… description: ‘Abbás Effendi: His personality, work, and followers and E.S. Stevens
author: E.S. Stevens
title: ‘Abbás Effendi: His personality, work, and followers notes: …

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by E. S. (Ethel Stefana) Stevens
published in Fortnightly Review, Volume 95, pages 1067-1084
Chapman and Hall, 1911
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The proclaiming of the Constitution throughout the Turkish dominions brought a belated freedom to a famous Oriental prisoner, the living head of one of the most remarkable movements which have appeared in the last century. Imprisoned for forty-two years in the penal settlement of ‘Akká in Syria, the prisoner, now a man of sixty-eight, is at last permitted to leave the precincts of that unhealthy little town, and take up his residence on the airier slope of Mount Carmel, across the bay. Any day in Haifa you may meet an old man whose flowing white hair, gathered up beneath his snowy turban, proclaims his aristocratic birth, accompanied at the slight distance prescribed by respect by Persian followers with folded hands. His long white beard, his blue eyes slightly flecked with brown, his commanding bearing, his dignified walk, his keen kindly face, all proclaim him to be someone of importance and distinction. He wears the

simple robe of white linen and grey linsey customary in Persia. This man is ‘Abbás Effendi, or ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (the Servant of Bahá), the recognised head of the Bahá’í movement throughout the world.

Bahá’ís have been accused by their Persian enemies of working an enchantment on those who visit them, so that an intoxication, an exultation like that of the hashish smoker, seizes their intellect and enchains their senses, lifting them into a dream-world of illusion. And anyone who has come into close contact with them, as I have been permitted to do during the past six months, is inclined to endorse this, for it is impossible to be with them long without feeling the infection of this strange enthusiasm, this spiritual hashish, which has sent men to martyrdom with smiles on their faces and joyous ecstasy in their hearts. “So they quenched his thirst with the bright sword of martyrdom,” says the Bábí chronicler, speaking of one of the martyrs in the earlier history of the movement; and any who have read The Traveller’s Narrative know the story of Mírzá Qurbán ‘Alí. The executioner, unnerved because of the sympathy of the onlookers for this good man, struck so badly that he only wounded the martyr’s neck, and caused his turban to fall to the ground. Then {{p1068}}

Mírzá Qurbán-‘Alí uttered this verse with visible joy (I give Professor Browne’s translation) :—

“Happy he whom Love’s intoxication So hath overcome that scarce he knows

Whether at the feet of the Beloved It be head or turban which he throws.”

And as late as 1901 one hundred and seventy martyrs suffered together for the cause in the public execution place of Yazd. One day at ‘Akká an aged Bahá’í presented me with a photograph of four of the persecuted sufferers. The history of two of these is very touching. They were father and son, the son a boy of about fourteen years, of great beauty and intelligence. He had made a pilgrimage to ‘Akká with his father, Mírzá Varqá Shahíd Yazdí, to see Bahá’u’lláh in his exile, and had charmed everyone by his good manners, modesty, and skill in writing verse. On their return to Persia they were taken prisoner during the Bahá’í persecutions, and led to execution with chains round their necks. Taking pity on the youth and good looks of the boy, those in authority approached him and said: “You are too young to die, and we will pardon you. As a matter of formality, curse the name of Bahá’u’lláh, and you shall be set free.” But the child steadfastly refused, and implored them to kill him. This they did, cutting his throat before the eyes of his father. The other two prisoners in the photograph, Mullá Ḥusayn Khámsih and Ḥájí Aymán Khámsih, were, by a subsequent order from the Government, released.

It is not my purpose in this article to give the history of the movement, so I will confine myself to the barest recital of the principal events of the Bábí movement, or the Bahá’í movement, as it is now almost universally called. Should anyone wish for further information, I must refer him to the works of Count Gobineau, Professor E.G. Browne, of Cambridge, Mr. Bernard Temple, Hippolyte Dreyfus, and others, who have made a study of this remarkable religion which is growing

so swiftly and surely that it already counts among its adherents one-third of the Persian nation, has many thousands of converts in America, and in almost every part of the Oriental world. It is essentially a missionising religion, in the best sense of the word "missionising," by which they do not understand the attempt to force their dogmas on those who hold different religious convictions, whether by argument, bribery, or persuasion; but rather the effort to put the beliefs which have illuminated them within reach of those who feel need of illumination. Bahá'ís let their deeds speak for them; but if an inquirer comes to their gates he is never sent empty away. {{p1069}} In the middle of the nineteenth century, then, a Persian youth of noble birth, a Siyyid, whom his companions and friends describe as being of a singularly pure and lofty disposition, gave out that he was the Báb, the Gate of Knowledge of which Muḥammad prophesied in the Qur'án in the utterance: "I am the City of Knowledge and 'Alí is its Gate." Contemporaries speak of his beauty, of the conviction which he possessed of his high mission, namely, of proclaiming a purer religion, throwing off the yoke of the priesthood and awakening his fellow-countrymen to their shortcomings. He called them, in fact, to a worthier conception of religion and duty, whether private or public. But, above all, he spoke of one who should come after him, to whom the Divine Inspiration should be given in a fuller degree: one who should be a light to lighten, not only the Persian nation, but the entire world. The message of his successor was to be to the whole of humanity.

After six years of public teaching, four of which were spent in prison, the Báb was publicly shot at Tabriz, in 1850. Thirteen years later, Bahá'u'lláh, one of the most earnest adherents of the Babist philosophy, declared himself to be the Knowledge of which the Báb had been the Gate, and was immediately recognised by the entire Babist community, with the exception of a small section.

Bahá'u'lláh, or Mírzá Ḥusayn 'Alí, was the grandson of a Grand Vizír of Persia; his father was a Vizír, so that he was of one of the best-known and most respected families in Persia. He was born at Ṭihrán in 1817. In 1846, four years before the martyrdom of the Báb, he joined himself to the Bábís, and during the persecution of them which followed the Báb's death he was exiled to Baghdád, as one of the most prominent among those who taught and promulgated the new religion. While at Baghdád he spent two years in solitary meditation among the mountains near by, and on issuing from his retirement announced to some of his friends and followers that he was the "Manifestation" prophesied by the Báb, that he was the promised Knowledge, to which the Báb had been the Gate. As I have said, his acceptance was immediate. The Bábís became henceforth known as Bahá'ís, and Bahá'u'lláh became the object of their reverence and love as the Supreme Teacher. His growing power and influence caused the Government considerable alarm, and the exiles were driven from Baghdád to Adrianople, and from Adrianople to 'Akká (Acre); in which latter place he, with those who shared his exile, seventy persons in all, were imprisoned in a very small space. As time went on, towards the end of his long life, this severe captivity was lessened somewhat, but Bahá'u'lláh was {{p1070}} never permitted to leave the precincts of the town. Here in 'Akká he taught, wrote, and worked till the end.

He was seventy-five years old when he died, and was buried near Bahjí, the house just outside ‘Akká where he had been permitted to reside in the latter days of his old age.

‘Abbás Effendi, his eldest son, who during his father’s lifetime had been his untiring help and companion, had been carefully trained by his father to assume the leadership of the Bahá’í community and to become the head of the movement. With selfless enthusiasm he devoted himself to his life-work, and was recognised by all the Bahá’ís as their head and loved teacher. He was pre-eminently fitted for this important office. He has in the highest degree that great gift which we call personality. His readily-given sympathy, his understanding of human nature, his power of interesting himself in every human soul which asks his advice and help, have made him passionately beloved by his people. Above all, he has that subtler quality of spirituality which is felt rather than understood by those with whom he comes into contact. He receives the long stream of pilgrims, inquirers and pupils who come to ‘Akká, and now to Haifa, with unfailing gentleness, geniality, and courtesy. He takes a personal interest in every one of the Persians in Haifa—-there are now about thirty families, some of which were exiled with Bahá’u’lláh, others Bahá’ís who have voluntarily come to Syria in order to be near the Master. He names their children for them, helps to educate them when they are unable to afford education for themselves, and advises them in their material as well as their spiritual life.

It is his habit to receive the men of the community every evening an hour after sunset, and however long and tiring the day’s work has been, he never refuses to admit them and talk with them. It has been my privilege to assist several times at these evening receptions. The Master’s house is simply built and simply furnished. He loves two things: light and flowers, so that the room in which he receives his guests has many windows, and a vase full of flowers stands always on the table. “For the rest, the walls are bare and white, the woodwork is painted white, and the chairs and divans ranged around the room are covered with an unpretentious light-coloured cotton holland material. At seven o’clock the Persians enter together, their hands folded and their heads bent, and, leaving their shoes outside in the Oriental fashion, seat themselves round the room. For each man as he comes in ‘Abbás Effendi has a kindly greeting, a tactful remark, a personal inquiry, or sometimes a humorous ‘sally which brings a smile to then — grave faces. Among them is {{p1071}} often a pilgrim, a believer who has travelled from a great distance to see and learn from the Master. ‘Abbás Effendi will draw him out; and interesting discussions follow, for the pilgrim may be a Zoroastrian from North Persia, a Parsee from India, or even a Japanese. After a moment the talk invariably turns on the spiritual life, and upon the twin Leit-Motive of the Master’s teaching — Love and Unity.

A humanity knit together by the spirit of unity, sympathy, and selflessness; a universal language; a world in which there will be neither war nor intolerance, a universal religion which shall comprise but two essentials, love to man and love to God: these were the ideals of Bahá’u’lláh, the practical realisation of

which ‘Abbás Effendi sets before the Bahá’ís. It is not infrequent to find seven or eight different nationalities and religions together at his table, all in the utmost friendliness-and this, in a country where religion and fanaticism are almost synonymous, means a great deal.

Love, he declares, is the beginning and end of all. Before the presence of Love, all disputes, whether national, religious or personal, will disappear like the night before the sun. God has revealed His Light many times in order to bring men to this true religion. Buddha, Zoroaster, Christ, Muḥammad, and Bahá’u’lláh, were all Messengers of God, all Lanterns in which the light of Truth was placed.

Nor is his talk entirely confined to abstractions. He is keenly interested in the political, social, and educational movements in the Western world which seem like the beginning of the fulfilment of Bahá’u’lláh’s predictions. He has discussed Esperanto with me, which may be destined to become the universal language prophesied by Bahá’u’lláh; the efforts of Tolstoi and the Peace Conference towards the abolition of war, and the great philanthropic institutions of Europe and America. He speaks confidently of the day when Chauvinism, the wish to further the interests of one nation at the expense of another, which too often passes for legitimate patriotism, will be replaced by the endeavour to further the interests of humanity at large; of a time when the universal language will be taught in schools founded on an international basis whose educational system shall have no religious bias, no racial bias, no political bias; of an era when the attention of inventors, instead of being directed towards the construction of engines of war and destruction, will be exclusively devoted to the improvement and amelioration of the human race and the alleviation of its miseries. He discusses, too, the scientific questions of the day, and has opinions to offer which are of the most interesting nature.

And this versatility, {{p1072}} this capacity to reason and form suggestive theories on any subject, is the more amazing when one reflects that ‘Abbás Effendi has had no schooling at all. He was nine years old when he was exiled with his father to Baghdád, and during his forty-two years of close imprisonment in ‘Akká there was little opportunity for study, cut off as the prisoners were from relations with the world of culture and science. The same might be said of his father. Bahá’u’lláh came of the aristocratic class, which leaves the study of theology and Arabic to hodjas and mullahs, the teachers and theologians. According to those who knew him, when he went to Baghdád he knew no Arabic; nevertheless, the “tablets” written in Baghdád during the first period of his “manifestation,” among the most beautiful of all his revelations, are written in the purest literary Arabic.

A Frenchman of great intelligence who has lived for many years in Haifa in an official capacity, and who often goes to ‘Abbás Effendi’s house to discuss the questions of the day with him, said to me one day with admiration, speaking of such a discussion, “What a mind! What intuition he has!” And in the early days at ‘Akká, when ‘Abbás Effendi was appointed by his father to receive the visitors who came to their house-for Bahá’u’lláh rarely admitted any to his

presence except the faithful-controversialists and religionists of all kinds would come to him with the purpose of confuting him with their arguments. But ‘Abbás Effendi was able to answer them all; and so great is the respect in which he is held, even among the fanatical Muḥammadans, that ceremonial visits have been made to him by most of the principal Moslem theologians who have come to ‘Akká or Haifa.

Another side to his character is his charity. He never makes his charities openly, or even speaks of them; but you hear of them in roundabout ways. A devout Catholic once said to me: "‘Abbás Effendi helps our work among the poor every year, and" — she paused — "if I were only permitted to tell you of the secret good that he has done!" And once in Damascus I ran across a poor Persian, who asked me to take his respectful greetings and a letter to the Master. He spoke of him with emotional affection, and then told me that during the late Adana massacres his shop had been burnt down and his father killed by the Kurds, he himself being left for dead. ‘Abbás Effendi sent him monetary help, wrote him kindly letters which gave the unfortunate man the courage to face life again, and started him afresh. Nor, in spite of his vast correspondence, does he cease to take an interest in his protege.

And the Master himself lives in the utmost plainness. I have said that the furniture of the house is not rich. His own bedroom {{p1073}} is of a Spartan simplicity. His food is very frugal: a little rice and a plate of soup will often represent his biggest meal, which, by the way, is always concluded by the ceremonial washing of the face and hands by water poured over them by a servant, and the rinsing of the mouth in the Persian fashion. His wife and his four daughters clothe themselves in the plain Persian house-dress of print in summer or merino in winter, wear no jewelry, and when they go out of doors dress themselves in the ordinary modest out-of-door habiliments of the Turkish and Persian women-the nun-like black chadur, or black mantle and hood-cape, which covers them completely, and the ru-band, which falls like a thick curtain before their faces.

And this leads me to speak about the family of ‘Abbás Effendi. He is an advocate of monogamy, which he thinks is the higher conception of marriage; and though his only son died in infancy and lies buried in the little Persian cemetery outside ‘Akká, he has never taken a second wife, as Persian custom permits. His daughters address their father as "Áqá" (lord), speak of him as the "Sarkar áqá" (worshipful lord), and hold him in the very highest respect as well as affection. Their life is a very busy one, for from morning to evening their services are required for the entertainment of guests, or as translators should foreign ladies be amongst the visitors, for they are good linguists, and for the superintendence of a very irregular household. Oriental hospitality is a duty, but when the visitors are so numerous and frequent as at ‘Abbás Effendi's house, it must become a duty not" without its burdens. "We never know how many people to prepare for when ordering a meal," his daughter said to me once with a smile. "We have to be ready for any emergency. Sometimes when a number of Persian pilgrims

arrive we may have as many as twenty unexpected guests to our evening meal." In the andirun, or women's apartments, the samovar is always boiling, for every visitor is served with a glass of tea in the Persian fashion, and this entails constant labour. But it is cheerfully performed, and though I have practically lived in the house during a very busy time, I never heard an impatient word or complaint.

No Bahá'í visits Haifa without first receiving a permission from the Master. He does not receive everyone who wishes to see him. Those who have nothing but idle curiosity to prompt their visit are not accorded interviews. Indeed, I am told that even to believers he is sometimes difficult of access, so that I have been doubly fortunate in seeing him almost daily and in having continual long interviews with him. During these interviews, one characteristic, not, I think, particularly noticed by those who {{p1074}} have written about him, has particularly struck me. That is, his keen sense of humour. He has the Oriental habit of illustrating his teaching with stories, and sometimes these are of a delightfully ironical and amusing nature. For instance, this was a story which he told me, to illustrate the superstition and ignorance of the Moslem officials. It should be first explained that the Muḥammadan regards the madman as a sacred person and the utterances of the insane as the utterances of Alláh; and also that the dog throughout the East is nothing but a despised pariah. "I was one day visiting the Mutessarif of 'Akká, a Kurd, when a madman entered the garden in which we were seated. His demeanour was wild, and his shirt blew open and displayed a bare chest. All rose to their feet as soon as they perceived his insane condition, and the Mutessarif gave the madman the seat of honour. In a moment a dog strayed in through the gate which the madman had left open, and barked at the company. Then said the Mutessarif to the madman, with great respect, 'Tell us, pray, Effendi, what the dog is saying.' The madman replied, 'I don't know.' 'Surely your Excellency understands the language of dogs?' 'I don't know,' repeated the madman. 'But I am certain that if your Excellency wished you could translate for us what the dog said.' "Then the madman turned and said to the Mutessarif, maliciously, 'Who told you that I could speak Kurdish?' "

And the following anecdote shows the absurdities which spring from cleanliness which is purely ceremonial and fanatical. "I was one day about to partake of a meal at Tiberias, when a Jewish priest of a certain sect came in. He was unwashed and unkempt, snd smelt very disagreeable, so that it was unpleasant to be in the same room with him. I knew that if he stayed, I myself should be prevented from eating my food, but, nevertheless, I invited him to eat with me. But when the priest saw the food on my table, he made a gesture of abhorrence, and pronounced the word 'Tarif!' (Unclean). I inquired what food the man would not consider unclean. He replied: 'Olives, and white bread, and fish.' I then ordered these things to be brought, but the man replied, 'Do not trouble; I have brought my food with me.' And, opening his shirt, he drew out from next his body a small fish, which he began to eat. "I then said to him, 'You call the food which I have provided unclean; and yet that fish, which you have carried

in your bosom, you consider clean food. Is it reasonable?' And the man did not know what to answer."

His philosophy is essentially human, in the highest and broadest sense of the word. He directs the attention of humanity not to the letter, but to the spirit of religion. I remember that once our discussion fell upon the question of asceticism, and I asked whether the crushing of the desires and needs of the flesh, in his opinion, helped the soul in its growth into the spiritual state. He replied :— "Asceticism is not necessary. A soul grows by the exercise of human virtues, and the observance of human morals; and by the Divine Favour. {{p1075}} The extreme asceticism of the saints was superstition. The monasticism of the Christian Church was mistaken. St. Paul was responsible for much of this, because in one of his epistles he praises those who do not marry, and prophesied that sects would arise which would not marry. St. Paul disapproved of marriage. But God did not give us good gifts that we should reject them. He created all these blessings that His servants may bless Him."

On another occasion an American visitor asked a question about fasting, and whether it would not be beneficial to the spiritual life. He replied :— "Fasting is a symbol. Fasting signifies abstinence from lust. Physical fasting is a symbol of that abstinence, and is a reminder; that is, just asa person abstains from physical appetites, he is to abstain from self-appetites and self-desires. But mere abstention from food has no effect on. the spirit. It is a mere symbol, a reminder. Otherwise, it is of no importance. Fasting for this purpose does not mean entire abstinence from food. The golden rule as to food is, Do not take too much or too little. Moderation is necessary. There is a sect in India called the Jats, who practice extreme abstinence, and gradually reduce their food until they exist on almost nothing. But their intelligence suffers. A man is not fit to do service for God in brain or body if he is weakened by lack of food. He cannot see clearly."

The American then told him of experiments made in America, whereby the mind was supposed to benefit psychically by abstinence. He replied :— "It is imagination. … To sum up, God knows better than all. He has given us an appetite; therefore we should eat. If the body is deprived of what is necessary to it, the mind suffers. God asks of us according to our capacity. If a man who has only sufficient strength to carry fifty kilos be burdened with a hundred kilos, he will fall. Moderation and commonsense must be used."

He considers superstition and interest in miraculous phenomena as also tending to divert the mind from the pursuit of real and practical religion. His eldest daughter once said to me :— "We in our religion do not dwell upon the miraculous. A man once wrote a book in which he enumerated the miracles of the Báb. Bahá'u'lláh burnt it, lest it should be the cause of later superstition. And he forbade his people to talk of these things. . . . They tend to lower a religion and to make people think about the things which are not important. Which is most important, the miracles or the life of Christ? And yet, because people have not been able to believe these miracles, they have doubted the teachings

of Christ."

Bahá'ís have no priests, no churches, no fixed order of prayers. Every man is his own priest, is responsible for his own soul growth. It is true that Bahá'u'lláh wrote a book of prayers destined to fit the needs which may arise, but no man is obliged to use them. But prayer is advocated. I once asked if prayer {{p1076}} was necessary, since presumably God knows the wishes of all hearts. The Master replied :— "If one friend feels love for another, he will wish to say so. Though he knows that the friend is aware that he loves him, he will still wish to say so. If there is anyone that you love, do you not seek an opportunity to speak with him, to speak lovingly with him, to bring him gifts, to write him letters? If you did not feel such a desire, it would be that you did not love your friend. God knows the wishes of all hearts. But the impulse to prayer is a natural one, springing from man's love to God. "If there be no love: if there be no pleasure or spiritual enjoyment in prayer, do not pray. Prayer should spring from love, from the desire of the person to commune with God. Just as a lover never ceases from wishing to communicate with the beloved, so does the lover of God always wish for constant communication with the Deity. Prayer need not be in words, but rather in thought and attitude. But if this love and this desire are lacking, it is useless to try to force them. Words without love mean nothing. If a person talks to you as an unpleasant duty, with no love or pleasure in his meeting with you, do you wish to converse with him? Efforts should first be made to make attachment to God."

"But how is this attachment to be made?" I asked. "How is the love of God to be obtained? There are many people in the world who admit the existence of a Deity, but without any emotion." The reply was :— "Knowledge is love. Study, listen to exhortations, think, try to understand the wisdom and greatness of God. . . . The soil must be fertilised before the seed be sown."

Another time, speaking of love, he said :— "Unity is love: it cannot be established without love. Therefore try, as far as possible, to be filled with love. Love is perpetual life, the most perfect vitality. Consider how love has gathered us together from the East and the West. If there were no love between us, our friendship would have been concluded by salutations, such as 'Good Morning' and 'Good Evening.' Love draws us in friendship to the people of every race and religion. From whom we breathe the fragrance of this love again, be as a Bahá'í, of the people of Bahá." … "The highest love is independent of any personal advantages which we may draw from the love of the friend. If you love truly, your love for your friend will continue, even if he treat you ill. A man who really loves God, will love Him whether he be ill, or sad, or unfortunate. He does not love God because He has created him — his life may be full of dissatisfactions and miseries. He does not love God because He has given him health or wealth, because these may disappear at any moment. He does not love Him because He has given him the strength of youth, because old age will surely come upon him. The reason for his love is not because he is grateful for certain mercies and benefits. No."" "The Lover of God desires and adores Him

because He is Perfection and because of His Perfections. Love should be the very essence of love, and not dependent on outward manifestations."" "A moth loves the light, though his wings are burnt. Though his wings are singed, he throws himself against the flame. He does not love the {{p1077}} light because it has conferred some benefit upon him. Therefore he hovers round the light, though he sacrifice his wings."" "This is the highest degree of love. Without this abandonment, this ecstasy, love is imperfect."" "The Lover of God loves Him for Himself, not for his own sake."

This high, mystical fervour, these spiritual ideals, constitute the real life of Bahá'ísm. "When true knowledge begins, earthly knowledge drops away," a Bahá'í said to me once, speaking with some amazement of the habit that European visitors have of asking purely metaphysical questions. To their minds many of these questions are both futile and unnecessary. To endeavour to compass the universe with any philosophical theory appears almost absurd to them. The spiritual life, when entered upon, is beyond reason. Bahá'u'lláh wrote :— "When the fire of love is become ablaze, The harvest of reason will be wholly consumed."

This, and the practical endeavour to bring about the Kingdom of Love upon earth, occupies their energies. I have often commented to outsiders upon the atmosphere of radiating happiness which surrounds most Bahá'ís. I have found them sincere, unlike other Orientals. And their warm hospitality and friendliness is unfailing. I cannot enumerate the many kindnesses which I have received, kindnesses which I have been totally unable to return in any way. In the course of a conversation with me one day, 'Abbás Effendi said :— "The religionists of the world have forsaken the essence of the teaching and hold to the letter. It is as if the students in a college quarreled and disputed with each other as to which master was the best, instead of attending to the lessons which were given by those masters. The religious conceptions of every creed postulate the existence of a medium, or intermediary between God and man. The spiritual teaching of each medium, the Word of God, whether Moses, or Elijah, or Christ, or Muḥammad, was the same. The light is the same. The mediums are identical, that is, derive their radiance from the same source. Moses, Muḥammad, Christ-what are these but names? What do names, mere words, matter? And yet people quarrel about these names. And the teaching is that the true object of religion, of spiritual progress, is to make every soul reflect the Divine. Each soul must become radiant as a lamp. And this is our message, our mission. We must labour night and day to establish unity and solidarity among humanity. Enough of quarrels, backbitings, and criticisms. See how the Catholics abuse the Protestants, and the Protestants the Catholics. Do they love each other as Christ commanded? Have they a brotherly feeling towards each other? And so with many other sects, even in one religion, the Christian. . . . But we (the Bahá'ís) hope that these difficulties may be removed, that all may please one another, until the Word of God, with all its perfections, may bring them into the Kingdom of God."

Once I asked him: "What is essential in the belief of a {{p1078}} Bahá'í?" We were in the low, white house of one of the Persian exiles at the foot of Mount Carmel, and the wind conveyed the scent of almond-blossom from the hillside. ʻAbbás Effendi was seated on the divan by the open window, and was gazing towards the sea beneath us. The kindly face beneath the white turban was turned to me after a moment, and with a smile in his tired blue eyes he answered :— "To be a Bahá'í simply means to love all the world, to love humanity and try to serve it: to work for the universal peace and the universal brotherhood."

I have said that ʻAbbás Effendi is fond of flowers. He is, in fact, like his father, Bahá'u'lláh, an ardent lover of nature. His favourite flower is the pink Persian rose, not unlike a larger Dorothy Perkins, with pink, fragile petals and an extremely sweet perfume. He likes to have these roses strewn upon the table whenever he has guests. He has a great love for Mount Carmel, and I have often met him with a few followers on the little platform, planted with rose trees, before the tomb of the Báb half-way up the mountain side; for the body of the martyred saint was secured by his followers and eventually interred on Carmel. From this little rose-garden, tended lovingly by the Persians, one has a wonderful view of the flower-covered slopes of the mountain, the little red and white town of Haifa below, and then the wide blue bay with its long crescent of sandy beach, on the further side of which ʻAkká lies close to the water's edge within her fortified walls, white as the breast of a sea-gull.

One April afternoon, when we had met by chance in the rose-garden and were afterwards drinking glasses of Persian tea in one of the cool, high ante-chambers of the tomb, he remarked :— "This mountain is a holy mountain: it has always been a sacred place. The prophets have always loved this mountain. Christ has trodden on its paths; Elijah lived on it. The wind is sweet on it, the flowers are many, the view is wonderful. When you come up the mountain, there are many fragrances which reach you: the clean air gladdens you, the beauty refreshes you. So the mind is made pure on this mountain, the thoughts are cleansed, the spirit turns to God."

Every Persian pilgrim visits ʻAkká when he comes to Haifa, as it was the scene of Bahá'u'lláh's long imprisonment, and the spot from which most of his teachings were given out into the world. I, too, went, curious to see the environments of ʻAbbás Effendi's youth and manhood, and the spots which are regarded as hallowed by Bahá'ís of the East and West. I went with a gentle old Persian and his wife and daughter in one of the high carriages used for the voyage between Haifa and ʻAkká, for two rivers have to be forded — the Kishon, from which Elijah took {{p1079}} water to pour over his sacrifice, and the Na'amein (the Two Yeses), the river Belus of the Phoenicians. This latter river owes its name to the tradition that Muḥammad, when going from Carmel to ʻAkká, was asked by his followers whether they were to ford the Kishon. He replied, "Na'am" (Yes). But when they came to the Belus they asked again; he answered somewhat impatiently, "Na'am, na'am!" (Yes! yes!)

As we drove along the sand, sometimes going into the sea, the Mírzá talked of

the teaching of Bahá'u'lláh, for whose sake, years ago, he had left the world to settle in 'Akká and share the imprisonment of his co-religionists. He is of a very good family, and had a career open to him in Persia; but studying the doctrines of the Bahá'ís, he became filled with the longing to learn at the very feet of the Master. He sent to ask permission. Bahá'u'lláh sent him these verses :— "Come not if love of life thou still must own, But come, if giving life and mind, nor come alone. This is the Path if thou Bahá wouldst meet. If not, abide afar, nor trouble pilgrim feet."

After this, in his own words, "I sent another supplication. I begged thus: 'O my Lord, is it meet that, rich as Thou art, Thou shouldst turn away from the door of Bounty one so poor, so humble even as I?' This time permission was granted me, and I proceeded on my journey there."

His wife and daughter had their ru-bandehha raised as we rode along in the fresh morning air, and in the best of spirits we laughed and talked all the way to 'Akká, which is a purely Oriental town, almost entirely Moslem, with its palm-shaded mosque, its vaulted streets, and the caravans of camels which pad their haughty way through the narrow alleys. There we visited the house in which 'Abbás Effendi lived before his removal to Haifa. His once carefully-tended garden in the forecourt had been trampled down ruthlessly by the lawless Arabs; but within the little garden was still sweet with flowers, and weeded and watered by the few Persians who take care of the place since 'Abbás Effendi and his family have left. A small number of Persian pilgrims were also staying in the big, empty house, now only occasionally visited by the Master. One of the women prepared us a lemonade. She was a Parsee from India, I was informed, and her history was a sad one. Her husband became a Bahá'í in India, and was an ardent supporter of the new religion. A certain Englishman, also a Bahá'í, was in India, on his way to Persia, when he suddenly fell ill of a terrible form of plague. There was no hospital within reach, and the natives would not go near him, but the Parsee nursed him devotedly through the {{p1080}} illness. The Englishman recovered, but the Parsee sickened and died. His widow sold all that they possessed, and came to 'Akká with her two little boys, in order to be near 'Abbás Effendi. The eldest died from the effects of the climate, and her other little son she sent to the Englishman for whom her husband had given his life, so that he might learn English and French, and be enabled to serve the cause. She has certainly given all that she has.

Another of the Bahá'ís there, Mírzá Ḥaydar-'Alí, was especially interesting as being a contemporary of Bahá'u'lláh himself. He was a venerable, smiling old man, with long Persian robes and a spotlessly white turban. As we had travelled along, the Persian ladies had laughingly spoken of a beautiful young man, who they were sure would captivate me. They would make a match between us, they said.

This now proved to be the aged Mírzá, whose kindly, humorous old eyes twinkled merrily as he heard what they had prophesied, and joined in their laughter. They did not cover before him. Afterwards the ladies told me something of his

history. He was imprisoned for fourteen years during the time of the persecution. At one time, when he was being transferred from one prison to another many days' journey away, he and his fellow-prisoner, another Bahá'í, were carried on donkeys, head downwards, with their feet and hands secured. Ḥaydar-'Alí laughed and sang gaily. So they beat him unmercifully, and said, "Now will you sing?" But he answered them that he was more glad than before, since he had been given the pleasure of enduring something for the sake of God.

He never married, and in 'Akká was one of the most constant and loved companions of Bahá'u'lláh. I remarked upon his cheerful appearance, and added, "But all you Bahá'ís look happy." Mírzá Ḥaydar-'Alí said: "Sometimes we have surface troubles, but that cannot touch our happiness. The heart of those who belong to the Malikút (Kingdom of God) is like the sea: when the wind is rough it troubles the surface of the water, but two metres down there is perfect calm and clearness." They told him that I was seeing much of 'Abbás Effendi. He turned to me and said: "They tell me that you are clever, that you have travelled, and read many books and seen many people. You have talked with philosophers, learned persons, and psychologists (those who study the soul). Have you ever seen anyone like 'Abdu'l-Bahá?"

I said, no, I had never met anyone like him.

He said: "He is a teacher of the Kingdom. If you leave your studies and all the world, and follow him, you, too, will be of the {{p1081}} Kingdom. When you and he have the same heart, when you enter into his ways and thoughts, then you will belong to the Kingdom. You have instruction, and Peter was a poor man, an ignorant fisherman — but could you do what he has done?" Then he ended, "All your learning is good, but you must forget it, and become like a child."

After seeing the outside of the house in which the seventy prisoners were confined in two rooms when Bahá'u'lláh first came to 'Akká, we drove out to the garden of the Riḍván — which means the Garden of God. The garden has a pretty history. Bahá'u'lláh had suffered very much from his long confinement, and his followers, as soon as the conditions of their imprisonment allowed it, put their money together and bought a piece of land just outside 'Akká, and made a garden there for him themselves. Here Bahá'u'lláh used to write and teach. The Riḍván lies in the division of the Na'amein, so that the river runs on both sides of it. It is full of every imaginable kind of flower: the bees and butterflies run riot in it, and the prodigal Oriental spring fills the air with a hundred scents. On one side a little square, paved with white marble and black and white pebbles, has steps leading down to the river, and an artificial shallow marble conduit in the centre conducts water from the fountain just above, through the square and into the river, with a very gentle and cooling sound. In this square grow two huge mulberry trees, with a wooden table beneath, and round it are wide benches, painted blue and white and stained by sun and wind. In summer, so thick is the foliage and so wide the spreading branches of the mulberry trees, this square is like a green tent; but when I was there the leaves were still not

fully grown, and the shade partial and speckled.

On the table beneath the mulberry trees, chicken, lettuces, vegetables cooked into a cake, eggs, and Persian sweetmeat were served. In addition to this, the gardener's wife fried us some fish that we had bought on our way from fishermen who were drawing in their nets as we passed. Oranges finished the meal, and we all washed our hands, faces, and mouths, Persian fashion, in the river. This little paved square used to be a favourite haunt of Bahá'u'lláh, and the corner in which he sat and taught is marked by a couple of potted plants, one in a rusty petroleum tin, placed there by the gardeners to prevent others from using a spot so hallowed by memories of the prophet. Here, too, he used to write on summer evenings, by the light of a big lantern suspended in the overhanging branches. All around the square lies the garden, threaded in and out by paths, over which the marigolds sometimes grew riot, as if the garden were spilling {{p1082}} its gold, and encroaching on the more utilitarian beaten ways. In the beds behind us as we ate our lunch, around the small white marble fountain which fed the artificial stream, I saw Mary lilies ready to burst their sheaths, red and pink roses, carnations, white stocks, marigolds, verbena, violets, tall Chinese lilies, and sapphire lupins. Presently we walked in the garden, picking flowers and oranges as we went. Further up, more steps lead into the river-date-palms grow on the further bank-and hereon hot days, when the colony was in ʻAkká, the Persian girls used to come down and bathe. Then we visited the peacocks, penned together at the end of a marigold-bordered path, and the little summer-house where Bahá'u'lláh used to write. It has many windows, and directly below them grows a little garden, full of sweet-smelling flowers-for Bahá'u'lláh loved the heavier garden scents which draw the moth, and are most fragrant at nightfall. Here grew orange trees in blossom, jessamine, white stocks, frisias and lilies, so that the incense of their white blossoms should rise to the open windows of the summer-house. The room was barely furnished, and has never been used by anyone since his death. A tray with a tea-pot and cups, the bedding, his chair, enclosed in a protecting case, and his writing-table are all there. It is the habit of the gardeners to light the candle every evening, in memory of him whom they call the Greatest of Lights.

I have spoken of the gardeners, and I feel that they should be spoken of, as their loving attention keeps the Riḍván in all its beauty. They are twins, and so alike that one can scarcely distinguish one from the other. Abu'l-Káẓim and Ibrahim, his brother, joined the Bahá'ís as children, when the persecutions were at their height in Ṭihrán, and large numbers of the adherents of the new faith were being slaughtered daily. At fourteen they left their parents and the land which they were to have inherited, and came to ʻAkká to serve Bahá'u'lláh, and when he died, ʻAbbás Effendi. They tend the garden, and live in it: it is their child, so to speak, and they spend the days in the pleasant thousand and one attentions that it needs, for a garden is like a lovely coquette, who needs constant ministrations and care, lest her beauty be impaired by neglect.

Then we visited the tomb of the great teacher, a mile away across sandy ways,

around which another garden has been planted. Inside, a roofed courtyard is full of palms and more delicate plants, the path which encircles it being spread with fine Persian rugs. The tomb itself is very sunny and silent. The light streams in through veiled windows, and the carpet that covered the portion of the flooring beneath which the body has been laid is of a tender green. The curtain at the entrance is {{p1083}} green too. Above the tomb is the simple inscription "Bahá," in Persian script on an illuminated background, and around the square of green carpet lamps and candles and flowers are placed. That is all. There are none of the symbols of grief, none of the ugly trappings which we Westerns associate with death. It is the silent room in an empty house-and nothing further.

In the cool of the evening, before I left ʻAkká, I went with the Persian ladies for a moment to the little Bahá'í cemetery just outside ʻAkká. We left our carriage and walked over the grass, thick with wild flowers, towards the small group of exiled tombs, which are set back from the road. Over the graves were white marble stones with inscriptions in the beautiful, elaborate Persian script, some of which my companions translated for me. I cannot remember the exact wording, but one ran something like this. It was for a Persian girl :—

"This sweet and fragrant flower was plucked by God for the Malikut, that its transplanted perfume might gladden Him."

And here lies ʻAbbás Effendi's only son, his mother, his brother, and others of the family of Bahá'u'lláh. They pointed me out the grave of one old Persian who had committed suicide. He had followed Bahá'u'lláh into exile and shared his imprisonment. Fifteen days after the death of the "Blessed Perfection" he was missing. And several days afterwards they found his body floating in the sea. Just before he had drowned himself he wrote in Persian verse that he could not endure life without his master, and that he had gone to join him.

I have spoken at such length of the followers of Bahá and his successor, because each contributes by his personal enthusiasm to this other-worldly, fairy-tale atmosphere which constitutes the charm of converse with them. Ḥaydar-ʻAlí, the Parsees, the twin gardeners, and my companions are all typical Bahá'ís. And to judge of the strength and vitality of a movement, one judges it not so much by its head as by its followers. There is a power, there is a force in Bahá'ísm which, at least in my opinion, may make it one of the elements to be reckoned with in the history of the future. Sooner or later it must become an important factor in the politics of the Near East. No movement, however rational, has any continued vitality among any Eastern people unless it be religious. Enthusiasm, romance, and impulse to action, to the Oriental, are centered entirely in his religious life. Even when he has ceased, under European influences, to believe in his ancient creeds, his subconscious ego is governed by this inherited sense. So that progressivism in the East must, in {{p1084}} order to permeate the masses, be a religious progressivism. And this is exactly what Bahá'ísm provides. It appeals to the religious sense. It makes converts in Islám, both Shí'ah and Sunní. It turns fanaticism into tolerance, retrogression into progression, Sauls with fire

and sword in their hands into Pauls preaching brotherly love and goodwill. And it is precisely this alchemist power in Bahá'ísm which might make it a factor of untold value to us in our solution of the Young Egyptian problem; just as it is likely to smooth the way of the French Government if it gains a permanent foothold in North Africa. It may become corrupt in the course of time; it may lose the white-hot fervour of its first purity; the clouds of glory that trail behind it may drop away when the first childhood of the faith has departed; but it can never be any other than a civilising and broadening influence. E. S. Stevens.