

... description: 1901, William Copeland Dodge
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title: With 'Abdu'l-Baha in 1901
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With 'Abdu'l-Baha

William Copeland Dodge

November 16, 1901

At in the afternoon of November 16, 1901, 'Abdu'l-Bahá entered our room and greeted us. We had just arrived at His Holy Household in the prison city of 'Akká' (Acre) Syria, having traveled in a carriage driven by two horses along the shore of the Mediterranean from Haifa.

'Abdu'l-Bahá said: "welcome, my boys and chanted a prayer for my brother Wendell and me.

Wendell was eighteen and I was twenty one (September 6, 1901) My father, Arthur Pillsbury Dodge, had arranged the trip for us.

At that time, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was a prisoner of the Turkish government, but He was allowed the freedom of the City. His home was in the original section of the City enclosed by a high wall. As 'Akká' increased in population, a second high wall was built around the City. Finally a third high wall enclosed the entire area.

Before we could enter 'Akká' it was necessary to obtain a recommendation from the United States government. This requirement was in addition to the usual passport. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was such a living example of love and humility, that the government officials became friendly with Him. General Badri Baik of the Turkish army was a frequent guest at dinner with 'Abdu'l-Bahá while we were there.

We stayed with 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His household nineteen days, November 16, 1901 to December 4, 1901. Every day breakfast was served to us in our room. The noon day meal and the evening dinner we had with 'Abdu'l-Bahá at His table. Generally about sixteen Persian Believers attended each meal, making nineteen present. In the Holy land at that time, women did not eat with men when others than the family were present.

Each morning, after breakfast, 'Abdu'l-Bahá came to our room and greeted us. He was gracious, considerate and always concerned with our comfort. At every meal 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave us lessons, and allowed us plenty of time to record his remarks in our note books. These talks were later published by the Board of Counsel of New York City in a booklet of twenty-four pages entitled:

“Utterances of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá ‘Abbás to two young men, American Pilgrims to Acre, 1901.”

Those days the Advisory Body of the Believers In New York City was called the Board of Counsel.

A photograph of the first BOARD OF COUNSEL in New York City appears at page 23 of Volume IX of the Bahá’í World.

In His lesson of November 19, 1901, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said:

“One of the most severe of the world’s diseases is that of contention anti strife, the fire of which is burning among all nations and cannot be removed except through the Word of GOD. As this intense fire can only be quenched by the Heavenly Water, therefore the faithful followers of GOD must be as a banner of peace and as a most luminous sun of harmony and union.

“In the days of Moses the people pitched the tent of martyrdom, and in the time of Jesus Christ they established the greatest church; but in this time the believers in Gm must raise the tent of Peace, Union and Concord. I hope that through the providence of GOD the brilliancy of love will light all the horizons. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá often wrote to the believers in America. These communications were called Tablets, and many were published in book form. They answered many questions concerning world problems. My father received sixty four of these Tablets. I have copies, of all of them.

Although ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was a serious expounder of the Bahá’í Faith, he had a fine sense of humor.

One day at dinner, we were eating soup, a nice thick soup. Leaving my spoon in the plate, I raised my hand to adjust my collar. As I brought down my hand, my elbow came in contact with the handle of the spoon and soup was sprayed upon the whiskers of the Persian believer on my right. Of course I was terribly embarrassed. However, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, observing the incident, quickly said: “Do not worry; that is a blessing and laughed aloud. My brother Wendell then remarked “Who gets the blessing, Bill, you or the friend with the whiskers?” and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá laughed again.

Wendell and I were so glad to be with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that sometimes we were quite jolly. We were mere boys of eighteen and twenty-one. Our interpreter, Ameen Faríd, told us that we must be reverent; that when we entered the presence of the Master we must bow our heads, clasp our hands, never smiling. Of course we fait the rebuke.

So, the next time we entered the dining room, our heads were bowed, our hands clasped, and we did not smile. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá passed quickly by us; he seemed to ignore us. We felt further rebuked.

Returning to our room, we wondered why ‘Abdu’l-Bahá seemed different in His attitude toward us. Well, we decided that we were not good actors.

So, when we entered the dining room for the next meal, we smiled. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá smiled; he came to us, took us into His arms and said “That’s the way I want you boys to act; be natural, be happy”

At the supper table, November 21, 1901, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said:

“When this blessed Cause was manifested in Persia, some of the divines and famous learned men became believers and were martyred. The people murdered the Báb, thinking they had ended the Holy Cause. They annihilated thousands of families, plundered the goods of the Believers, killed men and captured women and children. However, it was found that this had no destructive effect upon the Cause, but that the flaming fire of God was kindled the more. The lamp of God became more brilliant, waves of the sea of bounty increased, the breeze of God grew stronger, and the fragrance of the Holy Spirit became more powerful; and after imprisoning the Blessed Perfection, the government decided to banish Him to Baghdád, thinking that through this banishment the root of the Cause would be destroyed. As it took one month to go from Tīhrán to Baghdád, it was thought by the people that all trace of the Cause would be lost. On the contrary, the Cause of God became more powerful, His words more widely spread, His proclamation more generally hoard, and the power of His Cause the stronger; consequently the government decided to send the Blessed Perfection from Baghdád to Constantinople. As Constantinople was a large city and as there were many Persians in the city who traveled freely, this plan also proved fruit-less. Through the power of the Persian government, the Blessed Perfection was then sent to Adrianople, in Roumalia, a country very far from Persia (and a possession of Turkish. Because there was no railway, there was very little travel by the Persians to and from Adrianople, and therefore it was thought by the learned men of Persia that the Cause of God would have no effect upon the Persians. However, it was soon learned that these places were not places of banishment for the Blessed Perfection, (glory be to Him), and it was therefore decided that He should be sent to some small place – a place where murderers were confined, where robbers were imprisoned, so that this Cause would be weakened. Accordingly, the clergy, or learned men of Persia, being hostile to this Holy Cause, so arranged that the Blessed Perfection was sent from Adrianople (the Land of Mystery) to Acre, Syria.

“In this prison (Acre) the flag of the Gardener of God was raised, the greatness of the Word of God appeared and the Sun of Truth shone in such a degree that all the horizons became clear.

“Praise be to God! The promises about the Holy Land were fulfilled and the glad-tidings uttered through the tongues of the prophets of God were realized, for the enemies caused the Blessed perfection to be sent to the Holy Land and to have his residence in the Promised Land.

“Therefore the faithful followers of God must know that calamities in the path

of God will cause His truth to become more apparent.

“The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was the means of spreading the light of the Cause of God and the martyrdom of His disciples resulted in the eternal greatness of the Cause. The disciples were like torches, which, though burned by the fire of the hostility of the people, yet they enlightened the world.

“Therefore the Believers must not be sorrowful for this re confinement and for these new calamities, but they must be more attracted and kindled in cutting themselves from the world.”

The 22nd day of November, 1901 was the Muḥammadan day of worship, similar to our Sunday. The mid day meal is either one half hour before noon or one half hour after noon. So, our luncheon that day with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was at twelve thirty o’clock.

During the early days of the Bahá’í Faith in the United States, many of the believers wore a ring containing a stone on which was engraved the Greatest Name. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá came to our room on November 24th, 1901 with ten of those stones. He kissed each one and then handed five of them to Wendell and five to me, and then chanted a prayer for us.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá often talked to us about mother and father. They had visited Him in 1900. On November 26, 1901, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told us that He dreamed that our father was with him again. He said that although “Mr. Dodge was not with him in person, he was always with him spiritually”.

It is a great privilege for me to look at my father;’ picture on page 118 of volume IV of the Bahá’í World. One of the Disciples of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, one of the Heralds of the Covenants God surely did bless him. Alláh O’Abhá!

During the early days of the Bahá’í Faith in New York, the believers were confronted with various ideas of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh. It therefore became necessary for teachers from the Holy Land to come here to enlighten us.

Many of us believed that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was the Spirit of Christ referred to in the 24th chapter of Saint Matthew. We were quite emotional. There were critical discussions.

Therefore, on the 1st day of December, 1901, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá dictated to Wendell and me the following:

“In this greatest period there are only two Manifestations, the Blessed Báb (may my soul be a ransom to him) and the Manifestation of the Blessed Perfection (Glory be to Him).

“We are all the servants of the threshold of Bahá and the one who series most in His Holy threshold is the most beloved. My greatest wish and desire is submissiveness and servitude at His Holy Threshold. My name, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, means the servant of God; my heart is the servant of Bahá, and my spirit is the servant of Bahá and

rejoices only in this name. My purpose is love, not only by word but by action.

“The essence of all essence is love, which is likened unto the meat of the nut, while all else is likened unto the shell or outside. Through the providence of the Blessed Perfection our spirits must be full of the love of God. Therefore, anyone who asks you about me should be told that I am the servant of Bahá, because this is my only wish.

“Some years ago two believers became excited over a discussion as to the station of the Blessed Perfection, one of them declaring that Bahá'u'lláh was the Holy Identity of God. To settle the dispute they submitted the matter to the Holy Presence, and the Blessed Perfection answered: when there is a quarrel, all are wrong, but when there is love, all are right. The Blessed Perfection said the only thing that is not beloved is discord and all that is beloved is love.

“The believers must love each other and must reflect the love of God. Some may say the lamp is a light; others may say the lamp is the place of the manifestation of the light. Both statements are correct, but what is wrong is to quarrel, because it is contrary to the foundation laid by God.

“Therefore, in order that there may be no discord, all of the believers in the Truth must not mention me except as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the servant of God. The essential thing is love. I must love you, and you must love me. Such is the meaning of the truth, while untruth means rancour, discord and hatred. All else save love is merely outwardly uttered words.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá expressed the hope that the faithful followers of God in America will become gardeners in the Paradise of El Abhá, and the fruitful trees of that garden. “The [??] of their love should be as the healing rays of the sun; their teachings should be like the rains of providence; their spiritual characters should be like the life-giving breezes which diffuse the fragrances throughout all regions.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s last lesson to us, December 3, 1901, was as follows:

“It is stated in the New Testament that Jesus Christ was once drinking the juice of grapes and said He would drink no more except in the presence of the Father. This means that the spirit needs food for strength as well as the body. The appearance of the Holy Mantle tattoos is for the purpose of causing the heavenly table to descend. This table means the Divine virtues and characteristics, and is the means of strengthening the spirit and life. Therefore we hope that as this heavenly table has descended from the Kingdom of Abhá in this marvelous period, the believers and friends of God will have a

great portion of it, so that they will be the cause of eternal life and the means of enlightening the hearts of the people of the world.

“In short, I hope you will ask God to bless you as being the real sons of the Kingdom, because the sons of the Kingdom are of two kinds. One is the real son and the other is the material one. Judas Iscariot and Peter were both sons of the Kingdom, but Peter was the real son. Judas was the material son, consequently he was deprived. The real sons of the Kingdom are those souls who act according to the instructions and teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Blessed Perfection.

“They are drunken with the cup of providence, and are illuminated by the Divine Light. They are honored by all their perfections and virtues of humanity, and are characterized with attributes which embellish the essence of man in such a manner that all the people, even the enemies, testify of their good actions, attractions, separation from the world, purity, sanctity, knowledge and belief.

“In conclusion, I most humbly supplicate that God will admit you as the real sons of His Kingdom in such manner that you may be an honor to the cause of. God and that all the people, being astonished, may say: these young men are not the same. When they started for Acre they had a station, but on their return, they possess another station. They are baptised by the providence of God, by the fire of the love of God, and by the Holy Spirit. They have received a second birth, they have found eternal life.”

During our visit with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in ‘Akká (Acre) we were privileged several times to go to the Ridván, that beautiful Garden of Paradise, planted by Bahá'u'lláh, the Blessed Perfection.

On our last day in the Holy City, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá permitted us to visit the Holy Tomb and there see the pictures of Bahá'u'lláh, and the Blessed Báb. in that solemn atmosphere, prayers were chanted by Persian believers.

At 2:45 o'clock that afternoon, December 4th, 1901, we entered the carriage for our return to Haifa and home. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá bade us farewell, He gave us the following tablet for our father:

“He is God.

O thou pure soul.

Bahá'u'llah is upon thee. Thy two happy sons have presented themselves to this Blessed spot and were honored by a visit to the Most Holy Tomb.”

“I have associated with them for a while during which they were cheered by the fragrances which perfume the nostrils of the spirit by commemorating the beloved of God and by giving them the teachings of God.”

“I do supplicate God to make them two lamps glowing with the fire of the gift of God, that they will serve the Kingdom of God, put their strenuous efforts in the Kingdom of God, and spread the teachings of God, inasmuch as the traces of the love of God are brilliantly manifested in their faces.

“I ask God to help thee to be humble and submissive to all the beloved of God. Be kind and easy and compassionate to all, and dispute not with anybody over anything. Speak of the Divine Word, but if contradicted by a certain person do not argue with him. Follow my steps in all matters and take my disposition as an example for you in dealing with all persons.

“Rely upon God, the Living, the Self-existent.

Upon thee salutation and praise.

“‘Abdu’l-Bahá ‘Abbás.”

On the 24th day of February, 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote my father of His plan to visit the United States of America. Here is that Tablet:

To Mr. Dodge Upon him be Bahá’u’lláh El Abhá.

O thou dear friend:

I always remember thee and beg for thee the protection and preservation of the Possessor of the Kingdom. Ere long I shall hasten to America to meet the Friends and spend some time with joy and fragrance through the Favors of Abhá, and shall become engaged in proclaiming the name of the True One.

Convey on my behalf the wonderful Abhá greetings to all the Friends and the Maid servants of the Merciful, especially thy respected wife and thy dear sons. They are always in my memory and I seek for them Heavenly Confirmation.