

‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Europe,

1912–1913

‘The Sun is only just beginning to rise in Europe; soon will the divine light grow more intense, and then will you all behold what has come to pass.’

Words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoken in Paris, 15 March 1913

‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Europe, 1912–1913

*The Talks and Travels of the Master
as Recorded by Mírzá Maḥmúd Zarqání*

translated by
Adib Masumian

with the assistance of
Farnaz Masumian



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Foreword by the Translator

This translation of the second volume of Mírzá Maḥmúd Zarqání's diary recounts 'Abdu'l-Bahá's voyage from America to Europe (December 1912); His travels to the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Hungary, and Austria (December 1912–June 1913); and, toward the end of the book, glimpses from His sojourn in Egypt (June 1913–December 1913) and return to the Holy Land (December 1913), where He remained for the rest of His life. This account does *not* cover 'Abdu'l-Bahá's first visits to France and England in 1911, since Zarqání did not accompany Him on those travels.

This book was originally published in Persian a little more than a hundred years ago as the second of two volumes of *Kitáb-i-Badáyí'u'l-Áthár fí Asfár-i-Mawli'l-Akhyár ilá Mamálikí'l-Gharb bi'l-Izzati va'l-Iqtidár* (A Book of the Wondrous Traces of the Master's Glorious Travels to the West) – often shortened among Persian-speaking Bahá'ís to *Badáyí'u'l-Áthár* or *Safar-Námih* ('travelogue'). The first volume was translated into English in 1998 and published by George Ronald under the title of *Maḥmúd's Diary*. Though the present volume had not been rendered fully and directly into English until now, a considerable amount of its contents had previously been summarized by H. M. Balyuzi in his exquisite biography of 'Abdu'l-Bahá,¹ several of the anecdotes He relates in it were adapted by Amir Badiei for inclusion in *Stories Told by 'Abdu'l-Bahá*,² and certain snippets of His other remarks recorded in it were translated by Marzieh Gail in 'A Sampler from Maḥmúd's Diary'.³

In a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States dated 30 April 1984, the Universal House of Justice stated that it

. . . attaches great importance to this work which . . . is regarded as a reliable account of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's travels in the West and an authentic record of His utterances, whether in the form of formal

talks, table talks, or random oral statements. Mírzá Maḥmúd was a careful and faithful chronicler and engaged in assembling and publishing his work with the permission of the beloved Master, as he states in the Introduction. Indeed, Shoghi Effendi drew upon it for details about the Master's visit to the West in writing *God Passes By* . . .

It should, however, be noted that the words Zarqání has attributed to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in this chronicle do not have the status of Sacred Text, and the accounts included herein should be corroborated by His Writings where possible.

For those who wish to learn more about the people and events covered in this volume, I have prepared a freely accessible digital resource, *A Supplement to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Europe, 1912–1913*,⁴ which includes fuller English translations⁵ of those talks by 'Abdu'l-Bahá that Zarqání has mentioned in passing or quoted partially; my renderings⁶ of nearly thirty selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in which He discusses His journey to the West, several of which He composed while still there; and my translation of a biography of Zarqání authored by 'Azízu'lláh Sulaymání.

Given Zarqání's relative unfamiliarity with the Gregorian calendar, it is understandable that he made the occasional mistake in dating his entries. In these instances, I have retained the erroneous dates in the body of the chronicle but mentioned the correct ones in accompanying endnotes with reference to other sources from that time. For the most part, I have restricted the multitude of reverent titles Zarqání used for 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the original account to 'the Master' and 'the Centre of the Covenant'. The translations used for the Biblical verses quoted in this chronicle are all taken from the King James Bible. For Quranic passages, I have used Shoghi Effendi's translations or renderings authorized by the Universal House of Justice where available; in every other case, I have relied on Rodwell's translation. All parenthetical text in the body of the account is Zarqání's, while all bracketed commentary is mine. All footnotes and endnotes are likewise my own. Zarqání withheld the names of certain Persian dignitaries who met with

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and this was done at His own instruction.⁷ I have denoted these omissions with two em-dashes wrapped in brackets, thus: [——].

The original volume concludes with a sixteen-page collection of poetry by Zarqání in which he illustrates the coming of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá from the East to the West after forty years of imprisonment, emphasizing the significance of that momentous journey; extols the greatness of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, lauding the talks He gave in the West and more generally the message of peace He delivered there; exhorts his fellow believers to follow ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s example of serving and teaching the Cause with self-sacrifice; glorifies the return of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá from the West to the East, and more specifically from Egypt to the Holy Land, highlighting the importance of this event; depicts the fulfilment of scriptural prophecies, including those pertaining to Mount Carmel, through the advent of the Bahá’í Faith and the construction of the Shrine of the Báb which is situated on that mountain; rebukes the Bábís who failed to recognize Bahá’u’lláh as the Promised One; and expresses his own love for Bahá’u’lláh, as well as his devoted servitude to Him. Those poems have not been included in this translation, and Zarqání’s one reference to them in this book – found at the end of his entry for 21 June 1913 – has consequently been left out.

In rendering a translation of this size and substance, I benefited immensely from the assistance of various people. The lion’s share of my gratitude goes to my mother, Farnaz Masumian, who sat with me and spent more hours than I can count checking every word of my translation against the original text as I produced it over a period of three years (July 2017–July 2020). I am also grateful to the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, who reviewed all my provisional translations of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words and approved them for publication in this book following the incorporation of some recommended revisions.⁸ Additional thanks are due to the team at George Ronald, including May Hofman, who edited the manuscript with patience and meticulous precision; and Erica Leith, who typeset the book, added the images, and undertook other production work. My father,

Bijan Masumian, pored over the entire manuscript to identify names, places, and other suitable candidates for the aforementioned images that enrich this translation. With the help of my cherished and erudite mentor, Naeem Nabiliakbar, I gained insight into some of the older meanings of terms and phrases intended by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Mírzá Maḥmúd Zarqání, and others featured in this account – and through his skillful and tireless tutelage over many years, he developed my command of Persian to a point that enabled me to take on this project in the first place. The 'brother I never had', Joshua D.T. Hall, offered several suggestions for improvement after reviewing an early draft of the full translation, and also provided, for my use in this work, his own superb renderings of certain lines of Persian poetry that have been quoted in this chronicle. Through the assistance of Edward Sevcik at the U.S. Bahá'í National Archives, I procured facsimiles of contemporaneous diary letters by Ahmad Sohrab which cover many of the same events recorded by Zarqání and thus served as a useful counterweight to his account. Jan Jasion and Amín Egea supplied me with a wealth of historical material relevant to the contents of this volume. Robert Stockman shed light on several allusions Zarqání made to the American Bahá'í community and to events that were concurrently unfolding in that country. Still more friends, diligent historians of the national Bahá'í communities to which they belong, reviewed chapters of the manuscript that aligned with their areas of expertise: David Merrick (United Kingdom), Ulrich Gollmer and Alexander Meinhard (Germany), Ágnes Ambró (Hungary), and David Menham (Austria). The recent release of *The Bahá'í Community of the British Isles, 1844–1963* – a new book printed by George Ronald and prepared by the late Adam Thorne, Moojan Momen, Janet Fleming Rose, and Earl Redman – proved serendipitous, in that George Ronald generously supplied me with a pre-publication copy just before they began editing this book. The fresh light shed by that definitive history of the Bahá'í Faith in Britain – especially in chapter 3, which covers 'Abdu'l-Bahá's time there – enabled me to make several corrections and clarifications to my notes to the corresponding period in this volume, and I cannot

recommend it enough to any student of the Cause's development in that part of the world. Jan Jasion's impressively comprehensive *'Abdu'l-Bahá in France: 1911 & 1913* was of similarly great help as I worked through the portions of this account dealing with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's time in that country.

I have tried my best to produce an accurate and adequately researched translation that avoids wording anachronistic to Zaqání's time, reflects his elevated tone, and maintains fidelity to his attitude of respectful admiration. I can only hope that I have done right by him and by that Mystery of God Whose talks and travels he has so lovingly striven to immortalize.

Adib Masumian
November 2023

A Brief Chronology of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Travels Covered in this Volume

1912	5 December	‘Abdu’l-Bahá concludes His journey throughout America and sets sail for England
1912	13 December	Arrives in England
1913	6 January	Departs England for Scotland
1913	10 January	Returns from Scotland to England
1913	21 January	Departs England for France
1913	1 April	Departs France for Germany
1913	8 April	Departs Germany for Hungary
1913	18 April	Departs Hungary for Austria
1913	24 April	Returns from Austria to Germany
1913	1 May	Returns from Germany to France
1913	13 June	Sets sail from France to Egypt
1913	2 December	Sets sail from Egypt to the Holy Land
1913	5 December	Arrives in the Holy Land

Preface by Mírzá Maḥmúd Zarqání

In the Name of God, the Most Powerful

Praise be to the All-Bountiful Creator, Who has adorned the firmament of existence with the rays of the sun of benevolence, and illumined the dawn of creation with the stars of insight and understanding. He has taught the divine anthem to the pure souls; He has kindled the fearless hearts with the fire of the love of God. With His heavenly message, He has instilled a fresh spirit and breathed new life into the world. With His divine glory, He has endowed the human race with limitless endurance. He has summoned all His servants to the tabernacle of unity, and has made the exalted pavilion of peace the resting-place of the hearts and souls of humankind. He has illumined the West with the sun of the East. He has perfumed the nostrils of the truly liberated with the fragrance wafting from the firmament of the Covenant – a fragrance so enchanting that it stirs even the rose-gardens to jealousy. He has influenced the leaders of the West with His counsel, and has – through His aid and assistance – given the wise ones of the East a religion which has granted them salvation, that they may become the envy of the world and the cause of its perpetual prosperity, for this has always been, and will always be, the method of God.

The Sovereign of the Kingdom of glory has demonstrated His extraordinary power, and perfected His divine proof, by choosing the holy Manifestations from among the most backward of people. Through His spiritual power, He has enabled such people to surpass even the most glorious of nations. Unaided by earthly hosts, and void of acquired knowledge, they have conquered the religions and great nations of the world. He has made those Manifestations the greatest means of the unification of all peoples and races. With the advent of the prophet Abraham, for instance, God bestowed blessings and eternal glory upon his descendants. With the coming of Moses, He freed the Israelites from captivity, and made them even as the kings of the earth. With the breath of Jesus Christ, He

unified the diverse nations of Assyria, Chaldea, Egypt, and Syria, and breathed eternal life into them. With the rising of the Muhammadan countenance, He made the peoples and pagan tribes of the Arabian desert the inheritors and caliphs of the earth. And now we arrive at this brilliant age and heavenly century, in which the Sun of Bounty [Bahá'u'lláh] shed its splendour from the horizon of Persia. With His advent, He made the East the dawning-place of God's ancient grace and glorious triumph. With the light of divine civilization, He has illumined scores of the people of advanced societies, and has made the renowned philosophers of the West to fall for the Beloved of the East. It behooves the learned ones of the East, then – especially those of Persian extraction – to lift up their voices to the highest heaven in gratitude of this honour and privilege, and cry out, 'Glad tidings! Glad tidings!' It befits them to sing the song that hails the loving Lord as they pluck the harp and strike the drum. They should so excel in this arena of grace that the signs of their supremacy will forever endure in both this world and the next, and so hoist the standard of felicity in this soul-stirring space that the banner of its glory shall wave throughout the ages and centuries to come. They must so move in the world of existence as to become the clear tokens of this most great dispensation and this supreme era. Even as a brilliant star must they rise over the horizon of these blessed words: 'Erelong will God bring forth treasures of the earth – men who shall aid Him with a power born of Him,'⁹ and come to completely exemplify this irrevocable promise: 'There lay concealed within the Holy Veil, and prepared for the service of God, a company of His chosen ones who shall be manifested unto men, who shall aid His Cause, who shall be afraid of no one, though the entire human race rise up and war against them.'¹⁰

Were the peoples of the world to consider, with fairness and insight, the sacred teachings of this most great Cause, as well as the momentousness of this journey to the West – and also to ponder the grandeur, the glory, the majesty, and the transcendence that 'Abdu'l-Bahá (may the souls of all existence be a sacrifice for His bounty) evinced as He travelled throughout the cities of America and Europe – they would account all these as the most conclusive

proof, the most perfect evidence attesting to the truth of the Revelation of the Blessed Beauty (magnified be His glory), and regard them as the supreme sign of the Sun of Truth shining resplendent from the Most Exalted Horizon and the Most Glorious Kingdom. Thereby would they be apprised of the secrets and truths of the divine religions, and moved to turn their faces from the darkness of prejudice and blind imitation to the luminous realm of oneness and unity. Indeed, every people would cleave tenaciously to this most great Cause as a source of life and a path to salvation, and all humanity would deem it their obligation to promote these blessed precepts. This applies in particular to the people of the East, whom the peerless Lord has once again deigned to honour with a crown so exquisite, a diadem so refulgent, that it shall arouse the envy of all humankind, and exalt that people to a most illustrious station in both this world and the world to come. I beseech God, blessed and glorified be He, to prepare them for this supreme bestowal and to make them grateful for this most magnificent gift. I pray, moreover, that He may aid them to preserve this imperishable glory and enable them to promulgate His sacred commandments, through which every weak one is strengthened, every lowly one is exalted, every poor one is enriched, every sick one is healed, and every soul is empowered to soar to the loftiest summits of redemption and reach the celestial heights of tranquillity. He, verily, is the Most Compassionate, the Lord of grace abounding.

Praised be God, Who out of His all-encompassing grace and all-pervading bounty has aided this poor servant to record the significant events of the Master's journey throughout the states of America, and helped him to complete and present the first volume of this chronicle.¹¹ Upon completing this introduction, I shall finish writing this vivid account of the Master's travels to the cities of Europe, and thus bring the second volume of this chronicle to completion. Having set my face towards the horizon of God's assistance and favour, I hopefully supplicate the paradise of His support and protection to make me vigilantly heedful of such things as beseem the majestic greatness of His Cause and the powerful might of His Covenant, and to protect me from errors and omissions. He

is, in truth, the Protector, the Helper, the Giver of victory, and He is the Sustainer, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

The most important detail which the reader will glean from perusing these pages is surely the majesty and might which 'Abdu'l-Bahá (may my spirit be a sacrifice for the dust which the footsteps of His loved ones have trodden) demonstrated in the sundry churches and gatherings where He spoke; the transformation experienced by the celebrated philosophers who met Him, as well as the deference they showed Him; and the humble reverence extended to Him by religious leaders and the heads of various other groups, for in addition to captivating the hearts of the friends at Bahá'í gatherings, the profound impression which His blessed utterances made at other assemblies invariably revolutionized the hearts of eminent persons, and roused His distinguished listeners to genuine veneration and vigilant attention. Even our esteemed compatriots, who were residing in London and Paris when we journeyed to those cities, were, for the most part, witnesses to these things themselves, and have testified to the power and grandeur of the Master. Many were the matters of major importance that came to pass, the like of which I have previously discussed in my preface to the first volume of this chronicle, and countless the fruits of the power displayed, the resolve evinced, and the talks given by the Master in America and Europe.

What is surprising is that the most inveterate enemies of this Cause in Persia have not been able to deny this power and might. In Tehran, the Azalís – who today are meddling, both secretly and openly, in the political spheres of Persia with a view to disordering its affairs – have repeatedly said:

'Abbás Effendí has gifted precious objects and given large sums to the ministers of churches and the heads of societies. It is for this reason that the respected people of the West have, in their houses of worship and other gathering-places, lavished such lofty praise upon Him and held Him in such high esteem.

Here is an evidence of true power – that even the tongues of our Eastern enemies should bear ample testimony to the praise and

respect which the Master received in the West, as well as the deference and reverence which the esteemed people of that land accorded Him at numerous gatherings. Ignorant as our opponents are of the pervasively prevailing might of the Word of God – which, though ever bereft of earthly means, has always reared humankind aright, and subdued its hearts and souls – they, in their idle fancy, have ultimately imagined the influence of the Cause of God and the power of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to have stemmed from material possessions. It is true that the Master’s displays of generosity constituted just one of His distinctive behaviours that would invariably cause people to rejoice, but He gave this money to care for the weak and help the poor. It is also the case that, on certain occasions when He was the guest of a respected person – or when He Himself had a guest who was dear to Him (as it is the custom among the people of every nation to conclude their visits with friends for whom they feel respect by giving them a souvenir of some sort) – the Master would likewise extend His beneficence to people as He bade them farewell, but He Himself never accepted a single gift from anyone. To them that judge fairly, the Master’s demonstrations of this munificence – as well as the self-sufficiency and independence He exhibited – all undoubtedly serve as testaments to the loftiness of His grandeur and the highness of His rank.

Such is the notion that these people, in accordance with their vain imaginings and selfish motives, have conceived – that with the ephemeral vanities of this world, one can transform the hearts of humanity and unite their inner realities beneath the shade of a single Word. Yet if that were truly possible, then it should be the Christian missionaries – with their wealth and capability, their schools and seminaries, their political power and influence – who achieve the outcome they so dearly cherish in summoning the peoples of the East to embrace their cause. Why should the Bahá’ís – the objects of hatred and wrath, the outcasts and prisoners of the nations – have received so much attention in the highly developed countries of the West and so completely captivated the hearts of their inhabitants?

During my sojourn in India, I met a great many people in the various provinces of that country (which is today one of the realms

of the mighty British Empire) who had all been born into villages and farms in the utmost poverty and hardship, and taken by Christian missionaries to their schools on the condition that they convert to Christianity. The missionaries clothed them, fed them, and taught them, and every day they would read the sacred texts and learn religious subjects. In those schools and quarters, every one of the servants and other attendants had to first accept Christianity before they were employed there. They were expected to attend church regularly, at fixed times, where they would be taught spiritual topics. Yet despite all this, once they left the schools and quarters of the Christians after studying there for a few years, they, like their fellow Indians, returned to supporting their own people, reverted to the religion of their forefathers, and grew more entrenched in their prejudices of race and nationality, thus rendering all the efforts and outlays of the Christian missionaries and teachers entirely fruitless in the domain of religion; indeed, their endeavours had consequences in the political sphere that were the very opposite of what they had hoped to achieve.

Tremendously powerful confirmations, then, are needed to effectively spread divine guidance, not the expenditure of the transitory wealth of this world, for if the confirmations of God consisted in the riches of men, the Christians would have been able to protect the basis of divine religion from the pervasive onslaught of Western materialists, such that pure spirituality and divine civilization – the indispensable foundation of human welfare and prosperity – could have withstood the influence of material civilization. Not only this, but through divine confirmations, those spiritual forces could have even prevailed over the libertine civilization of the materialists, which can culminate only in sheer animality, and exalted the souls and inner realities of humankind to stations holy and eternal.

It is this aid and assistance from on high that has, in this day, sustained the Cause of the Blessed Beauty [Bahá'u'lláh] and supported the Centre of His Covenant ['Abdu'l-Bahá], Who in spite of His dire afflictions, the plundering of His possessions, His displacement in various climes and countries, and His incarceration

in the Most Great Prison, has been able, in so short a span, to spread the Word of God in sundry regions of the world and penetrate the hearts of humanity with the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. The ray of the Sun of Truth, beaming down from the horizon of the East, has been so cast upon the farthest corners of the West that, as soon as the Master had been freed from prison as a result of the Young Turk Revolution, special invitations were sent to Him not only from the Bahá'ís of America, but even from the leaders of churches and other significant assemblies in that land, imploring Him repeatedly to travel to their countries and speak to the new and wondrous teachings – all this notwithstanding that they had yet to meet Him in person, or receive any gifts or other transient treasures from Him. Had those who raised their cavils against the Master been aware of the invitations He had received before embarking on His journey, they would have attributed the praise and respect He was given only to the power of God, and were they to reflect, however briefly, on what could possibly be the source of such wealth as this – which has so remarkably noised abroad the Cause of God and glorified His Word in those prosperous lands – they would realize at once that this wealth has come from the treasuries of the Most Glorious Kingdom, and that this aid and assistance are rendered by hosts from the Concourse on High.

This glory, this wealth, this aid vouchsafed from the realm above are all the fruits of the calamities which the loved ones of Bahá'u'lláh have sustained in the path of God, and the results of their renouncing their lives, their riches, their prestige, and their repose, consenting instead to bear toil and trouble, abasement and vagrancy, as they follow in the footsteps of that One Beloved – ever afflicted, ever captive, ever faced with the threat of the blade.