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## **Impressions of ‘Abdu’l-Baha**

**Mrs. Louise R. Waite**

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### **Impressions of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá**

**by Mrs. Louise R. Waite, of Chicago, who visited ‘Akká.**

**October, 1909.**

To describe ‘Abdu’l-Bahá so as to form any mental picture of Him that would in any way do Him justice, is as impossible as to try to paint a sunbeam. The artist may put the ray of yellow light in exactly the right place and with most beautiful effect; but, no matter how great his skill, he cannot catch that real essence of the sunbeam – that golden luminosity, which is like an elixir of life, is uncatchable, unpaintable. So it is with the likeness of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. His expression is ever changing; each thought and emotion is mirrored forth and the face becomes so illumined that words are but as the dull, lifeless paint which cannot reproduce the sunbeam – yet some idea can be gathered from them.

When I first saw ‘Abdu’l-Bahá I was alone and I came face to face with Him all unexpectedly. He stood not over four feet from me. It \*as in the upper courts with the blue sky over head and the sunlight shining down brightly upon Him, it being but a little while after “high noon”. It might have been anyone else of the family, as His sons-in-law were often passing to and fro, but every atom of my being, my heart and my soul cried out “It is He”. The face of my dream of Him stood before me with that same heavenly smile of welcome. The light of Infinite Love was radiating from His countenance. Majestic and yet sublimely tender, He was looking right into my eyes. I gave a start as if I had suddenly plunged into an ocean-then stood transfixed. It seemed as if I had come upon Him unawares and saw the “Glory of the Lord” shining forth around Him, and I know I must have felt as Mary Magdalene felt when Christ revealed Himself to her in her vision after the crucifixion – “The Risen Lord,” He motioned me to pass on. I could not. A sense of my great unworthiness made me bow my head-then He passed by me. He was dressed all in white. His hair fell in soft waves about His shoulders and His head was crowned with a white turban bound with a white cloth. His step was firm and kingly. When He reached His door He turned and motioned me again to pass on. I came toward Him and when I reached His door, I looked up into those marvelous eyes. I knew that every

thought every act of mine was known to Him. Yet, knowing this I could look fearlessly, unwaveringly at Him, realizing all my sins and weaknesses, yet know He understood me as I could never understand myself, and that He was indeed “Infinite Love Incarnate.” I could not pass until He turned and entered His room – then, nearly overcome by the vibrations which thrilled me thru and thru, I Passed on. Later He came to greet us and I was fully confirmed – it was truly ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, but a very different one, I now felt, from the one I had first seen. As He firmly grasped my hand with that welcoming pressure that comes deep from the heart, a hand-shake that warms you thru and thru, I saw the Divinely human man, the personification of my highest ideal of an earthly father. I never again, while in ‘Akká, saw Him as I had in that first meeting. It was then as if I had seen the Reality of His being, with the shades of flesh all raised that the Light of Spirit might stream forth.

In height, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is in reality but of medium height, but He holds Himself so superbly, with such a commanding dignity, and carries His head so high, with such a majestic air, that He ever gives the impression of greater height. His voice is full, and vibrant, each word uttered with marked distinctness and with that tone quality that leaves a faint echo, as it were, or wave vibrations such as come from a beautifully toned bell. All thru the day it rings out, first in one place, than another, for with astonishing rapidity ‘Abdu’l-Bahá seems to be everywhere – now in the garden, now in the room close beside the entrance, now in a guest’s room – or you may hear him calling someone in the “family section” of the “prison home” Always when I heard it, I felt its vibrations most deeply. Like His face, His voice expresses every emotion from tones that are stern and emphatic to those as tender and loving – as the cooing of a dove. His eyes defy description. I only know that to me they seemed gray, with a circle of white around the iris, which at times became luminous. Sometimes In the light I caught a shade of blue, and, again by lamp light they seemed almost brown - ever changing were they and wonderful. They, too, like His face and voice, expressed every emotion felt by Him.

I was deeply impressed by His perfect naturalness, His lack of conventionality and set form, and His refreshing simplicity. Divinely simple is He and simply Divine. His hair, which is gray and long, but rather thin, would at one time be flowing softly around His head, and at another time it would be tucked up beneath His turban in a careless, comfortable way. All of His physical senses seem intensified and when eating anything which He particularly likes, He shows the keenest enjoyment of it. Likewise, the perfume of a flower will seem to entrance Him. I thought of what one pilgrim to ‘Akká had said: “When ‘Abdu’l Baba inhales the odor of flowers, it is wonderful to see Him. It seems as though the perfume of .the hyacinth were telling Him something as He buried His face in the flowers. It is like the effort of the ear to hear a beautiful harmony-a concentrated attention. How He understands the mystery of all these things which we know nothing of! This, indeed is true.

While there was a deep undercurrent of exultancy In ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, yet, while I

was there which was but a few days, to my consciousness there seemed a strain of sorrow and sadness, as if the weight of the world was upon His shoulders. Especially did I realize this upon my first night in ‘Akká. I occupied the room directly next to His. His bed rested against the same wall that mine did, and I could hear His slightest move. I could not sleep, and as I lay there wide awake I heard Him pacing up and down His room; then He would throw Himself upon the bed; then arise and walk back and forth again. Once, when He threw Himself down upon the bed, He moaned. Oh! that moan! It came from the depth of His soul and it pierced me thru and thru – the heart, I felt that was again the Christ Spirit was daily, hourly, being crucified by the lack of perfect love and unity among the believers that once again it was crying out:”O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent to thee, how often have I gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold your house is left unto you desolate.” How I longed to go to Him and declare my love and faith in Him. Then I realized that it was not our love and faith in Him, our love for one another, that is His crown of glory and the balm for His soul, for He said to a pilgrim: “If you love one another, it is just the same as if you love Me. The closer you draw to one another the closer to Me you draw. I will go away from this world but love will always stay. Therefore you should love one another very much.”

I felt that every inharmonious thought and action of the believers was painfully registered on that great heart, and with this thought came the overwhelming sense of the personal responsibility falling upon each one of us. Having seen and met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, I realized that “His Words are the Words of God, His Utterances are the Utterances of God; that He is indeed the Center of the Covenant of God.” And with this realization came the deepest joy. No need of arguments and worry over problems of life and death Which have confounded the greatest philosophers; no need to spend the precious time in delving into the unknown and unknowable – He has, or can explain it all and His explanations are true. Once having accepted ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s station it is as useless to vex our minds with all these “whys and wherefores” as it would be for a “Way worn” traveller, when a wagon comes along and the driver offers to “carry him to town and he gladly climbs in, et continues to carry his heavy burden on his back.” At ‘Akká not only climbed into the wagon of Truth, but I also left my heavy bundle of felf opinions and perplexity of ideas by the roadside, knowing this Divine Driver would carry me safely to the town. God has indeed given us an “Ark of Safety” in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.