
[p. 207]

THE BAHA'IS

by

SITARIH KHANUM (Lady Blomfield)

The purpose of this article is to give a brief sketch of the Baha'i Movement, in the course of which it is hoped to suggest something of the atmosphere of that spirit of love and self-sacrifice by which it is animated.

To this end also will be brought together a few of the impressions, as far as possible in their own words, made upon certain personalities of the Western world, whether by their coming into personal touch with Baha'u'llah himself, or through investigations in Persia. To these may be added the remark of the revered Master of Balliol College, Oxford — Dr. Benjamin Jowett — to a fellow-professor, that he was deeply interested in the Baha'i Movement. "This," he said, "is the greatest Light that has come into the world since Jesus Christ Never let it out of your sight. It is too great and too near for this generation to comprehend. The future alone can reveal its import."

THE BAB

Let us glance for a moment at the earlier scenes of this drama, of which the prologue stretches far back into the centuries that are past.

In Shiraz, a city of Persia, was born in A.D. 1819 a child who was named 'Ali Muhammad. As he grew from childhood he became more and more "renowned for his piety and virtue, his courtesy of manner, and the

[p. 208]

beauty of his person." He spent his youth in the study of the Holy Writings, and became remarkable for his knowledge of their spiritual significance.

In the year 1844, this young man declared his mission, calling men to repentance. Soon after, he proclaimed himself the Forerunner of the "Great Prophet" who had been expected for centuries. He assumed the title of The Bab, signifying Gate or Door (of Heaven and of Wisdom). "What he intended by

the term Bab, was this, that he was the channel of grace from some great Person still behind the veil of glory, who was the possessor of countless and boundless perfections, by whose will he moved, and to the bond of whose love he clung. The Bab was ever repeating and meditating on the qualities and attributes of that absent-yet-present, regarded-and-regarding Person of his. Thus he makes a mention of Him, whereof this is the purport: ‘Though the ocean of woe rageth on every side, and the bolts of fate follow in quick succession, and the darkness of griefs and affliction invade soul and body, yet is my heart brightened by the remembrance of Thy countenance and my soul is as a rose-garden from the perfume of Thy nature.’”

He (The Bab) invited men to the work of “preparing His way” by freeing themselves from spiritual bondage. In many Tablets, and in the Book of Bayán (literally, Revelation) — as well as in his spoken word — The Bab exhorted his countrymen to return to the original purity of Religion, so that they might be ready to receive the “Great One: Him whom God should make manifest.” Many enthusiastic hearers answered his call. The good news spread with wondrous swiftness. The Bab was hailed by great numbers “as the Dawn which should break upon a dark and perplexed world.” The alarm of those mainly responsible for that darkness and perplexity was awakened; they feared the loss of their power, prestige, and pecuniary benefits. Instigated by these persons, The Bab was arrested, taken from prison to prison, and, after many mock trials, finally shot at Tabriz in 1850.

[p. 209]

After the execution of the “beautiful youth, with the shining face, who walked in a serene, sedate manner”, the authorities determined to stamp out the movement. Then burst forth a violent storm of persecution, in which tens of thousands of The Bab’s followers were massacred. All classes were included; nobles and peasants, learned and unlearned, men, women, and children were martyred. Firm and steadfast in their faith, they suffered confiscation of their property and exile; they endured the most horrible mutilations; “they were tortured, not accepting deliverance”; they were faithful unto

death, even the most violent and cruel that could be devised.

None was ever known to recant: “out of weakness they were made strong.” “My life is of no importance,” said a child of twelve years old, “but to insult the Holy One is impossible” — and the torturers carried out their ghastly threats. Verily “the Tree of Life was watered by the red blood of martyrs,” for the remnant of those who were saved, steadfast as the martyred, and ready, if need be, to suffer the same fate, awaited the coming of “Him Whom God should make manifest”, whose way had been prepared by The Bab. At what cost of “cruel mockings and scourgings, bonds and imprisonments, torments and early death”, we may read in a narrative of the time, which describes with a direct simplicity the “Episode of the Bab”, of whom the world was not worthy.

Of The Bab Professor Ross, of London University, has written: “His wonderful life needs no comment.

If ever a life spoke for itself, it is The Bab’s, with its simplicity, integrity, and unswerving devotion to the Truth that was born in him. He felt the Truth in him, and in the proclamation of that Truth, he moved neither hand nor foot to spare himself, but unflinchingly submitted to all manner of injustice and persecution, and finally to an ignominious death. His influence on his hearers penetrated deeper than their curiosity or their minds; it reached their hearts, and inspired them with a spirit of self-sacrifice, dedication, and devotion as remarkable and as admirable as his own.”

[p. 210]

BAHA’U’LLAH (Jamál-i-Mubárah)

Among the first to recognise the inspired source of the new doctrine of The Bab was a young and wealthy man of noble birth, Mirzá Husayn ‘Ali Núri, allied to the royal family of Persia, and whose gentleness and philanthropy had won for him the title of Father of the Poor. Now he is revered by innumerable people as Baha’u’lláh, signifying “The Splendour of the Glory of God.”

During the reign of horror, after the death of The Bab, he was arrested, and, in spite of his powerful family influence, thrown into a dungeon, chained to five other disciples. In

this state of torment he
was kept for several months. He was then deprived of his property and estates,
and with his family
driven into exile. The hardships and privations suffered on this journey to
Baghdád were doubly cruel,
as the children were very young, and the snow was on the ground. A number of
families of the faithful
and persecuted followed him and soon grew to look upon him as their leader. The
greatness of his
personality began to attract numbers of cultivated and learned men, who, having
discovered the
whereabouts of the exiled band of Persians, journeyed to hear his teaching. His
power and influence
alarmed afresh his ever-vigilant enemies, who persuaded those in authority to
summon him to
Constantinople. Thence he was banished to Adrianople; but the sound of the
Voice crying aloud the
Message of Regeneration could not be silenced; its influence could not be
stayed. Bahá'u'lláh's teaching
had a more universal note than that of The Báb. Not only were religious
perversions in Persian to be
reformed, but the whole world was to be united in one great bond of
brotherhood, and peace and
goodwill, under a universal code of love and honour — free from superstition,
hatred and war. Then
came a day when he proclaimed to his eldest son, Abbás Effendi, and a few
intimate friends, that he
was the "Promised One", "He whom God should make manifest."

[p. 211]

This was in 1863 — nineteen years after the proclamation of the mission of
The Bab, and in accordance
with his prophecy. In spite of all opposition, the sacred Message was
persistently proclaimed — God,
speaking again through His great Manifestation, would lead mankind to recognise
the Sun of Truth
shining at the core of all religions: for as "in the realm of Conscience,
naught but the Ray of God's Light
can command, and on the throne of the heart none but the pervading power of the
King of Kings should
rule" — therefore all men, developing their spiritual nature, would make
such progress in divine
virtue, that they should become regenerate [sic] through love, and this renewal
should gather every
Nation together under the "Tent of Unity."

Letters were sent to the crowned heads of Europe. "We trust that God will

assist the Kings of the earth
to illuminate and adorn the earth with the effulgent light of the Sun of
Justice” — Bahá’u’lláh wrote;
and he charged them to look upon themselves as trustees of God, and guardians,
under His Rule, of
their people; and he called upon these powerful ones of the world, as servants
of the Most High Lord
of Mercy, to put an end to the horrors of War.

Again he was exiled — this time to the far off Eastern fortress of ‘Akká,
in the Holy Land. In this town
he remained, persecuted, tormented, until he returned to God in 1892. From the
“most great Prison”,
he sent out his messages; and in his captivity he wrote laws for the spiritual
guidance of the world of
the future. “For, as nothing can prevent the radiance of the sun descending
to give life to the gardens
of earth, and no man prevent the fall of rain from heaven, so, no earthly power
can prevent the
fulfilment of the word of God.”

His long years of tedious banishment and imprisonment, sometimes in chains,
sometimes in his own
hired house, always surrounded by spies seeking excuses for renewed
persecutions — all these
tribulations he accepted with joy and a marvellous patient dignity. “My
captivity is not my abasement:
it is indeed a glory to me,” he

[p. 212]

said. He left to his eldest son, Abbas Effendi, henceforth ‘Abdú’l Baha
(The Servant of the Glory of God),
the mission of carrying his message into all the world.

Few persons of the Western world ever succeeded in obtaining the privilege of
coming into the
presence of Bahá’u’lláh.

Fortunately, Professor Edward Granville Browne of Cambridge, “after many
disappointments and
failures, attained the fulfilment of his hopes, in a manner surpassing his most
sanguine expectations.”

I propose to quote his description of a memorable visit to Báji near Akká:

“So here at Báji was I installed as a guest, in the very midst of all that
Bahá’ism accounts most noble
and most holy; and here did I spend five most memorable days, during which I
enjoyed unparalleled
and unhoped-for opportunities of holding intercourse with those who are the

very fountain-heads of
that mighty and wondrous spirit which works with invisible but ever-increasing
force for the
transformation and quickening of a people who slumber in a sleep like unto
death. It was in truth a
strange and moving experience, but one whereof I despair of conveying any save
the feeblest
impression. I might, indeed, strive to describe in greater detail the faces and
forms which surrounded
me, the conversations to which I was privileged to listen, the solemn melodious
reading of the sacred
books, the general sense of harmony and content which pervaded the place, and
the fragrant shady
gardens whither in the afternoon we sometimes repaired; but all this was as
nought in comparison
with the spiritual atmosphere with which I was encompassed
. The spirit which
pervades the Bahá'is is such that it can hardly fail to affect most
powerfully all subjected to its
influence. It may appal or attract: it cannot be ignored or disregarded. Let
those who have not seen,
disbelieve me if they will; but, should that spirit once reveal itself to them,
they will experience an
emotion which they are not likely to forget.

[p. 213]

“Of the culminating event of this my journey some few words at least must be
said. During the morning
of the day after my installation at Báji . . . I found myself in a large
apartment, along the upper end of
which ran a low divan, while on the side opposite the door were placed two or
three chairs. Though I
dimly suspected whither I was going and whom I was to behold (for no distinct
intimation had been
given to me), a second or two lapsed ere, with a throb of wonder and awe, I
became definitely conscious
that the room was not untenanted. In the corner where the divan met the wall
sat a wondrous and
venerable figure, crowned with a felt head-dress of the kind called táj by
dervishes (but of unusual
height and make), round the base of which was wound a small white turban. The
face of him on whom
I gazed, I can never forget though I cannot describe it. Those piercing eyes
seemed to read one's very
soul; power and authority sat on that ample brow; while the deep lines of the
forehead and face implied
an age which the jet-black hair and beard seemed to belie.

“No need to ask in whose presence I stood, as I bowed myself before one who is the object of a devotion and love which kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain!

“A mild dignified voice bade me be seated, and then continued: ‘Praise be to God that thou hast attained! . . . Thou hast come to see a prisoner and an exile . . . We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations; yet they deem us a stirrer up of strife and sedition worthy of bondage and banishment . . . That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled — what harm is there in this? . . . Yet so it shall be: these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the Most Great Peace shall come . . . Do not you in Europe need this also? Is not this that which Christ foretold? . . . Yet do we see your kings and rulers lavishing their treasures

[p. 214]

more freely on means for the destruction of the human race than on that which would conduce to the happiness of mankind . . . These strifes and this bloodshed and discord must cease, and all men be as one kindred and one family . . . Let not a man glory in this that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind . . .’

“Such, so far as I can recall them, were the words, which, besides many others, I heard from Bahá’u’lláh.

“Let those who read them consider well with themselves whether such doctrines merit death and bonds, and whether the world is more likely to gain or lose by their diffusion.

“My interview lasted altogether about twenty minutes, and during the latter part of it Bahá’u’lláh read a portion of an epistle (lawh) whereof the translation is as follows:

“‘He is God, exalted is His state, wisdom and utterance! The True One (glorious is His glory), for the shewing-forth of the gems of ideals from the mine of man, hath, in every age, sent a trusted one. The primary foundation of the faith of God and the religion of God is this, that they should not make diverse

sects and various paths the cause and reason of hatred. These principles and laws and firm sure roads appear from one Dawning-place and shine from one Dayspring, and these diversities were out of regard for the requirements of the time, season, ages, and epochs. . . . Make firm the girdle of endeavour, that perchance religious strife and conflict may be removed from amongst the people of the world and be annulled.

“For love of God and His servants engage in this great and mighty matter. Religious hatred and rancour is a world-consuming fire, and the quenching thereof most arduous, unless the hand of Divine Might give men deliverance from this unfruitful calamity. Consider a war which happeneth between two states: both sides have foregone wealth and life: how many villages were beheld as though they were not! This precept is in the position of the light in the lamp of utterance.

“O people of the world, ye are all the fruit of one tree and

[p. 215]

the leaves of one branch. Walk with perfect charity, concord, affection, and agreement. I swear by the Sun of Truth, the light of agreement shall brighten and illumine the horizon. The all-knowing Truth hath been and is the witness to this saying. Endeavour to attain to this high supreme station which is the station of protection and preservation of mankind. This is the intent of the King of intentions, and this the hope of the Lord of hopes’.”

The utterances of Bahá’u’lláh are of two classes. In one class he writes or speaks simply as a man who has been charged by God with a message to his fellows, while again sometimes his words have the authority of the direct utterance of God Himself. Bahá’u’lláh writes in the Book of Iqán:

“There are two stations for the Suns rising from the Daysprings of Divinity. One is the station of Unity and condition of Oneness. ‘We make no distinction between any of them’ (Quran, S. 2). Thus it is said, ‘Verily, they who swear fealty unto thee, swear fealty unto God . . .’

“In this station, all are sent forth from the presence of that Ideal King and Eternal Essence . . .

“The other station is that of distinction, creation and human limitations. In

this station for each one a temple is designated, a mission is indicated, a manifestation is decreed, and certain limitations are assigned. Each one is named by a certain name, characterized by a quality, and appointed to a new Cause and Law.

“In the station of Oneness and rank of Singleness, pure Sublimity, Divinity, Unity and absolute Deity have been and are ascribed to those Essences of Existence, because they are all seated upon the throne of the ‘Manifestation of God’ . . . that is, the appearance and the beauty of God is revealed by their beauty.

“But in the second station, which is that of distinction, separation, limitation and temporal condition and indication, they show forth absolute servitude, real need and utter lowliness: as it is said, ‘Verily, I am the servant of

[p. 216]

God’, and, ‘Verily, I am only a man like you’ (Qur’an, S. 41).

“If it be heard from the perfect Manifestations: ‘Verily, I am God’, it is true and without doubt; for . . . through their Manifestation, Attributes and Names, the Manifestation of God, the Attributes of God and the Name of God appear upon earth . . . Likewise if they say: ‘We are the servants of God’, this also is confirmed and evident, for outwardly they have appeared with the utmost degree of servitude. No one [else] hath the courage to appear in the world with that manner of servitude!

“Thus those Essences of Existence when submerged in the seas of Eternal Holiness and when ascending to the summits of the significances of the Ideal King, utter declarations of Unity and Deity. Were one to consider attentively, he will find that even in this state they witness in themselves the utmost humility and lowliness in presence of the Absolute Existence and Real Life as though accounting themselves utterly non-existent and deeming mention of themselves in that court as polytheism . . .

“Therefore, whatever they may say and claim, including Divinity, Deity, Prophethood, Messengership, Successorship, Imámat or Servitude, is true and without doubt.”

When Bahá'u'lláh speaks as a man, the station he claims for himself is that of utter humility, of “annihilation in God.” What distinguishes the “Manifestation”, in his human personality, from other men, is the completeness of his self-abnegation as well as the perfection of his powers. In all circumstances he is able to say, as did the Lord Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Nevertheless not my will but Thine be done.”

Thus in his epistle to the Shah of Persia Bahá'u'lláh says: “I was asleep on My couch: the breaths of My Lord, the Merciful, passed over Me and awakened Me from my sleep; and commanded me to proclaim betwixt Earth and Heaven. This was not on my part but on His part, and to this bear witness the denizens of the realm of His power and His kingdom, and the dwellers in the cities of

[p. 217]

His Glory, and Himself, the True. I am not impatient of calamities in His way, nor of afflictions for His love and at His good pleasure — God hath made afflictions as a morning shower to His green pasture, and as a wick for His lamp whereby earth and heaven are illumined.” And again: “By God, though weariness should weaken Me and hunger should destroy Me, though My couch should be made of the hard rock and My associates of the beasts of the desert, I will not blench, but will be patient, as the resolute and determined are patient, in the strength of God, the King of Pre-existence, the Creator of the nations: and under all circumstances I give thanks unto God”.

In the Hidden Words Bahá'u'lláh speaks from the station of Divinity.

“O SON OF SPIRIT!

“My first counsel is this: Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty, heavenly, ancient, imperishable and everlasting.”

“O SON OF BEING!

“Love Me, that I may love thee. If thou love Me not, My love can in no wise reach thee. Know this, O servant.”

“O SON OF SPIRIT!

“I have created thee rich; wherefore impoverish thyself? Noble I made thee; why dost thou abase

thyself? Out of the essence of Knowledge I manifested thee; why seekest thou any one beside Me? Of the Clay of Love I moulded thee; why dost thou busy thyself with another? Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, Powerful, Mighty and Supreme.”

“O SON OF SPIRIT!

“Know verily that he who exhorts men to equity, and himself does injustice, is not of Me, even though he bear My Name.”

[p. 218]

‘ABDU’L-BAHA.

Until 1908, sixteen years after the passing of Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was himself confined in the fortress of Akká, where the system of watchful persecution was continued. Having endured a lifetime of exile and imprisonment, a “captive for the cause of God,” he was liberated, at the age of sixty-four, by the Young Turk Party. Now, at last, after forty long years, borne with the cheerfulness of high faith in his mission to succour the suffering sons of men, he was able to make plans for carrying out the charge laid upon him by Bahá’u’lláh. “That cry of Regeneration, raised behind prison walls, now echoes abroad in the hearts of men”, for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá came and proclaimed the Message to the Western world!

“I waited forty years in prison to bring this Message to you; are you pleased to receive such a guest?” he said to those who awaited him in London.

Those who have had the privilege of knowing ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the Prison Fortress of Akká, during his days of captivity, and those who came into personal touch with him in London and Paris, were alike impressed with the great moral beauty of his character, and the indescribable spiritual dignity of his demeanour.

Always did he speak with authority, and not as the mere expounder, albeit a certain gentle courtesy was most conspicuous, and seemed to surround him with an atmosphere of loving-kindness, the benign influence of which was felt by all who came into his presence. Whether it were a great minister of State or an ecclesiastical dignitary, a busy toiler for his daily bread or a sorrow-burthened Princess, a famous artist or a learned barrister, a celebrated physician or a Christian

Scientist, a woman
suffragist or an Oxford Professor, a poor seamstress or a renowned writer, an
[p. 219]

inquiring journalist or an able man of science, none was either too great or
too insignificant to receive
of the bountiful warmth of his sympathetic consideration. He was marvellously
energetic, and his
presence brought a delightful, vivid gladness. “When a man turns his face to
God, he finds sunshine
everywhere; all men are his brethren”, he said to us one day. Never was he
sad, save for others’
sorrows. One day, in Paris, he heard the news of the battle of Benghazi. “My
heart is grieved:” — he
looked very sorrowful as he spoke — “I wonder at the human cruelty which
still exists in the world.
There is nothing so heart-breaking as an outburst of men’s savagery. I charge
you all that each one of
you concentrate the thoughts of your hearts on Love and Unity; when a thought
of war comes, oppose
it by a stronger thought of Peace. Do not think the Peace of the world an ideal
impossible of attainment;
nothing is impossible to the Divine Benevolence of God! Through this Power
comes the success of the
most colossal undertakings.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá with a serene aloofness counselled a detachment from
personality [sic]. It is to be borne
in mind that he himself claimed no title but ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, i.e. the
servant of the Splendour of God, so
that there can never be any controversy concerning his station. He called to
all the friends of God in
every region of the earth to arise and help him in the Service of Humanity, in
the well-being of the
world, and in the spreading of Divine love and kindness! He inspired the
Baha’is (literally, Friends of
God and Followers of the Light) with an amazing enthusiasm for the cause of the
Love of God. They hold
that there is nothing else in this world worthy of their life’s devotion. The
service of the brotherhood
of man is their inspiration — that all the children of God, our Father, out
of every tribe and nation,
should be gathered together in a Spiritual Unity, is their aim and high
endeavour. To be zealously
engaged in the working out of the Supreme Design, under the one Divine
Architect of the Universe, is
their joyful occupation. To serve as soldiers in the army of Love and

[p. 220]

Light, ever vanquishing the power of hatred and darkness on the battlefield of the world is their ambition. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá did not suggest our leaving our own beloved form of Truth, but rather that we should strive to enlarge its horizon, free ourselves from the uncharitableness of narrowing prejudices and set our hearts and minds on the Divine work of bringing it into the Grand Unity.

He enjoined upon all an unvarying courtesy and kindness in every relation of life, however fraught with difficulty, reminding us that where soldiers of the world draw their swords, soldiers of God clasp each others’ [sic] hands; that to be nominally a Christian is easy: to be a real Christian is hard; and that, whilst we must not neglect to “render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s”, we must diligently “render unto God the things that are God’s.”

The “Followers of the Light” are at all times charged to be loyal adherents of all just and righteous governments, and to be law-abiding citizens, in whatever country they may dwell. They have no form of membership nor institutions to differentiate them outwardly from other people. The Cause asks only for the hearts of its followers. When the heart is in the work, giving and doing are privileges and not obligations.

Professor Edward Granville Browne thus describes ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. “Soon after this, a sudden stir without announced the arrival of fresh visitors . . . one of whom . . . as I guessed from the first, by the extraordinary deference shewn to him by all present, was none other than Bahá’u’lláh’s eldest son, ‘Abbas Efendi. Seldom have I seen one whose appearance impressed me more. A tall strongly-built man holding himself straight as an arrow, with white turban and raiment, long black locks reaching almost to the shoulder, broad powerful forehead indicating a strong intellect combined with an unswerving will, eyes keen as a hawk’s, and strongly-marked but pleasing features: such was my first impression of ‘Abbas Efendi, “the

[p. 221]

Master” (Áká) as he par excellence is called by the Bahá’is. Subsequent

conversation with him served
only to heighten the respect with which his appearance had from the first
inspired me. One more
eloquent of speech, more ready of argument, more apt of illustration, more
intimately acquainted with
the sacred books of the Jews, the Christians, and the Muhammadans, could, I
should think, scarcely be
found even amongst the eloquent, ready, and subtle race to which he belongs.
These qualities,
combined with a bearing at once majestic and genial, made me cease to wonder at
the influence and
esteem which he enjoyed even beyond the circle of his father's followers.
About the greatness of this
man and his power no one who had seen him could entertain a doubt."

Mr. Horace Holley has also left on record an account, which is well worth
reproduction, of his first
meeting with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, at Thonon on the Lake of Geneva.

"Prepared in some measure for the meeting by the noble mountain scenery
through which we had
passed, we approached the hotel feeling ourselves strangely aloof from the
tourist world. If I could but
look upon 'Abdu'l-Bahá from a distance, I considered that I should fulfil
a pilgrim's most earnest desire.

"Groups of people were walking quietly about under the trees . . . My wife
pressed my arm . . . I looked
up quickly . . . and saw a stately old man, robed in a cream-coloured gown, his
white hair and beard
shining in the sun.

"He displayed a beauty of stature, an inevitable harmony of attitude and
dress I had never seen nor
thought of in men. Without having ever visualized the "Master", I knew that
this was he. I seemed to
have turned into some most sensitive sense-organ, as if eyes and ears were not
enough for this sublime
impression. In every part of me I stood aware of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's presence
. . . A glory, as it were, from
the summits of human nature poured into me, and I was conscious of a most
intense impulse to admire.

[p. 222]

"In 'Abdu'l-Bahá I felt the awful presence of Bahá'u'lláh, and, as
my thoughts returned to activity, I
realized that I had thus drawn as near as men now may to pure spirit and pure
being . . . I had entered
the Master's presence and become a servant of a higher will . . . Even my

memory of that temporary
change of being bears strange authority over me. I know what men can become . .
.

“After what seemed a cycle of existence this state passed . . . and I
advanced to accept ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s
hearty welcome . . .

“I yielded to a feeling of reverence which contained more than the solution
of intellectual or moral
problems. To look upon so wonderful a human being, to respond utterly to the
charm of his presence
— this brought me continual happiness . . . The tribute which poets have
offered our human nature, in
its noblest manifestation, came naturally to mind as I watched his gestures and
listened to his stately,
rhythmic speech . . . Patriarchal, majestic, strong, yet infinitely kind, he
appeared like some just king,
that very moment descended from his throne to mingle with a devoted people . .
. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, even
more impressive walking than seated, led the way . . . Our party included some
Orientals. I could not
help remarking the bearing of these splendid men . . . All were natives of
countries in which Bahá’ism
has not only been a capital offence in the eyes of the law, but the object of
constant popular hatred
and persecution; yet not one, by the slightest trace of weariness or bitterness
showed the effect of
hardship and wrong upon the soul. Toward ‘Abdu’l-Bahá their attitude was
beautifully reverent. It was
the relationship of disciple to master . . . The dinner was throughout cheerful
and animated. ‘Abdu’l-
Bahá answered questions and made frequent observations on religion in the
West. He laughed heartily
from time to time — indeed, the idea of asceticism or useless misery of any
kind cannot attach itself to
this fully-developed personality.”

Finally, it may be of interest to add an extract from a talk recorded by Mirza
Valiyyu’llah Khan Varga.

“My

[p. 223]

father,” said Valiyyu’llah Khan, “was much with Bahá’u’llah. One
night Bahá’u’llah, as he strode back
and forth in his room, said to my father:

“At stated periods souls are sent to Earth by the Mighty God with what we
call the power of the Great

Ether. And those who possess this power can do anything: they have ALL power.’

“‘Even this walk of mine’, said Bahá’u’llah, ‘has an effect in the world. Jesus Christ had this power. The people thought Him a poor young man whom they had crucified; but He possessed the power of the Great Ether; therefore he could not remain underground. This ethereal power rose and quickened the world. And now look to the Master, for this power is his!’”

“Bahá’u’llah”, added Valiyyu’llah Khan, “taught my father much about Agha. AGHA (Master) you know, is one of the titles of ‘Abdu’l Bahá, and The Greatest Mystery of God is another, and The Greatest Branch is still another. By all these we call him in Persia.

“The Blessed Perfection, Bahá’u’llah, revealed the station of ‘Abdu’l Bahá to my father. And my father wrote many poems to the Master, though the Master would scold him and say, ‘You must not write such things to me!’ But the heart of my father would not keep quiet. One [sic] one occasion he wrote:

O Dawning-Place of the Beauty of God!
I know Thee!

Though Thou wrappest Thyself in ten thousand veils,
I know Thee!

Though Thou shouldst wear the tatters of a beggar,
Still would I know Thee!”

Lord Curzon of Kedleston, in his Persia (published in 1892), wrote of the Baha’i Movement with deep appreciation. “Beauty”, he says, “and the female sex also lent their consecration to the new creed, and the heroism of the

[p. 224]

lovely but ill-fated poetess of Kasvin, Zerín-Táj (Crown of Gold) or Kurrat-el-Ain (Solace of the Eyes), who, throwing off the veil, carried the missionary torch far and wide, is one of the most affecting episodes in modern history . . . The lowest estimate places the present number of Baha’is in Persia at half a million. I am disposed to think, from conversations with persons well-qualified to judge, that the total is nearer one million. They are to be found in every walk of life, from the ministers and nobles of the

Court to the scavenger or the groom, not the least arena in their activity
being the Mussulman
priesthood itself. It will have been noticed that the movement was initiated by
Seyids, Hajis, and
Mullahs, i.e. persons who, either by descent, from pious inclination, or by
profession, were intimately
concerned with the Mohammedan creed. If one conclusion more than another has
been forced upon
our notice by the retrospect in which I have indulged, it is that a sublime and
murmuring devotion has
been inculcated by this new faith, whatever it may be . . . Tales of
magnificent heroism illumine the
bloodstained pages of Babi and Baha'i history. Ignorant and unlettered as
many of its votaries are, and
have been, they are yet prepared to die for their religion, and fires of
Smithfield did not kindle a nobler
courage than has met and defied the more refined torture-mongers of Teheran. Of
no small account,
then, must be the tenets of a creed that can awaken in its followers so rare
and beautiful a spirit of
self-sacrifice."

Mr. Bernard Temple, also, has given some impressions of the Baha'is in a
lecture before the Royal
Society of Arts in London (in May, 1910) . . . "I believe that events are
shaping in Asia which may end in
reconstructing the whole fabric of present-day internationalism, and add a
chapter to the world's
history as dramatic and momentous as any that has been written. The Baha'i
Movement arose in Persia
. . . The number of Baha'is in the world is now stated to exceed two millions
[sic]. Not less than one fifth
of the population of Persia has embraced Baha'ism. In Turkey, Egypt, North
India, and elsewhere
Baha'is are

[p. 225]

becoming numerous — even among the Sikhs, the Buddhists, Taoists, Shintoists,
and the Persian Jews.

Many Parsees have become Baha'is, and their teaching has been adopted in
Russia, Germany, France,
the United States, and England. The number of Baha'is in London is
appreciable, and smaller circles
exist elsewhere . . . In its essential character it is not so much a religion
as a religious movement . . .
Therein lies its force, promise, and historical momentousness. There has arisen
. . . thanks to the

freshness and fineness of Persian thought, a regenerative influence of almost incalculable energy.”

On November 28th, 1921, ‘Abdu’l Bahá passed away at Haifa, and something of the loss felt by his followers may be gathered from a letter written then to his family by a gentleman of Arabia, who extolled the Master in the terms of Eastern enthusiasm:

If the trees of all the woods, gardens, and forests of the world were made into pens;
Were the waters of all the rivers, lakes, seas, and oceans of Earth converted into ink;
Were all the mountains, hills, and plains rolled out into one mighty scroll;
And were the whole human race, from the beginning of time, to write and write and write — yet would they fail
in setting forth the majesty of Thy service to Humanity.

Therefore, O ‘Abdu’l Bahá, Servant of the living God, we say
NOTHING.

By the will of ‘Abdu’l Bahá his grandson, Shoghi Effendi, still at Balliol College, Oxford, when his grandfather passed away, was appointed to the position of “Guardian

[p. 226]

of the Cause of God”. His tasks and responsibilities are many and onerous. Baha’i Assemblies are now formed in almost every country of the world; their correspondence, dealing with the manifold affairs of the Cause, receives his untiring attention: while the translation of the Baha’i Tablets and Laws is an immense undertaking. Of these, probably not more than a third have been done into Western tongues, but this work, as well as the rest, is felt by the Baha’is to be in excellent and worthy hands.
May God prosper the Cause!

— The Baha’is (Used by permission of the curator)