



'Abdu'l-Bahá

*The Center
of the Covenant*

JULIET THOMPSON

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By

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‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ

Vibrant Personality and Unique Function of the Figure Who Heralds the Golden Age

IN THESE DAYS when a civilization is dying before our very eyes, and when the great Prophet, Bahá'u'lláh, 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-captivating beauty:—the youthful Báb, His Forerunner, equal in rank with Him as an independent Revelator, and the Son of Bahá'u'lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. “‘Abdu’l-Bahá”, translated, means “Servant of the Glory”, and this is His self-assumed title. Bahá'u'lláh entitled Him “The Master”.

In the language of Shoghi Effendi, the present Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá “holds not only in the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, but in the entire field of religious history, a unique function. Though moving in a sphere of His own and holding a rank radically different from that of the Author and the Forerunner of the Bahá'í Revelation, He, by virtue of the station ordained for Him through the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh forms, together with Them, what may be termed the Three Central Figures of a Faith unapproached in the world's spiritual history. He towers, in conjunction with Them, above the destinies of this 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 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 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 'Abdu'l-Bahá 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 tremendous Figure to envision its overshadowing of the future, and are too imperfect, at our stage of development, to perceive in its fullness 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, seeing it, we adore "the Mystery". The heart made bold by love can scale great heights—though not such heights as His.

The Guardian has unveiled for us in one incomparable sentence the meaning of the title, "The Mystery of God",—leaving it, in its essence, still a mystery. "In the person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá," he says, "the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman 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 Bahá'u'lláh.

To glimpse something of the beauty of the Name, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and of the Master's choice of it, to understand why the Guardian calls it "the magic 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 GLORY

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 sun 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 unknowable 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 becomes adorned with the attributes of the Merciful." And Jesus said: "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant."

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

THE PERFECT EXEMPLAR

It is Shoghi Effendi who designates 'Abdu'l-Bahá the Perfect Man, the "Exemplar" of the Bahá'í Faith. That is, His life, in its perfection, is not only the pure example to our generation, but to a re-born human race, who will follow Bahá'u'lláh through all the future centuries till the close of His Dispensation. Man, we are told, is now in his "turbulent adolescence", about to come of age. His maturity will then

unfold, his latent spiritual powers, including more subtle senses, will appear; his unclouded reality will radiate the "new virtues". To such a race as this, unimaginable now, 'Abdu'l-Bahá will still be the Exemplar. 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 peerless and all-enfolding Covenant", let us look back into that perfect life. Let us look for a moment into His childhood, His tenth year, when a world-shaking event occurred in His presence—and His alone. This was the first Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh made in 1853 in Baghdád, where He, with His Family, then lived in exile,—the exact fulfillment of the Báb's prophecy that in "the Year Nine" (corresponding with 1853) "He Whom God would make manifest" would announce Himself.

It was in the preceding year, in Tíhrán, and in a dungeon, 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, too, sat awaiting death, bowed under heavy chains; when in a dream one night He heard these words, resounding from all sides:

"Verily, We shall render Thee victorious by Thyself and by Thy Pen. Grieve Thou not for that which hath befallen Thee, neither be Thou afraid, for Thou art in safety. Ere long will God raise up the treasures of the earth—men who will aid Thee through Thy Name, wherewith God hath revived the hearts of such as have recognized Him."

When, by the intervention of the Russian ambassador, Bahá'u'lláh was released and returned to His plundered home, and His beggared family, the nimbus of the Prophet rested

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'u'lláh, 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 Baghdád 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 servitude, incessant as the beating of the heart, to God and man. With all who came to Him in the Prison of 'Akká seeking alms 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 these fifty-six years was the sacrifice prolonged. When the commutation of His life-sentence opened for Him world opportunities, as He traveled throughout Europe and America, His door stood open from dawn to midnight. High and low flocked to that door and none was turned away.

Forty of those years of exile were passed at the side of His Father, at times in a close imprisonment all but insupportable to the flesh. It was in 'Akká, Syria, a Turkish penal colony, that Bahá'u'lláh 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 Adrianople, preferring captivity with Him to freedom in their own homes. And now, in the terrible "Barracks" of 'Akká, during a period of two years, these were all herded into one room, men, women and children, with the delicately reared family of Bahá'u'lláh. The room had an adjoining alcove, in which Bahá'u'lláh was placed.

In the stories we have of those days, through all the intolerable physical misery we hear the high ring of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's gaiety cheering His fellow-prisoners. We see Him nursing with His own hands the sick and the dying among them, as many—in that one room—fell victims to dreadful contagious diseases. When the jailers fastened chains upon Him, we can sense the sweetness of His tones answering their astonished question: "How is it you laugh and sing when prisoners ironed in this way usually cry out, weep 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 irons, to experience what other men have been subjected to. I have heard of this; now 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 such enchanting stories that we forgot the guns."

Human experience, bitter at best—for Him raised to the degree of torture — He accepted with divine gallantry, an ecstatic secret exultation. To the believers of Mázindarán, singled out at the 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 Karbilá."

From the first we find 'Abdu'l-Bahá decisive and endowed with a strange power. While His Father was still in the dungeon in Tíhrán and 'Abdu'l-Bahá but eight years old, the wife of Bahá'u'lláh, returning one day from her sister's house to 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 molest Him. "He was standing straight 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 united 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, frantic 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 brutally

attempted to control it. It was then that 'Abdu'l-Bahá suddenly appeared in their midst. We sense a lightning flash of power, a superhuman force, as we read of His "impassioned and vehement words", denouncing the cruelty of the police, demanding the presence of the governor. "We had never before," said His sister, in telling the story, "seen my brother angry." So swift was the effect of this anger that the governor was at once sent for. He hurried 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 constitute Himself His Father's special attendant and servant." At that tender age in Baghdád, His first thought was to protect His Father. With an eagerness that moves the heart, He made a shield of His own young body to ward off the insincere and, while Bahá'u'lláh sat writing those sacred Books which are destined to guide a world, to guard His seclusion from intruders.

As 'Abdu'l-Bahá grew into early manhood in Baghdád it is said His beauty was so great that when He walked in the street ladies screened 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 governor could resist the unearthly attractive power which radiated from their captives, Father and Son. Yet they were never wholly out of danger. Time after time disturbances brought about with the Persian and Turkish governments threatened them with death. Always confined within the walls of 'Akká, at first in the

Barracks, later in a small house, later still on one floor of a house, they were permitted after some years to walk in the streets of that stark white prison-city, treeless, hot, malarial. Another long period of years and Haifa, twelve miles from 'Akká, was included in their sphere of liberty. Toward the close of His life, Bahá'u'lláh lived in Bahjí, a beautiful country-place on the sea near 'Akká. Its name, chosen by Him, means Joy.

STRONGHOLD OF THE FAITH

The earthly life of Bahá'u'lláh 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.

"Thou knowest, O My God," Bahá'u'lláh prays, "that I desire for Him naught except that which Thou didst desire and have chosen Him for no purpose save that for which Thou hadst 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'u'lláh, 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 Baha'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 schisms which have rent other religious systems into countless sects.

And now, in His clear and incisive 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 tower of strength and commanding power.

For there is nothing more vital to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh

than the preservation of its unity. A religion which has for its object the establishment of the Oneness 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 'Abdu'l-Bahá 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 Blessed Dispensation, for the sake of permanency of the Cause of God and the avoidance of dissension amongst the people of God, the 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 Exponent of the Book and the Annnuller of disputes. Whatsoever 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'u'lláh 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 assail it outwardly or inwardly. 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 sternly speaks "the Lover of the East", who for Him-

self would accept no title but that of the Servant, in protection of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh.

We now see 'Abdu'l-Bahá, through the appointment of Bahá'u'lláh, as embodied Authority to all who profess themselves believers. Yet the great import of this appointment was not fully revealed till the ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself, when in His own Will and Testament was found the amazing sequel to His Father's Will, the further unfolding of the Master-Plan—the Plan of the Divine Revelator for a New World Order.

This we will consider later. Let us now turn to other passages in the sacred writings of Bahá'u'lláh referring to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's station of Mystery. For the obedience of the Bahá'ís to their Source of light is of a two-fold nature: a strict obedience to the outer laws through which order will be restored in a chaotic world, and obedience to those inner laws of Spirit, exemplified in the Being of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Without this last deepest obedience the form, however imposing its structure, can never give life to the world.

"Look at me," said 'Abdu'l-Bahá—and none but He could dare say this—"Look at me, follow me, be 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 foes; . . . 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 its life away drop by drop in order to give forth its flame of light."

Of Him, in the Tablet of the Branch, Bahá'u'lláh writes:

"Render thanks unto God, O people, for His appearance; for verily He is the *most great* Favor unto you, the most per-

fect bounty upon you, and through Him every mouldering bone is quickened. Whoso turneth towards Him hath turned towards God, and whoso turneth away from Him hath turned away from My Beauty, repudiated My Proof 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 temple."

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 circleth 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."

"Praise be to Him," again writes Bahá'u'lláh to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who had set forth for Beirut, "Who hath honored the land of Bá (Beirut) through the footsteps of Him round Whom all names revolve. . . . Blessed, doubly blessed, is the ground which His footsteps have trodden, the eye that hath been cheered by the beauty of His countenance, the ear that hath been honored by hearkening 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 ancient and immutable 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, is my own

servitude to the sacred Threshold of the Abhá Beauty, my complete self-effacement, my utter nothingness before Him. This is my resplendent crown, my most precious adorning." And, in this connection, as the Guardian tells us, He writes: "I am, according to the explicit texts of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and the Kitáb-i-'Ahd, the manifest Interpreter of the Word of God. . . . Whoso 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'u'lláh that refer to the Mystery of God. Yet *awareness* is not forbidden and the Master Himself has shown us the way to awareness.

"Turn with thy breast unto the heart of 'Abdu'l-Bahá," He, Himself, writes, "and then this concealed fact will be disclosed, the Hidden Mystery [be] unveiled to thee." "O ye friends! Turn the mirrors of your hearts toward mine. Unquestionably the mysteries of this heart shall be reflected upon those hearts and the emotions of this longing 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 unto 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 near unto me. . . . Turn thou unto the Kingdom of Abhá, until thou mayest comprehend my mysteries."

IN THE IMAGE OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ

In the combined activities of meditation and service, in the outcry for understanding expressed through prayer, and that other form of outcry, the endeavor to pattern our lives

on His sublime life—and in unity with one another—lies the secret of approach to this veiled Figure in the midmost heart of the Covenant which Bahá'u'lláh has taken with his believers. Herein lies also the secret whereby our Faith may burn through the thick darkness of the world around us. For not till our lives become glowing examples, not till the love of which His heart is the channel to “quicken mouldering bones” is reflected into our own hearts; not till we love as those early heroes, the Dawn-Breakers, loved; not till the mirrored image of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, God’s “charge within us”, actually “*stands within*” us, will we radiate that power 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 sovereigns, His royal jailers—the Sultán of Turkey, the Sháh of Persia—He went forth into the world, the Pioneer of pioneers, embodying in His every act, before the eyes of Europe and America, the Holy Teachings His eloquence spread.

In ‘Akká He was known as the Father of the Poor. Once a week He gathered into His garden the maim, the halt, the blind and the lepers. Here He would walk up and down among them, with His majestic tread and His tender ways, pausing before each one to embrace him, to give to each one some special word of cheer, taking even lepers into His arms. He would then press into the palm of each money enough to sustain 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. But every day and night He went to them, seeking them out Himself in their own wretched hovels. One of the Persian believers said to me: "There is not an alley in 'Akká I do not know, nor a prison cell, for I have followed the footsteps of my Lord."

Monstrously sinned against, too great was He to claim the right to forgive. In His almost off-hand brushing aside of a cruelty, in the ineffable sweetness 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, Zillah Sultán, brother of the Sháh of Persia, Muḥammad 'Alí Sháh. Not alone 'Abdu'l-Bahá, but a great number of His followers, band after band of Bahá'í martyrs, had suffered worse than death at the hands of these two princes. When the downfall of the Sháh, with that of the Sultán of Turkey, set 'Abdu'l-Bahá at liberty, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, beginning His journey through Europe, went first to Thonon-les-Bains on the Lake of Geneva. The exiled Sháh was then somewhere in Europe; Zillah-Sultán, also in exile with his two sons, had fled to Geneva. Thus 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the exonerated and free, and Zillah Sultán, the fugitive, were almost within a stone's throw of each other.

In the suite of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was a distinguished European who had visited Persia and there met Zillah Sultán. One day when the European was standing on the balustraded terrace of the hotel in Thonon and 'Abdu'l-Bahá was pacing to and fro at a little distance, Zillah Sultán approached the terrace.

'Abdu'l-Bahá was wearing, as always, the turban, the long white belted robe and long 'abá of Persia. His hair, according to the ancient custom of the Persian nobility, flowed to His shoulders. Zillah Sulṭán, after greeting the European, immediately asked:

"Who is that Persian nobleman?"

" 'Abdu'l-Bahá."

"Take me to Him."

In describing the scene later, the European said:

"If you could have heard the wretch mumbling his miserable excuses!"

But 'Abdu'l-Bahá took the prince in His arms.

"All that is of the past," He answered, "Never think of it again. Send your two sons to see me. I want to meet your sons."

They came, one at a time. Each spent a day with the Master. The first, though an immature boy, nevertheless showed Him great deference. The second, older and more sensitive, left the room of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, where he had been received alone, weeping uncontrollably.

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

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

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

Shortly before this meeting of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the brother of the Sháh, the Master had passed through the

greatest crisis of His life, when the Sultán, 'Abdu'l-Ḥamíd, was on the very brink of issuing an order for His execution. 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 sea on their way back to Constantinople that the young Turks rose overnight and dethroned the Sultán. During those days of waiting for death on the cross, the Spanish consul conceived a plan to rescue 'Abdu'l-Bahá by spiriting Him away on an Italian ship. But in telling the story afterward 'Abdu'l-Bahá said:

"I thought: The Báb did not run away; Bahá'u'lláh did not run away and now neither will I run away. I will not deliver myself. Then God delivered me! The cannon of God boomed before the palace of 'Abdu'l-Ḥamíd!"

Throughout Europe and America for the greater part of three years—1911, 1912 and 1913—went 'Abdu'l-Bahá, uplifting with His magic eloquence the Teachings of His Father, speaking on the platform of many churches, universities, synagogues and progressive movements, calling the world to a realization of its essential oneness and to the establishment of universal peace, *warning* the world of the terrible wars to come should it fail to turn toward peace—and God; serving innumerable individuals; shaking the hearts by His dynamic Love; rousing many to a momentary wakefulness. How drowsy must 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 certainly promised other results. As He walked among the people, an Immortal in a less than human world, with His ineffable beauty, His scintillating power, His strange, unearthly majesty, eyes full of wonder followed Him.

The poet, Kahlil Gibran, said: "For the first time I saw form noble enough to be the receptacle for Holy Spirit!"

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

Those who met Him perceived no more than their capacity 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 hide 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 famous playwright, when he came from the room 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 Muḥammadan, when told of the advent of Bahá'u'lláh, 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, invited 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 rose and, facing 'Abdu'l-Bahá with tears in his eyes, toasted 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 1912.

After the Master's return to Syria, during the years of the first World War and under the hot summer sun of Galilee, He, though well over seventy, Himself ploughed the wheat-fields of His estate there, that the starving people might have bread.

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá ascended in 1921 to His "original abode", plunging the Bahá'í world into such grief as is only felt once in an age, when disciples mourn their Lord, His last Will and Testament came as a complete surprise, an inestimable bounty to His confused and desolate 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 safeguarded from schisms and dissensions—still led through a Focal Point of "unerring guidance".

"The mighty stronghold," 'Abdu'l-Bahá says in that most powerful Document, 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 Aghsán, the Afnán, the Hands of the Cause of God, to show their obedience, submissiveness 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 lineal descendants." "Salutation and praise, blessing and glory be upon . . . them that have believed, rested assured, stood steadfast in His Covenant and followed the Light that after my passing shineth from the Dayspring of Divine Guidance—for behold! he is the blest and sacred bough that hath branched from the Twin Holy

Trees. Well is it with him that seeketh the shelter of His shade that overshadoweth all mankind."

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Shoghi Effendi tells us: "It was 'Abdu'l-Bahá Who, through the provisions of His weighty 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 conceived 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 acclaimed as the inevitable offspring resulting from the mystic intercourse between Him Who communicated the generating 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, "lies enshrined in the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh," 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, "Moreover the light of the

moon shall be as 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 bindeth up the hurt of His people and healeth 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 bankrupt world, now deluded by the plans of its leaders into incomparable misery, will at last turn to the Divine Plan—by which we must build in faithful adherence to its sublimity. We see its glory but dimly, since its very nature foreshadows mature man—man evolved to the state where his soul, through connection with the world of Spirit, is the recipient of divine guidance. The Universal House of Justice, acting in collaboration with the inspired Guardian, is promised "unerring guidance". But the culminating point of this unerring guidance is the Guardian, in his function of sole Interpreter of the sacred Books.

Thus, in obedience to the Guardian, which is clearly obedience to the Revealed Word, in obedience to the Tablets and the Life-Pattern of our Beloved Master, in true co-operation with and obedience to our Assemblies (the present form of the Houses of Justice) lies the key to our essential unity. We who believe that a group of disciples may, by the grace of God, sound such a depth of oneness as can stabilize the world and may form a spiritual nucleus from which the Brotherhood of Man will grow, have no choice but to obey.

We have seen 'Abdu'l-Bahá, through His Will and Testament, as well as through His function of Exemplar, the "vital" and "indissoluble link" between the great age of the Bahá'í 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 Institutions He Himself laid down during His life-time, continue to operate and function in the present Administrative Era of our Faith. There is thus close doctrinal as well as historical continuity between the era of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the present phase of the Administrative development of the Cause. Both the Temple enterprise and the Teaching campaign now operating in North, Central and South America, which constitute the two-fold task set up before the American Bahá'í Community under the Seven-Year Plan, were established and launched during the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The Seven-Year Plan is indeed 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 first 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 guidance centering in His creative writings."

And now to return once more to our Master, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as the Mystery of God, the Servant of God and our Exemplar.

What is the servant of the living body but the heart? What is the highest function of the heart but to be the channel of Divine Love?—that Law of Love which, as we are told by Bahá'u'lláh, "is never overtaken by change." And 'Abdu'l-Bahá's last words to His believers in 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 sacred Dispensation, conflict and contention are in no wise permitted. Every aggressor deprives himself of God's grace. It is incumbent upon everyone to show the utmost love, rectitude of conduct, straightforwardness and sincere kindness unto all the peoples and kindreds of the world, be they friends or strangers. So intense must be the spirit of love and lovingkindness, that the stranger may find 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 whereof may shine upon everyone. The light of the sun shineth upon all the world and the merciful showers of Divine Providence fall upon all peoples. The vivifying breeze reviveth every living creature and all beings endued with life obtain their share and portion at His heavenly board. In like manner, the affections and loving-kindness of the servants of the One True God must be bountifully and universally extended to all mankind. Regarding this, restrictions and limitations are in no wise permitted.

"Wherefore, O my loving friends, consort with all the peoples, kindreds and religions of the world with the utmost 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 Bahá, that ignorance, enmity, hate and rancor may vanish from the world and the darkness and estrangement amidst 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 sincere! Such are the attributes of the truthful.”