



# THE BAHÁ'Í WORLD

A BIENNIAL INTERNATIONAL RECORD

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become converts so that they may teach their own people! 'Abdu'l-Bahá has said these Indian people will illumine the whole

world. It is the task of the American Bahá'ís to light the torch. What a glorious privilege!

### 13. IN THE PRESENCE OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ

By ELLA C. QUANT

IT WAS no confirmation in belief to me to come into the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá; perhaps I did not need it. As I had come into the knowledge of the Bahá'í Faith in 1903, I had already been a Bahá'í for nine years when 'Abdu'l-Bahá came to the United States in 1912; I had accepted Him as the Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant of peace and unity for the world. However, every moment spent in His presence brought its lesson in the "divine art of living."

Perhaps the best way to tell a story is to start at the beginning. Mrs. Margaret La-Grange and I, Bahá'ís of Johnstown, N.Y., anticipating the visit of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to America in 1912, were planning to go to New York City to meet Him on arrival. A day or so before we planned to start for New York, word came that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was not on the ship expected. This news was, of course, disturbing to us and was the cause, temporarily, of greater disappointment than I can express. However, the thought came to me that 'Abdu'l-Bahá could send a wireless message, which He did, confirming His anticipated arrival. (Wireless was then in its infancy and was considered more or less a miracle.)

According to our plan, therefore, we started for New York City on the evening preceding the 11th of April. The next morning we found our way to the pier where already many of the friends of 'Abdu'l-Bahá were gathered, this number being augmented by the frequent arrival of others, some alone, some in groups of two or three. Subdued excitement, glorious anticipation at the joy of meeting the Master, filled the hearts and radiated from the faces and voices of the friends. We waited for some time and at last our patience was rewarded in seeing the huge bulk of the vessel breaking through the morning fog and mist. In due time it docked.

It was not long before word came from 'Abdu'l-Bahá that He would meet the

friends at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Kinney, two Bahá'ís of long standing in the Faith. After receiving this word the friends began to disperse. But Margaret and I, knowing that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was on the vessel, could not tear ourselves away from the pier; so, lingering, our eyes riveted, we were rewarded with a glimpse of Him for whom our hearts longed. Then, satisfied, in anticipation of the afternoon meeting, we, too, left the pier. Later I suppose we had lunch, but it is only a supposition, for such a minor detail of physical existence has absolutely passed from my memory.

When we arrived at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Kinney, the rooms were crowded with the friends and 'Abdu'l-Bahá was mingling freely among them radiating the spiritual happiness He said He felt in meeting the "friends of God." That afternoon in His first address to the American Bahá'ís He said in part:

"I am greatly pleased with the city of New York. Its harbor entrance, its piers, buildings and broad avenues are magnificent and beautiful. Truly it is a wonderful city. As New York has made such progress in material civilization, I hope that it may also advance spiritually in the kingdom and covenant of God so that the friends here may become the cause of the illumination of America; that this city may become the city of love and that the fragrance of God may be spread from this place to all parts of the world. I have come for this. I pray that you may be manifestations of the love of Bahá'u'lláh . . . This is my highest aspiration."<sup>1</sup>

At the end of this address 'Abdu'l-Bahá greeted each one personally, clasping the hand and repeating the word, "Marhabá! Marhabá!" (Welcome! Welcome!) with such fervor that I could not fail to grasp

<sup>1</sup> The addresses of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in New York City, from which passages are quoted in this article, may be found in *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 1-14. (Editors.)

His meaning, though unfamiliar with the word.

Our second meeting with 'Abdu'l-Bahá was on April 12, in the studio of Miss Phillips. In connection with this meeting, I must go into a little detail that will show all too clearly my immaturity in the ethics of the Kingdom. As Margaret and I entered the spacious room we observed our beloved 'Abdu'l-Bahá sitting on a couch, a young Persian on either side of Him. Shortly one of the devoted friends of the Master entered and one of the Persians sitting beside 'Abdu'l-Bahá arose and offered his seat to the lady, which she accepted. I was disturbed and said to myself, "Oh! Who is worthy to sit beside 'Abdu'l-Bahá?" The question bothered me all evening, but was relegated to the background of my mind save at such times as I found myself alone with my thoughts.

'Abdu'l-Bahá gave a beautiful talk that evening, saying in part:

"These are the days of seed-sowing. These are the days of tree-planting . . . He who sows a seed in this day will behold his reward in the fruits and harvest of the heavenly kingdom."

And again,

"The doors of the kingdom are opened. The lights of the Sun of Truth are shining . . . Know ye then the value of these days."

Later, in leaving, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá took my hand, I was conscious of His eyes partially raised to mine. Did He see there the unanswered question of the early evening: Who is worthy to sit beside 'Abdu'l-Bahá?

On the following Monday, the last day we were privileged to be in His holy presence, He deigned to answer my question. After greeting us He seated Margaret on a chair near Him at just the right angle, she told me later, where she might look into His eyes; thus fulfilling a desire of hers. Then, He seated *me on the couch beside Him* and turned on me (the questioner) the smile of His divine love, which penetrated my physical and spiritual consciousness. Thus did He teach us, the friends, everywhere, not by rebuke, but with touching example, that the Sun of God's bounty shines upon all and only the veils of self hide us from an ever-increasing realization of its effulgence.

On Saturday, April 13, 1912, with many others we gathered at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Morten to see and hear the Master. That day in His address He compared the

appearance of a Divine Manifestation to the springtime and showed us that the progress and decline of religion are comparable to the four seasons in the material world. In part He said:

"The world spiritual is like unto the world phenomenal . . . When we look upon the phenomenal world we perceive that it is divided into four seasons; one is the season of spring, another the season of summer, another autumn and then these three seasons are followed by winter . . ."

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá reached the phrase "the season of summer" the interpreter hesitated and finally stopped speaking. Then the voice of the Master came forth clear and strong with "summer," and a ripple of pleasure went through the audience as we realized that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was interpreting to the interpreter.

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá was weary and repaired to an upper room, some one suggested closing the door of the room, to "protect" the Master, that He might have some seclusion from the friends who were already ascending the stairs to be nearer to Him. How like the days of Jesus when the disciples tried to spare Him the encroachment of the crowd! 'Abdu'l-Bahá said, Let them come! He took my hand as I with others passed before Him and He said to me, *Al-láh-u-Abhá*, that word of Bahá'í greeting, which means God the Most Glorious. Many years later 'Abdu'l-Bahá said that the unity of the friends was the cause of health to Him, and the extreme weariness of that afternoon I now believe was brought about by the weight of the spirit's burden rather than by any physical strain, great as that no doubt was; for He received callers from very early in the morning until late at night; no one was turned away.

Margaret and I longed for an interview with 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Some of the friends had been granted that privilege, so we decided to ask an interpreter to arrange it for us. Again I was reminded of the days of Jesus Christ and of the desire of the disciples to protect Him from the multitude. The interpreter said the Master was very busy, but, nothing daunted, Margaret explained to him that we were from out of town and longed for an interview before leaving New York. So the matter was finally arranged and on Sunday morning at nine we found ourselves being ushered into the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and in English He was addressing us

with the words, Sit down, sit down, as He courteously showed us to seats. Then the question so frequently asked by Him, Are you well? Are you happy?—What did He mean—the health of the body or the well-being of the spirit? I do not recall giving an answer. How could we answer a question that to the Questioner was already clear—that for us time was standing still; that we had reached the ultimate of our desire, our station in the sun where there is no night. His next words awakened us to our immediate environment. He said, He was happy to have such souls as we were: Rest thou assured, rest thou assured. And, we had come some distance to meet Him and had passed through difficulties, but He had come farther to meet us.

Such words we were not prepared to hear; knowing that we were humble people and feeling we had but small capacity to serve the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, we could not understand such words applying to ourselves.

We were taken to the smaller room of the suite, where 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave private interviews. There He told Margaret He prayed for her parents (who had passed into the life beyond some months before). Her eyes filled with tears and overflowed; mine then did likewise. The interpreter, perhaps at a loss, shook his head at us and said in an admonishing tone that we should never cry in His presence. It made Him sad. As I looked up, I saw that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's sadness was for us—not for Himself—for with hands outstretched to calm and protect us, like a mother bird hovering over her young in the nest, He exclaimed in English, *Laugh! Laugh!* I shall never forget that voice, vibrant and powerful beyond any words of mine to express. In that voice I have come to see the power of heaven to rout all the negative forces of existence, and in arising to obey that command to find the eternal joy of life.

'Abdu'l-Bahá bade us come to the church (Church of the Ascension, Fifth Avenue and Tenth Street) where He was to speak that morning. Margaret sat at His side and I directly facing Him. He lovingly took and held the hand of Margaret (in leaving) and fondly patted her shoulder with the other hand. He then did the same to me; and when I asked the interpreter to tell Him I wished to serve Him always, He called me His daughter. He then said, Your face is radiant.

I find I must digress a little in order to give the reader a clear understanding of the real value of the beautiful expressions that 'Abdu'l-Bahá bestowed upon the friends. Once when He in a Tablet called one of the faithful friends His daughter, I laughingly remarked, "If 'Abdu'l-Bahá ever called *me* His daughter I'd never have another worry. I'd *know* I was saved." As we grow in grace and spiritual understanding we find that 'Abdu'l-Bahá, through these bestowals, sowed the seeds of attainment in our hearts; we realize that He opened the door of spiritual progress for us, as in His great love and wisdom He saw the Father's face in every face.

It was Palm Sunday and the church was filled to capacity and more, although we understood that the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá there that morning had not been publicly announced. To me, and I have no doubt to many others, it was an unforgettable picture—'Abdu'l-Bahá standing among the lilies.

If you have thought of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as robed in somber, formal ecclesiastical dress, please "see" Him now (I never saw Him otherwise) in long, light, easy-flowing cloak and light head dress, a symbol of sunlight; warm, comforting, and "alive." There was a certain color resemblance between 'Abdu'l-Bahá's white hair and his cream-colored cloak and the white and gold of the lilies. He stood there, not a figure come to be worshiped, but as the Servant of the Divine Gardener, warming the ground of human minds and hearts by a deeper penetration of the rays of the Sun of Truth.

Although coming from a life of suffering and imprisonment, He radiated the life-giving forces of God, declaring "there is no prison save the prison of self"; teaching that man is essentially a spiritual being, and that all down the ages man's conception of so-called death as extinction has corroded within him and closed his spiritual eye to the unspeakably blessed opportunities of this life, as well as to the vision of his glorious destiny in all the worlds of God.

Among the words He addressed to that audience were the following, after forty years so strikingly applicable to the world of today. He said:

"Today the world of humanity is in need of international unity and conciliation. To establish these great fundamental principles a propelling power is needed. It is self-evident that unity of the human world and

the 'Most Great Peace' cannot be accomplished through material means. . . . All the Prophets have come to promote divine bestowals, to found the spiritual civilization and teach the principles of morality. Therefore we must strive with all our powers so that spiritual influences may gain the victory . . ."

In His first address that Sunday to the Christian Church in America, 'Abdu'l-Bahá sent forth the call to unity, even as He did later on that same day in His address before the adherents of New Thought.

On that afternoon, April 14, 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed the Union Meeting of Advanced Thought Centers in Carnegie Lyceum on West 57th Street. In all His teachings 'Abdu'l-Bahá was Himself a point of unity. He first established a basis of unity and upon that He proceeded to build something of eternal value. Sometimes people have questioned the simplicity of His presentation of truth. In His public addresses, as well as in His private interviews, He fitted His words to the spiritual capacity of those to whom He spoke. To that audience in Carnegie Lyceum He said in part:

"I have come here with this mission; that through your endeavors, through your heavenly morals, through your devoted efforts a perfect bond of unity and love may be established between the east and the west, so that the bestowals of God may descend upon all and all may be seen to be parts of the same tree,—the great tree of the human family . . . so likewise must we be connected and blended together until each part shall become the expression of the whole . . ."

Again and again did 'Abdu'l-Bahá stress the oneness of mankind: All humanity are leaves on the Tree of Creation; some ill who need to be healed, others ignorant who need to be taught; but all recipients of the bounty of the loving Creator. Even in material ways 'Abdu'l-Bahá demonstrated the unity that He taught; He joined in the clapping of hands at that particular gathering, and contributed when the offering was taken.

I wish I could convey to you a clearer picture of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, that love that knows no limitation, no restriction, flowing out to and embracing male and female, rich and poor, schooled and unschooled. He received each soul as a precious substance upon which to bestow the bounty of the Love of God. A touching instance of that love is found in the episode of the roses.

One day when we were in the hall, the little floor maid emerged from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's suite, her arms filled with roses—beautiful roses—the gift to Him from some of the Bahá'ís. Sensing that we were friends of the Master, all formality fell away and with a touching gesture she exclaimed, "*See what He gave me! See what He gave me!*" She probably knew nothing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Station as the Center of God's Covenant and the Interpreter of Bahá'u'lláh's teaching to a needy world; she perhaps did not know His name or title, but He had shown her His love.

Margaret and I were entertained during our stay in New York by my aunt who lived on 73rd Street, almost under the eaves, it seemed to me, of the Ansonia Hotel. Imagine our delight when we were told that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was staying at the Ansonia. It seemed like a special privilege to us, and indeed such it very strikingly turned out to be. It came about in this way. On that last morning of our stay I suggested to Margaret that we walk over to the hotel before leaving the city, saying we might get a glimpse of 'Abdu'l-Bahá passing out or going in. How limited was my vision! Later we walked over to the Ansonia and some friends who were just leaving the hotel said to us, "Go right up. 'Abdu'l-Bahá is there." So as if led by an unseen hand we walked to the elevator and when we alighted from it other friends of 'Abdu'l-Bahá were leaving His suite and in their joy of having been with the Master and in the blessing of sharing, they said to us, "'Abdu'l-Bahá is there. Go right in." We opened the door and found, seemingly waiting for us, the one whose door was closed to none, regardless of color, race or creed. Truly 'Abdu'l-Bahá had drawn us to Himself. He would not let us leave the city without another assurance of His love for us. As I write of His love "for us," I am reminded of the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to one of the friends visiting Him in 'Akká. When that Bahá'í spoke of her wish that all the friends in America might be in 'Akká sharing her blessing, He answered that they *are here*; one represents all.

After seating us, 'Abdu'l-Bahá asked about our health, then addressed us with the words He had used in our first interview, enlarging upon them, saying we had come some distance to meet Him. He had come farther to meet us. He had made the journey because of His great love for us. At first the

journey was very hard; the harder the path, the greater the difficulty, the greater the mercy. The divine bounty is continually descending.

I had been in rather poor health for some months and had hoped to receive from 'Abdu'l-Bahá something to help me carry on my household duties, which were exacting, for I was brought up in the old-fashioned way that assumed the house could not be clean unless one had a backache. The most experienced psychiatrist could not have more readily touched upon my need than did 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Servant of the Divine Physician, when He advised me, in response to the interpreter's word about my health, to decrease physical labor, work not beyond the extent of your strength, turn toward the Kingdom of God; strength is from God; divine confirmation shall descend; you shall attain to physical health; rest assured of the favor of God. More than once through the years these words of the Master have kept

not only my physical balance, but the mental and spiritual as well.

A day or two before leaving home for New York City to meet our beloved Master, I had a dream. During my years of knowledge of the Bahá'í Faith, I have had several dreams from which I have endeavored to extract some spiritual meaning, but the dream in question is the only one for which I have a verbal interpretation from 'Abdu'l-Bahá; therefore, the importance of that particular dream is to me very great.

When the interpreter spoke of my dream (with another Bahá'í, I was standing before a vast expanse of water) 'Abdu'l-Bahá said that in the dream the sea is the Kingdom, and that is the Cause of God. That I with that other Bahá'í shall attain to the shore of that Sea, and shall behold its expanse.

The time had come when Margaret and I were scheduled to leave New York City for home. After this last unexpected meeting, on April 15, 1912, we were never again in His physical presence.

## 14. THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH IN BACKWARD AFRICA

By DUNDUZU K. CHISIZA

THE motion for today's debate is: 'Africa for Africans.' May I call upon Mr. Chisiza to speak on the motion?" said the chairman.

"Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen," the writer began, "we are assembled to debate but let us not talk for argument's sake. The motion we have today affects us profoundly. The ideas we shall gather from this debate will go a long way to determine the fate or blessings of your immediate family, your fellow Africans and what's more, our posterity.

"Black Africa is in ferment today. The African is in a plight because of a foreign white minority. The Hereros in South West Africa have protested, have prayed that their country should not be under Malan's South Africa but the white administrators have given them a deaf ear. In South Africa itself the Defiance Campaign against apartheid laws is at its height. 'Shoot the leaders, jail the rest and investigate later' is Malan's slogan. In Bechuanaland, Seretse Khama has

been banished by foreigners who once acknowledged him ruler and owner of that country. In Central Africa, Africans are protesting, are wailing and yelling in vain against federation. In Tanganyika your fellow Africans are crying for equal representation. In Uganda, in 1949 we had terrible so-called riots. In Kenya your brothers and sisters are being marauded as Mau Maus and as adherents of Dini Ya Nsambwa.<sup>1</sup> In Egypt there is the Suez Canal Zone struggle. In West Africa the massacres connected with the S.S.S. movement will long remain in our memories. And alas, even in the far off Congo the East African Standard says that a chief has protested in public that he might better die than see himself stripped of his all by the white man.

"In all these troubles, please note, ladies and gentlemen, the aggressor has been the white man, and as long as he is with us he

<sup>1</sup> A religion or sect started by an African in Kenya.