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'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Center Of The Covenant

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“URGENT PERSONALITY AND URGENT FUNCTION
IN THE FRONT WITH HERALD THE GOLDEN AGE”

In these days when a civilization is dying before our very eyes, and when the great Prophet, Bahá'ílláh, has appeared, standing on the threshold of a new age with a scroll of new commandments in His hand, two other figures stand with Him, of heart-seizing beauty—the faithful Báb, His Forerunner, equal in rank with Him as an independent Revealer, and the Son of Bahá'ílláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá—“'Abdu'l-Bahá”, translated, means “Servant of the Glory”, and this is His self-assumed title: Bahá'ílláh called Him “The Master”.

In the language of Shoghi Effendi, the present Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, 'Abdu'l-Bahá “walked not only in the Disposition of Bahá'ílláh, but in the same field of religious history, a unique function. Though coming in a subject of Himself and holding a rank radically different from that of the Author and the Forerunner of the Bahá'í Revelation, He, in

vision of the matter obtained for Him through the Covenant of Baha'ullah forms, together with them, what may be termed the Three Great Figures of a Faith unapproached in the world's spiritual history. He towers, in conjunction with them, above the domain of the infant Faith of God from a level to which no individual or body ministering to its needs after Him, and for no less a period than a thousand years, can ever hope to rise."

Among the many titles conferred by His Father on 'Ala'u'd-Din is that of "The Mystery of God". The Guardian, referring to these titles, writes that they "invest Him with a power and surround Him with a halo which the present generation can never adequately appreciate."

We, of course, are of this generation, and the hearts that are grateful to 'Ala'u'd-Din have realized with sorrow the truth of the Guardian's words—we cannot "appreciate" such grandeur, nor the significance of such a station. We stand too close to this transcendent figure to witness its overshadowing of the future, and are too imperfect, at our stage of development, to perceive in its fulfills the beauty of the Perfect. We have but one hope:—As, in reality, we love and follow the Servant of God, His "halo" shines for us, and, using it, we solve "The Mystery". The secret made plain by love can scale great heights—though not such heights as His.

The Guardian has revealed for us in one incomparable sentence the meaning of his title, "The Mystery of God";—leaving it, in its essence, still a mystery. "In the person of 'Ala'u'd-Din," he says, "the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and supernatural knowledge and perfections have been blended and completely harmonized." Thus He, the Perfect Man, is a bridge between man in his "station of servitude" and that forever mysterious Being, the Manifestation of God. He, indeed, is our link with Baha'ullah.

To glimpse something of the beauty of the Name, ‘Abdu’-Bahá, and of the Master’s dignity of it, to understand why the Guardian calls it “the unique Name”, and to feel its power over the heart, let us recall the Bahá’í conception of the station of servitude.

THE SERVANT OF THE MASTER

According to the Bahá’í Teaching, man has no approach to the Essence of Deity save through the Revelator, whose human temple is so pervaded by the burning energy of the Holy Spirit, or creative Word of God, that He is as a son to His age. The outpourings of light from the Essence mingle with and use His pure Being. Man through Him is made aware of God. Yet even He claims no access to inaccessible Deity. And just as the Revelator Himself stands in a World of His own, below the World of Deity, so man is in a fixed station—that of servitude—beyond which he cannot pass. Yet so great is this station of servitude that only the evolved and selfless soul can rise to its high requirements—true service to God and to man. Bahá’u’lláh has said: “Verily Man is not called Man until he become adorned with the attributes of the Merciful.” And Jesus said: “He that is greatest among you shall be your servant.”

So we see ‘Abdu’-Bahá, destined from birth to fulfill “a unique function in all religious history”, endowed from birth with supernatural perfections, yet choosing a name which places the emphasis on His human nature, identifies Him with man’s station. At the same time He speaks for us the sublimity of the station, involving in His own Being its manifold “new vicinities” and the splendor of its future—while forever He towers above it, as Exemplar. “‘Abdu’-Bahá, the Servant of Báb, has clad himself in the mantle of servitude and devotion for the beloved of Báb. Verily this is a great victory.”

THE PERFECT EXAMPLE

It is *Shaykh Effendi* who designates 'Abdu'l-Bahá the Perfect Man, the "Example" of the Bahá'í Faith. That is, His life, in its perfection, is not only the pure example to our generation, but to a modern human race, who will follow Bahá'u'lláh through all the before mentioned till the close of His Dispensation. Man, we are told, is born in his "childhood adolescence", about the same of age. His maturity will then unfold, his latent spiritual powers, including those which must, will appear; his unclouded reality will realize the "new virtues". To such a race as this, unimaginable one, 'Abdu'l-Bahá will still be the Example. And such a race as this will have developed the consciousness wherewith to "adequately appreciate" Him.

Before we consider His great appointment under the Will and Testament of His Father as "Center and Pivot of Bahá'u'lláh's purpose and all-embracing Covenant", let us look back into that perfect life. Let us look for a moment into His childhood, His youth year, when a world-shaking event occurred in His presence—and His close. This was the first Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh made in 1852 in Baghdad, whom His, with His Family, close lived in unity,—the exact fulfillment of the Báb's prophecy that in "the Year Nine" (corresponding with 1852) "He Whom God would make manifest" would announce Himself.

It was in the preceding year, in Thibar, and in a dangerous, that Bahá'u'lláh first woke to His world Mission. Accused as a follower of the Báb who had just been put to death, He, lying on a matting death, bowed under heavy chains; when at a dawn one night He heard those words, resounding from all sides:

"Verily, We shall render Thee victorious by Thyself and

in Thy Power. Grant Thou not for that which hath betokened
Thee, neither for Thee afraid, for Thou art in safety. For
long will God raise up the treasures of the earth—men who
will aid Thee through Thy Name, whereby God may re-
new the hearts of such as have recognized Him.”

When, by the intervention of the Russian ambassador,
Bahá’íth was released and returned to His plundered home,
and His beggared family, the window of the Prophet opened
upon Him. “He returned,” His daughter has said, “a changed
Father.” To this “changed Father” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, then only
a little child, gave up His whole heart.

Of that first Declaration of Bahá’íth, made to His Son
alone, we have the account of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself, given
sixty years later.

“I am the Servant of the Blessed Perfection. In Baghdad I
was a child. Then and there He announced to me the Word, and
I believed in Him. As soon as He proclaimed to me the Word,
I threw myself at His Holy Feet and implored and supplicated
Him to accept my blood as a sacrifice in His Pathway.”

The sacrifice, of life at least, was accepted, and prolonged
for fifty-six years in prison and exile, within the limitations of
which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was faithful to a worldwide, incessant or
the beating of the heart, to God and man. With all who came
to Him in the Prison of ‘Alák seeking alone or wisdom, with
the countless pilgrims who in the end found their way to that
prison, in a vast correspondence with East and West, day and
night He labored. He took no rest, allowing Himself but
two or three hours of sleep. Even beyond those fifty-six years
was the sacrifice prolonged. When the construction of His
Institutions opened for His world apprentices, as He
traveled throughout Europe and America, His door stood open
from dawn to midnight. High and low looked at that door
and none was turned away.

Years of those years of exile were passed at the side of His Father, at times in a close imprisonment all but inseparable to the flesh. It was in 'Abkh, Syria, a Turkish penal colony, that Bahá'í'íh and His family spent these darkest days, confined in a fortress—He and His Son in chains. To this penal colony more than seventy disciples had chosen to follow their beloved Lord, accompanying Him from Akbará, preferring captivity with Him to freedom in their own homes. And now, in the fortress "Barracks" of 'Abkh, during a period of two years, there were all hurled into one room, men, women and children, with the delicately reared family of Bahá'í'íh. The room had an adjoining clove, in which Bahá'í'íh was placed.

In the stories we have of those days, through all the incredible physical misery we hear the high ring of 'Abkh's-Bahá'í'íh going cheering His fellow-prisoners. We see Him moving with His own hands the sick and the dying among them, as many—in that one room—fall victims to dreaded contagious diseases. When the jailers fastened chains upon Him, we can see the sweetness of His tears answering their astonished question: "How is it you laugh and sing when prisoners treated in this way usually cry-out, wail and lament?" "I rejoice because you are doing me a great kindness, you are making me very happy. For a long time I have wished to know the feelings of a prisoner in truth, to experience what other men have been subjected to. I have heard of this, but you have taught me what it is. You have given me this opportunity. Therefore I sing and am very happy. I am very thankful to you."

To skip years—one of His daughters gave me a little vignette of the bombardment of Haifa during the last war. "When it began," she said, "the Master gathered us all around Him and told us some exhilarating stories that we forgot the guns."

Human experience, bitter at best—for His vision to the degree of fervor:—He accepted with divine gallantry, an ecstatic secret realization. To the believers at Mount Lebanon singled out at this time for martyrdom, He wrote: "Let things go by with a smile. . . . This is not the first blood that has been shed on the plain of Karball."

From the text we find 'Abdu'l-Bahá delivered and endowed with a strange power. While His Father was still in the dungeons in Tiflis and 'Abdu'l-Bahá but eight years old, the wife of Bahá'u'lláh, returning one day from her sister's house in which she went daily in the hope of receiving news of her husband, found her little son in the street, surrounded by a band of older boys who had gathered to make a game. "He was standing upright as an arrow in their midst, quietly commanding them not to lay hands on Him. 'Which, strange to say,' the story ends, 'they seemed unable to do.'"

Another picture of this commanding power comes down to us from His early youth. At that time the most terrible crisis which Bahá'u'lláh and His family ever had to meet, developed in Adrianople, where again they were on the eve of banishment. A banishment far more cruel than the three that had preceded it, for now this uniquely sacred family was to be torn asunder, Bahá'u'lláh sent to a distant city, a secret destination, His wife and children to another secret destination; forever parted, and forever lost, one to the other. 'Abdu'l-Bahá sought out the officials. Again and again He went to them. What he said has not been recorded—only that "He pleaded", "He persisted", and that the officials "seemed unable to put the measure into execution." While this measure was pending, news of it reached the believers of Adrianople and they rushed in a body to the house of Bahá'u'lláh, driven at the thought of separation from Him. One old man seized a knife and crying, "If I must be separated from my Lord, I

will go now and join my God," cut his throat. A scene of wild confusion followed, during which a cordon of police surrounded the frenzied crowd and bravely attempted to control it. It was then that 'Abdu'l-Bahá suddenly appeared in their midst. We saw a lightning flash of power, a supernatural force, as we read of His "compassion and vehement wrath", dismissing the frenzy of the police, demanding the presence of the governor. "We had sworn before," said His son, in telling the story, "that my brother angry." So swift was the effect of this sage that the governor was at once sent for. He hastened to the scene and, witnessing it, said: "We cannot separate these people. It is impossible."

Thus it was that seventy devotees found themselves imprisoned in one room with their Divine Beloved.

We are told that from the hour of Bahá'u'lláh's first Declaration made to His little Son, this Son "seemed to combine Himself His Father's special attendant and servant." At that tender age in Baghdad, His first thought was to protect His Father. With an ingenuity that melted the heart, He made a shield of His own young body to ward off the missiles and, while Bahá'u'lláh was writing those sacred Tablets which are destined to guide a world, to guard His entrance from intruders.

As 'Abdu'l-Bahá grew into early manhood in Baghdad it is said His beauty was so great that when He walked in the street ladies prostrated by their lattices threw roses on Him. Only a few years later we find Him in chains in the fortress of 'Akká.

As the years went by this imprisonment in 'Akká became less and less rigorous, for no government could resist the unearthly attractive power which radiated from their captive, Father and Son. Yet they were never wholly out of danger. Time after time disturbances brought about with the Persians

and Turkish governments threatened them with death. Always confined within the walls of 'Akka, at first in the Barracks, later in a small house, later still in one floor of a house, they were permitted after some years to walk in the streets of that walled white prison-city, treeless, hot, unshaded. Another long period of pain and Hell, twelve miles from 'Akka, was included in their episode of slavery. Toward the close of His life, Bahá'í'ah lived in Bahjí, a beautiful country-place on the sea near 'Akka. Its name, chosen by Him, means Joy.

SEVENTEENTH OR EIGHTEENTH

The earthly life of Bahá'í'ah ended in 1892, and from the hour when His Will and Testament was read, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was recognized as the Center and Pivot of His Covenant.

"Thus knowest, O My God," Bahá'í'ah prays, "that I desire for Him naught except that which Thou dost desire and have chosen Him for no purpose save that for which Thou hast intended Him."

In this unparalleled institution, the Covenant, of which 'Abdu'l-Bahá is appointed the Center and the sole Interpreter of the Words of Bahá'í'ah, in which the Bahá'ís are required to turn to this Center in perfect obedience (that obedience which only love evokes), we find the great stronghold of the Bahá'í Faith. For this function of sole Interpreter implies the reading of the sacred Books by the same divine light that revealed them, and guards the Faith forever from those actions which have rent other religious systems into chaotic ruins.

And now, in His clear and positive explanations of His Father's Will, in His firm insistence that all Bahá'ís strictly adhere to its provisions, we see again in 'Abdu'l-Bahá a power of strength and commanding power.

For there is nothing more vital to the Faith of Bahá'í'ah than the preservation of its unity. A religion which has for its

where the establishment of the Cause of Mankind must be in itself an organic unity and must, like a sound body, served by all its cells, remain a living unit through its all-pervading Spirit.

On the subject of the Covenant 'Abdi'-'Abdi writes, among many other statements: "Were it not for the protecting power of the Covenant to guard the impregnable fort of the Cause of God, there would arise among the Bahá'ís, in one day, a thousand different sects, as was the case in former ages, but in this Eternal Dispensation, for the sake of permanency of the Cause of God and the avoidance of dissension amongst the people of God, His Blessed Beauty (may my life be a sacrifice to Him) has through the Supreme Pen written the Covenant and Testament; He appointed a Center, the Foundation of the Book and the Arsenal of disputes. Whosoever is written by Him is conformable to truth and under the protection of the Blessed Beauty. He is infallible."

"As to the most great characteristic, and it is a specific teaching of the Revelation of Bahá'í'í and not given by any of the Prophets of the Past,—it is the teaching concerning the Center of the Covenant. By giving the teaching concerning the Center of the Covenant, He made a provision against all kinds of differences, so that no man should be able to create a new sect."

"My purpose is to convey to you that it is your duty to guard the Religion of God, so that none shall be able to amend it verbally or secretly. If you see injurious teachings coming from an individual, no matter who that individual may be, even though He be my own son, know ye verily that I am quit of him."

Thus surely speaks "the Letter of the East", who in Himself would script no title but that of the servant, in protection of the Covenant of Bahá'í'í.

We met an ‘Abd’l-Baki, through the appointment of Bahá’ílik, as authorized Authority to all who profess themselves believers. Yet the great import of this appointment was not fully revealed till the accession of ‘Abd’l-Baki Humád, when in His own Will and Testament was found the amazing counsel to His Fisher’s Will, the further unfolding of the Master-Plan—the Plan of the Divine Revelation for a New World Order.

This we will consider later. Let us now turn to other passages in the sacred writings of Bahá’ílik relating to ‘Abd’l-Baki’s station of Mystery. For the station of the Bahá’ís to their Source of light is of a two-fold nature: a strict obedience to the same laws through which order will be restored in a chaotic world, and obedience to those same laws of Spirit, exemplified in the Being of ‘Abd’l-Baki. Without this last deepest obedience the Form, however imposing its structure, can never give life to the world.

“Look at me,” said ‘Abd’l-Baki—and were but He could do so too—“Look at me, follow me, for as I am, take no thought for yourselves or your lives, whether ye eat or whether ye sleep, whether ye are comfortable, whether ye are well or ill, whether ye are with friends or lonely . . . for all these things ye must care not at all. Look at me and be as I am, ye must die to yourselves and to the world that ye may be born again and enter the kingdom of heaven. Behold a candle, how it gives its light. It weeps as life away drop by drop in order to give forth its flame of light.”

Of Him, in the Tablet of the Branch, Bahá’ílik wrote: “Blessed thanks unto God, O people, for His appointment, for verily He is the most great Favor unto you, the most perfect beauty upon you, and through Him every manifestation here is witnessed. Whoso turneth towards Him hath turned towards God, and whoso turneth away from Him hath turned

away from My Beauty, repulsed My Proud and transgressed against Me. He is the Trust of God amongst you, His charge within you, His manifestation unto you and His appearance among His favored servants. . . . We have sent Him down in the form of a human tongue."

In other Tablets addressed to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'u'lláh writes in His own hand:

"We pray God to illumine the world through Thy knowledge and wisdom." And in another: "The Glory of God rest upon Thee and upon whosoever serveth Thee and dwelleth around Thee." "We have made Thee a shelter for all mankind, a shield unto all who are in heaven and earth, a stronghold for whosoever hath believed in God, the Incomparable, the All-knowing."

"Peace be to Him," again writes Bahá'u'lláh to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who had set forth for Beirut, "Who hath honored the land of Bâ (Beirut) through the footsteps of Him and Whom all names involve. . . . Blessed, doubly blessed, is the ground which His footsteps have trodden, the eye that hath been cleared by the treasury of His countenance, the ear that hath been honored by harkening to His call, the heart that hath felt the sweetness of His love." In this same Tablet Bahá'u'lláh refers to His Son as "The great, the most mighty Branch of God—His sacred and inviolable Mystery."

Speaking from the heights of His divine humility, and from His knowledge of the essence of His station of servitude, 'Abdu'l-Bahá interprets the Tablet of the Branch thus: "I affirm that the true meaning, the real significance, the innermost secret of these verses, of these very words, in my own servitude to the sacred Threshold of the Abhá Beauty, my complete self-effacement, my utter subjugation before Him. This is my explanation, my most precious utterance." And, in the connection, as the Guardian will see, He writes

"I am, according to the explicit words of the *Quill of Justice* and the *Kitáb-i-'Abd*, the manifest Interpreter of the Word of God. . . . Whom deviates from my interpretation is a victim of his own fancy."

Even should we dare, in the face of such statements, to attempt to lift the veil lowered by a divine hand—to pry into the forbidden—we are wholly incapable of understanding, much less interpreting, these words of Bahá'íth that refer to the Mystery of God. Yet *enmarrat* is not forbidden and the Master Himself has shown us the way to *enmarrat*.

"Turn with thy heart unto the heart of 'Abdu'l-Bahá," He, Himself, writes, "and then this concealed fact will be disclosed, the Hidden Mystery [is] revealed to thee." "O ye friends! Turn the mirrors of your hearts toward me. Unquestionably the mysteries of this heart shall be reflected upon these hearts and the creations of this hoping one shall become manifest and evident." "I am the lamp and the love of God is my light. The light hath become reflected in the mirrors of hearts. Therefore turn thou into thy heart, that is, when it is in the utmost freedom, and behold! how the radiance of my love is manifest in that mirror and thou art now united me. . . . Turn thou unto the Kingdom of Allah, until thou mayest comprehend my mysteries."

IN THE HOUSE OF 'AMU'L-BAHÁ

In the continued activities of meditation and service, in that unity (or understanding expressed through prayer, and that other form of unity, the embrace of passing our lives on His sublime life—and in unity with one another)—lies the secret of approach to this veiled Figure in the radiant heart of the *Compass* which Bahá'íth has taken with his followers. Hence too also the secret whereby our Faith may burn through the thick darkness of the world around us. For

we fill our lives with glowing examples, not till the love of which His heart is the channel to "speakers sanctifying homes" is reflected into our own hearts, not till we love as those early heroes, the Dawn-Breakers, loved, not till the mirrored image of 'Alibi's-Bibi, God's "charge within us", usually "zandi vobis" us, will we realize that justice which alone can change the world.

Let us look once more into our beloved Exemplar's life. First, another fleeting glance into that life bounded by prison walls and yet unlimited; then into His days of freedom when, the doors of His prison having opened through the downfall of two empires, His royal jailers—the Sultan of Turkey, the Shah of Persia—He went forth into the world, the Pioneer of progress, embodying in His every act, before the eyes of Europe and America, the Holy Teachings His disciples spread.

In 'Alibi He was known as the Father of the Poor. Once a week He gathered into His garden the orphans, the blind and the lame. Here He would walk up and down among them, with His majestic tread and His tender ways, passing before each one in cultured dress, to give to each one some special word of cheer, taking even leave and His army. He would then press into the palm of each man's hand to massage him till his next visit. For as He wittily said to a friend who questioned the wisdom of charity: "Assuredly give to the poor. If you give them nothing but words, when they put their hands into their pockets after you have gone, they will find themselves none the richer for you."

This moving scene in the garden has been witnessed by many Western pilgrims. It happened once a week, on Friday. Then He called the poor and the suffering to Him. On every day and night He went to them, seeking them out Himself in their own wretched hovels. One of the Persian be-

having said to me: "There is not an ally to 'Alī! I do not know, for a prince only, for I have followed the footsteps of my Lord."

Monstrously cruel against, but great was His to claim the right to forgive. In His almost off-hand handling, with of a cruelty, in the unfeeling overtones with which He ignored it, it was as though He said: Forgiveness belongs only to God.

An example of this was His memorable meeting with the royal prince, Zillih Saljūq, brother of the Shāh of Persia, Mubarrak 'Alī Shāh. Not alone 'Abd'Ū-Bakī, but a great number of His followers, had after trial of Bakī's martyr, had suffered more than death at the hands of these two princes. When the downfall of the Shāh, with that of the Saljūq of Turkey, set 'Abd'Ū-Bakī at liberty, 'Abd'Ū-Bakī, beginning His journey through Europe, went first to Thonon-le-Bain on the Lake of Geneva. The exiled Shāh was then somewhere in Europe; Zillih-Saljūq, also in exile with his two sons, had fled to Geneva. Thus 'Abd'Ū-Bakī, the emancipated and free, and Zillih-Saljūq, the fugitive, were almost within a stone's throw of each other.

In the suite of 'Abd'Ū-Bakī was a distinguished European who had visited Persia and there met Zillih Saljūq. One day when the European was standing on the balustraded terrace of the hotel in Thonon and 'Abd'Ū-Bakī was passing to and fro at a little distance, Zillih Saljūq approached the terrace. 'Abd'Ū-Bakī was wearing, as always, the turban, the long white belted robe and long 'alā of Persia. His hair, according to the ancient custom of the Persian nobility, shaved to His shoulder. Zillih Saljūq, after greeting the European, immediately asked:

"Who is that Persian nobleman?"

"'Abd'Ū-Bakī."

"Take me to Him?"

In describing the same later, the European said:

"If you could have heard the wretch mauling his miserable victims!"

But 'Abdu'l-Bahá took the prison as His arms:

"All that is of the past," He answered, "Never think of it again. Seal your eye when to see me. I want to meet your eyes."

They came, one at a time. Each spent a day with the Master. The first, though an insensitive lay, nevertheless showed Him great devotion. The second, child and more sensitive, left the room of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, weaver he had been recruited alone, weeping unaccountably.

"If only I could be born again," he said, "into any other family than mine."

For not only had every Bahá'í been martyred during his uncle's reign (upwards of a hundred by his father's incitement), and the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá threatened again and again, but his grandfather, Násir-Ud-Dín Sháh, had ordered the execution of the Báb, as well as the seizure and death of thousands of Bahá'ís.

The young prince was "born again"—a Bahá'í.

Shortly before the meeting of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the brother of the Sháh, the Master had passed through the greatest crisis of His life, when the Sultan, 'Abdu'l-Majid, was on the very brink of issuing an order for His execution.⁴ An investigating committee had been sent from Constantinople to try 'Abdu'l-Bahá for treason and had pronounced Him guilty. But it was while they were still on the way on their way back to Constantinople that the young Turks rose overnight and dethroned the Sultan. During those days of waiting for death on the cross, the Italian consul conceived a plan to rescue 'Abdu'l-Bahá by spirited Him away on an Italian ship. But in telling the story afterward 'Abdu'l-Bahá said:

"I thought: The Bahá'í did not run away; Bahá'u'lláh did not run away and how neither will I run away; I will not deliver myself. Then God delivered me! The command of God sounded before the palace of 'Abdu'l-Bahá!'"

Throughout Europe and America for the greater part of three years—1911, 1912 and 1913—was 'Abdu'l-Bahá, upholding with His magic eloquence the Teachings of His Father, speaking on the platform of every church university, synagogue and progressive movement, calling the world to a realization of its essential human soul to the establishment of universal peace, warning the world of the terrible ways to come should it fail to turn toward peace—and God, serving unnumbered individuals, shaking the hearts by His dynamic Love, causing many to a momentary realization. How few may have been that generation to have fallen again into so sound a sleep!

The effect of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on those multitudes who saw and heard Him cannot be promised other results. As He walked among the people, an immortal in a less than human world, with His ineffable beauty, His unutilizing power, His strange, unearthly majesty, eyes full of wonder followed Him.

The poet, Khalil Gibran, said: "For the first time I was born noble enough to be the recipient for Holy Spirit!"

An infidel went to a church to hear Him speak and later eagerly sought Him at His home. When this scholar was asked: "Did you feel the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá?" he indignantly replied: "Would you feel the presence of Niagara?"

Those who met Him perceived no more than their country could register. A society woman exclaimed: "Such beauty—the beauty of strength! And such charm! Why, He is a perfect man of the world!" And another society woman who had talked at length with Him: "You can take nothing from Him! He looked into my heart and discovered all its secrets."

A woman in sorrow, passing through a cruel experience,

said: "He took all the bitterness out of my heart." A Danish playwright, when he came from the court of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, declared: "I have been in the presence of God!" And Lee McClung, then Treasurer of the United States, after his meeting with the Master, groping for words to describe it, said:

"I felt as if I were in the presence of a great Prophet—Isaiah—Elijah—no, that is not it. The presence of Christ—no. I felt as if I were in the presence of my Divine Father."

The Turkish ambassador, Zia Pasha, a devout Muslim, when told of the advent of Bahá'í Faith, had scoffed at the thought of a new Prophet. But while 'Abdu'l-Bahá was in Washington Zia Pasha met Him at the Persian Embassy, served by His Excellency Ali-Kuli Khan, and Madame Khan, and immediately arranged a dinner to be given in His honor at the Turkish Embassy. At this dinner the ambassador was, seeing 'Abdu'l-Bahá with trust in his eyes, named Him as "The Light of the age, Who has come to spread His glory and perfection among us."

These are only a few examples of the response of the people to the Mystery of God which I myself witnessed in 1911.

After the Master's return to Syria, during the years of the last World War and under the last emperor son of Gallias, He, though well over seventy, Himself ploughed the wilderness of His estate there, that the starving people might have bread.

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá succeeded in 1921 to His "original abode", plunging the Bahá'í world here and there as it only felt now in an age, when doubts obscure their Lord, His last Will and Testament came as a complete surprise, an instantaneous bounty to His confused and doubting believers. For in it He appointed His own grandson, the beloved Shoghi Effendi, as the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith and His successor as sole Interpreter of the sacred Books. So we found our Faith still

independent from nations and Governments—all led through a Final Power of "inspiring guidance".

"The mighty stronghold," 'Abdu'l-Bahá says in that most powerful Decree, His Will, "shall remain impregnable and safe through obedience to him who is the Guardian of the Cause of God." "It is incumbent upon the members of the House of Justice, the Aghya, the Aftab, the Heads of the Cause of God, to show their obedience, submission and subordination unto the Guardian of the Cause of God." "He is the Interpreter of the Word of God and after Him will succeed the first-born of his loyal descendants." "Salvation and praise, blessing and glory be upon . . . them that have believed, faith secured, and steadfast in His Covenant and followed the Light that after my passing shined from the Dazzling of Divine Guidance—for behold! he is the best and surest hope that hath branched from the Tree Holy Tree. Will it be with him that which the scales of His scale that ever shalldureth all mankind."

THE KEYS TO THE GATE

Shoghi Effendi tells us: "It was 'Abdu'l-Bahá Who, through the provision of His mighty Will and Testament, has forged the vital link which must forever connect the age that has just expired [the "glorious and heroic Apostolic Age"] with the one we now live in—the Transitional and Formative period of the Bahá'í Faith. . . ." "His Will and Testament should be regarded as the perpetual, the indissoluble link which the mind of Him Who is the Mystery of God has contrived in order to insure the continuity of the three ages that constitute the component parts of the Bahá'í Dispensation" (The Apostolic, the Formative and the Golden Age.) "The creative energies released by the Law of Bahá'u'lláh, permeating and evolving within the mind of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, have,

by their very impact and close inter-action, given birth to an instrument which may be viewed as the Charter of the New World Order, which is at once the glory and the promise of this most great Dispensation. The Will may thus be achieved as the inevitable offspring resulting from the mystic intercourse between Him Who commissioned the governing influence of His divine Purpose and the One Who was its vehicle and chosen recipient.*

As we read in the Will the boldly outlined pattern of a New World Order "which", in the words of the Guardian, "has enshrined in the Teachings of Bahá'í-íshih," we are reminded of passages in Isaiah: "and the Government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end. . . ." and, "Wherever the light of the moon shall be on the light of the sun and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that Jehovah shalleth up the horn of His people and shalleth the stroke of their wound." And in the Book of Revelation: "I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth are passed away."

Now, in this great Document, the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, we see 'Abdu'l-Bahá in yet another aspect—that of the Architect of a Divine Order through which earth will reflect the Kingdom of God Himself—rather, will be the Kingdom of God.

We of the Formative Period see only "as in a glass darkly" that future, when a hitherto world, now deluded by the plans of its leaders into unquenchable misery, will at last turn to this Divine Plan—by which we must stand in faithful adherence to its callings. We see its glory but dimly, since we may never fathomless nature man—man involved in the

man whose life will, through connection with the world of Spirit, be the recipient of divine guidance. The Universal House of Justice, acting in collaboration with the spiritual Guardian, is promised "inspiring guidance". But the continuing quest of this inspiring guidance is the Guardian, in his function of sole Interpreter of the sacred Books.

Thus, in obedience to the Guardian, which is clearly identification to the Revealed Word, is obedience to the Tablets and the Libro-Patterns of our Beloved Master, in true cooperation with will obedience to our Assemblies (the present form of the House of Justice) lies the key to our universal unity. We who believe that a group of disciples may, by the grant of God, reach such a depth of success as can enlighten this world and may form a spiritual nucleus from which the Brotherhood of Man will grow, have no choice but to obey.

We have seen 'Abdi'l-Baki, through His Will and Testament, as well as through His function of Exemplar, the "vital" and "indissoluble link" between the great age of the Babi's Messengers and Apostles, our own age and the Golden Age to come. In a letter to a believer the Guardian has been even more explicit.

"Although the bodily Temple has disappeared," he writes, "yet His Spirit, nay, the very plans and instructions He Himself laid down during His life-time, continue to operate and function in the present Administrative Era of our Faith. There is thus that eternal as well as historical continuity between the era of 'Abdi'l-Baki and the present phase of the Administrative development of the Cause. Both the Temple sanctuary and the Teaching converge now operating in North, Central and South America, which continues the two-fold task set up before the American Babi's Community under the Seven-Year Plan. Both of them have been established and upheld during the ministry of 'Abdi'l-Baki. The Seven-Year Plan is subject

but the child of that Divine Plan set up by the Master in His immortal Tablets revealed to the American believers during the darkest days of the World War, and its operation and success are therefore primarily dependent upon the faithful application of the methods and principles He Himself has defined and upon the power and position entering in His creative writings.⁷

And even to return our love to our Master, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as the Mystery of God, the Servant of God and our Exemplar:

What is the secret of the living body but the heart? What is the highest function of the heart but to be the channel of Divine Love—that Love of Love which, as we are told by Bahá'í Writings, "is never overtaken by change." And 'Abdu'l-Bahá's last words to His believers as His Will and Testament concern this mystery of love, without which none can rise to the station of servitude.

"O ye beloved of the Lord! In this divine Dispensation, conflict and contention are to no more permitted. Every aggressor deprives himself of God's grace. It is incumbent upon every one to show the utmost love, rectitude of conduct, straightforwardness and sincere kindness unto all the peoples and kindreds of the world, to thy friends or strangers. No intent must be the spirit of love and loving-kindness, that the stranger may feel himself a friend, the enemy a true brother, no difference whatsoever existing between them. For universality is of God and all limitations earthly. Thus man must strive that his reality may manifest virtues and perfections, the light ethereal may shine upon everyone. The light of the sun shineth upon all the world and the merciful discovery of Divine Providence fall upon all peoples. The vivifying breeze reviveth every living creature and all beings united with life obtain their share and portion at His heavenly board. In like manner, the effluence and loving-kindness of the servants of the

That True God must be lovingly and successfully extended to all mankind. Regarding this, restrictions and limitations are of no use permitted.

"Wherefore, O my loving friends, consort with all the peoples, kindreds and religions of the world with the genuine truthfulness, uprightness, faithfulness, kindness, good will and friendliness; that all the world of being may be filled with the holy ecstasy of the grace of Allah, that ignorance, enmity, hate and rancor may vanish from the world and the darkness and mismanagement under the peoples and kindreds of the world may give way to the Light of Unity. Should other peoples and nations be unfaithful to you, show your fidelity unto them, should they be unjust towards you, show justice towards them, should they keep aloof from you, attract them to yourself, should they show their enmity, be friendly towards them, should they poison your lives, sweeten their souls, should they inflict a wound on you, be a salve to their sores. Such are the attributes of the innocent. Such are the attributes of the truthful."

TRUE LIBERTY

We find men desiring liberty, and priding themselves therein, but measure in the depths of ignorance.

Liberty mean, in its real, full or entire, when found upon our speech. This is what you the Wise in the Kingdom, the All-Knowing. Know ye that the establishment of liberty and its spread to the universal. That which liberates man is not liberation unto such extent as will protect him from his own ignorance, and guard him against the harm of the world's-evil.

The liberty that freedom men do to be found available, with its complete growth, come God, the Eternal Truth. Whose fullness of life, existence, will rather to have it for all the freedom of men and women.

—KADÏ'KADÏ.