

Men and the Baha'i Faith

An investigation into the role of indigenous men in the early Baha'i community in the British Isles

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0. Introduction

It is common to see titles such as “Women and Islam”, “Women’s Spirituality” and so on; rather less common are “Men and Football” or “Masculinity and Motoring”, which suggests that even now the male is the default option. In Baha’i circles we still talk about prioritising the education of girls, when in England the underachievement of White working class boys is the pressing concern of the educational establishment. The British Baha’i community (1899 - 1930) was heavily dominated by women and this has been the subject of some interest, in particular in relation to the suffrage movement and the relationship between feminism and spirituality, and the Divine Feminine. This paper seeks to investigate the role of men in the Baha’i group before 1930; it considers the importance of Freemasonry and other esoteric orders to the development of the British community in the context of masculine spirituality. Rather than address the question “why were there so many women?” this paper asks, “Why were there so few men?” and considers the relationship between the sexes in terms of expectations of gendered behaviour in the context of leadership and authority. A great deal has been written about women and the Bahá’í Faith, however, I have only been able to find one article on men: *Feminism, Men and the Bahá’í Faith* by Morgan Wilson published in *75 Years of the Bahá’í Faith in Australasia* Rosebery: Association for Baha’i Studies Australia, 1996. Wilson approaches the subject in two ways; firstly by looking at feminism and the Bahá’í Faith, and secondly by looking at men and the Bahá’í Faith, it is a rather limited contribution to the discourse; its primary importance is simply that of its existence. I have written at length about the application of the Theory of Relevance (Slide 1) to the development of the Baha’i Faith in Britain¹, very briefly I have asserted that prior to 1930 the Baha’i Movement was an auxiliary religious movement, rather than a religion. It required neither act of conversion nor rejection of previous beliefs, it was self selecting, “living the life” was the only requirement; Baha’is styled themselves Baha’i Christians and continued to go to church. I have argued that the Teachings were often only partially understood and that “Relevance” was inferred in the incompleteness of utterances. Furthermore, that networks within the nascent Baha’i community were the context of Relevance and it was an interchange of Relevance through disambiguation and contextualisation that progressed understanding of the Teachings – or their rejection. The networks included those who found Relevance in the Baha’i Teachings in the context of the Glastonbury legends or in academic discourse. This paper introduces a new concept, that of “Gateways”, the context, usually an organisation or set of beliefs by which the individual is introduced to the Baha’i Movement, thus for some the Women’s suffrage movement might be the “gateway” for someone to find “relevance” in the context of the Baha’i Teachings on the equality of the sexes.

¹ (Osborn 2014)

1. A snapshot in time

The difficulty with dealing with the early days of the Baha'i Faith in a Western cultural context is trying to decipher, who was a Baha'i? This issue was resolved in the period of the development of the Administration when the lists of members were required to create the ballots to elect assemblies. There was considerable discussion as to how to define a Baha'i and some debate on the accuracy of the lists but the results of the 1923 election and the ballot for the 1924 election remain the best evidence of who identified a Baha'i at the time.

Of the nine people elected in 1923, six are women, with the exception of Caudia Coles, Mrs. Miriam Thornburgh-Cropper (both USA) and Diá'u'lláh Aşgharzádih (Persian), were all natives of the British Isles and have chosen as adults to self identify as Baha'is. The six ethnically British had all been involved with the Bahá'í cause for many years and would have met Abdu'l Baha on his visits to the British Isles and several had visited him in Palestine and or Egypt.

Results of the Voting for the London Assembly, 1923

| Name | Votes |
|--------------------------------|--------------|
| Lady Sarah Louise Blomfield | 55 |
| Mrs. Miriam Thornburgh-Cropper | 50 |
| Mrs. Florence "Mother" George | 45 |
| Miss Ethel Jenner Rosenberg | 45 |
| Eric Hammond | 43 |
| Mrs. Claudia Stuart Coles | 42 |
| George Palgrave Simpson | 41 |
| Elizabeth Herrick | 33 |
| Diá'u'lláh Aşgharzádih | 32 |

Ballot papers for the election of the 1924 London Spiritual Assembly are a good indicator of membership of the group in London and areas outside Manchester and Bournemouth, both of which elected their own assemblies. The ballot includes names of eighteen people resident outside London, in places that are known to include Ireland, Glastonbury and Birmingham; they were marked with an asterisk to indicate their distance from London meant they did not wish to serve on the Assembly². (Slide 2)

Voters in the Election of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of London, April 1924

Of the 80 names
19 are male
61 are female

20% are male
80% are female

10% are single male
10% are coupled male

10% are coupled female
70% are single female

² Interestingly Eric Hammond has an asterisk despite living in Wimbledon, he had served on the Assembly elected in 1923 and may have not wished to do so again

There are what appear to be nine married couples, at least three of the males, Cole, Hammond and Simpson were married but their wives do not appear on the ballot. Of the sixty one females, thirty four are prefixed "miss" indicating they were spinsters, of the remaining thirty seven at least seven were widowed or divorced. Clearly, the London voters were dominated by women and single women at that. The Bournemouth and Manchester groups were based on a different demographic, Manchester was based around two families the Halls and the Sugars; membership was consequently more evenly distributed across the sexes. The Bournemouth group centred on Dr John Esslemont and Nurse Challis and their work with tuberculosis patients, the group had a bias towards females but that was due in part at least to the ratio of patients in the sanatorium. What Manchester and Bournemouth had in common was they had males with a history of involvement in socialism as the dominant personalities and connections with non conformist Christianity, the Quakers in Bournemouth and the Unitarians in Manchester.

Of the nineteen male names on the ballot seven appear to be Orientals, either Persians or Arabs. It would be reasonable to assume that they were all Baha'is before travelling to the British Isles. Whilst the primary reason for their residency may have been business or study, they were active in the Baha'i community and several are well known figures. However distinguished their service to the Cause, they are not of concern to matter in hand.

A further six names appear in no other Baha'i record known to the writer, they are Mr E Bedingfield who appears with his wife and an asterisk to indicate he resides outside London, the other apparently married men are Messrs Grimwood and Wellard, while Messrs Brodsky, Bull and Scott Lane appear to be singletons. There is a Mr Grimwood of Detroit mentioned in Star of the West; it is possible they are the same man. The name "Brodsky" suggests a Jewish heritage; there were Baha'is of Jewish background in the British community at this time, the Kings from America in Bournemouth and the Persian Joseph brothers in Manchester, however, there is no record of British Jews in London so Brodsky may also be from elsewhere.

1. Ruhi Afnan
2. Dia'u'llah Asgharzadiah married
3. Prof. Darab Yuhanna Dawad
4. Mr J Dawud
5. Mr. Froughi
6. Mr. M. S. Hakim married
7. Mr. El Nochougati
8. Mr Grimwood married Detroit USA?
https://bahai.works/Star_of_the_West/Volume_11/Issue_11 (Slide 3)
9. Mr. E. Bedingfield – married – outside London
10. Mr. Brodsky
11. Mr. S. Bull
12. Mr. Wellard - married
13. Mr. Scott Lane
14. Mr. C. S. Cole Hounslow (married but wife not on ballot)
15. Comd. T. R. Fforde married Ireland
16. Mr. Eric Hammond married Wimbledon
17. Mr. John Ludlow Marshall married Birmingham
18. Mr. Carey Morris married Chelsea, London
19. Mr. George Palgrave Simpson Hampstead (married but wife not on ballot)(Slide 4)

The ballot list is inconsistent in that the rendering of the names is not systematic, some people have a Christian name, some have initials and some merely family names, and this may suggest that the compiler of the ballot paper was not personally familiar with some of the electors. Some of the names on the ballot are very familiar and indicate longstanding involvement, while others are mentioned nowhere else, it is impossible to estimate their level of involvement.

Some brief biographical notes:

1.i Charles Stewart Dudley Cole

The electors of the first London Spiritual Assembly include a Mr C S Cole. Cole is pictured³ at a Ridvan gathering at the home of Elizabeth Herrick in 1922. He is listed in *Baha'i World 1932-1934* and *Baha'i World 1935-1936*, his address is given as "Sutton Villa, Sutton Road, Hounslow." A 1923 directory of Hounslow in the Local History Library lists Charles Stuart Dudley Cole of Sutton Villa and adds the letters after his name which indicates he was a member of the Institution of Civil Engineers. His professional association was able to furnish some interesting details of his life. Cole was born in Trowbridge, Wiltshire on 21st February 1875, he was educated at King's College School, London and then at the South Kensington School of Science in Lincoln. He joined his father's civil engineering practice, specialising in sewerage and sewage disposal. By 1915 Cole was living in Spring Grove, Isleworth, five years later he moved to the Sutton Villa address where he lived until his death in 1954. Cole transferred from associate to member of the Institution in January 1924, his occupation is given as resident engineer, construction of the Great West Road for the county of Middlesex, thus it can be inferred that at the time of his involvement with the Baha'i Movement his professional life was going extremely well.

Little is known of his Baha'i life; however he is mentioned by Susan Kilford in her contribution to the UK Baha'i Histories Project:

Mr Charles Stewart Cole of London was also a frequent Bahá'í visitor. At that time he was the engineer in charge of the building of the Great West Road out of London and was presented to King George V at the opening ceremony. He used to come down to Broadstone at weekends and gave much pleasure to patients and visitors by taking them for drives round the beauty spots of Dorset and parts of Hampshire.

<https://bahaihistoryuk.wordpress.com/2013/01/04/susan-golden-kilford-killie-1883-1967> UK Baha'i Histories, *Susan Golden Kilford (Killie) (1883-1967)*

His appearance in the early twenties and disappearance in the mid thirties may be significant, quite a few people drifted away in the mid thirties as the Administrative Order changed the loose knit Baha'i Movement into the centrally organised Baha'i Faith. Cole's successful professional life might suggest Masonic connections, and indeed he was initiated on the 18th October 1915 into the Willesden Lodge (2489) of the Freemasons; he gave his profession as "Civil engineer", he may have chosen to leave when Baha'is were required to sever links with such organisations in 1936. Another clue to his spiritual interests might be found in his addresses, Spring Grove is built on the site of an ancient healing well

³ This picture can be seen in *Ethel Jenner Rosenberg, the life and times of England's outstanding Baha'i pioneer worker* Robert Weinberg, George Ronald, Oxford 1995 between pages 280 & 281

and Sutton Villa backs onto the site where the famous Hounslow Sarcen Stone⁴ was found, it is purely conjecture but this might indicate an interest in sacred sites, similar to the involvement of Baha'is in the reconstruction of the Holy Well at Glastonbury.

1.ii Comd. T. R. Fforde

Thomas Fford was one of the earliest Baha'is in Ireland and despite a commission in the Royal Navy had communist sympathies. Further information on him and his wife Joan Fforde nee Waring can be found in *Early Irish Bahá'ís* by R. Jackson Armstrong-Ingram (Armstrong-Ingram 1998, Spring) and *Joan Waring and Thomas Fforde* by Edwin Graham in *Essays and Notes on Early Links Between the Bahá'í Faith and Ireland*⁵. The Ffords do not seem to have played any role in the mainland community, although of course all of Ireland was part of the United Kingdom for part of the period under discussion.

1.iii Eric Hammond

His full name was Joseph Oliver Eric Hammond, born in Gosport, Hampshire in 1852, son of Alfred Hammond, whose profession is listed as "journalist" on the birth record. In 1891 Eric married Martha Ellen Ford at Farnham, St Andrews and by 1911 he was living at 30, Park Road, Wimbledon, the same address is listed on his death certificate in 1936. He was a significant contributor to early Baha'i literature, notably as the author of *The Splendour of God*, which was published in 1909 as part of the *Wisdom of the East Series* and is still widely available. He wrote the introduction to *Abdu'l Baha in London* and might reasonably be supposed to have played a part in its collection, editing and publication. Indeed, the publishers, The Unity Press were based in East Sheen, on the other side of the common from Wimbledon. Hammond seems to have been exceptionally fond of Wimbledon, he wrote a poem entitled "Song of Wimbledon" which was published in the *Wimbledon and Merton Annual*, Volume I (Copeland 1903), another contributor was a fellow Wimbledon resident well known to the Baha'is, W. T. Stead who contributed, "Reminiscences of Wimbledon". It is possible Hammond and Stead were known to each other but there is no evidence to support such a conjecture. Hammond was, however, interested in Hinduism and Theosophy, in 1902 he wrote an essay on Ramakrishna entitled "An Eastern Saint of Today", which was published in *The Theosophical Review* (Stavig 2010) Sravig describes Hammond as "an admirer of Vivekananda" and a reminiscence of a meeting with Swami Vivekananda in 1896 by Eric Hammond can be found on the Vivekananda website, <http://vivekananda.ws/eric-hammond/>. Hammond's interest in Vivekananda seems to predate his interest in the Baha'is and this was true of several Baha'is including Lady Blomfield. Interestingly his wife appears to have shared his interest in Vivekananda, at least a letter addressed to Nell and Eric Hammond is cited in, Swami Vivekananda, *the Living Vedanta* (Badrinath 2006, 409).

1.iv John Ludlow Marshall

An early Bahá'í, Emily Eastgate, recorded in her diary in 1948 details about the first Bahá'í in Birmingham. This was John Ludlow Marshall "Johnny" was a Scot, born in 1876, went to work as a tinsmith at the age of eleven and later, after marriage, settled in Birmingham to pursue his trade around 1900. He was confirmed in the Faith by Abdu'l Baha, Whom he met in 1911 and 1913, when he was, for many years, the only Bahá'í in Birmingham. Johnny kept excellent records of visits and lectures by some of the early visitors to Birmingham,

⁴ The stone can be seen in a dreadful state of disrepair in Lampton Park

⁵ <https://connectionsbbc.wordpress.com/2011/03/30/joan-waring-and-thomas-fforde/>

including Martha Root, Dr. Esslemont, Mountford Mills and Helen Bishop. At the age of 71 he retired from work and pioneered to Edinburgh where he died as a result of an accident in January 1948, only three months before the first Spiritual Assembly was formed there.⁶

1.v Carey Morris (Slide 5)

Carey Morris and his wife appear in no other Baha'i records; however, there is a Welsh artist of the same unusual name. It is possible that they are the same person. Carey Morris the artist was born in, Llandeilo Carmarthenshire on 7 May 1882; he married Jessie Phillips, who was the author of children's books, which he illustrated, and a journalist. Morris attended the National School and Llandeilo County School. Then he began his artistic studies at the Forbes School of Painting from 1902 to 1907. Two years after completing his studies at Forbes he began his studies at the Slade School of Art. He also studied at the Newlyn School in Cornwall. After completing his studies in Newlyn, he returned to London and maintained a studio on Cheyne Walk, Chelsea. During the First World War, he enlisted in the South Wales Borderers. He was on the Isle of Wight serving with the Isle of Wight Rifles from 1915-1917 and found some time during the war to paint. In the trenches of Flanders he suffered from poison gas which left him with lifelong health issues. He spent twelve months in hospitals in the Isle of Wight and Liverpool. After the war Morris had a studio in Chelsea and the couple lived in London. Although Morris concentrated primarily on portraits, he also worked as an illustrator for his wife and other authors. During the 1920s, Morris was a director of the National Eisteddfod.⁷ That his name appears on the ballot does not guarantee that it is the same person, however, art has always been central to the Faith and several of the Baha'is were artists. Morris painted a portrait of Rutland Broughton, a composer deeply involved with the reestablishment of Glastonbury, although Broughton was not a close colleague of Tudor Pole in his work in Glastonbury, Morris could easily have encountered him if he was visiting Broughton. Morris's involvement with the National Eisteddfod indicates an interest in Celtic culture which would also dovetail with Tudor Pole's interests. *All of this is of course purely circumstantial the writer is attempting to contact Morris's biographer to ascertain if there is any supporting evidence.*

1.vi George Palgrave Simpson

George Simpson was the leading male Baha'i of the period. The short biography of him in *Unfolding Destiny* states:

George Palgrave Simpson was associated with the Administration of the Faith in the British Isles from its earliest days, elected as Chairman of the first "Spiritual Council" and President of the "National Spiritual Assembly" in 1923. He also served as the Assistant Secretary and the Treasurer for some years. All the early letters from the Guardian were addressed to him and the file copies of his letters to the Holy Land, some to the Guardian and others to the various secretaries, as well as the Minutes in his handwriting, give us our closest insight into the conditions obtaining in the 1920's. At one stage he felt obliged to resign from the National Assembly but was still called upon to remain as its

⁶ <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/UD/ud-677.html> Unfolding Destiny

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carey_Morris

Treasurer and attend the meetings! He served the Cause with great distinction until his death on 31 August 1934.⁸

There was, another side to George Simpson, he was a lifelong Freemason. He was initiated on 28th February 1871 into the Lodge of Sincerity, in Norwich: in 1904, he joined the Lodge of Virtue, Manchester: and on 26th May 1894 he was initiated into the Electric Lodge, Hampton Court.

2. *The Missing Men*

Another point in time during which the nascent Baha'i community was visible, was during the visits of Abdul Baha 3rd September to 3rd October 1911 and 13th December 1912 to 21st January 1913 when in seeking the maximum publicity for Abdul Baha their activities were written up in periodicals, journals and books. It must be stressed that whilst the 1924 ballot paper is not totally accurate, it is far more accurate than sampling reports around the visits. However, a number of male names that appear to be significant at least in the public face of the Bahá'í Movement during the course of the visits are noticeable by their absence on the ballot paper. Whilst it would appear that although women were numerically dominant amongst the Baha'is who met the Master, males were disproportionately visible. This may reflect the nature of society at the time, men operated in a more public sphere, they built their networks through schools, colleges, regiments and lodges, men had access to professions from which women were excluded. Many of the women involved in the Baha'i Movement had links with the suffrage movement which operated through personal contact and small "at home" meetings and this was translated into their relationship with the Baha'i Movement.

The difference between the way males and females organised is very visible in the first visit of Abdu'l Baha to Great Britain. Abdu'l Baha arrived on 3rd September 1911 and spent most of his time in London, staying at the home of Lady Blomfield, he also visited Surrey and Bristol. There were four major public appearances, which must have been set up prior to Abdu'l Baha's arrival, it is known that both Wellesley Tudor Pole and Neville Meakin made visits to Egypt in 1910 to presumably to finalise arrangements.

On Sunday September 10th 1911 'Abdu'l-Bahá made his first public appearance in Britain at the City Temple in the City of London. He did so at the request of the minister Reginald Campbell (Hammond 1982 reprint, 17). Campbell was closely involved with the *Christian Commonwealth* periodical, a Christian socialist publication and he had written an influential book entitled *New Theology* and was seen by some of his more enthusiastic supporters as a successor to Luther. The Address was published in *The Christian Commonwealth* of September 13th, 1911, with the following description: "Spoken by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Persian from the city Temple pulpit, the above translation was then read to the congregation by Mr. W. Tudor-Pole." The venue is very significant, the City Temple is the only Non Conformist church in the City, it is the "premier pulpit" of the Congregationalist Church (now the URC) and R J Campbell was probably the most influential Non Conformist clergyman of the time. The role of Tudor Pole is also interesting; he was the most high profile male Baha'i at the

⁸ <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/UD/ud-643.html>

time, he was a frequent contributor to *The Christian Commonwealth* and the likely contact with Campbell.

The second of these big public meetings took place a week later at St. John the Divine Church in Smith Square, Westminster. Here the minister was Archdeacon Basil Wilberforce, an eccentric and influential Anglican and Freemason. He was first

On September 17th, 'Abdu'l-Bahá at the request of the venerable Archdeacon of Westminster addressed the congregation of Saint John the Divine after evening service. With a few warm words characteristic of his whole attitude Archdeacon Wilberforce introduced the revered Messenger from the East, who had crossed seas and countries on his Mission of Peace and Unity for which he had suffered forty years of captivity and persecution. The Archdeacon had the Bishop's chair placed for his Guest on the Chancel steps, and standing beside him read the translation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's address himself. The Congregation was profoundly moved, and following the Archdeacon's example knelt to receive the blessing of the Servant of God—who stood with extended arms—his wonderful voice rising and falling in the silence with the power of his invocation. As the Archdeacon said: "Truly the East and the West have met in this sacred place tonight." The hymn "O God our help in ages past" was sung by the entire assembly standing, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Archdeacon passed down the aisle to the vestry hand in hand. (Hammond 1982 reprint, 127)

The third public event took place in Bristol, at The Clifton Guest House, owned and run by the Pole family. The guest house advertised regularly in the *Christian Commonwealth*, an "interesting" speaker was an important part of the experience of staying there and a number of high profile alternative opinions were aired there. The "Blue Bowl" which Wellesley Tudor Pole and three women had recovered from a well in Glastonbury, it was believed by many to be of great spiritual significance and by some, including Basil Wilberforce to be the Holy Grail. The bowl was kept in an Oratory in the guest house and it would appear to be to this that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was alluding when:

He went over the Guest house and blessed it as a centre for pilgrims from every part of the world, and said it would become indeed a House of Rest. (Hammond 1982 reprint)

No mention of the bowl is made in any Baha'i sources and it may be that it was a conscious decision to distance 'Abdu'l-Bahá from what might have been considered a somewhat eccentric perspective. There is mention; however, "On the morning of the third day, a Canon of the Anglican Church met him at breakfast." (Hammond 1982 reprint) This was likely Basil Wilberforce and it would seem to be the last contact between the two men for a while, in Mahmud's Diary a somewhat strained reconciliation appears to take place. (slide 6)

The fourth and final meeting was organised by Mrs Thornburgh Cropper and was attended by over four hundred and fifty people. It was held at the Passmore Edwards Settlement, where regular Baha'i meetings took place.

On the platform surrounding 'Abdu'l-Bahá were men of different shades of thought, met to express their sympathy with the work and mission of their great visitor. Professor Michael E. Sadler was in the chair. (Hammond 1982 reprint)

The Chairman was followed by Sir Richard Stapley, Mr. Eric Hammond, Mr. Claude Montefiore, Mrs. Stannard from Egypt, and others. (Hammond 1982 reprint)

An enquirer who attended these four very public events would have been unlikely to assume that some ten years later the membership of the Baha'i community would be 80% female. At the City Temple 'Abdu'l-Bahá, surrounded by his exclusively male Persian entourage was introduced by Campbell and his words read in English by Pole, in the church of St John, Wilberforce took a leading role, in Bristol Thomas and Wellesley Pole were the hosts who introduced Abdu'l Baha's talk and at the Passmore Edwards Settlement meeting, although Alice Buckton and Jean Stannard spoke the majority of the speakers were male. Overall, the public face of the Baha'is over the course of the first visit was male, although photographs reveal a large proportion of women in the audiences both in small private meetings and large public ones.

This raises the question, what happened to the men? Of the names on the 1924 voting list only Eric Hammond and George Simpson would have been recognised by the 1911 enquirer. Birmingham's John Marshall and Edward Hall and Alfred Sugar of Manchester were still there in 1924, but they had not been part of the high profile participants from London. Both Campbell and Wilberforce seem to lose interest and there is no further invitation to preach in their churches on the second visit. Arthur Cuthbert left over the expulsion of Amin'u'llah Farid, Wellesley Tudor Pole declined to join, Robert Felkin moved to New Zealand and some, Neville Meakin, Thomas Cheyne, Daniel Jenkin - died. Perhaps more significantly, there were no males who stepped up to replace them

This may be down to the tensions which developed in the British community around the period of the visits. In a society, still very much segregated by sex and gender the behaviour, expectations and experiences of men and women differed widely; arguably these differences informed the reaction of men and women to Abdul Baha. After the first visit a letter from Jean Stannard appeared in the 16th November, 1911 edition of the *Egyptian Gazette*, the paper also published an editorial which suggested that the writer had been present in London at some of Abdu'l Baha's public addresses. Both Stannard's letter and the editorial were republished in *Star of the West*, December 12th, 1911. The editorial is critical, not of Abdu'l Baha but of the behaviour of the Bahais:

Yet we must frankly admit that to us this is the least attractive side of the Bahá'í movement. If Baháism has found favour in the United States it cannot be forgotten that countless other "religions" have become popular there which would not have been taken seriously in any other country in the world. About the London meetings, also, there was a certain air of gush and self-advertisement-not on the part of Abbas Effendi, but on the part of his enlightened friends-which was quite patent to all who are familiar with, that kind of religion which will listen to anything so long as it is unorthodox, new, and sensational. We cannot help regretting the "lionizing" of Abbas Effendi.⁹

Star of the West not only partially concurs with opinions expressed but goes on to say:

⁹ https://bahai.media/images/8/8f/SW_Vol2_No15.pdf

'The criticism of the 'lionising" of Abdul-Baha should be received in the same kindly spirit in which it is made. In justice, however, to the friends in England, we quote the following extracts from a letter written by Mr. Tudor Pole, of Bristol, to the STAR OF THE WEST: "Since Abdul-Baha arrived in England and especially since he was my guest here, I have had some special opportunities for communion which have proved of immense service to me and to others. There are one or two points of considerable moment that have been borne in upon me as a result and in communicating them to you it should be understood that I do so on my own initiative and that the suggestions I make are not at the direct suggestion of Abdul-Baha himself. He is a most remarkable figure in history and his love and wisdom are boundless, yet of course he is simply the servant of his Father who was undoubtedly a great Messenger of God, and Abdul-Baha claims no other distinction. ••• There seems a tendency in America and elsewhere to focus too great attention on Abdul-Baha rather than upon the Manifestation Itself. * * * Abdul-Baha, I can see, does not wish for references to himself save as the servant of God, the inspired exponent or his Father's great message. To idolise Abdul-Baha in exaggerated terms or forms is to delay the spread of the Bahai spirit 'Of Unity. * * We are wonderfully blessed to have him among us, but imagination, exaggerated emphasis must not be laid upon his personality or the whole movement will suffer. This is a matter of supreme import."¹⁰

The writer of Star of the West, continues by explaining that while "lionising" and "idolising" of "great souls is most natural", it is an immature reaction and the balance of reverence of the spirit and the personality should always be maintained. This passage is probably an attempt to address possible inappropriate responses by American believers.

Another clue comes from the obituary of Andrew Petrie Cattanach:

He was much impressed with Baha Ullah and with Abdul Baha who was in London in 1912. "The world will know more of them before it comes to an end," he wrote, adding: "Abdul Baha asked me to work for it and I did so up to a point, but had to chuck it owing to foolishness. I fear I am one who cannot suffer fools gladly, probably being one myself."

Cattanach had been a member of the Stella Matutina Order and was an associate of Felkin and Meakin, he was Scottish and a lifelong Theosophist. He is yet another male Baha'i who does not make it onto the 1924 ballot paper.

3. Masculine Spirituality

So, what was the relevance which drew men towards the Baha'i Cause, that was not sustained enough to allow them to overcome their dislike of the "fools", "lionising" and "idolising"? There appear to be two strands of context in which a single focus of relevance can be identified. The relevance is "brotherhood" and the contexts are Freemasonry and Socialism. The two contexts have considerable overlap, in so far as radical movements have

¹⁰ Ibid

often sought spiritual grounding in occult beliefs, there is a wealth of literature on this phenomenon and it is only touched upon in this paper.

Slide 7

| Socialism/Communism/Labour Party | Freemasons and occult orders |
|--|---|
| <i>Reginald Campbell</i> Edward T Hall Arthur Sugar John Esslemont Cmdr Fforde | <i>Basil Wilberforce</i> Wellesly Tudor Pole Thomas Pole Neville Meakin Robert Felkin Andrew Petrie Cattanach George Palgrave Simpson Charles S D Cole |
| | |

Freemasons **Slides 8abc**

It suffices to state here that many radical movements contained men who were Masons, perhaps one of the most interesting was the Humanitas Lodge in Vienna:

Humanitas was the oldest and largest lodge and had a few hundred members. Masonic lodges provided the bourgeoisie with an alternative to the established social hierarchy. Their leadership came from the bourgeoisie's upper echelons and their members from the solid middle classes: affluent merchants and bankers, well-to-do professionals and professors. Jews were heavily represented giving Austrian lodges a very different profile from their German counterparts. (Hacohen 2002)

The Humanitas Lodge included amongst its members the eccentric Richard Nikolaus Eijiro, Count of Coudenhove-Kalergi, (November 16, 1894 – July 27, 1972) a pioneer of the now discredited notion of European integration, he argued for native European populations to be augmented by mass immigration and mixing of races, he also believed the Jews had a particular destiny as the “spiritual nobility of Europe”.

The man of the future will be of mixed race. Today's races and classes will gradually disappear owing to the vanishing of space, time, and prejudice. The Eurasian-Negroid race of the future, similar in its appearance to the Ancient Egyptians, will replace the diversity of peoples with a diversity of individuals. ... Instead of destroying European Jewry, Europe, against its own will, refined and educated this people into a future leader-nation through this artificial selection process. No wonder that this people, that escaped Ghetto-Prison, developed into a spiritual nobility of Europe. Therefore a gracious Providence provided Europe with a new race of nobility by the Grace of Spirit. This happened at the moment when Europe's feudal aristocracy became dilapidated, and thanks to Jewish emancipation.

Coudenhove-Kalergi's work probably forms the basis of many Masonic-Zionist conspiracy theories; however, it was influential and arguably informed the creation of the European Union. Also initiated into the Humanitas Lodge was Carl Kellner, (1 September 1851 – June 7, 1905) the founder of the OTO, an occult order that rose to greater notoriety under the leadership of Alistair Crowley.

A more benign version of Masonic brotherhood in a multicultural context can found in Kipling's poem, The Old Mother Lodge (**slide 9**). All these lodges, fraternities and orders had

one concept in common – brotherhood. The notion of brotherhood (sometimes inclusive of sisterhood but more often exclusively brethren) seems to have been particularly strong in the years leading up to the First World War and due to the success of the Russian Revolution the socialist aspect of fraternity became particularly important. There is evidence of Baha'is being interested in the socialist notion of brotherhood is clear in the poems of ET Hall and Esslemont's articles in the *Southern Worker*. The socialist men, outside London such as Hall and Esslemont seem to have been more likely to stay within the Baha'i community than those of an esoteric or occultist background, perhaps the relevance shared between socialism and the Baha'i Teachings was more enduring because until the limitations on political involvement for Baha'is became fully accepted, there seemed little contradiction, whereas, the shared ground with occultism was not enhanced by the visits of 'Abdu'l Baha.

4. The Baha'i Teachings and Men

There is little in the Baha'i Writings that specifically address the concerns of men, indeed the quotations below, all of which are from public talks given by Abdu'l Baha whilst in London and Paris, whilst they clearly indicate the stress placed on the equality of women as outlined in the Baha'i Teachings, they do not appear particularly radical today, however, at the time there may well have been men who would have found them difficult to accept.

The woman is indeed of the greater importance to the race. She has the greater burden and the greater work. Look at the vegetable and the animal worlds. The palm which carries the fruit is the tree most prized by the date grower. The Arab knows that for a long journey the mare has the longest wind. For her greater strength and fierceness, the lioness is more feared by the hunter than the lion. (*'Abdu'l-Bahá in London*, pp. 102-3)

The woman has greater moral courage than the man; she has also special gifts which enable her to govern in moments of danger and crisis. (*'Abdu'l-Bahá in London*, p. 103)

His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh has greatly strengthened the cause of women, and the rights and privileges of women is one of the greatest principles of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Rest ye assured! Erelong the days shall come when the men addressing the women, shall say: "*Blessed are ye! Blessed are ye! Verily ye are worthy of every gift. Verily ye deserve to adorn your heads with the crown of everlasting glory, because in sciences and arts, in virtues and perfections ye shall become equal to man, and as regards tenderness of heart and the abundance of mercy and sympathy ye are superior.*" (*Paris Talks*)

The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the balance is already shifting; force is losing its dominance, and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an age less masculine and more permeated with the feminine ideals, or, to speak more exactly, will be an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more evenly balanced. (Quoted in J. E. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*)

Whatever the impact of these utterances were on males in the audience no record remains of anybody disputing the assertions, however, women's suffrage was at this time far from universally accepted and it is reasonable to suppose that there were some who would have found these views uncomfortable. Whilst not all of those would have been men, it is likely a disproportionate number were.

5. *Conclusions*

There can never be rigorous demonstration of why something did not happen, however, the following considerations may go some way to explain the failure of males to embrace the Baha'i Cause or to withdraw from it after a brief period.

- It would seem that Abdu'l Baha was better suited to the smaller scale "at home" style of meetings, rather than the large, formal public meetings where his oratory would be impeded by the need for interpreters and it was in this type of meeting where men tended to be to the fore. The less formal meetings where females dominated and questions related to suffrage and the role of women were put were more in line with the intimacy of meetings with pilgrims that were familiar to Abdu'l Baha and his followers.
- The importance of women's suffrage in this period and the role of Baha'i women in the suffrage movement meant that the issue would always be prominent, during the second visit in particular Abdu'l Baha met with Mrs Pankhurst and addressed the Women's Freedom League with Charlotte Despard. Clearly, where there were women interested in suffrage Abdu'l Baha would be asked his opinion on the matter, that Baha'i Teachings and the prevalent understanding of women's rights were in harmony meant that relevance for women would be exceptionally high. While men would have been disproportionately represented amongst those who found the Teachings on equality too radical.
- Men whose experience was based on Freemasonry or similar orders initially found relevance in the brotherhood aspect of the Baha'i Teachings and possibly in assumed esoteric components, however, when faced with the reality, that there were no rituals, robes or secret handshakes, the relevance withdrew and so did they.

Men found relevance in the Baha'i Teachings because they spoke of international brotherhood, however, the Baha'i Teachings were not unique enough to be really compelling. A similar message was available in other contexts, Freemasons, occult orders and trade unions.