

The Choice of the West for 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Epoch-making Trip

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A child born in Tehran in 1844 had to leave His homeland at the age of nine and live the rest of His life in exile. Fifty-five years later the political landscape in Iran and Turkey, the countries responsible for His exile and confinement, changed and sealed the fate of the despotic regimes in those countries. As a result, He gained his freedom and undertook a long and arduous journey to lands far beyond His familiar environs. He traveled to areas spread over three continents of the globe, crossed seas and oceans, and used various modes of transportation to visit souls longing to see Him and to speak to people eager to hear His message. He embarked on the trip despite His old age, the risk to His failing health, a lack of material means, and the need for hasty preparations for His colossal undertaking. Although legally free, His traditional enemies watched Him closely, monitored His every movement, and did what they could to frustrate His plan. The trip, a precursor to the revelation of the Tablets of the Divine Plan, described by Shoghi Effendi "the birthright of the North American Bahá'í community"(CF 7) could not be postponed. The time was short, the project had to be accomplished regardless of the obstacles in His way and the formidable circumstances that prevailed.

The child Who spent almost all His life in exile was 'Abbás Effendi, the eldest Son of Bahá'u'lláh. In His Writings Bahá'u'lláh bestows upon Him many titles descriptive of His unique station, such as the Master, the Mystery of God, He Round Whom Revolves All Names, He Who Sprang from the Ancient Root, and so forth. After

Bahá'u'lláh passed away, 'Abbás Effendi chose 'Abdu'l-Bahá (Servant of Bahá) as His title and required His followers to address Him as such. This is the name by which He has become known throughout the Bahá'í world and in outer circles, and that is how He is addressed in this article.

The reason 'Abdu'l-Bahá went into exile at the age of nine had nothing to do with what He had done, or failed to do. His Father had accepted the Claim of the Báb, Who in 1844 declared in Shiraz that He was first of the two Manifestations of God expected in Scripture. The Báb's mission was to prepare the way for the coming of the next Manifestation of God, the Promise of All Ages. The Báb was executed in Tabriz in 1850 by firing squad. His execution, demanded by the religious establishment and government authorities in Iran, was expected to extinguish the light of His Cause, diminish the influence of His teachings, root out the new Order He had brought and intimidate those who promoted the new Faith He had authored. Mirzá Husayn-'Alí, entitled Bahá'u'lláh (Glory of God) was the Manifestation of God the Báb had preceded and Whose coming he had heralded. Bahá'u'lláh embraced the truth of the Bab's Revelation in 1844. He was the most prominent of the Báb's followers and actively promoted the Bábí Cause. His activities made Him a target for the wrath of those who were intent on eradicating the Cause of the Báb.

An attempt on the life of Nasiri'd-Din Sháh in 1852 by three Bábí youth who held him responsible for the atrocities perpetrated against their loved ones, provided the authorities with the pretext to imprison Bahá'u'lláh in mid-1852. After four months imprisonment in the Síyáh-Chál (Black Pit) of Tehran, He was ordered to leave Iran. Accompanied by the members of His immediate family, He left Iran for Baghdad, which was then under the Ottoman rule. The reason for the banishment was the perception of those in charge of the country's affairs that Iran could not enjoy rest and tranquility

while Bahá'u'lláh lived there, for prominent Bábís rallied around Him, sought His guidance and followed His advice.

When Bahá'u'lláh left Iran, He had not yet made publicly known His own Claim of being the one for whom the Báb had come to prepare the way and for whose sake He had sacrificed His life. Bahá'u'lláh's declaration of His Mission occurred ten years later in Baghdad in 1863 just prior to the time when He and His family were forced to leave Baghdad to yet another place of exile. The successive banishments imposed on Bahá'u'lláh and His family by the Ottoman Rulers, who acted under intense pressure from the Persian government to send Him ever farther away from the Iranian border, culminated in His imprisonment in the walled city of 'Akká, then a desolate city and penal colony where He lived the rest of His life.

The Centre of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant:

Before Bahá'u'lláh passed away on 29 May 1892, in a document known as the Book of the Covenant written from beginning to end in His own hand and bearing His seal, He outlined the salient features of His revelation, specified unity as the purpose of religion, and stipulated that the object of the verses He had revealed in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas two decades earlier about the One to Whom all His followers were to turn after His Ascension and the One authorized to interpret His writings, was none other than His eldest son, the Most Great Branch, Who later adopted 'Abdu'l-Bahá as His title. In the same document He appointed his second son, Mirzá Muḥammad 'Alí, titled the Greater Branch as a successor to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and specified that his station was beneath that of the Most Great Branch.

Hoping to have a leading role in directing the affairs of the Bahá'í community, Mirzá Muḥammad 'Alí soon realized that the contents of Bahá'u'lláh's Testament made his aspiration untenable. He resented

being overshadowed by the luminosity of his half-brother, Who was ten years his senior. Recognizing the futility of contesting the authenticity of his Father's Book of the Covenant, he outwardly accepted its provisions without abandoning the claim of being 'Abdu'l-Bahá's equal and of sharing with Him the leadership of the Bahá'í world. His ambitious and feeble attempts at seeking recognition and exerting his influence among the believers did not come as a complete surprise. As far back as 1867 he had exposed his unbridled ambition by claiming to enjoy a station on par with Bahá'u'lláh. He clandestinely wrote to some believers in Iran claiming to be the recipient of direct revelation from God. The confusion occasioned by his claim angered Bahá'u'lláh, Who clarified the station of His sons and emphasized that steadfastness in His Cause was the cardinal prerequisite for attaining His good pleasure. He further stated that if any of His sons stepped out from beneath the shadow of the Tree of the Cause of God, their doings would be brought to naught.¹

When Bahá'u'lláh's Book of the Covenant was unsealed and read to the assembled believers, Mirzá Muḥammad 'Alí realized that he could not openly dispute the contents or contest the authenticity of that mighty Document. However, he vainly argued that safeguarding the unity of the Bahá'í community, so emphatically stressed by Bahá'u'lláh, required that he and 'Abdu'l-Bahá lead it jointly. He also denied that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was the authorized Interpreter of all of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings. This was crucial to his argument, for otherwise he could not interpret the Writings as he pleased and confuse the minds of the people he wanted to influence. When he failed in his attempts to undermine 'Abdu'l-Bahá's authority, he teamed up with like-minded people within and outside the community. Together they stopped at nothing to discredit 'Abdu'l-Bahá, to cause Him suffering, even to endanger His life.

Opposition to 'Abdu'l-Bahá started immediately after Bahá'u'lláh's Ascension. Its scope widened rapidly, and the campaign of slander

aimed at rendering Him ineffective grew in seriousness and intensity. At the instigation of His half brothers and their supporters who worked in conjunction with hostile and corrupt local officials, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was incarcerated, His movements and the people with whom He associated were kept under surveillance and His activities severely restricted. The concerted efforts of His opponents were aimed at removing Him from the scene and having Him sent to a faraway place, out of the reach of His family and faithful Bahá'ís. He was accused of building a fortress on Mount Carmel,² of having contrived a new standard used to invite support and incite revolt,³ and of meeting foreigners in 'Akká.⁴

Alarmed by the startling accusations, the central government dispatched a commission of enquiry to investigate the charges. The falsified evidence prepared by Mirzá Muḥammad 'Alí and his collaborators, despite the cooperation he received from the Commission, did not achieve what he had fondly hoped: That of removing 'Abdu'l-Bahá from the scene, which would have enabled him to do as he pleased. The incessant mischievous activities of the Covenant-breakers and their supporters continued until 'Abdu'l-Bahá was incarcerated within the city walls of 'Akká in August 1901.⁵

Greatly distressed by the news of fresh restrictions on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's activities and movement, some western believers consulted together and made a plan: They raised a considerable sum of money and decided to send a delegation to Constantinople to meet the Sultan, explain 'Abdu'l-Bahá's innocence and arrange His release.⁶ Prominent believers, such as Mrs. Jackson, Hippolyte Dreyfus and Lua Getsinger were involved. Lua Getsinger and Hippolyte Dreyfus had, at 'Abdu'l-Bahá's behest met Muzaffari'd-Din Sháh and his Prime Minister in Paris in 1901, and pleaded for justice on behalf of the persecuted Bahá'ís in Iran. Encouraged by the success of their meeting with the Shah, they seem to have conceived a plan to meet Sultan 'Abdu'l-Ḥamíd of Turkey in 1902 and to plead with him to

order the release of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. When informed, 'Abdu'l-Bahá strongly advised against the plan and asked that it be abandoned.

Another Commission of Enquiry headed by a man heavily influenced by intrigues employed by Mirzá Muḥammad 'Alí arrived in late 1907. This Commission was determined to succeed where the previous one had failed. The presentation of the elaborate report prepared over months of collaborative efforts between the Commission and Mirzá Muḥammad 'Alí and his partisans aimed at justifying the recommendation that 'Abdu'l-Bahá be sent to "the landlocked sandy wastes of Fizan"⁷ coincided with the attempt on the life of Sultan 'Abdu'l-Ḥamíd. Upon receipt, he is reported to have pushed it aside and said: "Another time will do."⁸ That time never came, for in July 1908 the Young Turks Revolution gained ascendancy and months later the Sultan was deposed.

The principle aim of the Covenant-breakers was to have 'Abdu'l-Bahá removed from the nerve Centre of the Faith and to take control of the affairs of the Bahá'í community. In the darkest hours of His ministry, when the danger to His life seemed real and imminent, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote His Will and Testament. In it He explained how Mirzá Muḥammad 'Alí had disqualified himself as His successor, and appointed his grandson Shoghi Effendi, then a child of tender years, as the Guardian of the Cause of God. To keep the document safe, He buried it underground in an unsuspected spot in the basement of His residence in 'Akká, the House of 'Abdu'lláh Pashá. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's sister, the Greatest Holy Leaf, knew of the appointment of Shoghi Effendi as the Guardian of the Faith, (PP 11) and surely of the whereabouts of His Testament.

The Young Turk's Revolution Leads to Freedom from Oppression

Corruption, oppression and lack of concern for the welfare of the people living under their rule marked the reign of the last Ottoman emperors. It was during the Caliphate of Sultan 'Abdu'l-'Azíz that Bahá'u'lláh was banished from place to place within his domain, and endured untold hardships. Sultan 'Abdu'l-'Azíz surrounded himself with ministers who followed "*the desires of a corrupt inclination*" and "*cast behind their backs that which had been committed into their hands and manifestly betrayed their trust..*"(GWB 232) Bahá'u'lláh counseled the Sultan: "*Be bounteous to others as God hath been bounteous to thee, and abandon not the interests of thy people to the mercy of such ministers as these.*" (ibid) He promised the monarch that if he inclined his ear unto His speech and observed His counsel, God would exalt him "*to so eminent a position that the designs of no man on the whole earth can ever touch or hurt thee.*"(bid 234)But, as anticipated, the Sultan did not heed Bahá'u'lláh's loving counsel and warning. The excesses characterizing his rule, the injustices perpetrated by officials who served in his court, the hardships suffered by his people, and the sense of hopelessness that gripped the population continued during the reign of his successor, Sultan 'Abdu'l-Hamíd, and caused widespread resentment.

The situation in Turkey worsened steadily. Acute dissatisfaction with the status quo and the ruler's lack of response to the needs of the people under his rule caused the population, especially the younger generation, to arise against him. The Young Turks Revolution gained momentum and in 1908 ushered in an era of social and political change. One of the demands of the Revolution was the restoration of the constitution which Sultan 'Abdu'l-Hamíd had suspended, and the release of all political prisoners. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was not a political figure, but the trumped up charges against Him were deliberately designed to have political implications. He had been falsely accused of involvement in

subversive activities against the central government. When political prisoners were freed, 'Abdu'l-Bahá gained freedom as well. Had there been a delay, He would not have been able to achieve the work that He was destined to do, including the completion of the original structure of the Báb's Mausoleum, the interment of the remains of the Báb, which had arrived in the Holy Land ten years earlier, in their permanent resting place on Mount Carmel, and undertaking His momentous trip to the west, especially to North America.

The Choice of the West for An Epoch-making Trip

Much had occurred during the fifty-five years intervening between the time 'Abdu'l-Bahá was exiled from the land of His birth, and 1908 when He gained freedom from the shackles of confinement. He left Iran as a child accompanying His Father, spent the rest of His childhood, youth and adulthood moving from land to land, undertaking responsibilities and challenges in service to Bahá'u'lláh and His mighty Cause. By the time Bahá'u'lláh passed away, His Faith had spread not only in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey where He had lived, but also to other Middle Eastern countries, as well as to far away areas; the Indian sub-continent, China, some central Asian countries and parts of North Africa. The sovereigns and rulers of the world had been addressed by Him, His Most Holy Book, as well as major Tablets revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, had been published, and the tenets of His Faith had been set out in more than one hundred volumes and major works revealed from His Pen.

The pace of progress accelerated during the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'u'lláh's Successor and the Centre of His Covenant. He consolidated the Cause of God where Bahá'ís lived, and established it in new territories. One area of the globe where the light of Bahá'u'lláh penetrated shortly after His Ascension was North America and from there it spread to Europe. The spread of the Faith

to the western hemisphere has been described by Shoghi Effendi as “the most outstanding achievement that will forever be associated with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s ministry.” (GPB 279)

The activities of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s opponents that had caused Him untold suffering during the first sixteen years of His ministry had been frustrated, but the agitation they fomented continued into the ministry of the one He appointed as the Guardian of the Cause of God. As the Covenant-breakers witnessed the fading of their reputation and the loss of their status among the believers, their clandestine activities increased. They stopped at nothing to discredit ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Whose main aim was to spread far and wide the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh, unite the believers under the banner of His Cause, and help them to work toward an ever-advancing civilization.

During the first decade of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s ministry, the remains of the Báb Who had been martyred fifty years earlier, arrived safely in the Holy Land. Shortly after the arrival of the remains, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá laid the foundation stone of the Báb’s Mausoleum, in a groundbreaking ceremony held in 1900 on Mount Carmel. The original structure, which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá built at the instruction of Bahá’u’lláh for the interment of the remains of the Báb, took nine years to complete.

Almost simultaneously with the arrival of the remains of the Báb in the Holy Land, and while preparations were being made for the construction of the Báb’s Mausoleum, a significant event with far-reaching consequences took place: Western pilgrims, eager to meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and visit the Sacred Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh, set sail in 1898 and arrived in ‘Akká in several small groups. When restrictions intensified, there was a halt, but when the rigors of confinement eased, the numbers increased once again. However, many believers did not have the means to embark on a transatlantic voyage. For them the only hope of meeting ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was if He visited their country.

The returning pilgrims and those who could not make the trip to the Holy Land sent petitions to 'Abdu'l-Bahá pleading with Him to honor their land with His presence. They even raised funds for His trip, which He gently declined.⁹

'Abdu'l-Bahá received invitations not only from the believers but also from religious leaders, political figures, organizers of peace conferences, and groups concerned with the status of the world and its future stability. They longed to meet and hear the "Prophet of the East", despite His insistence that He was not a prophet but simply 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Servant of Bahá.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's advanced age, failing health, the pressing matters that He had to deal with and the world situation made it impossible for Him to undertake trips to all of the different parts of the globe, where the Light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation had penetrated and which enjoyed religious freedom. In some of His Tablets, He expressed the wish to visit India, Japan and China, but knew the wish would remain unfulfilled. When He was in Chicago, members of the Society of Indians resident in that city attained His presence and read Him an address of welcome. In it they called His visit to the United States "a source of honor and grace" to them. In the same address, they said:

[W]e believe that our country, India, will greatly benefit from a visit from your Excellency. The lack of unity between the Hindus and Muslims has kept them in the utmost contention and strife. As your Excellency's teachings are very much like the teachings of our religious leaders, they will undoubtedly unite them and make these contending nations one. We are certain that you will receive the same warmth and honor in India as here in America... We pray to God to give your Excellency long life so that you may be enabled to convey your message to all mankind.¹⁰

The prevailing circumstances were such that 'Abdu'l-Bahá could make only one trip far away from the Headquarters of the Faith. He chose a trip to the West, a trip Shoghi Effendi has described as "the culmination of His ministry". (GPB 295) Bahá'u'lláh had anticipated this priceless opportunity during His lifetime, when all worldly forces were leagued against Him: "*In the East the light of His Revelation hath broken; in the West have appeared the signs of His dominion.*" (TB 13) He further prophesied: "*Should they attempt to conceal its light on the continent, it will assuredly rear its head in the midmost heart of the ocean, and, raising its voice, proclaim: 'I am the life-giver of the world!'*" (WOB 78–79. These momentous utterances found fulfillment with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's trip to the west, particularly His transatlantic voyage.

The opportunity to make the trip had to be seized immediately, or it would have been lost forever. Aware of the upheavals in the making that threatened international peace, and the short years during which He could make the trip, He decided the time had come for Him to take action and fulfill a preordained mission, but did not divulge His intention regarding a specific time or the places He wanted to visit aforesaid.

In response to invitations from the friends in the United States, 'Abdu'l-Bahá stipulated one condition: "*My invitation to America will be the unity of the believers.*"¹¹ Differences of opinion among the friends had led to disunity. The cause of the differences was directly linked to the misdeeds and intrigues of an ambitious person who had taken the message of Bahá'u'lláh to the United States of America, and taught many to enlist under the banner of His Cause. His name was Ibrahim Kheiralla, who, in the words of Shoghi Effendi, "blinded by his extraordinary success and aspiring after an uncontrolled domination over the beliefs and activities of his fellow-disciples, insolently raised the standard of revolt."¹² He "dreamt of sharing 'Abdu'l-Bahá's authority."¹³

Of Syrian origin and Christian evangelical background, Kheiralla became a Bahá'í in Egypt in about 1888. In 1894 he migrated to the United States where he began teaching the Bahá'í Faith with great success. In 1900 he joined an early group of pilgrims to 'Akká, stayed in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's house as a guest, was received warmly by Him and praised for the services he had rendered. Acknowledging his outstanding success in teaching the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh to so many souls, 'Abdu'l-Bahá conferred upon him "the titles of 'Bahá's Peter,' 'Shepherd of God's Flocks,' and 'Conqueror of America.'" However, Kheiralla wanted much more. When he realized that "[t]he integrity of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's stewardship could not be breached,"¹⁴ he rose in opposition to Him, determined to form a following and exert influence on the Bahá'í community in the west. If rising to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's stature was not in the equation, discrediting Him through false accusations and slander could go a long way to fulfill that intention, especially if he joined hand with those who had a similar aim. To achieve the purpose, he worked in conjunction with other Covenant-breakers. He launched "a campaign of unrelenting vilification against the person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, to undermine the faith of those believers whom he had during no less than eight years, so strenuously toiled to convert." (WOB 82)

Kheiralla defected at a crucial juncture in the fortunes of the Faith in the West. His collaboration with the traditional enemies of 'Abdu'l-Bahá within and outside the United States, his working in concert with them to propagate calumnies and the misleading material he published in English confused the minds of some of the people he had taught. The believers were divided in their understanding of Kheiralla's true standing in the Faith and in the way he comported himself. 'Abdu'l-Bahá sent Tablets emphasizing the importance of unity. He also dispatched outstanding Bahá'í teachers to the West, such as 'Abdu'l-Karím Tihrání, the man who had taught the Faith to Kheiralla, Siyyid Asadu'llah Isfahani, and Mirza Abu'l-Fadl who spent nearly two years in the United States at the beginning of the

twentieth century. The purpose of his long sojourn was to deepen the understanding of the believers in the tenets revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and to allay the doubts that still lingered in the minds of some believers. As His own station had become a controversial subject and a matter of contention, 'Abdu'l-Bahá emphasized servitude as His glorious crown and strongly urged the believers to see and refer to Him as 'Abdu'l-Bahá (Servant of Bahá), and to follow His example. These efforts were successful to some degree, but restoring health to the ailing body of the community that had suffered the malady of disunity, required a powerful antidote. 'Abdu'l-Bahá had addressed the believers' concerns through correspondence and had dispatched emissaries to help them overcome the stumbling blocks in the way of achieving unity, but nothing short of a visit from Him could arouse them to scale the heights that they achieved after His historic trip, described by Shoghi Effendi as "a turning point of the utmost significance in the history of the century. (GPB 279–280)

'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke of the crucial importance of His trip to the United States when He was on His way to Kenosha, Wisconsin, a stronghold of Kheiralla's activities:

I am bearing the discomforts of this journey with stopovers so that the Cause of God may be protected from any breach. For I am still not sure about what is going to happen after me. If I could be sure, then I would sit comfortably in some corner; I would not leave the Holy Land and travel far away from the Most Holy Tomb. Once, after the martyrdom of the Báb, the Cause of God was dealt a hard blow through Yahya. Again, after the ascension of the Blessed Beauty, it received another blow. And I fear that self-seeking persons may again disrupt the love and unity of the friends. If the time were right and the House of Justice were established, the House of Justice would protect the friends.¹⁵

He then spoke of the devastating effects of disunity at the beginning of the Islamic dispensation: "Because of certain people who sought to fulfill their personal desires and who yet counted themselves among the supporters of the religion, the foundation of Islam was completely uprooted."

The Genesis of the Spread of the Bahá'í Faith in the West

In his message of Naw-Ruz 110 BE to the friends in the East, Shoghi Effendi refers to the astonishing phenomenon of the spread of the light of Bahá'u'lláh's Cause to the West. He says the light which blazed in the midmost heart of a storm in Tihiran, emerged from behind the veils in Baghdad, glowed in the clear glass of Adrianople, and shed its light on the western hemisphere from the horizon of the prison city of 'Akká, the qiblih of the people of Bahá.¹⁶

The western world first heard of the Bahá'í Faith through press reports and the writings of Orientalists, such as Edward G. Browne¹⁷ and Alexander Tumansky.¹⁸ Edward Browne had an audience with Bahá'u'lláh in 'Akká in 1890, and left to posterity his matchless description of the Person he had met. But the person who actively promoted the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in the United States was Ibrahim Kheiralla. He set foot there shortly after Bahá'u'lláh's Ascension, and began in earnest to teach the Cause. When success crowned his efforts, he was tempted by insatiable ambition and desired to be the recognized leader of Bahá'ís in the West. When that dream proved unattainable, he turned against 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Centre of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant, and rebelled against His authority. His rebellion caused a breach of short duration in the community he had helped establish, and temporarily halted the pace of progress he had set in motion.

Kheiralla is not the first or only person in the history of the Bahá'í Faith whose success in the teaching field became a grievous test, exposed his ambition and caused his downfall, while the Faith he was using for his own selfish ends emerged triumphant and forged ahead without his presence. It was through Kheiralla's initial efforts that the Cause of God was established in several parts of the United States and through his rebellion and defection that the unity of the believers was threatened. To receive 'Abdu'l-Bahá in their midst, the greatest gift they could imagine, the faithful believers united under the banner of the Covenant. His visit galvanized them to arise in service to the Cause of the Blessed Beauty, the purpose of which is to unite humankind, and made them worthy of being the recipients, together with the believers in Canada, of *The Tablets of the Divine Plan*, a mandate for the spiritualization of the planet. These Tablets were revealed while World War I was raging, a war that began shortly after 'Abdu'l-Bahá returned to the Holy Land from His visit to North America and Europe, and ended three years before His Ascension.

A Pre-ordained Trip

'Abdu'l-Bahá had accompanied His Father into exile when Iran was in the tight grip of a dictatorial Qajar Shah,¹⁹ and the Ottoman Empire was ruled by a despotic Sultan.²⁰ Fifty-five years later, the Qajar dynasty and the Ottoman Empire were under seige by devastating adversities. The Constitutional Revolution was gaining strength in Iran and the Revolution of the Young Turks was weakening the foundation of the Ottoman Empire. While those regimes were in the twilight years of their existence, 'Abdu'l-Bahá at the age of sixty-four was freed from five and half decades of exile and confinement. Those long years of immense hardship and suffering had taken their toll on his health and sapped His strength. Nonetheless, when freed, He wasted no time in putting into action the plan that diffused the

light of Bahá'u'lláh's Cause in the West and awakened the conscience of the world to the urgent need of pursuing practical solutions for overcoming deep-rooted differences and the establishment of peace.

Bahá'u'lláh was born and raised in Iran, but lived most of His life as exile in areas under Turkish rule. Turkey and Iran, although political rivals, had the religion of Islam in common, however each pledged allegiance to a denomination which the other abhorred: The state religion of Iran was Shi'ih Islam, while in Turkey and in the Arab world Sunni Islam was predominantly adhered to. The Shi'ih of Iran traveled freely to Iraq, then a part of the Ottoman Empire, where their twin holy cities of Karbila and Najaf are situated. When the government of Iran decided to exile Bahá'u'lláh from His homeland in the hope of curbing His influence, it left the choice of a place to Him. Bahá'u'lláh agreed to go to Baghdad. After nearly ten years in that city, the two neighboring powers, seeing that His influence had actually widened, conspired to further curb His freedom by sending Him and His family to areas farther away from the Persian border. Thus, Bahá'u'lláh and His family were exiled to Constantinople (Istanbul) and then Adrianople (Edirne in modern Turkey). Finally they were sent to the Penal colony of 'Akká as prisoners, where the exiles were closely watched and expected to perish. However, they survived and multiplied, albeit with great difficulty and hardship. As stated earlier, Bahá'u'lláh passed away in 1892 and His body was laid to rest at Bahjí, His last place of residence, just outside the city of 'Akká.²¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá continued to live in the citadel of 'Akká until orders were received for His release from confinement.

When freed, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was eager to visit the West before His health condition deteriorated further, and world events interfered, making it impossible for him to undertake the trip. When the appointed time came, all forces worked together to bring about the realization of His plan. 'Abdu'l-Bahá embarked on His momentous journey two years after He was released from years of incarceration.

Two kings, Muhammad 'Alí Qájár, the Shah of Iran, and Sultan 'Abdu'l-Hamíd, the Ottoman Caliph, were dethroned that He may be freed. Without freedom, He would not have been able to fulfill His predestined trip to the West. This highly significant remark He made during His visit to the United States. "*Think of it,*" He said, "*Two kings were dethroned in order that I may be freed. This is naught but pure destiny.*"²²

Before embarking on His long and arduous journey, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was intent on completing the Báb's Mausoleum and on interring His remains in their permanent Resting Place, as had been envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh. The mission was finally complete when on Naw-Ruz 1909, in the presence of pilgrims and resident Bahá'ís, 'Abdu'l-Bahá placed with His own hands the inner casket containing the remains of the Báb and the disciple²³ who had been martyred with Him, in the marble sarcophagus offered for the purpose by the Bahá'ís of Rangoon, Burma. The sarcophagus had reached the Holy Land in good time and been placed in the vault of that Mausoleum, ready to receive the sacred remains of the Báb.²⁴

To embark on a protracted journey to lands far away from the Holy Land in fulfillment of a mission decreed by Providence at a time when means of communication between countries, let alone continents, were primitive and painfully slow, 'Abdu'l-Bahá needed a dependable and trustworthy person to serve as His deputy at the nerve Centre of the Faith. That person was none other than His beloved sister, Bahá'íyyih Khánum, known in the West as Bahíyyih Khánum, entitled the Greatest Holy Leaf. Shoghi Effendi says:

And when in pursuance of God's inscrutable Wisdom, the ban on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's confinement was lifted and the Plan which He, in the darkest hours of His confinement, had conceived materialized, He with unhesitating confidence, invested His trusted and honoured

sister with the responsibility of attending to the multitudinous details arising out of His protracted absence from the Holy Land.²⁵

Preparations for 'Abdu'l-Bahá's journey and arrangements for the affairs in the Holy Land to function smoothly during His absence, were all made quietly. If plans were disclosed prematurely, the Covenant-breakers would have done their utmost to cause disruption and frustration. Therefore, when on a September afternoon in 1910, 'Abdu'l-Bahá left for Egypt, everyone was taken by surprise. A Tablet revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in honor of the Greatest Holy Leaf, when He was either about to leave the Holy Land or possibly already on His way to Egypt, reads:

O thou my sister, my dear sister!

Divine wisdom hath decreed this temporary separation,²⁶ but I long more and more to be with thee again. Patience is called for, and long-suffering, and trust in God, and the seeking of His favor. Since thou art there, my mind is completely at rest.

In recent days, I have made a plan to visit Egypt, if this be God's will. Do thou, on my behalf, lay thy head on the sacred Threshold, and perfume brow and hair in the dust of that Door, and ask that I may be confirmed in my work; that I may, in return for His endless bounties, win, if He will, a drop out of the ocean of servitude.²⁷

When it became known that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had left Haifa, Sydney Sprague²⁸ disclosed the news in a letter to Isabella Brittingham:

I have a very big piece of news to tell you. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has left this Holy Spot for the first time in forty-two years, and has gone to Egypt. Think of the vast significance and importance of this step! By it many prophecies of the sacred Scriptures are fulfilled... Everyone was astounded to hear of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's departure, for no one knew until the very

last minute that he had any idea of leaving... The afternoon of the day he left, he came to Mírzá Asad Ullah's home to see us and sat with us a while beside a new well that has just been finished and said that he had come to taste the water. We did not realize that it was a good-bye visit. Then he took a carriage and went up the hill to the Holy Tomb (of the Báb). That night, as usual, the believers gathered before the house of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to receive that blessing, which every day is ours, of being in his presence, but we waited in vain, for one of the sons-in-law came and told us that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had taken the Khedivial steamer to Port Said.²⁹

'Abdu'l-Bahá's absence from the Holy Land was soon felt by everyone. The friends of the family who were not Bahá'ís enquired about His whereabouts. In a Tablet revealed in honor of His wife, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

Should people enquire about My whereabouts, tell them that certain prominent Americans and Europeans have repeatedly sought and received promises that I would make a trip to those areas... be evasive as much as possible... The less said the better it would be. Tell Dr. Fallscheer also not to divulge the truth, and thou shouldst not divulge either as far as possible.³⁰

Dr. Fallscheer was the family doctor who lived in Haifa. She was a close friend and confidant. She knew of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's trip to Egypt and of His plan to travel to Marseille, where He was to meet "a man of stature." In fact, she served as intermediary between 'Abdu'l-Bahá and that person.³¹ It was a highly confidential meeting. The name of the person and information about the meeting, whether it took place and what the outcome was, remained undisclosed.

Egypt was the starting point of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's epoch-making trip, during which He shed the brilliance of the Light of Bahá'u'lláh's

revelation on the western world. Juliet Thompson records in her Diary something 'Abdu'l-Bahá said to her when she was on pilgrimage in 1909, the year of the entombment of the remains of the Báb. That statement brings to focus the connection between Bahá'u'lláh's utterance about the Light of His Revelation breaking in the East and the signs of His dominion appearing in the West, also confirming that if attempts were made to conceal that Light on the land, it would raise its head in the midmost heart of the ocean. She says: "I was on the roof of the House in 'Akká with the Master and Munavvar Khanum.³² The Master was pointing to the moon. "The East. The moon. No!" He said. "I am the Sun of the West."³³

Speaking of the Light of the Kingdom shedding greater illumination upon the West, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says: "*The East hath verily been illumined with the light of the Kingdom. Ere long will this same light shed a still greater illumination upon the West. Then will the hearts of its people be vivified through the potency of the teachings of God and their souls be set aglow by the undying fire of His love.*" (WOB 79)

Successive attempts over decades at suppressing the Light of Bahá'u'lláh's Advent in the land of its birth and in countries under the Ottoman rule provided the moving force to cause it to appear in promising lands in North America, whence it spread to the rest of the western hemisphere. During His travels, 'Abdu'l-Bahá met people of all ranks and backgrounds. With the luminosity of His unique personality, divine love, wisdom, compassion and understanding He transformed many souls and opened before them the gates of everlasting felicity and salvation. We have on record the accounts of many converts who have recorded their impressions of meeting Him face to face. There are also many comments by those who were not listed among His followers but perceived with their inner eyes the Light that shone through Him:

Diya Pasha, the Ambassador of Turkey, the country that had persecuted Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá most unjustly and for so long, gave a dinner at the Turkish Embassy in honor of the Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant. After dinner, he "made a thrilling speech. Rising and turning a lover's face to the Master, he called Him 'the Light of the world, the Unique One of the age, Who had come to spread His glory and perfection amongst us.'"³⁴

At a meeting of the New York Peace Society, held at the Hotel Astor, New York, "Mrs. [Anna Garland] Spencer introduced 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the Prophet of the East and the Messenger of Peace."³⁵ "The Consul General of Persia [Mr. Topakyan] referred to 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the Beauty of God and the Glory of the East."³⁶

The governor of Lahore, Khan Bahadur Allah-Bakhsh, called on the Master at the Hudson Apartment House one early morning in mid-May 1912. Three days later, Juliet Thompson had a note from him. It read: "'Abdu'l-Bahá is the Divine Light of today."³⁷

Mr. Lee McClung, the Treasurer of the United States, met 'Abdu'l-Bahá at Mrs. Parsons'. In response to Juliet Thompson who asked how he felt when he saw the Master, said: "Well, I felt as though I were in the presence of one of the great old Prophets: Elijah, Isaiah, Moses. No, it was more than that! Christ... no, now I have it. He seemed to me my Divine Father."³⁸

Lawrence White, a friend of Juliet Thompson's, had come to New York from Utica to meet the Master. After seeing 'Abdu'l-Bahá at Mount Morris Baptist Church, he whispered: "Look at Him and see the Christ."³⁹

In his review of the history of the first century of the Bahá'í Era (1844–1944), Shoghi Effendi has drawn a parallel between the summit reached during Bahá'u'lláh's ministry, when He proclaimed

His Message to the rulers of the earth, and that of the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, when He blazoned "the glory and greatness of His Father's Faith among the peoples of the West." He says:

As the day-star of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation had shone forth in its meridian splendor at the hour of the proclamation of His Message to the rulers of the earth in the city of Adrianople, so did the Orb of His Covenant mount its zenith and shed its brightest rays when He Who was its appointed Center arose to blazon the glory and greatness of His Father's Faith among the peoples of the West. (GPB 295)

The Ascendancy of the Covenant Empowered 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Undertake His Historic Trip

Shoghi Effendi refers to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's three-year trip to the West as a mission and explains how the ascendancy of the Covenant made the fulfillment of that mission possible:

That divinely instituted Covenant... had manifested... before all mankind, with a force in a measure hitherto unapproached, its vast potentialities when it empowered Him in Whom its spirit and its purpose were enshrined to embark on a three-year mission to the West—a mission so momentous that it deserves to rank as the greatest exploit ever to be associated with His ministry." (ibid)

Confirming the ascendancy of the Covenant by the time 'Abdu'l-Bahá embarked on His trip to the West, H.M. Balyuzi says: "Mirzá Muḥammad 'Alí and his partisans were now thoroughly discredited. In the absence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá from the Holy Land the violators would have the field entirely to themselves, but their utter inability to make any move to impair the unity of the Bahá'ís would set the

final seal on their downfall. 'Abdu'l-Bahá particularly stressed this fact in a Tablet addressed at the time to a Bahá'í in Iskandarún (Alexandretta).⁷⁴⁰

The early signs of the triumph of the Covenant were discernible when the western pilgrims arrived in 'Akká, spent a few glorious days in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's presence, and left completely transformed. By the time the first group of western pilgrims reached the shores of the Holy Land, almost all members of Bahá'u'lláh's family had arisen in opposition to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The coming of the pilgrims cheered the heart of the Greatest Holy Leaf and other members of His family who had for long been deeply concerned for His safety. In the words Shoghi Effendi:

It was through the arrival of these pilgrims, and these alone, that the gloom which had enveloped the disconsolate members of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's family was finally dispelled. Through the agency of these successive visitors the Greatest Holy Leaf, who alone with her Brother among the members of her Father's household had to confront the rebellion of almost the entire company of her relatives and associates, found that consolation which so powerfully sustained her till the very close of her life. (IWOB 81–82)

When the western pilgrims arrived in 'Akká in the concluding years of the nineteenth century, the stage was set for 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to North America and Europe some twelve years later:

It was through these pilgrimages, as they succeeded one another in the years immediately following the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, that the splendor of the Covenant, beclouded for a time by the apparent ascendancy of its Arch-Breaker, emerged triumphant amidst the vicissitudes which had afflicted it... By the forces which this little band of returning

pilgrims was able to release in the heart of that continent the death-knell of every scheme initiated by the would-be wrecker of the Cause of God was sounded. (ibid)

The returning pilgrims ignited the spark of longing for meeting 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the hearts of the believers, most of whom could not attain His presence due to lack of means. Many of them communicated with Him and received His Tablets. Many had heard from the returning pilgrims accounts of the transformation they had experienced. These believers, unlike many who lived in the Middle East and other Islamic countries, enjoyed the blessing of freedom and could receive 'Abdu'l-Bahá in their midst. Therefore, repeated petitions were sent beseeching Him to honor them with a visit. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to North America made firmer the steps of the faithful in the Cause of God, removed doubts from the hearts of the confused in areas where Covenant-breakers had penetrated, and emphasized the vital importance of unity and concord among the friends.

The Treatment of the Qajar Princes Responsible for the Massacre of Bahá'ís in Iran

Among the people 'Abdu'l-Bahá met during His first visit to Europe was a prince who was personally responsible for the massacre of Bahá'ís in Isfahan, Iran. Zillu's-Sultan,⁴¹ the eldest son of Nasiri'd-Din Sháh, and his two sons attained 'Abdu'l-Bahá's presence in Thonon on Lake Geneva. Juliet Thompson describes the meeting:

In the suite of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was a distinguished European⁴² who had visited Persia and there met Zillah Sultan. 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 Sultan approached the terrace. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was wearing, as always, the turban, the long

white belted robe and long `aba of Persia. His hair, according to the ancient custom of the Persian nobility, flowed to His shoulders. Zillah Sultan, 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 first⁴³ though an immature boy, nevertheless showed Him great deference. The second,⁴⁴ 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, Nasir'd-Din Sháh, had ordered the execution of the Báb, as well as the torture and death of thousand of Bábís.

The young prince was “born again”—a Bahá'í.⁴⁵

Another prince who attained `Abdu'l-Bahá's presence in Britain during His second visit to that country was Mahmud Mirza, the

Jalalu'd-Dawlih. It was during his governorship of Yazd, Iran, that the Bahá'ís of the area suffered unprecedented atrocities in 1903 and many were martyred. "He was now a broken man and an exile, seemingly contrite, asking for forgiveness. He threw himself at 'Abdu'l-Bahá's feet, but 'Abdu'l-Bahá would not permit him to humiliate himself."⁴⁶

The Reaction of Persian Diplomatic Representatives

In the United States of America and in Europe 'Abdu'l-Bahá met Iranian officials and potentates who spontaneously expressed their pleasure and appreciation for what His visit had done for their country. Several years earlier such meetings would have been unthinkable, for Bahá'ís were relentlessly persecuted in that country as a matter of state policy, dictated by the clergy.

The Iranian dignitaries in the United States witnessed with delight the admiration and respect for 'Abdu'l-Bahá among the inhabitants of that country. They were proud that His visit was the cause of great glory for Iran and the East. The Consul-General for Persia in New York, Mr. Topakiyan invited Him and His retinue to luncheon in his New York home, and "arranged as well, for some notabilities to meet 'Abdu'l-Bahá and some newspapermen to interview Him."⁴⁷

The Persian Minister in London, Mushiru'l-Mulk, visited 'Abdu'l-Bahá shortly after He arrived there in December 1912, and heard from Him "of His work in America—'winning everlasting victories which will bring unfading glory to the peoples of the East.'"⁴⁸ A few weeks later, the same Minister "gave a dinner party for 'Abdu'l-Bahá at the Legation. The Minister and his staff rejoiced over the news of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to Scotland, the reception accorded to Him in Edinburgh." The press reports were clear proof that He "had indeed brought glory to the people of the Orient...even as He had described

it to the Minister, in their first meeting."⁴⁹

The Persian Minister in Paris, 'Abdus-Samad Khan, the Mumtazu's-Saltanih "called on 'Abdu'l-Bahá a week after His arrival. A number of noted Easterners were also present, who were united in saying that they felt very much at home in the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá."⁵⁰

A prominent member of the Iranian aristocracy, Dust-Muhammad Khan, the Mu'ayyiru'l-Mamalik, son-in-law of Muzaffari'd-Din Shah (1896–1907), "had become so attached and devoted to the person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that he was always seeking His presence, and could almost be counted a member of His retinue."⁵¹

These and other examples of unhindered association, based on mutual respect and friendship, between 'Abdu'l-Bahá and officials of the Persian government make one wonder if the same would have been possible, had He travelled to any other part of the globe.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's Public Addresses

By personally addressing large gatherings of eager seekers in the free world, 'Abdu'l-Bahá proclaimed what His Father had revealed several decades earlier. He explained how the ultimate goal of the unity of humankind and universal peace could be achieved. He conveyed Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings in their purest form to those who were hearing it for the first time. He also corrected the misunderstandings and misconceptions that had crept in through self-seeking individuals who promoted their own interests in the guise of teaching the Bahá'í Faith. This priceless opportunity, had it been missed, would have not come about again, for World War I broke out shortly after He returned from His trip to the Holy Land, and three years after the end of the war He passed away in November 1921. With His visit to the West, for the first time in the annals of religious history, the

light of the Sun of Truth, which had risen in the east, illumined the West by the One whom Bahá'u'lláh had appointed the Centre of His Covenant and the infallible Interpreter of His Words.

'Abdu'l-Bahá had also received invitations from organizations that were eager to meet and seek enlightenment from Him. The world was moving toward a conflict that would engulf many countries. The threat of World War I was looming high. Many organizations were hard at work to promote goodwill among people and raise consciousness regarding the perils of war. Their ideas often revolved around the economic, social and political ills afflicting people of diverse backgrounds. 'Abdu'l-Bahá stressed the pivotal principles enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh; that the oneness of humanity was the basic prerequisite for addressing the ills afflicting humanity, that prejudices of all kinds had to be eliminated, that education had to become universal and compulsory, that preferences accorded people on the basis of gender and color of skin had to give way to equal rights for all. His message was spiritual in nature. He advocated a civilization in which the material and spiritual aspects were well balanced.

Among the conferences 'Abdu'l-Bahá attended in the United States was Lake Mohonk International Peace Conference. It was one of the most prestigious organizations searching for peaceful solutions to the problems assailing humanity. The eighteenth annual session of the conference on international arbitration was held 15–17 May 1912 at Lake Mohonk, New York. The attendance included delegates and visitors from many countries. 'Abdu'l-Bahá had been invited and accepted to participate. Announcing the Conference, the "Evening Sun" of New York City, the 8 May 1912 issue, number 25068, wrote:

The eighteenth annual Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration will meet by invitation of Albert Smiley at Mohonk Lake, New York, May 15–17, the members of which will include distinguished men from many countries.

The Choice of the West

Prominent among these speakers from abroad will be...
Abdul Baha Abbas of Persia, leader of the Bahai movement.

Under the headline "ABDUL BAHÁ LECTURES ON THE RELIGION OF PEACE", the Pittsburgh Press on 8 May 1912 reported on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talk on the night of 7 May in the Hotel Schenley "to an attentive audience of about 400 persons":

He is of absolute simplicity of manner, is unostentatious and unpretentious and delivered his message cheerfully, earnestly and quickly. The Bahai religion emanates from Persia and is promulgating an era of peace, and unity in language, politics and spiritual creeds. The Universal Brotherhood of man is the doctrine of this religion... Abdul Baha is the son of Baha-O'llah, who founded the religion. He is venerable in appearance, with long white hair and beard, and with strong, kindly, peaceful expressive features...

Abdul-Baha said the Bahais believe in the equality of women with men, for until women have an equal voice in the affairs of the world, war will not be abolished. They believe in the harmony of science and religion; in the oneness of life with all good; in religious adjustment of political economical conditions; in temperate, reasonable living; in being happy and contented; and in following the teachings of the founder of the religion of love, Jesus of Nazareth.

Various churches and societies of Pittsburg were represented in audience. New Thoughtists, Theosophists, Christian Scientists and Unitarians met with the most orthodox of religious denominations...

He also will address the Mohonk Peace conference in New York State this month.

Under the heading "JERSEY CITY TO HEAR A PEACE MISSIONARY" , The Urban Gazette, number 25104, wrote on 16 May 1912:

Famous Abdul Baha Will Talk at Brotherhood Church Sunday Night

There seems to be one man who has succeeded in impressing the world with his disinterested sincerity, as well as with his practical and spiritual power in the advocacy of international peace and the universal brotherhood of man. That man is 'Abdu'l-Bahá, of Persia. The history of this man is one of the remarkable things of all history. In exile and prison under the tyranny of the Turkish Government on account of his own and his father's religious convictions, since he was nine years old, these two men have attracted to their prison in Acca, Syria people from all over the world to get the wonderful inspiration of their message.

In an article headed: "PERSIAN TO EXPLAIN HIS CULT," the Evening Transcript of Boston, number 25114, dated 18 May 1912, wrote:

...Far from being a poetical presentation of new Oriental mysticism or the principles of a new cult, the Bahai movement's principles are disclosed to be the last word in the most advanced social, economic, educational, political and religious thought of the day. The keynote of the utterances of the Persian who for half a century has been known to the East, but little known in Western Europe, or America, is unity and universalism.

Abdul Baha declares that over fifty years ago one of the chief lessons his father sought to impress upon his followers was the necessity for world peace through the instrumentality

of arbitration treaties. He develops this idea to the extent even of providing for the terms of a treaty for international arbitration, international police and a gradual disarmament. He also advocates the blending of the world's religions, protesting against differences of creeds. "The true foundations of all faiths must be established," he writes. "There must be a oneness of faith."

Even a universal language is advocated. "The differences of languages cause disunion between nations," reads another paragraph. "There must be a universal auxiliary language."

Equality of the sexes is maintained to be the proper condition. The only reason why woman is not so advanced as man is given as a lack of education.

With religion, morals, education, work, government and other subjects the writings deal, yet pervading them all is the ideal of unity and a common world family.

Speaking of the general theme of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's discourses and the influence He had exerted on the public, "The World" as established by Joseph Pulitzer, wrote on 13 July 1912 in the section "Notes and News of the Churches":

Everywhere his addresses have been followed by a strong wave of influence toward Christian harmony and Christian recognition of a wider unity which is to comprise a real brotherhood and reconciliation among all religious systems of East and West.

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá reached London, after His visit to North America, reporters asked Him about the purpose of His visit. He said:

I have come from America where I travelled for nine months. I went to every city, spoke in their churches and meeting places.

*I was invited to many conferences, such as the Lake Mohonk, visited universities. Everywhere I was invited to speak. My talks were based on Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings. Based on those Teachings, I called everyone to universal peace, peace among religions, peace among nations, governments, regions. I set forth arguments about the necessity of peace. I proved, based on rational proofs, that in this day the greatest and most essential of all affairs is universal peace. It is the cause of comfort for the world of humanity, the most effective means for the resolution of problems. This is the century of light, the century for the advancement of mental faculty and thoughts... It is befitting that in a century such as this all nations become united, all religions come together in unity, all regions become one, for the world of humanity is like a single tree, religions and nations are like its branches and boughs....*⁵²

He was again asked on 27 December about the purpose of His visit. He said: *"I have come to promote divine civilization, the civilization that Bahá'u'lláh has established in the east, the civilization that would promote good character, the civilization that is the cause of universal peace, the civilization that promotes the unity of humankind."*⁵³

Reflection

'Abdu'l-Bahá's childhood journey in the mid-1800's was arduous and fraught with hazards. It was intended to root out the influence of His Father's Teachings and extinguish the Light of His Cause. It was a journey imposed on Him by temporal tyrannical authorities, a journey that presaged no return to His homeland. That journey involved a sojourn of ten years in Baghdad, four months in Constantinople (Istanbul), five years in Adrianople (Edirne), and ultimately consigned Him to spend the rest of His life in a penal colony of the Ottoman Empire, which is a part of Israel today. Bahá'u'lláh and His

family reached the shores of the Holy Land in 1868. The imperial decree, issued under pressure from Persian authorities, which brought Bahá'u'lláh and His family to `Akká, fulfilled scriptural prophecies about the Lord of Hosts appearing in the Promised Land.

`Abdu'l-Bahá's journey to the West was also arduous and fraught with hazards. However, unlike His childhood journey, it was initiated without the intervention of any temporal power. It was a journey undertaken when He was finally free to go where He pleased and over which He had full authority, a journey that blazoned the name of Bahá'u'lláh and spread the Light of His Revelation far and wide. It was the exact opposite of what the adversaries had hoped to achieve. The scheme of sending Bahá'u'lláh to a place where His followers could not reach Him, resulted, sixty years later, in the Centre of His Covenant appearing in the western world, where He raised the banner of His Cause among the people eager to hear His message, and won the admiration of those genuinely interested in the oneness of humanity and the establishment of an enduring peace.

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- 1 Abdulhamidi Eshraghekhavar, *Mayidiy-i-Asmani*, Tehran: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, , 128 b, (1971) vol. 4, p. 361. also *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, A Compilation*. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1963, p. 126–27
- 2 Juliet Thompson, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1948, pp 113 and 121.
- 3 *Ibid* 113

The Choice of the West

- 4 *Ibid* 114
- 5 *Ibid* 114, 129
- 6 *Ibid* 107
- 7 *Ibid* 119, 122
- 8 *Ibid* 123
- 9 Maḥmoud-i-Zarqání, *Maḥmud's Diary*, trans. by Mohi Sobhani. Osford: George Ronald, 1998, p. 8.
- 10 *Ibid* 75
- 11 Juliet Thompson, *The Diary of Juliet Thompson*. Los Angeles: Kalímát Press 1983, p 177.
- 12 *Ibid* 82.
- 13 Thompson 1948 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh p 85.
- 14 *Ibid* 85
- 15 *Mahmud's Diary*, p. 268
- 16 *Tawqí'at-i-Mubarakih Hadrat-i Valyy-i Amru'llah*, addressed to the believers in the East, p. 470.
- 17 A British scholar, who visited 'Akka and Iran and published material about the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths in English.
- 18 A Russian scholar, who lived in Iran for some time, was in touch with Mirza Abu'l-Fadl, translated and published the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* and other Writings of Bahá'u'lláh in Russian.
- 19 Nasiri'd-Din Shah
- 20 Sultan 'Abdu'l-'Aziz
- 21 Bahá'u'lláh's resting place is the Most Holy Spot in the Bahá'í world, it is the qiblih, and a place of pilgrimage.
- 22 *The Diary of Juliet Thompson*, p. 292
- 23 The body of Mirza Muhammad-'Aliy-i Zunuzi, a young disciple who insisted on being executed with the Báb, was mangled with that of His beloved Master. The remains were interred together in the vault of the Shrine of the Báb on Naw-Ruz 1909.
- 24 The remains of the Báb and His disciple were rescued from the moat where they were placed after execution, and kept safe for fifty years in different places in Iran until they were sent to the Holy Land. The remains reached the Haifa/'Akka area before the end of the nineteenth century. Shortly after their safe arrival, 'Abdu'l-Bahá began the construction of a mausoleum in the heart of Mount Carmel. It is known as the Shrine of the Báb.

Lights of 'Irfán Book Thirteen

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- 25 *Bahiyih Khanum, the Greatest Holy Leaf*, p. 39.
- 26 The use of the term “divine wisdom” in this Tablet indicates that a force beyond personal choice prompted ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to make the trip.
- 27 *Bahiyih Khanum, the Greatest Holy Leaf*, p. 13, also *Leaves of the Twin Divine Trees*, pp. 171–172
- 28 Sydney Sprague was married to Farangís Khanum, daughter of Siyyid Asadu’llah Isfahani and Raziyih Khanum, Munirih Khanum’s sister. Farangís Khanum is the sister of Dr. Amin (Ameen) Fareed who later broke the Covenant and caused the downfall of the immediate members of his family. Sydney Sprague later realized his mistake, sought pardon, and his membership in the Bahá’í community was reinstated.
- 29 Thompson 1948, p. 134
- 30 *Leaves of the Twin Divine Trees*, p. 344
- 31 *Ibid*, p. 343
- 32 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s youngest daughter.
- 33 *The Diary of Juliet Thompson*, p. 232.
- 34 *The Diary of Juliet Thompson*, p. 276.
- 35 *Mahmud’s Diary*, p. 99
- 36 *Ibid*
- 37 *The Diary of Juliet Thompson*, pp. 285–86
- 38 *Ibid*, p. 280
- 39 *Ibid*, p. 296
- 40 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *the Centre of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant*, p. 133
- 41 During his governorship of Isfahan, the King of Martyrs, the Beloved of Martyrs, and a large number of Baha’is were brutally killed.
- 42 Mr. Hippolyte Dreyfus, a distinguished European lawyer and a prominent Baha’i.
- 43 Prince Bahram Mirza.
- 44 Sultan Husayn Mirza
- 45 Thompson, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *the Centre of the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh*. pp. 19–20.
- 46 *Ibid*, p. 346
- 47 *Ibid*, p. 226
- 48 *Ibid*, p. 347
- 49 *Ibid*, pp 368–369

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- 50 *Ibid*, p. 374
- 51 *Ibid*, p. 347
- 52 Maḥmud Zarqání, *Badayi`u`lathar* (Maḥmud's Diary), vol 2. Langenheim: Bahá'í Verlag, 1982, p. 39, (paraphrased by this writer).
- 53 *Ibid*, p. 44