and fewer of the cerebral type, however laudable their political or social values. But for present purposes it is enough to have made this distinction between these two types of relevance, since it rescues religion from being understood solely as a matter of the mind and makes room for the spirit.

## *6.6 Final Conclusions*

That 'Abdu'l Baha was a master of relevance must now be apparent. Not only is there the description of the process of producing relevance given above in his own words, but there is also the hostile descriptive analysis of Baha'i relevance from his critics and opponents. First, it is here argued that these two accounts, coupled with the efficiency with which the British Baha'i Movement has been able to be represented within the modified theory of relevance, fully justify the use of this theory in the exposition of this thesis. Second, it needs to be remembered that the theory of relevance can only reveal how, and not why. Why can be answered on many levels, the most ultimate of which is beyond the reach of any scholarly methodology. At the most immediate level, two major spiritual imperatives can be argued to be operative, *adab*, which means politeness, consideration, seemliness to one's fellows and to God, a notion which includes the character, feelings and manners which are the fruit of spiritual culture, and *sabr*, patience, restraint. The first imperative would require listening to the concerns of one's hosts, the second would account for what has been termed as 'Abdu'l Baha's gradualism, since to everything there is a season. It is impossible to determine the extent to which Providence played a part in anything which has been recounted here, but the dimension of transcendence, the domain of ultimate whys, is left open as promised. In retrospect, the innocence of the British Baha'i Movement could never have sustained the programme that would later have been required of it; this demanded the robustness and discipline of the Baha'i Faith which replaced it. There is no evidence that 'Abdu'l Baha deliberately misled any of his followers in what he said; he spoke to what was required at the time, even if privately he saw things would be different on a longer perspective. But in what he was, his ontological relevance, the spirit, in Berger's terms, was unmistakably present, and that was by far the more enduring message. The demise of the inclusive Movement and the death of 'Abdu'l Baha, which brought an end to the period of Charismatic Leadership, led ultimately to the establishment of the exclusive Baha'i Faith in Britain. The price the Baha'is paid for this was that they would no longer walk in step with the *zeitgeist*.

## Appendix One: The Utterances of 'Abdu'l Baha

Date	The Utterances of 'Abdu'l Baha	Brief analysis of the content of public speeches
04.09.11	Addresses on arrival	
08.09.11	Miss Rosenberg's Unity Meeting	
09.09.11	Byfleet	
10.09.11	Address at the City Temple	Unity of man, new spiritual power, East/West unity
13.09.11	Discourse at Mrs Thornburgh-Cropper's	
17.09.11	Discourse at St. John's Westminster	
22.09.11	Unity Meeting of Misses Herrick & Jack	God above comprehension, all messengers mirrors of God, Saint Paul
23.09.11	Bristol	
24.09.11	Bristol	
29.09.11	Farewell meeting	Starts with the Lord's Prayer
30.09.11	Discourse at Theosophical Society	Oneness of religions, oneness and equality of humanity, religion and unity, science and religion
Date	Paris Talks	
16/7.10.11	Duty Of Kindness & Sympathy Towards Strangers & Foreigners	Universal friendship
18.10.11	The Power & Value of True Thought	Difference between philosophers and spiritual teachers
19.10.11	God is the Great Compassionate Physician	Spiritual healing
20.10.11	Need for Union between Peoples	East and West unity
20.10.11	God Comprehends all; He cannot be comprehended	The unknowable nature of God
21.10.11	The Pitiful Causes of War and the Duty of Everyone to strive for Peace	
22.10.11	The Sun of Truth	Spirituality as the core of civilisation, the role of Christ
23.10.11	The Light of Truth is now Shining Upon East & West	Unity between east and west and the role of Christ
24.10.11	The Universal Love	War, peace, unity
25.10.11	The Imprisonment of 'Abdu'l Baha	His pleasure at release and being able to spread the teachings of Christ and Baha'u'llah
26.10.11	God's Greatest Gift to Man	Intellect, use it to promote unity, exposition of Christ and Baha'u'llah
27.10.11	The Clouds That Obscure the Sun of Truth	Christ and Baha'u'llah
27.10.11	Religious Prejudices	Religious unity, especially Mohammed's acceptance of Christ
27.10.11	The Benefits of God to Man	Why God tests man, for example the life of Christ, Theosophical relevance
28.10.11	Beauty & Harmony in Diversity	Unity of race etc., emphasis on Christ, social relevance
30.10.11	The True Meaning of the Prophecies Concerning the Coming of Christ, all about Christ, Theosophical content	
31.10.11	The Holy Spirit, the intermediary Power between God & Man, all in Christian context with some Theosophical content	
01.11.11	The Two Natures in Man	Links between the spiritual and the material, Christian context – All Saints Day

02.11.11	Material & Spiritual Progress	Carried on from previous day, Christ and Baha'u'llah
03.11.11	Matter & the Development of the Soul	The progress of the soul and the body
04.11.11	The Spiritual Meetings in Paris	
05.11.11	The two Kinds of Light	East and west unity, divine light, theosophical tone
05.11.11	Spiritual Aspiration in the West	East and west, spirit and intellect.
06.11.11	Lecture Given at a Studio in Paris	Brief outline of precepts of Baha'u'llah
07.11.11	Baha'u'llah	Historical, potted biography, no clear mention of his station.
08.11.11	Good Ideas Must be Carried into action	Basis of a social program
09.11.11	True Meaning of Baptism by water & fire	Biblical references and Christian context
09.11.11	Discourse at the Spiritualist Alliance	East, west unity, the Holy Spirit, Biblical terminology
10.10.11	The Evolution of the Spirit	Life after death, progress of the soul, Baha'u'llah, Mohammed and Christ
10.11.11	1 <sup>st</sup> Principle: the Search after truth	Religions have become distorted by superstition and prejudice, they all contain a core of truth, w which unites them.
11.11.11	2 <sup>nd</sup> Principle: The unity of mankind	unity of religion will lead to unity of humanity
12.11.11	3 <sup>rd</sup> Principle That religion ought to be a cause of love & affection	
13.11.11	4 <sup>th</sup> Principle The relation between religion & science describes a symbiotic relationship	Prejudice is the cause of war and hatred
14.11.11	5 <sup>th</sup> Principle the Abolition of Prejudices	Right to a basic standard of living
	6 <sup>th</sup> Principle Means of Existence	Right to equality before the law
	7 <sup>th</sup> Principle Equality of men	Supreme international tribunal to be established
	8 <sup>th</sup> Principle Universal Peace	Equal rights especially in education
14.11.11	10 <sup>th</sup> Principle Equality of sex	
15.11.11	The Desires & Prayers of 'Abdu'l Baha	
17.11.11	Concerning Body, Soul & Spirit	Relationship between the material and the spiritual
17.11.11	9 <sup>th</sup> Principle Non-interference of Religion with politics	The role of religion is spiritual
18.11.11	11 <sup>th</sup> Principle The Power of the Holy Spirit	brings about spiritual development without which material progress is pointless
19.11.11	Baha'is must Work ... to bring about a better condition in the world	
20.11.11	On Calumny	Response to anti-Baha'i propaganda
21.11.11	There can be no true happiness & progress without spirituality	the relationship between the material and the spiritual
22.11.11	Pain & sorrow	do not exist in the world of the spirit
23.11.11	The perfect human sentiments & virtues	
24.11.11	The cruel indifference of people towards the suffering of foreign races	strongly worded statement-rejecting racism
25.11.11	We must not be discouraged by the smallness of our numbers	Christ and the early Church
26.11.11	Words spoken in Pastor Wagner's church	unity of religions, relationship of the prophets to each other, ending of war, peace, unity
28.11.11	The great & glorious cause	

01.12.11	The last meeting
26.12.12	Prayer
26.12.12	Evil
26.12.12	Progress of the Soul
04.01.13	Four kinds of love
12.01.13	At Friends Meeting House



## Appendix Two: Chronology of the Period

1891		<i>Kitab-i-Aqdas</i> published in Bombay <i>Travellers Narrative</i> , by EG Browne, published by Cambridge University Press
	15 <sup>th</sup> Feb	First public lecture on the Faith given by EG Browne, at the Southplace Institute, London
1892	29 <sup>th</sup> May	<b>The Ascension of Baha'u'llah</b>
	Summer	<b>Anton Haddad</b> arrives in the USA
	20 <sup>th</sup> Dec	<b>Ibrahim Kheiralla</b> arrives in New York
1893	23 <sup>rd</sup> Sept	First public mention of the Faith in N America, at World Parliament of Religions in Chicago
1895	Summer	<b>Marion Brown</b> of London, aunt of <b>Kheiralla's</b> wife is the first European, in Europe to accept Baha'ism - no further involvement
1898	10 <sup>th</sup> Dec	<b>Miriam Thornburg Cropper</b> joins her friend Pheobe Hurst on apilgrimage to Akka. She becomes the first active Bahai resident in the UK
1899	Spring	<b>May Bolles</b> establishes Baha'i group in Paris
1899	Summer	<b>Ethel Rosenburg</b> becomes a Bahai, the first English in England
1899		<b>Sarah Ann Ridgeway</b> becomes a Bahai in Baltimore, USA
1900		<b>Basil Willberforce</b> made arch deacon of Westminster <b>Anton Haddad</b> translates <i>Kitab-i-Aqdas</i> , it circulates in typescript form. <i>Tablets, Communes and Holy Utterances</i> a collection of writings by <b>Baha'u'llah</b> is published in the USA, probably translated by <b>Anton Haddad</b>
	8 <sup>th</sup> March	Defection of <b>Ibrahim Kheiralla</b>
1901	January	<b>Ethel Rosenburg</b> Makes first pilgrimage to Akka
	April	<b>Ethel Rosenburg</b> Leaves Hiafa for UK
	Summer	<b>Thomas Breakwell</b> becomes a Baha'i in Paris, first English male <b>Hippolyte Dreyfus</b> becomes a Baha'i in Paris
	Sept	<b>Thomas Breakwell</b> goes to Akka and is told to remain in Paris
1902	13 <sup>th</sup> June	<b>Thomas Breakwell</b> dies in Paris
1902	summer	<b>Myron H Phelps</b> heard about the Baha'is from friends in London
1902	Dec	<b>MHP</b> meets <b>AB</b> in Palestine
1902		<b>Abdul Fazl</b> publishes <i>Baha'i Proofs</i>
1902		<b>WTP</b> dreams he is a monk at Glastonbury
1903		<b>MHP</b> publishes <i>Abbas Effendi his life &amp; teaching</i>
1904		A compilation of baha'i writings in English published in New York
1904	April	<b>Ethel Rosenburg</b> second pilgrimage with <b>Laura Clifford Barney</b>
1905		
1906		<b>WTP et al</b> find the "Grail" or bowl in Glastonbury

- 1906 **SARidgway** returns to Manchester from Baltimore
- 1906 **RJ Campbell** publishes *The New Theology*
- 1906 Mar **Mrs Whyte & Mary Thornburgh-Cropper** make a pilgrimage to Palestine
- 1907 **Lady Blomfield**, her daughter **Mary** become Bahais in Paris
- 1907 Spring, Janet and Christine Allen whilst visiting London attend Some lectures on Christianity and Eastern Religions by **Basil Wilberforce**
- 1907 23<sup>rd</sup> June **WPT** meets **Wilberforce**
- 1907 20<sup>th</sup> July the "Grail" is presented to a number of important friends of **Wilberforce**, including, **Rev RJ Campbell & Alice Buckton**
- 1907 Review of Religions, The Babi or Bahai Religion. Pro Azali article, in two parts, recently reprinted
- 1908 **WTP** say he first heard of Bahais when in Constantinople in '08
- Elizabeth **Herrick** becomes a Baha'i
- 1908 Mar Barney LC. *Some Answered Questions*
- 27 Jul - 1 Au **Ethel Rosenberg** Represents Baha'is at 17<sup>th</sup> Universal Peace Conf. At Caxton Hall
- 1909 January **Ethel Rosenberg** third pilgrimage
- August **Ethel Rosenberg** back in London
- Dreyfus, *The Universal Religion; Bahaism*
- 1910 June Baha'i News SW 1.6 June, **Buckton & Schepel** have returned from Acca
- Dr Fisher** of Trentishoe Mans. Has held 2 feasts, with Baha'is from "Eastbourne, Surrey, Hornsey and Essex" He has also done classes on the Seven Valleys
- Khosroe Bohman visiting from Burma
- 1910 October **ET Hall** reads an article by **WPT** in the *Christian Commonwealth* and writes to him.
- 1910 Oct. 10<sup>th</sup> **Tamudin ul Molk** addresses City Temple on the Baha'i Movement
- 1910 November **WTP** in Egypt visiting AB (intro thru Wilberforce Benham p.106)
- 1910 November **ET Hall** meets **SA Ridgeway** meet in Manchester
- 1910 Dec. 31<sup>st</sup> **WTP** addresses a meeting at 10, Cheniston Gdns. About his trip to visit AB News Vol. 1. No. 18 "it was the largest meeting we have held in London
- (could this be the meeting mentioned in the Herrick bio?)
- 1910 **Ethel Rosenberg** writes *A Brief Account of the Baha'i Movement*
- Barney, LC. *God's Heroes* a drama in five acts
- Ford, MH. *The Oriental Rose*
- Abdul Baha, *Mysterious Forces of Civilisation* written 1875, trans
- 1910
- 1911 January **EJR** visits Manchester
- 1911 25<sup>th</sup> Feb **WTP** speaks to a meeting of Baha'is about trip to AB, SW 2.1

- 1<sup>st</sup> March **Wilberforce** speaks about the Faith  
**Buckton** in Boston SW2.1
- 1911 May **M Jack** moves to 13, Hanover Street, W. Holds regular Sun. Mtgs  
"Miss Buckton has just returned from her second visit to AB"  
Quotes a number of points about staying in whatever religious group you are a member of, Baha'i known by deeds etc. Report by AC in SW dated 27<sup>th</sup> May
- 1911 18<sup>th</sup> July Public meeting "Awakening in the East" **Mrs Stannard**  
19<sup>th</sup> July Public Meeting "Personal Experiences" **Sidney Sprague**  
20<sup>th</sup> July Public Meeting "Arab Life & Work" **Mr S H Leeder**  
21<sup>st</sup> July Public Meeting "Relation of Baha'i to Christianity" **Buckton**  
26<sup>th</sup> - 29<sup>th</sup> July Universal Races conference London, **WTP & Alice Buckton** are there
- 1911 4th Sept **Abdul Baha** arrives in London. he stays at **Lady Blomfield's** house
- 5<sup>th</sup> Sept Interview with **Albert Dawson** ed. of Christian Commonwealth
- 1911 Sept 8th **Abdul Baha** gives an address at **Ethel Rosenberg's** house White Lodge, Wimbledon
- Sept. 8<sup>th</sup> **AB** spoke at Passmore Edwards Settlement, Tavistock Place  
Sept. 9<sup>th</sup> visited Vanners, home of **Buckton & Schepel**  
Sept. 10<sup>th</sup> **AB** at City Temple  
Sept 12<sup>th</sup> **AB** at reception given by **Th-Cr** , 31, Evelyn Mans, Carlisle Place  
Sept 13<sup>th</sup> **AB** visits Th-Cr again  
Sept 17<sup>th</sup> **AB** at St John the Divine, Westminster am  
Indian Religious centre of Keshub Niketon pm
- Sept 22<sup>nd</sup> Unity mtg at the home of **Herrick & Jack**, 137a Wrights Lane, Kensington (Higher Thought Centre)
- Sept 22<sup>nd</sup> **AB** visited the Hostel of the Pioneer Preachers, 28 King Sq., Goswell  
Road, EC. City Temple project.
- 1911 Sept 23<sup>rd</sup> **AB** in Bristol, Stays at WTP's guest House, blesses Grail  
Sept 25<sup>th</sup> **AB** returns to London  
Sept 28<sup>th</sup> **AB** motors to Vanners and puts up friends in the Queens Head, 2 High St., Byfleet
- Sept 29<sup>th</sup> Farewell mtg. At Passmore Edwards Settlement, org by Thor-Cr  
Sept 30<sup>th</sup> **AB** spoke at TS 19/19a Tavistock Sq. invited by Besant  
Oct 1<sup>st</sup> **AB** visited Higher Thought Centre  
Oct 2<sup>nd</sup> **AB** breakfasts with the Lord Mayor at the Mansion House  
3rd Oct **Abdul Baha** leaves London for Paris, he is followed by **Lady Blomfield**, her daughters **Mary** and **Ellinor**, and their friend **Beatrice Platt**, together they produce *Paris Talks*
- 1911 **Hammond, E.** *The Splendour of God Religious Systems of the World*, a collection of addresses given at South Place Inst. 1888-89 and 1891, includes one by EG Browne o (may have been earliest public mention)

1912	May	<b>Abdul Baha</b> <i>Paris Talks</i> published
	13th Dec	<b>Abdul Baha</b> arrives in Liverpool
	Dec 14 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Abdul Baha</b> addresses TS in 18, Colquitt St., Liverpool
	Dec 15 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Abdul Baha</b> visits Pembroke Chapel, Pembroke Place, Liverpool
	16th Dec	<b>Abdul Baha</b> arrives in London for second visit
	Dec 17 <sup>th</sup>	Reception at Caxton Hall, hostess Thorn-Crop
	Dec 18 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Abdul Baha</b> visited Hyde Park and Regents Park by taxi
	Dec 20 <sup>th</sup>	Reception for <b>Abdul Baha</b> at the Westminster Palace Hotel, Sir
Thomas		Barclay in the chair
	22 <sup>nd</sup> Dec	<b>Abdul Baha</b> attends Eager Heart play
	Dec 25 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Abdul Baha</b> visited a children's home
		He went to Lord Lamington's house for a meeting
		<b>Abdul Baha</b> went to a Salvation Army Shelter for dinner
	Dec 26 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Abdul Baha</b> visited Misses Herrick & Jack
	Dec 27 <sup>th</sup>	He was driven to Hyde Park by Thorn-Crop. Evening, Blomfield
		Held a reception for him at Cadagan Gdns
	Dec 29 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Abdul Baha</b> visited Anne Gamble, 25 Highbury Hill
		<b>Abdul Baha</b> attended evening service at Kingswiegth House
		<b>Abdul Baha</b> went to 19 Day Feast prob. Evelyn Mans
	Dec 31 <sup>st</sup>	<b>Abdul Baha</b> went to Oxford and visited
1913	2 <sup>nd</sup> Jan	<b>Abdul Baha</b> at meeting of WFL chaired by <b>C Despard</b>
	16 <sup>th</sup> Jan	<b>Abdul Baha</b> speaks at Cadogan Gdns Meeting
1913	21st Jan	<b>Abdul Baha</b> leaves London for Paris
	14 <sup>th</sup> Oct	<b>Daniel Jenkyn</b> makes two week teaching trip to Holland
1914	Mid	Defection of <b>Amin Farid</b> becomes publicly known
1914	Dec	<b>John Esslemont</b> becomes a Bahai (his contact is through a <b>Mrs Parker</b> , whose husband he knew through public health work)
	31st Dec	Death of <b>Daniel Jenkyn</b> St Ives, Cornwall
1915		<b>RJ Campbell</b> leaves City Temple
	Feb	Death of <b>TK Cheyne</b>
1916		<b>RJ Campbell</b> joins Church of England
	13 <sup>th</sup> May	Death of <b>Wilberforce</b>
	winter	<b>George Townshend</b> receives pamphlets on Baha'ism
1917		<b>WTP</b> alerts British to danger to Abdu'l Baha
1918		
1918		Browne, EG. <i>Materials for the Study of the Babi Religion</i>
1919	10 <sup>th</sup> June	<b>George Townshend</b> writes letter to 'Abdu'l Baha acknowledging his acceptance of Baha'i teachings
1919	winter	<b>John Esslemont</b> in Haifa re book
		<u>Christian Commonwealth</u> becomes <u>New Commonwealth</u> controlled by ILP
1920	spring	<b>John Esslemont</b> returns UK
	27 <sup>th</sup> April	Abdu'l Baha knighted
	20 <sup>th</sup> May	Death of <b>Sir R Stapley</b>

	July	<b>Shoghi Effendi</b> arrives in England to study at Oxford, brings tablets for <b>Lady Blomfield, Major Tudor Pole &amp; Lord Lamington</b> . These 3 arranged for him to meet oriental scholars from Oxford & London Universities
	22 <sup>nd</sup> Oct	Preliminary meeting of Baha'i Council for England
	7 <sup>th</sup> Dec	First formal meeting of Baha'i Council for five years
1921	22 <sup>nd</sup> March	Second meeting of Baha'i Council
	7 <sup>th</sup> October	Third meeting of Baha'i Council
1921	November	<b>Ethel Rosenberg</b> fourth pilgrimage
	28 <sup>th</sup> Nov	<b>Abdul Baha</b> dies
	16 <sup>th</sup> Dec	<b>Lady Blomfield, Shoghi Effendi &amp; Ruhangiz</b> sail for Egypt
	29 <sup>th</sup> Dec	arrive Haifa, <b>Shoghi Effendi &amp; Lady Blomfield</b> produce <i>The Passing of Abdul Baha</i>
1921	pubs	Mazandarani, JF. <i>Lectures of Jenabe Fazel</i>
	pubs	Holley, H. <i>Bahai Spirit of the Age</i>
1922	Jan 7 <sup>th</sup>	Will of 'Abdu'l Baha read, <b>Ethel Rosenberg</b> present
1922	Feb/Mar	<b>Shoghi Effendi</b> meets with a group from America, England, France, Germany & Persia to consider the future. <b>Ethel Rosenberg, Lady Blomfield and Tudor Pole</b> present
	5 <sup>th</sup> March	Letter from <b>Shoghi Effendi</b> to American Baha'is urging establishment of Spiritual Assemblies
	Spring	<b>Rosenberg</b> is instructed to compile voting lists of all UK believers <b>Tudor Pole</b> declines inclusion
	17 <sup>th</sup> June	First meeting of elected Spiritual Assembly (All England Baha'i Council)
	8 <sup>th</sup> July	Second meeting of Spiritual Assembly
	7 <sup>th</sup> Oct	Third meeting of Spiritual Assembly
22 <sup>nd</sup> Dec		Fourth meeting of Spiritual Assembly, <b>Herrick and Gamble</b> question accuracy of voting lists
1922	23 <sup>rd</sup> Dec	Letter from <b>Shoghi Effendi</b> promising "an experienced teacher"
1923	3 <sup>rd</sup> February	Fifth meeting of Spiritual Assembly, discussed membership "formula"
	24 <sup>th</sup> March	Sixth meeting of Spiritual Assembly, dismisses annual elections as "too disruptive"
	24 <sup>th</sup> March	Formation of Manchester Spiritual Assembly
	11 <sup>th</sup> April	Formation of Bournemouth Spiritual Assembly
	28 <sup>th</sup> April	Special meeting of Spiritual Assembly accepts need for annual elections, <b>Rosenberg</b> instructed to prepare revised lists
	19 <sup>th</sup> May	Election of London Spiritual Assembly
1923	13 <sup>th</sup> Oct	<b>National Spiritual Assembly</b> elected <b>George Townshend</b> visits London Herrick, E. <i>Unity Triumphant</i>
1924	22 <sup>nd</sup> Sept/ 3 <sup>rd</sup> Oct	"Living Religions in the British Empire" Conference at the Imperial Institute, London

- 21<sup>st</sup> Nov      **John Esslemont** arrives to work in Haifa
- 1925      **George Townshend** visits London
- 1925 22nd Nov      **John Esslemont** dies in Haifa
- 1929      Ruth White in London
- 19<sup>th</sup> Sept      Baha'i Centre opens at Walmer House, Regent Street
- Elizabeth Herrick** dies
- 1930 26<sup>th</sup> April      First National Convention held at Walmer House
- 17<sup>th</sup> Nov      **Ethel Rosenberg** dies
- 1934      **George Palgrave Simpson** dies
- 1936      "But we did not understand the laws of administration and made many mistakes. It was not until 1936 that Mr George Spendlove came among us and taught us faithfully to follow the laws laid down for conducting the Baha'i Cause by the Administrative Code given to us by 'Abdu'l Baha himself." Recollections of Mother George 1942
- 1939 August      Registration of the NSA of the Baha'is of the UK as an unlimited non-profit making company, under the Companies Act.

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