

THORNTON CHASE

First American Bahá'í

Robert H. Stockman

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THORNTON CHASE

First American Bahá'í

by Robert H. Stockman


Bahá'í Publishing Trust
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To Lua

Part I. Childhood in Lua

1. Childhood in Lua (1911-1917)

The Old Man

The Old Woman

The Old Man

The Old Woman

The Old Man

The Old Woman

The Old Man

The Old Woman

Part II. Life in Lua

1. The Old Man

The Old Man

The Old Man

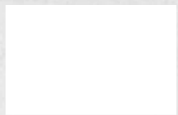
The Old Man

The Old Man

The Old Man

The Old Man

1911



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THE FAMILY OF THORNTON CHASE

Aquila Chase = Ann
(c. 1618-1670)
Newbury, MA

Thomas Chase
(1654-1733)
Newbury, MA

Dea. Thomas Chase
(1680-1756)
Newbury, MA

Rev. Josiah Chase (1743) = Sarah Tufts
(1713-1778)
Kittery, ME

Col. Josiah Chase (1768) = Hannah Grow
(1746-1824)
York, ME

Jotham Sewall Chase (1812) = Mary Gould
(1790-1883)
Boston, MA

Sarah Cutts S. G. Thornton = [1, 1846] Dea. Jotham Gould Chase [2, 1850] = Cornelia S. Savage
(1820-1847) (1816-1884) (1821-1901)
Springfield, MA

Annie Elizabeth Louise Allyn = [1, 1870; divorced 1878] [James Brown] Thornton Chase [2, 1880] = Eleanor Francesca Hockett Pervier
(1848-1918) (1847-1912) (1858-1933)

Charles Engs Lawton = Sarah Thornton Chase (1895)
(1871-1908)

Jessamine Allyn Chase
(1874-1947)

Col. William Jotham Thornton Chase
(1889-1967)

Edward Wing Lawton (1896-?)
Frances (1897-?)
Richard (1899-?)
Charles (1903-?)
Margaret (1904-?)

Preface

I approach the subject of this biography with more than academic or historical curiosity about the life of an important person, now long dead, or pious interest in the first American convert to my religion. Circumstances have tied my life to Thornton Chase's in some unexpected ways. First, there is a series of parallels between our lives.¹ Second, Thornton Chase's life has exerted a powerful influence on my own career and intellectual development. One result of my research on his life was my discovery that the study of historical documents and newspapers was fascinating and better suited my

1. We are both New England Yankees, as our Puritan ancestors arrived on America's shores only two years apart and settled in towns twenty miles apart. My grandmother and Thornton Chase's stepmother both lived in Hartford, Connecticut, and, were it not for the ten years separating their residences, it is quite likely they would have met, as both were upper-middle class and active in their respective Protestant churches. I grew up twenty miles from Springfield, Massachusetts, Thornton Chase's native city, and first heard of the Bahá'í Faith across the river from Springfield in West Springfield, where Thornton Chase lived as a child. I received my undergraduate education at Wesleyan University, a few miles from Thornton Chase's stepmother's parent's home, and then went to graduate school at Brown University, where Thornton Chase himself had been a student. My office there looked out over the backyard of Saint Stephen's Episcopal Church, which stood sixty feet from my desk; I later learned Thornton Chase was married there in 1870. The first place outside of New England where I have resided was greater Los Angeles, in the summer of 1976; Thornton Chase lived there three years and died there. One of the highlights of my sojourn was a visit to Thornton Chase's grave in Inglewood, California. Subsequent to my research on Thornton Chase, I moved to the Chicago area, another location where he spent a large portion of his life.

talents than research in geology, the field I had been studying. In late December 1979 I realized that if I knew the date of death of Thornton Chase's father, I could find his obituary in the *Springfield Republican* and thereby acquire considerable biographical information. Consequently, I ran the half-mile to Springfield City Hall to look up his death certificate. While running back to the public library, it occurred to me that I had never run while doing geological research, and I began to think seriously about changing my career.

As a result, in the spring of 1980, I experienced a career crisis. To help resolve it, I decided to say a particular prayer in the Bahá'í prayer book every day. I chose the one that includes the passage "brighten my eyes by beholding the hosts of divine assistance descending successively upon me from the kingdom of Thine omnipotent glory"² because it seemed best to describe the nature of the help I needed.

Partly as a result of saying the prayer and partly because I came to believe that research in the history of religion suited my talents better than scientific research, I applied to and later attended Harvard Divinity School to study the history of religion in the United States. Thornton Chase's tutor was a Harvard alumnus, as was his great-great-grandfather.

Even after resolving my career crisis by making the decision to pursue a doctorate in the history of religion, I continued to say daily the prayer that I had used. Later that year, in the summer of 1980, I learned that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had revealed the prayer specifically for Thornton Chase, at his request.

The project of writing Thornton Chase's biography, as originally conceived, included a large section detailing the history of the American Bahá'í community. The history subsequently developed separately into the two-volume work entitled *The Bahá'í Faith in*

2. *Bahá'í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), 57-58.

America: Origins, 1892–1900, and *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Early Expansion, 1900–1912*. Writing these two volumes became my first priority. The biography was drafted in 1987, but the need to complete my doctoral dissertation, then the demands of my job, delayed the editing over a decade.

Separating the biography of Thornton Chase from the history of the early American Bahá'í community has been difficult because the two stories are thoroughly interwoven. Thornton Chase was the most prominent American Bahá'í and the community's leading writer, speaker, and organizer. His papers provide the most complete picture of the community available. Thornton Chase is inevitably the most prominent figure in any history of the community to 1912. The Bahá'í Faith was Thornton Chase's central priority; thus the major events of the American Bahá'í community play a dominant role in shaping his life. In the two volumes of history, I have related the events dominated by Thornton Chase as they shaped the American Bahá'í community but have touched upon Thornton Chase's personality and past only as they were relevant to the events themselves. In the biography, I have mentioned the events of American Bahá'í history only as they affected Thornton Chase personally. This distinction is sometimes artificial but necessary; otherwise, details relevant to Thornton Chase but not to American Bahá'í history, or relevant to American Bahá'í history but not to Thornton Chase, would be so intermixed that creating a coherent narrative would be difficult.

The present work focuses on the life of an individual who was highly introspective in his letters and essays. Thornton Chase saw living as one great spiritual act; as he once succinctly put it, "Religion is Life, and Life is Love, and Love is God."³ Thus a key subject that this book will examine is the delineation of Thornton Chase's vision of true life, of living, and of love, and of how that vision changed during the different stages of his life.

3. Thornton Chase to Mrs. A. M. Bryant (copy), 30 November 1908, 3, TC.

The theory and practice of psychoanalysis—as described by Erik Erikson in his classic *Childhood and Society* and as applied in his brilliant psychobiographies *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* and *Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence*—have provided tools useful in studying Thornton Chase's life.⁴ Developmental psychology, as it has unfolded over the last several decades, also provides powerful conceptual schemes for examining the life of an individual, especially one as introspective and reflective as Thornton Chase's was. It has tentatively identified certain patterns of development through which all human beings pass, patterns that help to draw many conclusions about Thornton Chase's life even when the data are meager. Throughout the book, theories of developmental psychology will be used to examine the nature of Thornton Chase's personality and his growth. No psychological theory has yet been accepted as an exhaustive model for the nature of human beings—indeed, such a universal theory may not be possible. Hence my treatment of Thornton Chase should not be regarded as complete. The Seven Valleys, a composition by Bahá'u'lláh, the prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith, provides a description of spiritual development as a series of seven stages. These stages make a fitting description of part of Thornton Chase's spiritual development. However, it should be noted that Bahá'u'lláh's seven stages are an entirely different description of human development than the stages described by developmental psychologists and, unlike the latter, need not occur in a certain order.

Any biography seeks to reveal the private character of its subject as well as the individual's public persona. The surviving materials make this particularly difficult in the case of Thornton Chase because the two purges of his papers after his death sought to destroy

4. Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963); Erik Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1962); Erik Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1969).

items of a "private" nature. (See Appendix 1 for a detailed discussion of the history of his papers.) Consequently, little information remains on Thornton Chase's Civil War experiences, his attitudes toward racism and war, the dynamics of his marriage and family life, and other intimate aspects of his life. The biography has refrained from speculating about Thornton Chase's moods and feelings, leaving it to the reader to speculate about his personal reactions to events in his life.

This book will use the standard system of transliterating Arabic and Persian words used by the Bahá'í Faith. The only exceptions will be words now so common in English that they have become a part of the language (such as Iran, Tehran, Baghdad) and the names of those Middle Easterners who came to the United States, settled, learned English, and adopted a legal spelling of their name that differs from the standard Bahá'í transliteration.

Since the 1920s, the Bahá'í Faith has had a system whereby translations of the Bahá'í scriptures into English may be checked for accuracy and approved, thereby becoming official, authoritative translations. Such translations often do not exist for early texts quoted in this book. The reader need only check the citation, which gives the name of the translator and date of translation, to determine whether the translation can be considered authoritative.

Several people provided information and guidance without which this book would not have been possible. Dr. Sharon Parks at Harvard Divinity School has been my principal source of guidance about psychology and human development. Dr. William Hutchison has guided me through the history of religion in America, not only providing information but also pressing me to ask the significant questions. Dr. Betty J. Fisher, chief editor of *World Order* magazine, has encouraged me and served as a source of wise counsel. Drs. John Walbridge and William Maxwell both read the manuscript and made numerous suggestions for its improvement.

The descendants of Thornton Chase deserve special thanks. The members of the family descended from Thornton Chase and

his first wife have been unstintingly generous with their time, their family photographs, and their memories. I particularly thank Mr. Charles Lawton and Mrs. Margaret Hansen for their assistance. Charles has been particularly helpful in catching errors of spelling, infelicities of style, and nuances of interpretation.

The descendants of Thornton Chase through his second wife not only took a stranger into their homes but also provided him with more Southern hospitality in a week than he could have imagined receiving from anyone in a year. All have been generous with their family heritage and have provided most of the photographs that illustrate this work. Among the generous donors are Thornton Chase Nelson, F. Langley Nelson, Michael Nelson, Lavinia Morris Chase, W. March Boal, Louise Boal, Fred L. Nelson, and Joyce Nelson.

Numerous others provided information and documents that were crucial in assembling this biography. Among the institutions are the Boston Public Library; the Brown University Archives; the Chicago Public Library; the City and County of Denver, Colorado, court records; the Colorado State Historical Society Library, Denver, Colo.; the Connecticut State Library, Hartford, Conn.; the County Clerk's Office of Del Norte County, Colo.; the Dartmouth College Archives; the Denver Public Library; the Harvard University Archives; the Harvard University library system; the Hampshire County, Mass., court records; the Hilton Head Historical Society, Hilton Head, S.C.; the Library of Congress; the Los Angeles County, Calif., court records; the National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, Ill.; Newport, R.I., City Hall; the Pennsylvania State Historical Society Library, Philadelphia, Penn.; Providence, R.I., City Hall; Providence Public Library; the Redwood Library, Newport, R.I.; the Rhode Island State Historical Society Library, Providence, R.I.; Rockefeller Library, Brown University; Saint Stephen's Episcopal Church, Providence, R.I.; South Carolina State Historical Society Library, Charleston, S.C.; Springfield, Mass., City Hall; the Springfield Public Library; the Suffolk County, Mass., court records;

and the United States Government Archives, Washington, D.C. Individuals who provided information, answered questions, or assisted my work include R. Jackson Armstrong-Ingram, Ruth Colville, Roger Dahl, Patricia Gorman, David Gould, Bill and Marie Griffith, Craig Holman, Harmon Jones, Richard Hollinger, Brenda Kepley, Firuz and Joan Labib, Sophie Loeding, Taraz Martinez, Kenneth Mullen, Robert H. Peeples, Erich Reich, Patricia Riley, Dean and Donna Stansbury, Edna True, Lewis Walker, Isabelle Windust, and Ed Wuhlschleger. My gratitude to them cannot be expressed adequately by words. My greatest debt of gratitude, however, is to Thornton Chase for having left the documentation necessary for reconstructing his life and for having been the exemplary Bahá'í that he was.

Introduction

'Abdu'l-Bahá's praise of Thornton Chase (1847–1912) clearly indicates that Thornton Chase is one of the most significant figures in American Bahá'í history. In addition to giving him the title *Thábit*, meaning "steadfast"—one of the most significant spiritual titles to which a Bahá'í can attain—'Abdu'l-Bahá designated Thornton Chase's grave a place of pilgrimage, revealed a tablet of visitation (a prayer to say in remembrance of him), and decreed that his death be commemorated annually. Few Bahá'ís have received all three honors. 'Abdu'l-Bahá said Thornton Chase's "worth" at present "is not known" but "will be inestimably dear" in the future. He added that Thornton Chase's services "will ever be remembered," that his books "will be studied carefully by the coming generations," and that Thornton Chase's station in the future "will be known."¹ Although 'Abdu'l-Bahá is not known to have designated Thornton Chase a Hand of the Cause of God,² other statements He made signify that he attained an exceptionally high spiritual station.

One is at a loss to think of another American Bahá'í of Thornton Chase's generation who possessed his capacities. He was exceptionally even-tempered and mild-mannered. No criticism of him has yet been found, and he is not known to have engaged in extended controversy with anyone. His capacity to love everyone, even

1. *Star of the West* 3.13 (4 November 1912): 14–15.

2. A Hand of the Cause of God is an individual who has been recognized in the Bahá'í Faith for having special spiritual qualities. Only Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi were empowered to confer this designation.

those who disagreed with him, is repeatedly demonstrated in his words and actions.

Where efforts to develop the American Bahá'í administrative system from 1900 to 1912 are concerned, no one is comparable. Thornton Chase is perhaps the only individual before 1912 who had a thorough understanding of the Bahá'í concept of consultation. His service as chairman of the Chicago House of Spirituality probably accounts for the great success of that body, the only well-functioning Bahá'í consultative body in the Western world during Thornton Chase's lifetime. Records show that he was the chief instigator of many of the House's activities; he suggested most of the activities that it initiated and then wrote the letters and proposals or did the negotiating necessary for the activities to be carried through to conclusion. All these achievements suggest that Thornton Chase deserves the title of premier American Bahá'í administrator of the Heroic Age.³

Thornton Chase's job took him on a three- or four-month tour of much of the United States every year, making him probably the most traveled American Bahá'í. In a time before the American Bahá'ís had a national organization and, therefore, a sense of belonging to a national community, Thornton Chase's traveling made him by far the most widely known American Bahá'í on the continent.

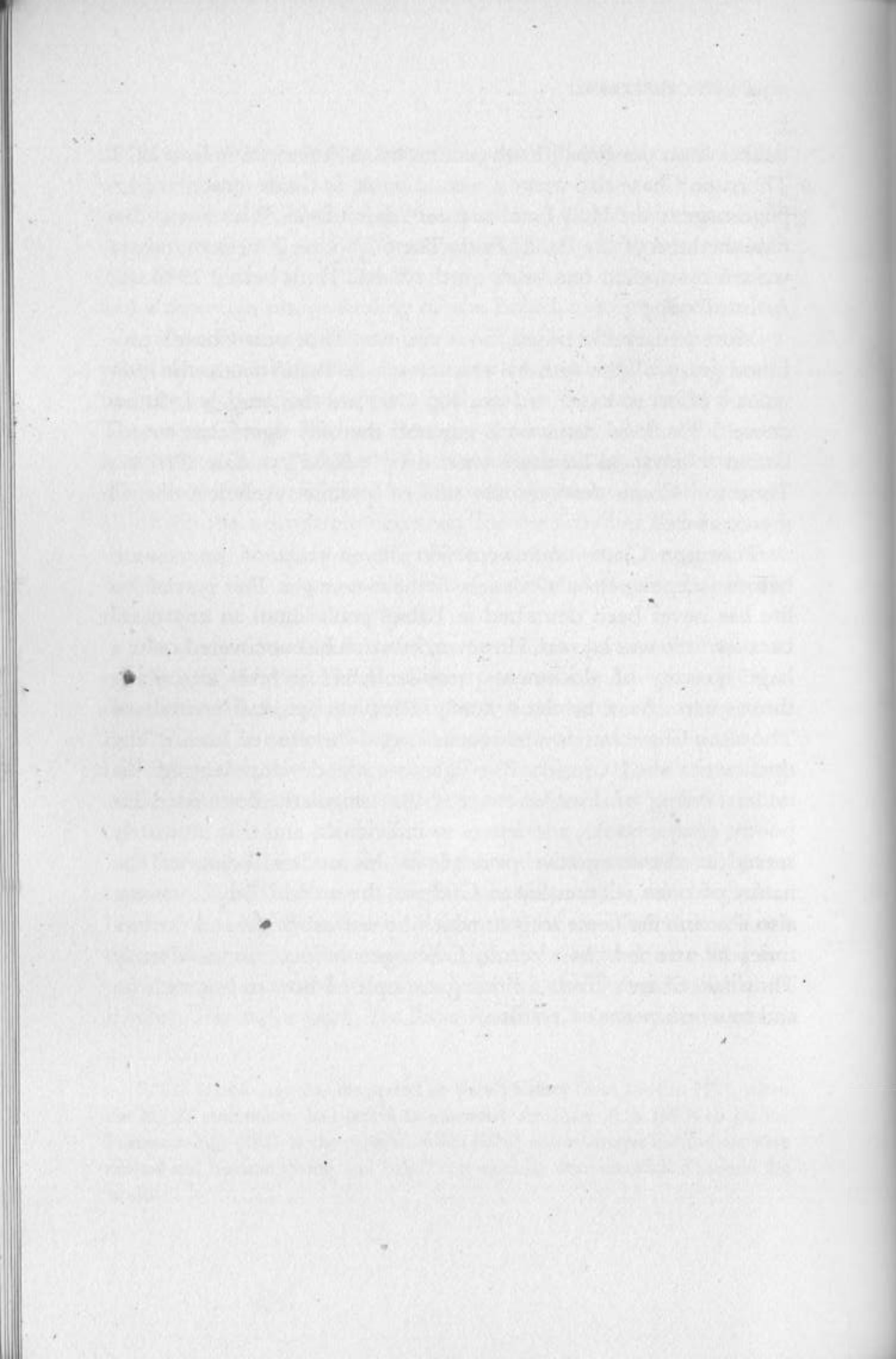
Thornton Chase's essays and letters also demonstrate his great capacity. Bahá'í literature in English was then scarce, and he probably had a more thorough understanding of the Bahá'í teachings than did any other Westerner. He had read—indeed, he edited for publication—most of the Bahá'í works that were available in English. His major work, *The Bahai Revelation*, was the only substan-

3. The Heroic Age was the period of Bahá'í history from 1844 to 1921, when the Bahá'í community had little administrative structure. It is followed by the Formative Age (1921 to the present), when Bahá'í administrative institutions were created and became strong, and Bahá'í communities were established around the world.

tial book on the Bahá'í Faith written by an American before 1912. Thornton Chase also wrote a second book, *In Galilee*, describing his pilgrimage to the Holy Land to meet 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who was at that time the head of the Bahá'í Faith. The only other American to have written more than one book on the Bahá'í Faith before 1912 was Arthur Dodge.

Most remarkable of all, however, was Thornton Chase's profound grasp of the spiritual essence of the Bahá'í Faith: the individual's effort to know and worship God and the struggle to know oneself. *The Bahai Revelation* is arguably the only significant contribution to mystical literature written by a Bahá'í to date. Perhaps Thornton Chase deserves the title of premier American Bahá'í mystic as well.

Thornton Chase underwent forty-seven years of preparation before accepting Bahá'u'lláh as a divine messenger. This part of his life has never been described in Bahá'í publications in any detail because little was known. However, research has uncovered quite a large quantity of documents outside Bahá'í archives describing those years. As a result, a nearly complete spiritual portrait of Thornton Chase can now be reconstructed for most of his life. The documents shed considerable light on the development of his understanding of love, a concept that singularly dominated his poetry, essays, books, and letters to individuals, and that ultimately served as the integrative principle in his understanding of the nature of one's relationship to God and the world. The documents also illumine the fierce tests to which he was subjected and the victories he attained. As a result, future generations can now study Thornton Chase's life as a shining example of how to live, to love, and to worship one's Creator.



CHAPTER 1

A Farewell

On the morning of Sunday, 26 September 1909, the Chicago Bahá'ís gathered for their weekly worship service at the Corinthian Hall of the Masonic Temple in downtown Chicago. Bahá'í communities have not traditionally held Sunday services, but the Chicago Bahá'ís, accustomed to weekly worship in their former churches, had devised a service in 1903 that consisted of a mixture of Protestant and Bahá'í features. That day's service was probably typical for the Chicago Bahá'í community. Thornton Chase began the program by uttering the words from Habbakuk 2:20 that were often used at the beginning of Protestant services: "The Lord is in His Holy Temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him."¹ The program that followed included readings from the Bahá'í scriptures and the Bible as well as the singing of hymns, both Bahá'í and Protestant, with piano accompaniment. The highlight of the gathering was a talk, given as usual by Thornton Chase. The program that day was noteworthy, however, because the talk was the last Thornton Chase would give in Chicago. Within a week he would leave the city where he had lived more than fifteen years for Los Angeles, because his company required him to relocate. Thornton Chase had been the mainspring of the Chicago Bahá'í community since its establishment in 1894. Thus the gathering was a sad one.

1. Sophie Loeding, interview with author, 9 July 1982, supplement page, author's personal papers. I am indebted to John Walbrider for identifying the biblical quotation and noting that it is often used to begin Episcopal services.

Thornton Chase rose and moved to the front of the room to deliver his talk. He was an extremely impressive man in two ways. First, physically: He was six feet, one and a half inches tall and weighed over 260 pounds.² To his size was added the distinction of age—he was sixty-two years old, with white hair and a large, bushy, white mustache. Second, spiritually: Thornton Chase apparently had a countenance that radiated a fatherly love, a patience with others, and an openness to others that was palpable. As Juanita Storch, who met Thornton Chase when she was a teenager, recalled, “He carried the Bahá’í spirit better than anyone else I met in those days. . . . Every inch of him had a radiance.”³

We cannot know what Thornton Chase felt as he looked out over his audience of about a hundred Chicago Bahá’ís and their friends, but both sadness and joy are likely to have been present. Sadness because of his imminent departure from the community that had been the focus of so much of his energy and love for the previous decade and a half; and joy for what the community, the oldest, largest, and most important Bahá’í community in North America, had become. In June 1894 Thornton Chase had attended the first Bahá’í meeting in Chicago and was among the first converts. In the years since, he had watched others convert, one by one, had personally introduced some of them to the Bahá’í Faith, and had explained its teachings to most of them. He had helped to organize the Chicago Bahá’í community and in 1901 had been one of the men who established the House of Spirituality, the community’s governing body and for many years the most important Bahá’í administrative institution in North America. He had been the

2. Thornton Chase’s height information comes from the questionnaire he filled out on 17 March 1909 for his Veteran’s Pension (United States Federal Archives, Washington, D.C.). His weight is given in correspondence from Arthur Agnew to Andrew J. Nelson, 3 August 1902, Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Racine, Wis., Records, National Bahá’í Archives, Wilmette, Ill.

3. Telephone Interview with Juanita Storch, 7 August 1982, notes in Robert H. Stockman, Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 15.3, author’s personal papers.

community's principal leader and guiding force. He had participated in every major decision of the Chicago Bahá'ís and in fact had often proposed the courses of action that were finally adopted. He was one of the reasons that Chicago had emerged as the leading Bahá'í community in the Western world. He had personally advised many of the Bahá'ís present, had often coordinated the funerals of their loved ones, and had attended their weddings. Leaving such a group of people must have been very difficult, for he loved them and was intimately bound up with their lives.

We know what Thornton Chase said on that day because he preferred never to speak extemporaneously; he always wrote out his talks beforehand, then edited and typed them. The words read much like a farewell address, for he summarized the themes that the Chicago Bahá'ís had heard him stress repeatedly in his talks, conversations, and letters.

He began by emphasizing that the Bahá'í teachings were divine revelation. Such an idea seems simple enough, but the opening sentences of the address make it clear that some saw the Bahá'í Faith otherwise: "The Bahai Revelation does not spring out of the human concept of God. It is not a mystical cult, not a psychological problem, not an Oriental philosophy, not a religious fad."⁴ Thornton Chase was attempting to correct the views of many Chicago Bahá'ís in the audience, not just the ideas of their friends. He saw one of the major problems faced by the American Bahá'í community as the unwillingness of its own members to take its teachings seriously. Rather, many American Bahá'ís retained the metaphysical and spiritual beliefs that they had held before hearing of Bahá'u'lláh, and they ignored Bahá'u'lláh's teachings when these contradicted their own previous beliefs. Much of Thornton Chase's effort to teach the Bahá'í Faith over the previous fifteen years had been directed toward correcting this problem. His willingness to shed whatever

4. "Address given by Mr. Thornton Chase Sunday, 26 September 1909, Corinthian Hall, Masonic Temple, Chicago, Ill.," Green Acre Bahá'í School Library, Eliot, Maine.

opinions he had formed in favor of the Word was extraordinary; it reflected the depth and quality of his faith. Because of Thornton Chase's faith, the head of the Bahá'í religion at that time—'Abdu'l-Bahá—had given him the title of *Thábit*, steadfast, one of the most exalted stations to which a Bahá'í could ever attain.

Thornton Chase quickly moved on to his second perennial theme, the nature of true religion. His definition, which reflects his own mystical experience, somewhat resembles that of modern existentialism, although that movement did not yet exist. Thornton Chase explained that

Religion is living, doing, being, not imaginations and superstitions. It does not consist in happiness, exaltations or ecstasies, although they result from its practice. It is not of the past nor future, but *now*. The past is only valuable for the lessons we may gain from it; the future can only be the result of the now. It matters not so much from whence we came or whither we go, as WHAT WE ARE. The star gleaming in the heavens needs not to look backward over its track nor forward to its pathway; its business is *to shine*. . . .

Thornton Chase added to this an implied criticism of St. Paul and his stress on faith alone: "Religion is faith and works, not faith alone; it is to be, to live, to do, to serve, to be of use."⁵ He elaborated his view with a statement that could almost be a summary of the Bahá'í vision of walking the mystical path with practical feet:

This is a working universe, not a dreaming one. The true vision is that of the truth of service, to be a factor in the hand of God for making existence happier. . . . Unity signifies mutual service, mutual aid, mutual giving, not personal receiving. A cup must empty itself before it can receive more; if it retains just what it has, its contents become stagnant, worthless.⁶

5. Address, 26 September 1909, 2.

6. Address, 26 September 1909, 2.

Thornton Chase's vision of life was of something in motion as well as in interaction:

The law of existence is change. It is the means of growth, the continuance of life. Life is not a something given to be permanent, changeless, but rather a constant inflowing and outflowing. If we receive it and give it not forth as it comes to us, we will find it to be death, not life. It is action, movement, living. Let us walk in the Light of this Great Revelation and spend our lives in living.⁷

Such a vision of life was quite different from that held in the northern Baptist church in which Thornton Chase had been reared. There, the stress was on the conversion experience, the sudden change of heart toward Christ, not on a steady growth of the soul. Of course, evangelical Protestantism had changed greatly since Thornton Chase's birth in 1847. Even when he was a youth, the more liberal-minded clergy had spoken of the Christian life in terms of growth and gradual change, and since the turn of the century, such language had become common. Where had Thornton Chase acquired his understanding of "life" and "religion," terms that were virtually synonymous for him? From his Protestant background? From mystical writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson? From the Bahá'í sacred writings? From his personal experience? Thornton Chase's emphasis on revelation in his farewell address demonstrates that his religious perspectives are based primarily on statements in the Bahá'í scriptures. But his understanding of the scriptures was inevitably influenced by his own diverse and difficult life experiences, and by his reading—of the Christian philosopher-mystic Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), of world religions, of alternative religious systems like Theosophy, of liberal Protestantism, and probably of Transcendentalists like Emerson and Romantics like Shelley.

7. Address, 26 September 1909, 3.

Thornton Chase then focused his talk on the Bahá'í scriptures and the evidence of their sacredness. His approach was an ancient one, used to prove the truths of Christianity by the Christians of the first centuries as well as by American clergy before the Civil War. Thornton Chase, like his Baptist forebears, saw a connection between prophecy and the events of the day:

He [Bahá'u'lláh] requires the mutual acquaintance and helpfulness, the brotherhood of all peoples, and at once appear the means of rapid communication and transportation to connect all the lands and waters of earth, so that it shall indeed "become as one home" for all His children. All of these swift coming evolutions of this time of change from an old earth to the new are unquestionably the direct result of the commands of God and the revealings of His spirit to the searchers for Truth through the means of scientific discoveries.⁸

Protestant contemporaries of Thornton Chase saw the same changes as divinely inspired developments that would make possible the conquest of the world for Christ. Thornton Chase, however, did not share the ebullient optimism of his Christian peers, many of whom felt that humanity had so matured that war was now impossible. On the contrary, Thornton Chase saw considerable war in humanity's future and offered a vision of how war would cease that in retrospect appears to be prophetic: "He [Bahá'u'lláh] foretells the end of war and His prophecy shall find its fulfilment through the disclosure of such means of wholesale destruction that man shall stand appalled at the prospect of war."⁹ In the optimistic environment of the United States before World War I, Thornton Chase's Bahá'í friends may have found such a statement puzzling.

Thornton Chase concluded his talk by turning to the impact that the Word of God can have on the individual who listens to it:

8. Address, 26 September 1909, 6.

9. Address, 26 September 1909, 6.

... he finds his soul uplifted and brought into the very presence of its Creator. He recognizes the nearness of God, the divine care of the Father for himself and the overshadowing protection and guidance of Infinite Love and Wisdom, which controls the universe and also holds his own life in its close embrace. He is consciously in the arms of safety; he has no fear, no doubt; perfect love has cast out fear. He has only a perfect assurance[,] a reliable faith, a sure hope, an abiding joy, peace and happiness in the realized Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

This is the meaning and purpose of the Bahai Revelation.¹⁰

Such words bespeak Thornton Chase's personal religious experience. Thornton Chase had *lived* religion; as a result, he had experienced the assurance, faith, hope, and joy of which he spoke. These qualities were the product of a lifetime of growth, change, and spiritual development. What preparation made such a life possible, and what sort of life had it been? The examination of these questions reveals the connection between Thornton Chase's words and his experience and delineates the example of one person's spiritual odyssey.

10. Address, 26 September 1909, 7.

CHAPTER 2

New England Roots

An integral part of Thornton Chase's preparation for his extraordinary services to the Bahá'í Faith was his New England upbringing. He was reared in an upper middle class evangelical Protestant family of New England Puritan stock. His ancestors arrived in New England almost at the very beginning of its settlement by Europeans. Although in 1620 the Pilgrims settled at Plymouth, Massachusetts, until John Winthrop arrived at Boston with seven hundred settlers in 1630, the total white population had been less than a few hundred.¹ The English led by Winthrop were Puritans—Protestants who insisted on a pure, biblical church (hence their name) and who viewed the Anglican Church (the only legal church in England) as corrupted. However, they believed that the church could be reformed from within and sought to do so until 1630, when the king appointed a new head of the church, William Laud, who persecuted the Puritans severely. From 1630 to 1643, over twenty thousand Puritans fled to New England, where they endeavored to set up a holy commonwealth based on their understanding of the revelation of Jesus Christ.² To guarantee the purity of both church and state, only church members could vote or hold public office, and only

1. Darrett B. Rutman, *Winthrop's Boston: Portrait of a Puritan Town, 1630-1649* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1965), 4.

2. Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, vol. 1 (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1975), 193.

those who could testify to a conversion experience—called “evidence of election”—could become church members. Church attendance and observance of the Sabbath theoretically were enforced by law, and the unorthodox had to remain silent or be banished. Repeat offenders could be dealt with harshly: From 1659 to 1661, four Quakers were hanged in Massachusetts for teaching their religious beliefs.³

An active participant in the New England experiment was Thornton Chase's great-great-great-great-great-grandfather, Aquila Chase (c. 1618–1670), who apparently emigrated from Chesham, England. The date of his arrival in New England is unknown, but the records of the town meetings of Hampton, New Hampshire, on the Atlantic Coast, indicate that he was granted land and settled there in 1640. His piety was perhaps not as great as desired by the local church; in 1646 he and his wife picked peas on the Sabbath, for which offense they were admonished and fined. Also in that year, Aquila moved to nearby Newbury, Massachusetts, where he was a mariner or fisherman and probably farmed as well. He and his wife, Ann, had eleven children, ten of whom survived to adulthood.⁴ This was not an unusual number of children in New England; when Thomas Malthus later wrote his essays on the growth of human population, he had New England's experience in mind.

Among Aquila's sons was Thomas Chase (1654–1733), a carpenter and farmer. He resided in Newbury all his life and served in the militia twice against Indians—once in King Philip's War in 1675, and once against the Narragansetts in Rhode Island. He married twice—not unusual, since many women died from complications

3. Ahlstrom, *Religious History of the American People*, 232.

4. John Carroll Chase and George Walter Chamberlain, *Seven Generations of the Descendants of Aquila and Thomas Chase* (Haverhill, Mass.: Record Publishing Co., 1928), 9, 29–31. William Moody Chase, *Reminiscences of the Family of Moody Chase of Shirley, Massachusetts; also, a Brief Account of His Ancestry* (Baltimore: John H. Shane and Co., Printers, 1888), 9.

following childbirth—and fathered eleven children, all of whom survived to adulthood.⁵

Thomas's oldest son was also named Thomas Chase (1680–1756), and he continued the family's residence in Newbury. With this Thomas we have the first sign of piety in the family; he was named a deacon—a member of the governing council—of the Second Church of Newbury and helped to organize the Fourth Parish Church of Newbury, of which he was also a deacon. As such, he would have been a prominent man in town.⁶

Among his eight children was Josiah Chase (1713–1778), who departed from family tradition in two significant ways. First, he moved from Newbury. By the early eighteenth century all the farmland there must have been allotted, and the amount of acreage per farmer, because of division among heirs, had become too small to support a family. Hence Josiah, like many other young men from his town, moved to the nearest frontier, which was in central New Hampshire and southern Maine. However, Josiah did not become a farmer; rather, he continued his father's interest in religion and became a minister. New England Puritans had high expectations of their clergy and required them to have a good education, including a good knowledge of ancient Greek and Latin. As a result Josiah was the first of his family to acquire some university education (and the last, until Thornton Chase attended Brown University). New England had only two colleges in the mid-eighteenth century, Harvard and Yale, and Yale was far away in another colony and little known. Virtually every minister in eastern Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Maine was Harvard educated; hence Josiah went to Cambridge, Massachusetts. He graduated from Harvard in 1738 and subsequently obtained his master's degree there.⁷

Josiah prepared for the ministry during a difficult time for New England's Puritan churches. The early eighteenth century has been

5. Chase, *Seven Generations*, 37–39.

6. Chase, *Seven Generations*, 46–47.

7. Chase, *Seven Generations*, 64.

called the "glacial age" because piety was reputedly at a very low level. Religious pluralism was also on the rise. The use of the death penalty against heterodoxy had been halted by the king, and Quakerism had spread in Massachusetts. Many New England Puritans became interested in Baptist theology, which was identical to their own except that it rejected infant baptism and insisted that only those who had had a born-again experience should be baptized. The first Baptist church in Massachusetts had been opened in Boston as early as 1665.⁸

To revive the piety of their congregations, many ministers began to preach fire-and-brimstone sermons and to stress the importance of experiencing rebirth. These sermons sometimes produced local, short-lived revivals, which resulted in a dozen or so converts. Then in 1734—the year Josiah Chase entered Harvard—Jonathan Edwards, a brilliant theologian who was pastor of the Puritan church in Northampton, Massachusetts, started a revival that lasted several years and spread to most towns in central Massachusetts and Connecticut. It was to transform New England Puritanism; thousands professed conversion. For religious-conscious New England, it was the greatest event of the century.

It also proved one of the most controversial. As quickly as the Awakening—as the event came to be called—acquired advocates, it also acquired critics who charged that emotion, not religion, was being spread. The critics' view was reinforced in 1740 when a brilliant but impetuous young preacher named George Whitefield toured New England. Although initially received favorably by virtually every minister, Whitefield's comments that most New England clergy were probably unconverted and that Harvard and Yale were sources of darkness instead of light soon alienated many, including Josiah Chase. When Charles Chauncy, leader of the opposition against the revival, published his chief anti-revival book in 1743,

8. Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America*, 2d ed. (New York: Scribner's, 1973), 44, 29; Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 283.

Josiah Chase was one of the work's subscribers. The one surviving comment on Josiah Chase's theology that has survived indicates that he, like Chauncy, tended toward a liberal interpretation of Puritan principles.⁹

Josiah also became involved in a local church split that was partly caused by the Awakening. In 1750 he was called to be the minister of a new church that was forming in Kittery, Maine. Its members were leaving the Middle Parish Church in Kittery, which was presided over by a revivalist minister; neither the minister nor any delegates of the old church attended the ceremony marking the creation of the new church.¹⁰ Both churches at least remained part of the same denomination; in other towns, the revival was provoking bitter church splits, and new Protestant sects were arising. As a result, the established Puritan churches lost their monopoly on religion and became one church among many in town. They now needed a name—they came to be called Congregational churches.

Josiah's ministry was undistinguished. Family legend has it that his faith was "literal and childlike." It is said that one day, while preaching a sermon, he had a premonition that a shoal of fish was entering the nearby creek; all the men of the congregation went down to the water and were able to make a big catch.¹¹

Josiah Chase married Sarah Tufts in 1743 and fathered six sons and one daughter. He was known for his rum drinking—about a quart a day—but the colonial period was a time of high alcohol consumption. (Protestants did not begin to consider drinking a sin and to call for abolition of alcoholic beverages until the early nineteenth century.) He died on 10 December 1778 as a result of falling into a creek while walking home in a snowstorm after attending a wedding.¹²

9. "Josiah Chase," in Clifford K. Shipton, *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*, vol. 10, 1736–1740 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1958), 272.

10. "Josiah Chase," 272.

11. *The Chase Chronicle* 4.1 (January 1913): 11–12.

12. "Josiah Chase," 273–74; Chase, *Seven Generations*, 64.

Josiah's second son, also named Josiah Chase (1746–1824), distinguished himself in a different way: He joined the Revolutionary Army in 1780 and rose to the rank of colonel. In his seven and a half months of service he was a quartermaster and paymaster. The decision to volunteer entailed considerable sacrifice; his brother Simon had been killed in the war in 1776, and Josiah already had a family. He had married Hannah Grow in 1768, and when he entered the army they already had six children, the oldest of whom was ten. Eventually they had a total of twelve children. The family lived in York, Maine, where Josiah was a clothier.¹³

Nothing else is known about Colonel Josiah Chase. His attitude toward religion would be particularly valuable if it were known, because there is the possibility that he became a Baptist. One of his sons was a Baptist minister and one grandson the deacon of a Baptist church. In spite of opposition from ministers like the Reverend Josiah Chase, revivals persisted. In Maine during the Revolutionary War, they reached an unprecedented intensity and were especially well received among war veterans like Colonel Chase. Revivals were sponsored by local churches of several denominations: the revivalistic Congregationalists; independent "New Light" churches; Baptist churches of two types—those advocating Puritan theology and those that stressed Free Will; and Universalist churches, which rejected Puritanism's belief in damnation of the unconverted and instead advocated belief in the eventual salvation of everyone. The regular Baptists gained the most members because their theology was similar to that of the prevailing Congregational churches and because they did not suffer as much disruption from the Revolution as did the Congregationalists.¹⁴ The Chase family,

13. *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War* (Boston: Wright and Potter, 1897), 359; Chase, *Seven Generations*, 113.

14. The best description of religion in frontier New England is Stephen A. Marini's *Radical Sects of Revolutionary New England* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982). The frequent conversion of war veterans is noted on pp. 51 and 53. The disruption of the Congregational churches and the growth of the Baptist churches is described on pp. 36–38 and 45–46.

either under Colonel Josiah Chase or under his son Jotham Sewall Chase, was among those converted to regular Baptism.

Jotham Sewall Chase (1790–1883) was Josiah's youngest son. The name comes from the Old Testament, Judges 9:5, where Jotham was the youngest son of Jerubbaal. The family's choice of this name suggests that he was intended to be the last child. Jotham was a manufacturer who lived in various Maine towns—York, Woolwich, and Wiscasset at least—before settling in Boston in 1856.¹⁵ He had ten children by his first wife, Mary Gould.

His eldest son, Jotham Gould Chase (1816–1884), was Thornton Chase's father. Born in Anson, Maine, Jotham Gould Chase moved to Boston briefly when he was twenty-one and became a merchant. In 1840 he settled in Springfield, a manufacturing center of 11,000 residents that was the largest city in western Massachusetts. It is not known why Jotham chose to settle in Springfield, but he had several cousins already living there. Springfield was one of the most rapidly growing cities in Massachusetts, both in terms of population and in terms of business opportunities. It was situated at a crossroads: At Springfield, railroads connecting Albany to Boston intersected lines running from Hartford and New Haven, Connecticut, to New Hampshire and Vermont. The United States Armory in the city manufactured the famous Springfield rifle, in heavy demand by soldier and pioneer alike. Because of the armory, the city was assured a steady economy and a large pool of skilled artisans. Although it lacked water power, the development of cheap steam power allowed local business interests to capitalize on the city's transportation and skilled workers to open a wide variety of small factories.¹⁶

15. Obituary of Jotham Sewall Chase, *Boston Daily Advertiser*, Tuesday, 4 September 1883, p. 5, col. 2. It can be inferred that he lived in Woolwich because his son was born there (death certificate of Jotham Gould Chase, author's personal papers). His occupation is listed in his son's obituary as well; see "Death of J. G. Chase," *Springfield Republican*, Saturday, 6 December 1884, p. 6, col. 2.

16. "Springfield, Descriptive, Historical, and Statistical," *Bessey's Springfield Directory for 1851–1852* (Springfield, Mass.: M. Bessey, 1851), 7. An excellent description

Jotham was among those who capitalized on the business opportunities. He was a remarkable man with a varied career. His obituary speaks of him as "a man of public spirit, sympathetic and earnest socially and industrious in business" with a "kindly face." He is also called a "Christian gentleman."¹⁷ In Springfield he went into the dry goods business with a cousin, E. C. Wilson, establishing Wilson and Chase Company. About 1846 he entered the lumber business, opening a lumberyard that he ran with various partners at times and alone at other times. Gradually the business grew. In 1865 the Springfield city directory described the firm thus:

Chase, J. G. and Brother, Steam Planing Mill, Lumber Yard, and Door, Sash and Blind Manufactory, north side of Western Railroad, a few rods east of depot. Dealers in Michigan, Canada, and Domestic Lumber, Shingles, and Lath. Also, manufacturers and Dealers in Long Dressed Clapboards, Floorings of all kinds, Sheathings, Carpenter's Molding, Stair Work, &c, &c.¹⁸

The operation, which produced materials for the local housing industry, must have been quite large, employing dozens and taking in thousands of dollars in revenue each year. It undoubtedly reflected the Civil War business boom, during which the city produced a million Springfield rifles, pistols, cannons, uniforms, and many other items for the war. As a result, the number of dwellings in the city jumped from 2,801 in 1860, to 3,556 in 1865. The end of the

of Springfield's rapid economic growth and an analysis of the reasons for it can be found in Michael H. Frisch, *Town into City: Springfield, Massachusetts, and the Meaning of Community, 1840-1880* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972).

17. "Death of J. G. Chase," *Springfield Republican*, Saturday, 6 December 1884, p. 6, col. 2; "Mrs. Cornelia (Savage) Chase," *Commemorative Biographical Record of Hartford County, Connecticut, Containing biographical sketches of prominent and representative citizens, and of many of the early settled families*, vol. 1 (Chicago: J. H. Beers & Co., 1901), 351.

18. *Springfield City Directory and Business Advertiser, For 1865-66. From July, 1865, to July, 1866.* (Springfield, Mass.: Samuel Bowles and Co., 1865), 54.

war did not see a drop in Springfield's prosperity, and an additional fifteen hundred dwellings were built in the next decade. As the business expanded, Jotham Chase opened a second operation in Hartford, Connecticut, at the urging of that city's mayor. He also invested in real estate—the city was developing rapidly—and by the early 1870s was one of Springfield's wealthiest residents. In the early 1850s he moved to Maple Street, a wide avenue that ran along the crest of a hill, which became the principal residential neighborhood for the city's wealthy. The Springfield city directory for 1871–72 described the setting as having “rare natural advantages, and affords views of the [Connecticut] river, the city and the adjacent country, not elsewhere surpassed.” It added that Frederick Law Olmsted, the famous landscape architect, had been engaged to lay out the grounds of a mansion that Jotham Chase intended to build.¹⁹ Two years later, the directory described the mansion:

Mr. Chase's house fronts both toward the river and on Maple street, and is of brick, with Ohio gray sandstone trimmings. It is two stories high, surmounted by a tower, and 80 by 40 feet in extreme dimensions. A piazza 10 feet wide extends along the entire west side and on the north and south ends, connecting with a plant stand at the southeast corner. Columns of polished Aberdeen granite support the main porch, and the rich carvings are especially noticeable. The rooms will be elegantly furnished, and each is of a generous size. The house will cost about \$50,000, exclusive of ground.²⁰

But Jotham Chase did not enjoy his house for long. The city directory for 1874–75 gives his address as “Blake's hill” and describes his occupation as “lumber dealer,” while listing the firm of

19. Springfield's growth during the war years is described in Frisch, *Town to City*, 74–88. “Mrs. Cornelia (Savage) Chase,” 351; *Springfield City Directory and Business Advertiser for 1871–72, For the Year Commencing June 1, 1871*. (Springfield, Mass.: Samuel Bowles and Co., 1871), 28.

20. *Springfield City Directory, and Business Advertiser for 1873–74. For the Year Commencing June 1, 1873*. (Springfield, Mass.: Clark W. Bryan and Co., 1873), 40–41.

Day and Jobson as "successors to J. G. Chase and Brother." This suggests a financial reverse, which probably resulted from the Panic of 1873 and the subsequent six-year economic depression. The number of dwellings in Springfield increased only by thirty-six between 1875 and 1880, a statistic with disastrous implications for a lumber company. Jotham Chase's house on Blake's Hill was elegant but not as grand as the mansion on Maple Street.²¹

Jotham Chase was also very successful in fields other than business. He was a "singer of marked force and sweetness" in Boston's Handel and Haydn Society while residing in that city. He read before the Springfield Scientific Association on 30 October 1866 a paper titled "Trees," an apt subject for a lumberman. He represented the Sixth Ward on the Springfield School Committee from 1876 to 1881; his obituary states he was on the city council.²² However,

21. *Springfield City Directory, and Business Advertiser for 1874-75. For the Year Commencing July 1, 1874.* (Springfield, Mass.: Clark W. Bryan and Co., 1874) 149, 172. Frisch, *Town to City*, 200.

22. "Mrs. Cornelia (Savage) Chase" 351; Jotham G. Chase, "Trees," MS, manuscript collection, Springfield Public Library, Springfield, Massachusetts. Jotham is listed as a member of the school committee in the following: *Springfield City Directory and Business Advertiser, Combined With Directories of New West Springfield, Chicopee, and Chicopee Falls, 1876-77, For the Year Commencing July 1st, 1876*, comp. Clark W. Bryan and Co. (Springfield: Clark W. Bryan and Co., 1876), 23; *Springfield City Directory and Business Advertiser, Combined With Directories of New West Springfield, Chicopee, and Chicopee Falls, 1877-78, For the Year Commencing July 1st, 1877*, comp. Clark W. Bryan and Co. (Springfield: Clark W. Bryan and Co., 1877), 23; *Springfield City Directory and Business Advertiser, Combined With Directories of New West Springfield, Chicopee, and Chicopee Falls, 1878-79 For the Year Commencing July 1st, 1878*, comp. Clark W. Bryan and Co. (Springfield: Clark W. Bryan and Co., 1878), 23; *Springfield City Directory and Business Advertiser, Combined With Directories of New West Springfield, Chicopee, and Chicopee Falls, 1879-80 For the Year Commencing July 1st, 1879*, comp. Clark W. Bryan and Co. (Springfield: Clark W. Bryan and Co., 1879), 25; *The City of Springfield, Chicopee, Chicopee Falls, and West Springfield, Directory, for 1880-81*, comp. Springfield Printing Co. (Springfield: Springfield Printing Co., 1880), 25; *The City of Springfield, Chicopee, Chicopee Falls, and West Springfield, Directory, for 1881-82*, comp. Springfield Printing Co. (Springfield: Springfield Printing Co., 1881), 25; "Death of J. G. Chase," *Springfield Republican*, Saturday, 6 December 1884, p. 6, col. 2.

he was most active in the First Baptist Church of Springfield, which he joined as soon as he arrived in the city. He was "prominent in its work" and served as a deacon of the church from 1880 to 1884. He also directed its choir.²³ He was a pious Christian who married an active Baptist churchwoman and sent his son to a Baptist clergyman for tutoring and to a Baptist college for his education.

Jotham Chase's domestic life was fated to be less successful than his various careers. On 29 April 1846 he married Miss Sarah Cutts S. G. Thornton of Saco, Maine. She had been born on 23 July 1820, the oldest daughter of James Brown Thornton (1790-?) and Eliza E. Gookin (1795-1854).²⁴ About a month after marrying, Sarah became pregnant, timing that was not unusual in nineteenth-century America. Their days together would end with Sarah's death shortly after the birth of their son, James Brown Thornton Chase (later known as Thornton Chase), on 22 February 1847.

23. Jotham Chase is listed as deacon in the following: *The City of Springfield, Chicopee, Chicopee Falls, and West Springfield, Directory, for 1881-82*, comp. Springfield Printing Co. (Springfield, Mass.: Springfield Printing Co., 1881), 49; *The City of Springfield, Chicopee, Chicopee Falls, and West Springfield, Directory, for 1882-83*, comp. Springfield Printing Co. (Springfield, Mass.: Springfield Printing Co., 1882), 48; *The City of Springfield, Chicopee, Chicopee Falls, and West Springfield, Directory, for 1884-85*, comp. Springfield Printing Co. (Springfield, Mass.: Springfield Printing Co., 1885), 40. No city directory for 1883-84 exists. Jotham Chase's work with the choir is mentioned in "Death of J. G. Chase," *Springfield Republican*, Saturday 6 December 1884, p. 6, col. 2; "Mrs. Cornelia (Savage) Chase," 351.

24. Information on Sarah Cutts S. G. Thornton Chase comes from her genealogical record in the Genealogical Society of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, and from J[otham]. G[ould]. Chase, A Brief Sketch of a Branch of the Chase Family, a single sheet privately printed, obtained from Charles Lawton, grandson of Thornton Chase (photographic copy in the author's personal papers).

PART 1

Religion Is Life

THE HISTORY OF THE
CITY OF BOSTON
FROM 1630 TO 1880
BY
JOHN H. COOPER
VOLUME I
1888

THE HISTORY OF THE
CITY OF BOSTON
FROM 1630 TO 1880
BY
JOHN H. COOPER
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CHAPTER 3

Childhood Years, 1847–1863

The citizens of Springfield opened their newspapers on Monday, 22 February 1847, to read that “this is the anniversary of WASHINGTON’S Birthday: a day that should forever occupy a leading place in the calendar of every American. Its return is to be celebrated, this year, in many places, by Temperance societies, Military companies, &c.” The celebration was made difficult by a winter blizzard. Springfield had received a foot of snow the day before, causing church attendance to be low, and the storm redoubled its vigor on Monday. The heaviest snowfall of the season was followed by the coldest weather.¹ However, nature’s fury did not cool the happy spirits prevailing in the house on Main Street where Jotham and Sarah Chase were living, for on that day their son, James Brown Thornton Chase, was born.

Although the child was healthy, the mother who delivered him was not. Neither the death certificate of Sarah Thornton Chase nor a letter written by Jotham Chase to “My dear Thornton”—presumably a brother of Sarah—gives the cause of her death, although the letter makes clear that the cause was complications following childbirth, probably a gradual infection (puerperal fever). Jotham Chase’s letter notes that for a few days Sarah was “quite comfortable and apparently doing well,” although she did experience occasional

1. *The Daily Republican*, Monday, 22 February 1847, p. 3, col. 1; p. 3, col. 2; Tuesday, 23 February 1847, p. 2, col. 3; Wednesday, 24 February 1847, p. 2, col. 4.

spasms of pain. The family's two physicians were not greatly concerned and gave her medicine. She neither improved nor worsened until Sunday, March 7th, fourteen days after the delivery, when the spasms of pain became more intense and frequent.²

Sarah saw the attacks of pain as the turning point and called her husband to her bedside so that they could pray together. Jotham recalled, "She then prayed for herself—a part of which I could hear—afterward she said 'Blessed Savior, I cannot be half thankful enough to him for his goodness to me'—She then felt I think—that she probably should not live." Sarah asked her husband to write her mother immediately and urge her to come, "if she would see me alive."³

Jotham also called for the physicians, and they again examined Sarah and expressed optimism that she would recover. However, on Monday she experienced further attacks of pain. Her mother arrived on Tuesday. Mrs. Thornton asked her daughter whether "Christ had supported her in her sickness," and she replied, "*Oh yes—Christ has been close by me all the time.*" Sarah also expressed much grief that her health had obliged her to neglect her baby.⁴

Shortly thereafter Sarah slipped into a coma, and, despite all the physicians' efforts, at 1:30 A.M. on Wednesday, 10 March 1847, she "quietly left us for the bosom of her Savior."⁵ At the age of seventeen days the infant Thornton Chase had lost his mother.

2. J[otham]. G. Chase to "My dear Thornton," 16 March 1847, original in the possession of Charles Lawton, Thornton Chase's grandson; photographic copy in author's personal papers. The letter refers to "the request of your dear Mother that I would write you," and the mother in question appears to be the mother of Sarah as well as of the recipient (she is the only mother referred to in the letter); consequently we may presume Jotham is writing to one of Sarah's brothers. However, all of Sarah's brothers had "Thornton" as their last name, so it cannot be determined to which one Jotham was writing.

3. Chase to "My Dear Thornton."

4. Chase to "My Dear Thornton."

5. Chase to "My Dear Thornton."

Sarah's death put Jotham—thirty-one years old and still struggling to establish himself in business—in the difficult position of having to care for a baby by himself. It is unknown what he did to solve the problem; possibly his sister Harriet, then almost seventeen, came down from Maine to help, as she later married a local Springfield resident. For Thornton Chase, his mother's death was to have profound consequences; it would not be an exaggeration to say that it became one of the most important events of his life. The preservation of the letter describing her death—which Thornton Chase must have acquired from its recipient years later—testifies to its importance to him, as does the existence of two photographs of Sarah taken in 1846, which Thornton Chase later copied and gave to descendants. He also acquired the cross that she had worn on a necklace, visible in the photographs. We have his statement that he later shortened his name to Thornton Chase, dropping the "James Brown" so as to keep "the name of my mother and father." Finally we have the mention by Thornton Chase's second wife of his "beautiful Christian mother who gave her life for him, and of his love for her all through life."⁶

The last statement is important because of what it says about Thornton Chase's understanding of his mother and not because of what it says directly about her. Her Christian piety—judging from her words cited in the letter describing her death—was strong but not unusual for mid-nineteenth-century America. Saying that she "gave her life for him" conveys part of the meaning that her death held for Thornton Chase, a meaning that is not immediately apparent from what occurred. Finally we have the assertion of his enduring love for her. For Thornton Chase, the word *love* was infused

6. Obituary of Thornton Chase, *Brown Alumni Monthly* 13.7 (February 1913): 190-91. In the late 1980s the cross was in the possession of Charles Lawton, grandson of Thornton Chase; he acquired it from Jessamine, Thornton Chase's younger daughter. Mrs. Chase mentioned Thornton Chase's mother in remarks she made to Bahá'ís gathered at a memorial service for him a few weeks after his death. *Star of the West* 3.12 (16 October 1912): 6.

with a special meaning and was as important to him as the words *life* and *religion*.

Psychologists studying newborn infants have found that the quality of the maternal relationship is extremely important for a child's subsequent development. Erikson has designated the first developmental crisis faced by an infant as one of "trust versus mistrust"—a time when the baby learns either that the surrounding environment is familiar and worthy of trust or that it is not.⁷ Maternal care and love are crucial factors in establishing a sense of trust, which in turn serves as the foundation for subsequent development. Considering that Thornton Chase's adult life was characterized by a high level of trust, consideration for others, and love, it seems very likely that someone mothered him very effectively. However, young Thornton Chase's own inner resources—in Bahá'í terms, his spiritual attributes—must have been of the kind to respond in an exceptional way to such love. While we do not know what tests the infant Thornton Chase faced or how he responded to them, we do know from psychological research that the first few years laid a crucial foundation for his later development.

No further information is available on Thornton Chase until May 1850, just after his third birthday. On May 28th, Jotham Chase married Cornelia S. Savage (1821–1901), a prominent citizen of Hartford, Connecticut. Her father, an important businessman in the city, was active in civic affairs and was one of the first directors of the Aetna Life Insurance Company. Her brother was also rising to prominence in Hartford's business community. An active Baptist, she joined Springfield's First Baptist Church.⁸

7. Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 2d ed. (New York: Norton, 1963), 247–51.

8. The date of the marriage comes from John Carroll Chase and George Walter Chamberlain, *Seven Generations of the Descendants of Aquila and Thomas Chase* (Haverhill, Mass.: Record Publishing Co., 1928), 239. Information on Cornelia Savage Chase comes from "Mrs. Cornelia (Savage) Chase," in *Commemorative Biographical Record of Hartford County, Connecticut, Containing biographical sketches of prominent and representative citizens, and of many of the early settled families*, vol. 1 (Chicago: J. H. Beers and Co., 1901), 351–52.

Jotham and Cornelia moved into a new house. Thornton Chase now had a stepmother, but his descendants recall that Cornelia "did not like her stepson."⁹ It cannot be determined how the ill feelings between stepson and stepmother developed. In a personal letter written in 1909 Thornton Chase offers the only hint about the impact that Jotham's remarriage had on him: "My childhood was loveless and lonely, as there was neither mother, sister nor brother."¹⁰ Apparently Cornelia did not constitute a mother for him.

There is one piece of evidence suggesting that the animosity between stepmother and stepchild may have begun within three and a half months of the parental marriage. The United States census of 1850, taken on September 10th, registered Thornton Chase, age three, as living with a family in West Springfield, across the Connecticut River from his father's house. The couple, Joseph and Sarah Benson, were working-class people; he was a machinist. They also had a fourteen-year-old boy staying with them whose last name was different from theirs, which suggests that they took in children to supplement their income. It cannot be known how long Thornton Chase stayed in their home, but it may have been a substantial length of time. When he was a teenager he stayed with yet another family.

It is possible that there is a connection between Thornton Chase's love for the mother he never knew and his dislike for his stepmother. By the age of three Thornton Chase would have developed a sense of loss for his mother, and the stepmother might have been perceived as an intruder and a competitor for his father's affection. It is equally possible that Cornelia's dislike of Thornton Chase triggered his dislike for her and his yearning for the love of his mother.

9. Thornton Chase Nelson [great-grandson of Thornton Chase] to the author, 24 September 1980, 3, author's personal papers.

10. Thornton Chase to Julia Culver (copy), 27 May 1909, 1, Thornton Chase papers, Bahá'í National Archives, Wilmette, Ill. (hereafter denoted as "TC").

Thornton Chase's description of his childhood as "loveless" also suggests the possibility that his later search for love and his passionate quest for God and religion as an adult were partly his reaction to a sad and lonely childhood. Indeed there may be a connection between Thornton Chase's love for his lost mother and his later emphasis on God as love. Psychologists have found that a child's concept of God may be strongly shaped by his or her "image of the opposite-sex or preferred parent."¹¹ Possibly the child Thornton Chase's image of his mother in heaven with the angels and loving him intensely helped to shape his later image of an intensely loving God. Reinforcing this hypothesis is the remark of a descendant, "I always thought Chase was looking for his mother."¹²

One cannot say, however, that Thornton Chase *had* to react to a sad childhood by becoming religious; another child in the same situation could have become an atheist or could have become hateful instead of loving. Thornton Chase's reaction is a sign of the inner strength and resources that he possessed as a child. Someone—possibly his Aunt Harriet or Sarah Benson as a foster-mother—had loved him enough to bring out these qualities.

It would be very interesting to know what role Jotham Chase played in rearing Thornton Chase. Thornton Chase's correspondence contains only two references to his father, fewer than those to his mother, suggesting that the two men were not close. Neither reference supplies much information about Thornton and Jotham Chase's relationship. On the one hand, we know that five years after the father's death Thornton Chase gave his own son the name of Jotham, suggesting that in later life, at least, Thornton Chase may have resolved any negative feelings about his father. Thornton Chase also worked for his father's business for several years. On the other hand, Jotham apparently did not pay for Thornton Chase's

11. Ana-Marie Rizzuto, *The Birth of the Living God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 5.

12. Personal Interview of Margaret Hansen, Thornton Chase's granddaughter, by Robert H. Stockman, 30 August 1985, author's personal papers.

college education; he did not appear to help him through several financial crises; he was absent for much of Thornton Chase's childhood; and the father and son must have been out of contact with each other for at least seven years before Jotham died in 1884. The lack of contact suggests that Thornton Chase's father was not the preferred parent—the parent to whom he felt closest. That role belonged to his deceased mother.

Ten years pass before we have additional information about Thornton Chase. By late 1860, at age thirteen, he was living with another family—that of Samuel Francis Smith (1808–1895), a Baptist minister in Newton, Massachusetts, a Boston suburb eighty miles from Springfield. Smith trained Thornton Chase for college, but Springfield had a high school, and private schools were available closer to home than Newton. One wonders why Thornton Chase was sent so far away from home. Perhaps he had become unmanageable at home. Probably by 1860 Jotham and Cornelia had begun to adopt children; they eventually adopted three girls: Cora J. (born 22 May 1856), Ada (born 14 December 1858), and Jessie Maria (born 25 November 1859). The last two girls were sisters.¹³ Thornton Chase's descendants report that Cornelia "lavished" her attention on the girls.¹⁴ Such behavior could only have intensified whatever sense of rejection and abandonment Thornton Chase felt, especially at a time when he was entering the difficult years of adolescence.

Thornton Chase's only mention of his four years of tutoring with Samuel Francis Smith (in a letter to a virtual stranger) is brief and states the facts without describing his feelings.¹⁵ However, the startling resemblance between Thornton Chase's later interests and those of Smith suggests that Smith was a significant influence. A

13. Obituary of Thornton Chase, *Brown Alumni Monthly*, 190; "Mrs. Cornelia (Savage) Chase," 352.

14. Thornton Chase Nelson to the author, 8 September 1980, 3, author's personal papers.

15. Obituary of Thornton Chase, *Brown Alumni Monthly*, 190.

more ideal mentor would be difficult to imagine. Judging from Smith's poetry and correspondence, he was a tenderhearted man who had a loving marriage and a close relationship with his six children. A colleague called him "preeminently a *pastor* in every sense of the word."¹⁶ At his funeral he was described by Dr. Alvah Hovey, president of the Newton Theological Institute, as "in doctrine uncorrupt, in language plain, and plain in manner, decent, solemn, chaste and natural in gesture."¹⁷ In short, by the standards of the day he was a good Christian.

He was also a man of many talents. Born in Boston, he graduated from Harvard College in 1829 as a member of perhaps its most famous class. Among his classmates were Oliver Wendell Holmes, a poet, essayist, professor of anatomy at Harvard, and a lifelong friend; James Freeman Clarke, a famous Transcendentalist and author of America's first classic study of comparative religions; Supreme Court Justice Benjamin R. Curtis; and William H. Channing, a famous Unitarian clergyman and Transcendentalist. Smith studied for the ministry at Andover Theological Seminary, which was strict in its Calvinist orthodoxy, graduating in 1832. To pay his way through school, Smith translated about a thousand pages of a German encyclopedia into English for publication in one of the first encyclopedias in America. In February 1832, when he was twenty-three years old, a friend asked him to translate some German songs into English, and, while examining the songbook, Smith came across a patriotic song whose tune he liked. Inspired, within half an hour he had composed the words of the song "America" ("My Country 'Tis of Thee") that immortalized him.¹⁸

16. Anonymous note attached to "Thousands Pause as 'America' is Wafted from Old Church Tower," *The Boston Journal*, Thursday, 22 October 1908, newspaper clipping in the Samuel F. Smith folder, Quinquennial file, Harvard University Archives.

17. "Eternal Sleep. Venerable Dr. S. F. Smith is Laid to Rest. . . ," *Boston Journal*, Wednesday, 20 November 1895, Samuel F. Smith folder, Quinquennial file, Harvard University Archives.

18. "Dr. Smith's Life," article attached to a Harvard College Library clipping sheet, Samuel F. Smith folder, Quinquennial file, Harvard University Archives;

Although Smith's literary and musical skills continued to develop after 1832, nothing else he accomplished won him as much fame as he acquired from that half-hour of work. He continued to write songs, eventually publishing over one hundred and fifty hymns. He also wrote poetry and became an essayist and editor. After graduation he moved to Waterville, Maine, where he was pastor of the local Baptist church and professor of modern languages at Colby College.¹⁹ Eight years later Smith moved to Newton Centre, Massachusetts, where he became pastor of its First Baptist Church and, from 1842 to 1848, edited the *Christian Review*, a Baptist quarterly journal. It was one of the Baptist church's most prominent periodicals, and its editorship would have made him widely known within that denomination.

In 1854 Smith resigned from the pastorate of the local church to devote all of his time to a new task: serving as editorial secretary of the American Baptist Missionary Union, one of the largest missionary organizations in the United States. In 1863, the last year that Thornton Chase lived with the Smith family, one of Smith's sons went to Burma as a missionary. Eventually Samuel Francis Smith made a round-the-world tour of American missionary projects. He was also an avid linguist; by the time of his death he knew sixteen languages in addition to English. He continued to write articles for magazines and sermons. He published four books in prose and one of poetry and edited a hymnbook.²⁰

As a role model, Smith had much to offer young Thornton Chase. During the teenage years, an adolescent passes through a phase of life described by Erikson as *identity versus role confusion*. It is a time of physical and mental maturation when an individual explores self-identity through relations with others and through

"Author of 'America' Dead," newspaper clipping in the Samuel F. Smith folder, Quinquennial file, Harvard University Archives.

19. "Autobiography of Samuel F. Smith," *Harvard Graduates' Magazine* 4.15 (March 1896): 345-48.

20. "Smith, Samuel Francis," *Dictionary of American Biography*, ed. Dumas Malone (New York: Scribner's, 1935), 27: 342.

acceptance of beliefs and causes. It is a time when a role model can be crucially important, and, judging from the parallelism between their interests, Smith was important to Thornton Chase, who later became a poet, a singer of some ability, an editor, the author of two books and three pamphlets, a traveling teacher for his religion, and a religious leader. He knew Latin, Greek, some French, some Persian, and at one point wanted to study Sanskrit—one of the sixteen languages mastered by Smith. Thornton Chase was even offered the editorship of *Star of the West*, a monthly Bahá'í magazine.

Religiously, Smith was the epitome of evangelical Protestantism. As such he would have stressed the necessity of rebirth in Christ for salvation and almost certainly would have said that only the grace of God could make such rebirth possible; the free will of the potential Christian was not the primary force behind conversion. In the mid-nineteenth century the superiority of Christianity over the "heathen" religions was taken for granted even by most Unitarians, members of America's most liberal denomination.

However, Smith also had a broad, even cosmopolitan interest in history, literature, and geography, and this background may have influenced Thornton Chase, setting the stage for his later religious search, which included investigation of the religious traditions of all the peoples of the world. Smith even had a love of nature, which may have encouraged Thornton to read the nature mysticism of Ralph Waldo Emerson and the other Transcendentalists, of whose religion Smith probably would not have approved (though he had mutual acquaintances with Transcendentalists). In short, Smith's ideals of education, broadmindedness, and culture probably gave Thornton a foundation of values that ultimately undermined the evangelical Protestant beliefs Smith sought to inculcate in his young charge. This pattern of education and consequent erosion of belief was common in the nineteenth century.²¹

21. Curiously, one of Samuel Francis Smith's grandsons also became a Bahá'í, but there is no evidence that he knew Thornton Chase. See "James F. Morton," by M. H. [Mariam Haney], *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record*, vol. 9, 1940-1944 (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1945), 629-30.

Nothing is known of adolescent Thornton Chase's close friends, ideals, or religious experiences. Possibly his later interest in music and poetry was first manifested during this period. Later in life Thornton Chase was an intensely sociable and introspective person; music could have served as his first social outlet and as an antidote to loneliness, while poetry may have early stimulated his introspection.

One piece of information suggests that as a youth Thornton Chase viewed religion as more than just an aesthetic experience; apparently, he was concerned about doctrines as well. In 1902, in a stray comment in a letter, Thornton Chase noted that the problem of innocent suffering had been "with me from my youth."²² Thus sometime in his teens or twenties Thornton Chase became interested in religious questions. In the mystical language of Bahá'u'lláh, he had entered the "valley of search."²³ Religious search would eventually dominate his life.

How often Smith tutored Thornton Chase and in what subjects is not known, although Smith must have given him basic knowledge of the subjects that were prerequisite for admission to college. Jotham probably sent his son to Smith for the very purpose of ensuring that he would be accepted by a college and would thereafter become a successful businessman, doctor, or lawyer. In 1863 Thornton Chase applied to Brown University in nearby Providence, Rhode Island. It was probably his family's first choice, for it was not only a school of high quality but also a Baptist college, originally established to train Baptist ministers. Smith undoubtedly knew its president and prominent faculty members because, like him, they were important Baptists.

22. Thornton Chase to 'Abdu'l-Bahá (copy), 12 May 1902, TC.

23. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys and The Four Valleys*, trans. Marzieh Gail (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1978), 5. Bahá'u'lláh describes spiritual growth as passing through a series of seven valleys. One does not have to pass through them sequentially but can repeat any valley at any time; thus Bahá'u'lláh's approach to spirituality is far less hierarchical than that of developmental psychology. The valleys Bahá'u'lláh describes are those of search, love, knowledge, unity, contentment, wonderment, and true poverty and absolute nothingness.

In July 1863, at the age of sixteen, Thornton Chase took Brown University's standard oral and written admission exams in arithmetic, algebra, ancient and modern geography, English grammar, Greek grammar and literature, and Latin grammar and literature. He passed the exams and was accepted into Brown's freshman class. It was not unusual for a boy to attend a university at such a young age, as Brown's catalog pointed out:

The earliest age at which, in general, it will be advantageous for a student to enter the University, is at the completion of the fifteenth year; the President is, however, authorized to matriculate a student at an earlier age, provided sufficient and peculiar reasons exist, and his parent or guardian places him under such moral supervision as is satisfactory to himself.²⁴

Boys were admitted to college at such a young age because in the mid-nineteenth century high schools had not been established everywhere, and the existing private schools varied greatly in their quality. Basic educational standards, such as twelve grades, a standard system for evaluating performance, and required courses, had not yet been created. Thus colleges were the only institutions providing a standardized education in the country.

At first Thornton Chase intended to attend Brown University in September 1863. However, between July and September he changed his mind about going to college. America was in the middle of the third year of the Civil War. From the first to the third of July, while Thornton Chase prepared for his entrance exams, the Battle of Gettysburg was fought. Like so many teenagers, Thornton Chase was apparently attracted to a cause. Feeling older than his sixteen years, he yearned to join the war effort. College would have to be postponed.

24. *A Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Brown University, 1867-68* (n.p., n.d.) 19.

CHAPTER 4

The Civil War

It is difficult to write about Thornton Chase's involvement in the Civil War because he never describes it beyond mentioning the basic facts. Nothing is recorded about the excitement he must have felt as he left the Northeast for the first time, or his thoughts before his first battle, or his feelings when he saw a dead soldier for the first time, or what he learned from the entire war experience. Fortunately the United States government has fairly comprehensive records regarding his role in the Civil War, although obviously they contain no description of what he felt.

Thornton Chase never explains why he chose to become involved in the Civil War, but some of his motivation can be surmised. After the late 1850s the northern evangelical Protestant middle class was strongly abolitionist and solidly Republican; Thornton Chase, Jotham Chase, and Samuel Francis Smith were members of that class. Boston was perhaps the greatest center of abolitionism in the country. Furthermore, Smith's sister went to North Carolina to teach in a school for Blacks after the war, suggesting an active concern for abolitionism in the Smith family.¹

The tendency of adolescents to become attached to causes, especially those perceived to be righteous, could have further

1. "S. F. Smith—Papers in Library of Congress," notes by Robert Stockman, Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 4.6A, author's personal papers. Smith's sister's name was Mrs. Susan E. Parker.

strengthened Thornton Chase's desire to fight in the war. Family oral tradition suggests that he did feel a strong commitment to the Union cause: One story states he was involved in recruiting for the army.² If true, most likely his efforts began after his decision to apply to Brown University in the spring of 1863 and continued that fall when he should have started his freshman year of school.

Thornton Chase did not simply join a local regiment being raised for the Union Army; he instead decided to obtain the training necessary to be a White officer in a Black army unit. Possibly he was motivated by a desire to associate with and elevate Blacks, or perhaps he desired to achieve a military rank above private quickly or to prove himself to his family.

Thornton Chase may have heard of the "Free Military School for Applicants for Command of Colored Troops" through his involvement in recruiting. By 5 February 1864—a few weeks before he turned seventeen—he made the decision to attend the Free Military School. On that day he received a haircut at his father's house in Springfield; a lock of his brown hair was kept for posterity. He left for Philadelphia and the war the next day.³

Presumably he found a boarding house in Philadelphia where he was able to rent a room. He enrolled in the school on February 10th; he was the 186th man to sign its register.⁴ The school had been established because there was a severe shortage of officers for Black army units. Most White army units were raised locally, and each one's organizer—who was usually wealthy—became its commanding officer, or the new soldiers elected their officers; then the entire unit would be mustered into the army. Little or no officer

2. Telephone interview with Charles Lawton (grandson of Thornton Chase), 16 September 1985, author's personal papers.

3. Thornton Chase Nelson to the author, 24 September 1980, 3–4, author's personal papers.

4. Register of the Free Military School for Applicants for Command of Colored Troops, located in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Penn.

training was offered. This procedure was not followed with Black army units because the government did not want Blacks to be officers. Furthermore, it was felt that Blacks would require special training to make good soldiers, and the best way to provide it was to train special officers to lead them. Consequently the Philadelphia supervisory committee for recruiting colored regiments established a free military school in Philadelphia in December 1863. The school offered basic courses to prepare its students for the examinations administered by the army; the student's military rank was a function of the score he achieved. As a result of such a system Black infantry units probably had officers of better quality than did most White units.

On an average day the school had 194 students. Thornton Chase was far from typical. Of the 198 students listed as attending the school on 31 March 1864, 58 percent were soldiers on furlough from the army, and many of the civilians had previously seen some military service. Only two were seventeen years old; one of them was Thornton Chase. Teenagers were extremely rare; most students were between the ages of twenty and twenty-seven. The largest number came from Pennsylvania and New York, although New Englanders were numerous.⁵

The school was a combination of military life and course work. From 9:00 to 10:30 A.M. the students attended classes; for the rest of the morning they marched, drilled, and performed a dress parade. For this purpose they were divided into a battalion of four companies, and each student was permanently assigned to one of the companies. The afternoon began with an hour and a half of classes at 2:00 P.M.; more drills and another dress parade followed. After supper an evening class on mathematics was held. Strict military discipline was enforced; disobedience, disrespect, or refractory comments against a superior officer warranted expulsion or severe

5. *Prospectus of the Free Military School for Applicants for Command of Colored Troops*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: King and Baird, Printers, 1864), 9, 33-43.

punishment. One could also be dismissed from the school for "conduct unbecoming of an officer and a gentleman."⁶

The course of study was described thus:

. . . [the student] should understand and be able to explain the elementary principles laid down in Casey's Infantry Tactics, as found in the school of the Soldier, Company, and Battalion [three successive courses the students had to take]. He should comprehend the duties of sentinels, guards, &c., as contained in the Army Regulations. He should know all about Muster and Pay Rolls, Descriptive Lists, and how to keep Company books.⁷

The students were also taught about the particular problems of commanding Black soldiers:

"A Regiment of Colored Troops, when turned over to the command of its white officers, consists of a thousand or more unlettered black men, often late slaves, dressed in the soldier's uniform and armed like soldiers. They will be expected to do a soldier's duty, but as yet they are profoundly ignorant of that duty. To organize this mass, to provide for it, to instruct it, to drill it, to march it, to lead it into battle and make it fight, will require an aggregate of various kinds of knowledge only possessed by superior white men.

"These officers should be selected with the greatest care—officers who shall know how to instruct these unlettered men—officers who shall inspire their confidence, and hold them up to a high sense of duty, and make them feel that now, for the first time in the history of their race, they are called upon to vindicate, on the battlefield, their title to the honored name of soldier. Under such direction, black men will make excellent soldiers; whereas if badly officered, they will be badly

6. *Prospectus of the Free Military School*, 18–19, 10, 21.

7. *Prospectus of the Free Military School*, 4.

taught, badly cared for, badly led, and the whole experiment of putting colored troops in the field will prove a failure."⁸

To help its students acquire experience, especially after they passed their examinations, the school encouraged them to work at Camp William Penn, a nearby training center for Black troops.

The school claimed that as a result of the classes it provided "the position [of lieutenant] is attainable by any bright young man having a fair common school education," and it published statistics that showed this to be true. By 29 March 1864 the examination board in Washington had tested 1,867 men for their fitness to command Black infantry units; ninety-four had come from the Free Military School. (Most of the rest were from the regular army.) The Board rejected almost half (848) as inadequately trained, but only four of the rejects came from the Free Military School. The remainder of the school's students divided very evenly in their achievements, roughly a third achieving the ranks of second lieutenant, first lieutenant, and captain respectively. Thornton Chase went to Washington to take the exam on March 8th, just a month after beginning the school, and was awarded the rank of first lieutenant, the higher of the two grades of lieutenants.⁹ Thus he fell in the middle of his class in terms of performance, a remarkable feat, considering his age and lack of military experience. Such an achievement speaks highly of his innate abilities, self-discipline, and desire to better himself.

Thornton Chase was informed that he had passed the examinations on March 23rd. Apparently he stayed at the school for a few

8. Extract from a letter written by a member of the Board of Examiners to the Chairman of the Supervisory Committee of the Free Military School, quoted in *Prospectus of the Free Military School*, 16.

9. *Prospectus of the Free Military School*, 4, 27, 43. The date Thornton Chase went to Washington to take the exams is given in the register of the Free Military School for Applicants for Command of Colored Troops, entry for Thornton Chase, located in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia (notes in author's Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 5.7).

weeks—he is listed as still present on 31 March 1864—possibly to work at Camp William Penn.¹⁰ He then went home to Springfield to await an assignment. On April 26th he was appointed First Lieutenant of Company K of the Twenty-Sixth United States Colored Troops. The news reached him by May 2nd; on that day in Springfield he swore an oath of allegiance to “support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic.” He signed the oath of office as “James B. Chase,” at first adding the “T.” and then scratching it out, thereby dropping the “Thornton” from his name.¹¹ Undoubtedly at that time in his life he was known as “James” and possibly as “Jim,” but not as “Thornton.”

His infantry regiment had just been created and was on its way to South Carolina. The Twenty-Sixth U. S. C. T. (United States Colored Troops) had been recruited in New York City by the Union League Club in January 1864.¹² It consisted of ten companies of about one hundred men each. The men of Company K, of which Thornton Chase was to be second in command, came from New York City, Brooklyn, Jamaica (a city on Long Island), and Albany.¹³ The unit, after organization and preliminary training, was sent by ship to Fort Duane, near Beaufort, South Carolina, arriving on

10. Letter from the Washington Examination Board to thirty-nine men, including James B. [Thornton] Chase, 23 March 1864, notes by author in Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 5.10; *Free Military School for Applicants for Command of Colored Troops*, 33, 7.

11. The date of Chase's appointment is given in James B. [Thornton] Chase to A. F. Rockwell, 3 June 1864, United States Government Archives, Washington, D.C.; accompanying the letter was a copy of the oath of office that Chase swore.

12. C. W. Foster to George Bliss, 4 January 1864, in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900), Series 3, 4:4; C. W. Foster to George Bliss, 27 January 1864, in Series 3, 4:55.

13. Notes by author on the Regimental Descriptive Book, United States Government Archives, Washington D.C., in Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 5.12.

April 15th.¹⁴ It had few officers; Company K had neither a captain nor a first lieutenant until Thornton Chase arrived on May 18th.¹⁵ Rather, it was commanded by Second Lieutenant Abraham U. Vangelder, a New Yorker who accompanied the unit south. The little that is known about him suggests he was a tough character; in September 1864 he was placed under arrest and was dismissed from the service in December.¹⁶

Once Thornton Chase arrived he was technically in command of one hundred men. He claimed he was nineteen, but actually he was only two months past his seventeenth birthday.¹⁷ One wonders what a tough New York officer and one hundred Black men from the slums of New York thought of having as a superior officer a beardless teenager (who still had two inches to grow) from a prosperous Massachusetts family. The company record books hint at the answer. Apparently Vangelder remained in charge, for the morning reports—which listed the men sick or present for duty and recorded important events that affected the unit each day—continued to be signed by him until a captain arrived and took over the task on May 31st.

The Twenty-Sixth was put in charge of guarding the forts and batteries defending Beaufort, presumably while their training proceeded. A glimpse of Thornton Chase's actions suggests that he was not ineffective as an officer—the morning report of June 26th notes that he had arrested a soldier for an assault.¹⁸

14. Notes by author on the Morning Reports of Companies A through K of the Twenty-Sixth U. S. C. T., in Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 5.15.

15. Notes by author on the Morning Report Book of the Twenty-Sixth U. S. C. T., in Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 5.15.

16. Notes by author on the Morning Reports of Companies A through K., Twenty-Sixth U. S. C. T., in Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 5.16.

17. Thornton Chase's lie about his age is contained in James B. [Thornton] Chase to A. F. Rockwell, 3 June 1864, United States Government Archives.

18. C. R. Brayton to W. L. M. Burger, 29 May 1864, in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1891), ser. 1, vol. 35, pt. 2, 106; notes by author on the Morning Reports of Companies A through K of the Twenty-Sixth U. S. C. T., in Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 5.15.

Thornton Chase must have learned quickly about the history of the war in South Carolina as well. In early November 1861 the Union had occupied Hilton Head Island and the neighboring town of Beaufort, both on the Port Royal Sound in South Carolina. The Sound was an enormous natural harbor, capable of holding an entire Union navy, and Hilton Head Island—one of hundreds of islands along the South Carolina coast that are separated from the mainland by tidal channels—could be defended by the navy itself. Hilton Head became one of a string of northern naval bases established to maintain a blockade of the South's coastline, thereby preventing the export of cotton and the import of military supplies from Europe. The blockade was slowly strangling the Southern economy. Hilton Head was situated halfway between Charleston, South Carolina, and Savannah, Georgia, thus forcing the Confederacy to maintain a considerable number of troops in both cities to defend them. Beaufort was within striking distance of one of the two railroad lines that connected Virginia and the Carolinas to Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi; if it were cut, the South's transportation system would be seriously weakened. However, the unwillingness of Northern generals to risk their troops in the field and their bad luck or incompetence when they left the safety of their islands had prevented them from severing the rail link. They preferred the less glorious but more important task of maintaining the North's blockade of the Southern coast.

The arrival of the Twenty-Sixth coincided with a change of plans from Washington. It was decided to make an attack on what was psychologically the most important target in the South: Charleston, where the war had begun. The plan involved attacks on John's Island and James Island, two large sections of land bordering Charleston Harbor on the south, an assault on Fort Sumter, and another attempt to cut the Charleston and Savannah Railroad. On July 2nd the commander, General Q. A. Gillmore, committed a large fraction of his 18,000 to 19,000 men to the campaign. The Twenty-Sixth was committed to the effort against Battery Pringle, a fort defending the Stono River, one of the main tidal channels

connecting the Charleston area to the maze of rivers and tidal channels in the Union-occupied Sea Islands.¹⁹

Thornton Chase and 5,000 other Union soldiers—a thousand of whom were the ten companies of the Twenty-Sixth—battled high humidity and heatstroke as they marched up John's Island; by July 5th they had reached Battery Pringle and established a camp in a secure position. The commanding general left six companies of the Twenty-Sixth along the road on which his army had marched in order to secure it; two of the companies, apparently including Company K, were attacked by a strong Confederate force and driven back.²⁰ Thus on 5 July 1865 Thornton Chase took part in his first battle.

Perhaps the commander was impressed by the fighting ability of the Twenty-Sixth, because on July 7th he committed the company to battle again—against the enemy lines defending the Battery. He later reported that

the troops behaved very handsomely, advancing steadily in open ground, under heavy fire, and driving the enemy from the line. Had the advance been supported, the enemy's artillery would have been captured; as it was, both artillery and infantry were driven from the field.²¹

Confederate reports of the battle agree that the Southern troops were driven back several hundred yards. However, the Union general made no effort to reinforce the Twenty-Sixth, and its victory

19. E. Milby Burton, *The Siege of Charleston, 1861–1865* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1970), 284–95.

20. Report of Brig. Gen. John P. Hatch to Headquarters of the United States Forces, 12 July 1864, in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1891), ser. 1, vol. 35, pt. 1, 84–85.

21. Report of Brig. Gen. John P. Hatch to Headquarters of the United States Forces, 12 July 1864, in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1891), ser. 1, vol. 35, pt. 1, 85.

came to naught. Apparently the reason was that the attack on Battery Pringle was not the main objective of the campaign, but a diversionary effort that sought to distract the defenders of Charleston from other targets. The next day, July 8th, Battery Pringle opened fire with its artillery on the Union camp; on July 9th the Confederate forces attacked. That night the Union forces retreated without making additional efforts to reduce the fort.²²

The Twenty-Sixth suffered twenty-five deaths as a result of the fighting, and 108 more deaths from sickness, drowning, and sunstroke during the campaign. Approximately one hundred men were wounded, and the unit had forty-nine desertions, thus losing almost one-third of its total strength. Company K suffered less severely than the others, having no deaths in battle and twelve deaths from other causes. Thornton Chase himself may have been among the wounded; a later summary of his life reports that at some time during the Civil War he was "wounded by an explosion of a cannon and made deaf in his left ear."²³

Only one hint of Thornton Chase's reaction to the blood, pain, and terror of battle exists. Nearly seventeen years later in 1882 he

22. Report of Major R. A. Wayne, First Georgia Volunteers, of skirmish on John's Island, 10 July 1864, in *The War of the Rebellion*, ser. 1, vol. 35, pt. 1, 263-64; Q. A. Gillmore, *Engineer and Artillery Operations against the Defenses of Charleston Harbor in 1863; Comprising the Descent upon Morris Island, the Demolition of Fort Sumter, the Reduction of Forts Wagner and Gregg. With Observations on Heavy Ordnance, Fortifications, etc.* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1865), 21; Burton, *Siege of Charleston*, 292-93.

23. Notes by author on the Descriptive Book of the Twenty-Sixth U. S. C. T., in Thornton Chase Research Notebook, pp. 5.13-5.14. The total number of wounded is not given, but J. G. Foster to the Headquarters, Department of the South, 12 July 1864, in *The War of the Rebellion*, ser. 1, vol. 35, pt. 1, 16-17, gives the total dead and wounded from the campaign as 33 and 133 respectively, and most of the dead (25) were members of the Twenty-Sixth; thus most of the wounded must have been as well. Thornton Chase's war injury is mentioned in his obituary in *Brown Alumni Monthly* 13.7 (February 1913): 190-91. However, there is no evidence in the government records that his injury had required hospitalization.

half of the unit was sick. Captain Pettit, commander of Company K, fell ill at almost the same time as Thornton Chase, and Second Lieutenant Vangelder was placed under arrest at the same time, leaving no officer in charge of the company.²⁶ Thornton Chase's illness was serious enough to send him to the Officer's General Hospital in Beaufort on September 20th; he was suffering from a "remittent fever." He had recovered sufficiently to return to his unit on October 4th but suffered a relapse; on October 12th he was brought back to the hospital in a delirious state. After two weeks, his health was only a little improved. As the surgeon in charge of the hospital wrote:

There is danger of a relapse if he should return to his camp or remain in this climate as his system is so prostrated & susceptible of a return of fever that he will not be able to do any duty until he has the benefit of a northern climate.²⁷

On October 24th Thornton Chase wrote a letter requesting a leave so that he could recover his health at home.²⁸ Permission was granted on October 26th. Apparently recovery took longer than expected, for he did not return to his unit until 11 December 1864.

During his illness and recovery several events occurred that proved extremely important to the Twenty-Sixth Regiment. On September 2nd Sherman occupied Atlanta; after burning the city he started his march to the sea in November. Two days after Thornton Chase returned to South Carolina, Sherman reached a Union fort

26. Notes by author on the Morning Report Book for Companies A through K, Twenty-Sixth U. S. C. T., in Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 5.16.

27. Recommendation of a leave of absence for James B. [Thornton] Chase by A. V. Dalrymple, Surgeon in Charge of the Officers U. S. A. General Hospital, 25 October 1864, United States Government Archives. Thornton Chase's presence or absence in Company K was recorded daily in the unit's Morning Report book (notes in Thornton Chase Research Notebook, pp. 5.15-5.17).

28. James B. [Thornton] Chase to Captain William L. M. Burgher, 24 October 1864, United States Government Archives.

outside Savannah, Georgia. Having marched to the sea, he then turned north to devastate South Carolina.

While Sherman was marching from Atlanta the Union forces in the Sea Islands had made another attempt to cut the Charleston and Savannah Railroad. The Twenty-Sixth fought in another battle, but the railroad was not taken. When Thornton Chase returned to his regiment he learned that Colonel Silliman, its commanding officer, had just died of wounds sustained in the battle.²⁹

The year 1865 began with a feeling of victory in the air. The South had been cut in half when the Union had taken control of the Mississippi River, and cut in half again by Sherman. The central Confederate states of Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Georgia had been occupied. With Sherman marching north from Georgia and Ulysses S. Grant moving south from Virginia, it was only a matter of time before Robert E. Lee and the last viable Confederate Army would be forced to surrender. In the Sea Islands, Thornton Chase and his company would see no more military action after January 1865. Rather, there was guard duty to carry out, camp facilities to maintain, and cannon placements to repair.

There were also new soldiers to train. South Carolina slaves were flocking to the Sea Islands and freedom; many of them wanted to join the army. As a result new regiments of the United States Colored Troops were being formed in Beaufort. In February 1865 the 104th U. S. C. T. was created, and it needed officers. On May 2nd, Thornton Chase was put on detached duty with the 104th; on June 14th, he was promoted to captain and assigned to command Company D of that regiment. He was now in charge of one hundred men. Although he claimed to be twenty years old, in fact he was only a few months past his eighteenth birthday.³⁰

29. Special orders issued by W. L. M. Burger, 26 December 1864, in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1893) ser. 1, 44:818.

30. J. G. Foster to Edwin M. Stanton, 2 February 1865, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington:

The war was now essentially over. Richmond, Virginia, the capital city of the Confederacy, fell to Grant on April 2nd; Lee surrendered to Grant on April 9th; and President Jefferson Davis was arrested by Sherman's army on May 5th. However, the Union Army was not disbanded, for it was needed to serve as an occupation force. After another bout with illness, Thornton Chase assumed his full duties as commander of Company D. He filled out all the daily reports and gave classes for the soldiers and noncommissioned officers. One glimpse of his performance of duty comes in a note in a regimental record book, dated 3 August 1865: Thornton Chase states, "in reply to communication of Col. D. Frazer, why Non. Com. Officers School was not held this p.m., that he was deep asleep and did not hear the Drum beat for school." In September he was in charge of the Union occupation of McPhersonville, a small South Carolina town near the railroad line:

The Commanding Officer of the 104th U. S. C. T. upon receipt of this order will dispatch as soon as possible Co. "C" of his command with its full complement of Officers to McPhersonville to relieve Co. D. same reg[imen]t now stationed there. . . .

Capt. Stone will appoint an Officer as Quartermaster who will receipt Capt. Chase.

Capt. Chase will march his Command as soon as relieved to Fort "Duane" and report for duty to Lieut. Col. Wilson. He will for the present leave 6 good men of his command to inform Capt. Stone about the inhabitants and country, the same to be relieved, and sent to "Fort Duane" within 10 days time.³¹

Government Printing Office, 1895), ser. 1, vol. 47, pt. 2, 209; Company Muster Roll for May and June, 1865, United States Government Archives; Individual Muster-out Roll of the Twenty-Sixth U. S. C. T. for James B. [Thornton] Chase, dated 21 June 1865, United States Government Archives.

31. Special Order 55, dated 28 September 1865, notes by author on the Regiment Letter, Indorsement, Order and Guard Report Book of the One Hundred-Fourth U. S. C. T., in Thornton Chase Research Notebook, pp. 5.17-5.18.

It would seem that by September discipline was becoming lax in the occupation army; Thornton Chase completely stopped filling out the company's morning reports. Apparently he had grown tired of the military, for on 12 October 1865 he tendered his resignation. His commanding officer quickly accepted it despite a shortage of officers in the regiment. Thornton Chase left his company on November 14th.³² He was a civilian again, a war veteran, and free to plan his life anew.

32. James B. [Thornton] Chase letter of resignation, and accompanying comments, United States Government Archives; notes by author on the Regiment Letter, Endorsement, Order and Guard Report Book of the One Hundred-Fourth U. S. C. T., in Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 5.19.

CHAPTER 5

Postwar Years

Thornton Chase did not immediately leave South Carolina after resigning his commission in November 1865. A letter he later wrote and signed "James B. Chase" notes that he was still in Beaufort in January 1866 and in Washington, D.C., in June 1866.¹ Presumably the latter city was a stop on his way home.

Brown University started its fall term on 7 September 1866, and among the seventy-three entering freshmen was one James B. T. Chase. The "T" was present in his name in all of his university records. Although he was not yet calling himself "Thornton," he had decided to keep it as part of his name. This change in the name he called himself is symbolic of the changes that he had undergone during the previous three years. He was no longer the uncertain sixteen year old who had applied to Brown in 1863, but a former Union Army captain and a veteran of two battles. Now he would tackle a new challenge: acquiring a university education.

Thornton Chase probably found his military experience both a help and a hindrance to his new task. On the one hand, he had not read any Latin or Greek in three years, and a basic reading knowledge of both was assumed of all freshmen. His military experience was little help in algebra and geometry, in which he performed

1. James B. [Thornton] Chase to A. A. Paul, Colored Bureau, War Dept., Washington, D.C., 2 June 1866, United States Government Archives, Washington, D.C.

abysmally. On the other hand, military life probably gave him discipline. It might have given him greater self-reliance and restlessness, qualities that could have worked against a desire to complete college. Very few—less than 1 percent—went to college in the mid-nineteenth century, and no profession required a college degree.

Judged by modern standards, a college education in the mid-nineteenth century would be characterized by irrelevance. Brown's curriculum was typical. Freshmen were required to take a year of Latin, a year of Greek, a semester of geometry, and a semester of algebra. Sophomores faced a year of Latin, a year of Greek, a year of French, a year of rhetoric, a semester of trigonometry and geometry, and a semester of physiology. Juniors were required to study a semester of Latin, a semester of Greek, a year of rhetoric, a year of "Natural Philosophy" (physics and astronomy), and a semester of chemistry. Second-semester juniors were actually given a choice of two courses from among four: geology, political economy, Latin, and Greek. Seniors were required to take "Intellectual Philosophy" and "Modern History" in the fall and "Moral Philosophy and the Evidences of Christianity" and "English and American History, Constitutional and International Law" in the spring. For their third course seniors could continue their study of Latin or Greek or take German. During the second semester, if they chose to abandon language study, they could take a course in geology or in political economy.²

Such a course of study was designed to produce gentlemen: pious Christian men who grasped the essentials of modern science and could give mellifluous speeches properly spiced with quotations from Cicero and Demosthenes. Not until 1869 did any American college introduce "majors" and a large number of electives. Colleges were virtually finishing schools for the children of the wealthy, who spent much of their time involved in pranks and rivalries with other classes.

2. *Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Brown University, 1867-8* (n.p., n.d.), 20-22.

Evidence suggests that Thornton Chase did not find the environment congenial. First his grades, which started out decently, steadily declined. In September and October his grades in Latin, Greek, and geometry averaged 15 (75 percent) on a scale from 0 to 20. This grade was typical or a bit low among his classmates. He subsequently maintained his average in the languages, but in geometry his grade dropped sharply, and he finished the semester with a 6.66 (33 percent). Second semester, he never scored above a 6 in algebra, and his language grades slipped downward. He did not even complete the last month of the semester and never took final exams.³

Thornton Chase seems to have expressed his dislike for college life by moving off campus. During the first semester he resided in room 50 of University Hall, one of the college's two buildings (today it is the administration building). During the second semester he rented a room off campus. Apparently he moved while the Providence city directory company was conducting its annual canvass of the city; thus he was listed twice. Both entries describe "James Chase" as a "laborer," suggesting that he was working while going to school. This also accords with the Brown University account book, which lists "J. B. T. Chase," not Jotham Chase, as responsible for the bills (most boys had their bills paid by their fathers). Thornton Chase paid a total of \$88.60 to the college, which was the cost of tuition for two semesters, one semester of room and board, and one semester of maid service.⁴

3. Record of Standing Book of the Class of 1870, entry for J. B. T. Chase, Brown University Archives, Providence, R.I., notes in Robert H. Stockman, "The Record of Thornton Chase in the Brown University Archives," TS, 1, author's personal papers.

4. *Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Brown University, 1867-8*, 15; *The Providence Directory, for the Year 1867: Containing a General Directory of the Citizens, and Business Directory, of the State of Rhode Island, City Record, Etc., Etc.* (Providence, R.I.: Sampson, Davenport, and Co., 1867), 48; "The Record of Thornton Chase in the Brown University Archives," 2.

Thornton Chase's attendance at classes and at compulsory chapel demonstrates a similar pattern of declining interest. In the second semester he was absent from classes fifteen times without excuse, while during the first semester he was never absent without excuse. He missed compulsory chapel without excuse once the first semester and fourteen times the second. The result of his low grades and poor attendance record was the accumulation of demerits. Thornton Chase's records close with the note, "May 29 was sent home had 210 demerits."⁵

Most likely Thornton Chase and Brown University were each happy to be free of the other. In the mid-nineteenth century it was not unusual for college students to complete only a portion of their schooling. Any college education at all was considered remarkable, for the costs were difficult to bear, and the allure of earning a living in business or as an apprentice to a lawyer or physician were great.

Thornton Chase returned to Springfield; the canvasser for the Springfield city directory found a "Chase, James J" boarding on Maple Street in July 1867.⁶ Probably the middle initial was printed incorrectly, and Thornton Chase was living at his father's house on Maple Street. No occupation was listed after his name, suggesting that he was unemployed.

The Springfield city directory is the main source of information for reconstructing Thornton Chase's life and activities for the next five years. He is absent from the directory entirely in 1868; he could have been missed in the canvassing, which often was not systematic, or he could have been living in another locality that year. The latter possibility is reinforced by a certificate of membership in the Grand Army of the Republic, a veteran's organization, which is in the hands of Thornton Chase's descendants. It notes that Thornton Chase was "mustered into" the organization on 2 October 1868 as a member of Post Number Two in Vermont. Thus it

5. Stockman, "The Record of Thornton Chase," 3, 4.

6. *Springfield City Directory and Business Advertiser, for 1867-68. From July, 1867, to July, 1868* (Springfield, Mass.: Samuel Bowles and Co., 1867), 77.

is likely he resided in Vermont in 1868. The document is referred to as a "traveling card," suggesting that whatever job he held took him to many places; possibly he was an agent for his father's lumber company and traveled to sign lumber contracts or to approve the timber before it was shipped to Springfield. Significantly, he signed his membership card as "J. B. Thornton Chase," indicating that he was beginning to switch to that name.⁷

The 1869 Springfield city directory lists "James T. Chase"—once again the "Thornton" has risen in importance—as boarding on Maple Street and as an employee of Chase, Currier, and Company, his father's lumber business.⁸

The year 1870, in which Thornton Chase turned twenty-three, was a crucial one for him, for in that year he married. The details of how he met Annie Elizabeth Louise Allyn are lost. She was born on 25 February 1848 in Bristol, a small town in Rhode Island, where she grew up. The 1850 census lists the occupation of her father, William H. Allyn, as "harness maker." His property was worth \$2,500, presumably the value of his house and shop, indicating that he was a man of average means.⁹ In 1869 Annie lived in Providence and worked as a teacher; in 1870 she taught at "East Street Intermediate," presumably a middle school.¹⁰

7. Traveling membership card in the Grand Army of the Republic for J. B. Thornton Chase, original in the hands of Charles Lawton, grandson of Thornton Chase (photographic copy in author's personal papers).

8. *Springfield City Directory and Business Advertiser for 1869-70. From July, 1869, to July, 1870* (Springfield, Mass.: Samuel Bowles and Co., 1869), 72.

9. Annie's date of birth comes from her death certificate in the Newport, R.I., city clerk's office (notes in Robert H. Stockman, Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 8.1, author's personal papers); United States Census for 1850, Bristol County, R.I., notes in Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 8.5.

10. *The Providence Directory, for the Year 1869: Containing a General Directory of the City, A Record of the City Government, its Institutions, Etc.; Together with a Complete Business Directory and Register of the Entire State* (Providence, R.I.: Sampson, Davenport, and Co., 1869), 16; *The Providence Directory, for the Year 1870: Containing a General Directory of the City, A Record of the City Government, its Institutions, Etc.; Together with a Complete Business Directory and Register of the Entire State* (Providence, R.I.: Sampson, Davenport, and Co., 1870), 20.

A descendant recalls that Annie heard Thornton Chase sing in a church choir and fell in love with his voice. Perhaps she sang in the choir too. She was an Episcopalian and probably attended St. Stephen's Church, next to Brown University, for that is the church where she and Thornton Chase were later married. Perhaps she attended the church in 1866–67, and perhaps Thornton Chase sang in its choir while he attended Brown.¹¹

They were married at 10:15 A.M. on Wednesday, 11 May 1870, by Henry Waterman, the rector of St. Stephen's. The couple settled in Springfield, where Thornton Chase purchased a house at 12 School Street and worked as a partner in Chase, Currier, and Company. Presumably the marriage began happily. If the entries in the Springfield city directory can be considered indicative, the marriage seems to have brought out Thornton Chase's creativity. It lists him as the director and lead bass of the choir at First Baptist Church; he was also secretary of the Mendelssohn Union, a singing society.¹² His lifelong love of music may have stimulated his interest in religious experience, for music is emotionally satisfying and powerfully aesthetic, and it is an activity that brings people together in fellowship and a shared effort. For some people it is an almost mystical experience.

To complete the new couple's joy, ten months after their wedding their first child was born on 16 March 1871. She was named Sarah Thornton Chase—after Thornton Chase's mother—and was the first great-grandchild of James B. Thornton, Thornton Chase's maternal grandfather.¹³

11. Personal Interview with Margaret Hansen, 30 August 1985, author's personal papers. Marriage record of Thornton Chase and Annie Allyn, St. Stephen's Church, Providence, R.I., notes in author's personal papers.

12. Marriage record of Thornton Chase and Annie Allyn, St. Stephen's Church, Providence, R.I., notes in author's personal papers; *Springfield City Directory and Business Advertiser for 1870–71, For the Year Commencing June 1, 1870* (Springfield, Mass.: Samuel Bowles and Co., 1870), 157, 52–53.

13. *Springfield Daily Republican*, Friday, 17 March 1871, p. 8, col. 6, notes in Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 8.1A.

An important and little-known factor in Thornton Chase's life was Phebe Lincoln Allyn (1827-1910), his mother-in-law. For a few years she lived with Thornton and Annie; probably her husband had died, for he had been twenty years older than she.¹⁴ In 1875 she remarried; her second husband was Stephen Albro Hopkins, a mariner who lived in Newport, Rhode Island. Seven years later, however, they divorced, a drastic and unusual action in the nineteenth century.¹⁵ Subsequently she again lived with her daughter.

In late 1871 or early 1872 Thornton Chase decided to open his own business, based on the experience he had gained from his work with his father. The 1872 Springfield city directory lists the occupation of J. B. Thornton Chase as "Dealer in Lumber. Spruce House Bills a speciality. Office 229 Main street, opposite Massasoit House." However, he was no longer listed as an officer for any musical organization in Springfield, nor was he listed as such in 1871; either his interest had waned or his business and family required too much of his time. His address had also changed, suggesting the family had moved into a larger house.¹⁶

Life had probably acquired stability and held out considerable promise for Thornton Chase. Sigmund Freud, once asked to summarize what a normal person should be able to do well, replied "*lieben und arbeiten*," to love and to work. Erikson has elaborated on this insight by describing two phases that adults must go through in

14. Phebe's birth date comes from the United States Census for 1900, Newport County, R.I., notes in Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 8.6; her date of death comes from the *Newport Daily News*, Saturday, 30 April 1910, Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 8.14. Her first husband's date of birth can be estimated from his age, given in the United States Census for 1850, Bristol County, R.I., notes in Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 8.5.

15. Marriage record of Stephen Albro Hopkins and Phebe Lincoln Allyn, Newport, R.I., City Hall, notes in Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 8.11; divorce record of Stephen Hopkins and Phebe A. Hopkins, Newport, R.I., Superior Court, notes in Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 8.12.

16. *Springfield City Directory and Business Advertiser for 1872-73, For the Year Commencing June 1, 1872* (Springfield, Mass.: Clark W. Bryan and Co., 1872), 157.

their lives. One, called "*intimacy versus isolation*," describes the challenge of the young adult to share his or her identity with another and to grow as a result of the rewards and risks of intimacy. Failure to meet this challenge can result in isolation, loneliness, and self-absorption. The other phase is called "*generativity versus stagnation*" and refers to the challenge to produce and rear the next generation and to be creative in one's life and work.¹⁷

Thornton Chase later noted that he "lived happily and faithfully with . . . Annie . . . well and diligently supporting her" and their baby.¹⁸ This statement suggests that he felt that he had succeeded in these two phases of life. For a man who had had a loveless and lonely childhood, the creation of a stable and happy home life must have been a particularly satisfying achievement.

However, everything changed in August 1872 when Thornton Chase's business failed. He was obligated to provide for his family in an era when there was no unemployment compensation or other government assistance for those thrown out of work. The 1873 city directory lists him as an express agent, but it also gives a different home address for him than in 1872, suggesting that he had either to sell the house he owned or to rent a cheaper house.¹⁹ Hard times had begun again; the tests of intimacy and generativity would ultimately produce much growth but were to bring seven years of severe pain as Thornton Chase faced repeated failures.

17. Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1950), 263-68.

18. James B. T. [Thornton] Chase to Newport Superior Court, Newport, R.I., 12 February 1878, copy in author's personal papers.

19. *Springfield City Directory and Business Advertiser for 1873-74. For the Year Commencing June 1, 1873* (Springfield, Mass.: Clark W. Bryan and Co., 1873), 189.

CHAPTER 6

Vision

After his business failed, Thornton Chase searched for work, but a suitable job was hard to find. Desperate, he traveled with the "consent and advice" of his wife, Annie, to Boston on 20 August 1872, hoping to find employment in the capital city of the state.¹ His luck there was little better; he could find work, but nothing that was permanent or that would earn enough to pay for two residences. Although he visited Springfield frequently, the separation must have been a strain on their marriage. He later said, however, that he continued to be on "intimate and loving terms" with his wife.²

Thornton Chase's arrival in Boston was poorly timed. On 9 and 10 November 1872 much of downtown burned in one of the biggest fires the city ever experienced. The fire created construction jobs, but the white-collar work that Thornton Chase sought would have suffered.

The year 1873 brought further misfortunes. In September the collapse of railroad investment sent stock-market prices tumbling and triggered the "Panic of 1873," America's first major economic depression. At its worst point an estimated 30 percent of the Mas-

1. James B. T. [Thornton] Chase to Newport Superior Court, Newport, R.I., 12 February 1878, in the divorce record of Annie E. L. Chase and James B. T. Chase, Court Records of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Providence College Library, Providence, R.I. (copy in author's personal papers).

2. James B. T. [Thornton] Chase to Newport Superior Court.

sachusetts labor force was unemployed at some time during the year.³ The economic downturn lasted six years until 1878. Thornton Chase found himself one of tens of thousands looking for work with little hope of finding any.

Thornton Chase did occasionally obtain work. The Springfield city directory for 1873 lists him as an "express agent."⁴ He probably held the job in Boston, since by his own account he was not residing in Springfield at the time (although his wife and child were, hence the entry in the directory). His salary was usually about nine dollars per week and never exceeded fifteen dollars per week, a level of income that was barely adequate to support a family.⁵

To complicate matters further, Annie Chase became pregnant again. The child, Jessamine Allyn Chase, was born on 13 April 1874. Thornton Chase now had two infant daughters to support as well as a wife and probably a mother-in-law. His desperation for a livelihood could only have increased.

Thornton Chase rarely spoke about his personal life in his letters and talks, but he did mention one event that occurred in Boston in 1873 or 1874, because it was one of the three or four most important events in his life. His description is tantalizing because of its brevity:

I was very, very poor. . . . [The experience] remained with me all my life, and it has been the motive that has caused me to be a student of comparative religions, as I have been for thirty-five years also, and my

3. Alexander Keyssar, *Out of Work: The First Century of Unemployment in Massachusetts* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986), 52.

4. *Springfield City Directory and Business Advertiser for 1873-74. For the Year Commencing June 1, 1873* (Springfield, Mass.: Clark W. Bryan and Co., 1873), 188.

5. James B. T. [Thornton] Chase to Newport Superior Court, 12 February 1878. Alexander Keyssar (*Out of Work*, 45) indicates that an income of \$600 to \$700 per year (in 1885), which would equal about thirteen dollars per week, was above the average for factory workers but was barely adequate to support a family.

whole time, outside of earning my bread and butter, has been devoted to those studies.⁶

Clearly whatever Thornton Chase experienced was very powerful, and it set him on a new course: He became an active student of religion. In a letter written in 1909 he described an experience that probably was the same one that occurred in Boston. It cannot be proved that it is a description of the same experience, but both accounts describe the event as extremely significant for his life, and both describe it as having followed a time of great difficulty. These similarities suggest that the two accounts refer to the same event.

Thornton Chase was replying to a Bahá'í woman who had written to him about a vision she had experienced. This prompted him to describe his own:

I am very glad you have sent me this information as I had feared that your experience had been of a different nature, but you have related my own experience of many years ago, one which sustained me in every trial, doubt, suffering and danger through all these years "which are but an instant."

That experience came in a time of pain and extreme soul suffering, and saved me from destruction. The same utter love, love *unspeakable* because it is not of this plane of experience or existence; a perfect evanescence [*sic*], an absolute oneness, the actual "Nirvana." And the following "walking on air"; the exhilaration and joy in the midst of grief and pain; the all-embracing love of human kind; while drinking the dregs of misery I was feeding on the food of Heaven. And after weeks, yes months, it faded away and became a sweet memory, an assurance of LOVE, which guarded my soul from destruction and guided my steps ever toward the LORD.

The only difference I perceive between your experience and mine was that my experience was in the presence of a Man, not one of the opposite sex [a woman]. It was the Christ. But I cannot, after reading

6. Transcript of a conversation with Thornton Chase, TS, 33, TC.

your description, I cannot believe that sex entered into your experience, because you describe that which I know, and it is sexless. It is One ness; it is "Love divine all love excelling"; it is "irrespective of personality." It is not self-created but the Gift of God. It is not the completion of an ideal, for the human has not the power to idealize nor to conceive what is above his plane. It is a glimpse of heaven, a foretaste of divine joy. It comes to *sufferers*.⁷

That the vision followed a time of "pain and extreme soul searching" and came to a "*sufferer*" is consistent with the theory that it occurred during Thornton Chase's time of desperate unemployment in Boston in 1873 or 1874. Indeed it must have occurred in one of those times that some psychologists describe as "shipwreck," for Thornton Chase's marriage, occupation, career plans, family ties, even his ability to find meaning in life must have been on the brink of destruction. In short, he did not appear to be meeting the challenges of intimacy and generativity successfully; isolation and stagnation loomed. Under such circumstances many people become mentally ill or commit suicide; the reference to the vision's saving him "from destruction" suggests that he may have contemplated suicide.

At such a low point in his life—a "dark night of the soul," as students of mysticism call it—Thornton Chase experienced a breakthrough. In terms of Erikson's psychology it was an experience of divine intimacy that overwhelmed the threat of isolation. Thornton Chase could only characterize the experience as coming from God. In his words it was a "glimpse of heaven" and above the plane of human experience—an act of God's grace.

To call his experience a vision is slightly misleading because it was not visual as much as it was affective. True, Thornton Chase does say he was in the presence of a Man (with a capital *M*) whom he says was "the Christ" (not just Christ, but "*the* Christ"; by this Thornton Chase presumably refers to the divine spirit that not only

7. Thornton Chase to Louise Waite, 1 September 1909 (copy), 1-2, TC.

filled Christ but also filled Bahá'u'lláh, prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith). But it is significant that Thornton Chase never describes the Man as doing or saying anything, nor does he describe a meeting or a setting for the experience. Rather, he focuses exclusively on a feeling, an "utter love, love *unspeakable*." Apparently he understood his experience as a union with God; this is probably what "an absolute oneness" and "the actual 'Nirvana'" describe.

But Thornton Chase felt more than God's love for him; he also experienced his own "all-embracing love of human kind." As such, his vision was unique because it empowered him to reach out to others, to transcend his isolation despite his pain. An intense love for others and a yearning to serve them would subsequently become one of the principal characteristics of Thornton Chase's personality.

The vision's focus on love is even more remarkable when one remembers Thornton Chase's "loveless and lonely" childhood. Rather than withdraw from others, as some children would do, Thornton Chase became an intense lover of others. His experience of a lack of love stimulated greater love; his love for his lost mother became transformed and redirected into a love of God. Viewed in this light his vision may be seen as yet another example of the remarkable inner resources he possessed.

One would like to know how Thornton Chase's vision redirected his religious loyalties. After becoming a Bahá'í he criticized the Calvinism of his father's church as being strong on God's wrath and damnation but weak on God's love. Before his vision he may not have perceived this as a weakness in evangelical Protestantism. However, the few references to Thornton Chase's religious activity before the vision all center on music, suggesting the possibility that church was primarily an aesthetic experience for him. We do not know whether he ever felt a religious devotion to a church.

After the vision it would seem that Thornton Chase largely abandoned evangelical doctrines; he continued to attend church, but it was a place where he could sing or conduct choirs. He says that he embarked on a new kind of search for truth and love, which

involved comparative religion. Thus it would not be inaccurate to call the vision a conversion experience. Thornton Chase was not converted to a particular ideology but rather to a value—love of God—and to a commitment to search the faiths of humanity for the religion best embodying that love. The seed sown by this commitment did not reach fruition until twenty years later, when Thornton Chase became a Bahá'í. He himself interprets his vision as the beginning of his quest for the Bahá'í Faith when he says that the experience “guided my steps ever toward the LORD.”

Bahá'u'lláh, in His mystical work titled the Seven Valleys, says that after the Valley of Search comes the Valley of Love, where “the heaven of ecstasy is upraised and the world-illuming sun of yearning shineth, and the fire of love is ablaze.” The Valley of Love perfectly describes Thornton Chase's experience. But Bahá'u'lláh ominously notes that “the steed of this Valley is pain; and if there be no pain this journey will never end.”⁸ This promise proved true as well.

Whether his mystical experience was the hallucination of an ill mind, the positive response of a sorely tested soul, or an act of grace—or all three—Thornton Chase made the vision a major turning point in his life. The experience did not mark the end of his suffering; on the contrary, it only marked the beginning. But the vision gave him hope, strength, and the ability to endure. Its sweetness and assurance lingered in his life and became the foundation for a steadfastness of faith—a quality for which 'Abdu'l-Bahá later singled him out—and for the love of all existence that became Thornton Chase's very being.

8. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys and The Four Valleys*, trans. Marzieh Gail (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), 8.

CHAPTER 7

Wilderness

It was fortunate that Thornton Chase had experienced his vision, because the next few years were perhaps the worst in his life. The gradual collapse of his marriage and his continued failure to achieve financial success drove him further and further into a psychic wilderness of loss of confidence, loss of purpose and meaning, and questioning of the very nature of his self. It finally drove him into a literal wilderness as well—the Colorado frontier and its yet unsettled mountains.

From August 1872 until July 1874 Thornton Chase labored at various jobs in Boston, but he never found one that provided a decent living. It is likely that, in addition to the continuing economic depression, Thornton Chase's own search for a vocation was part of his employment problem. In the early 1870s he was in his mid-twenties, an age when many try various careers. One source says that he was a "salaried member" of two church choirs in Boston, which suggests that he was attempting to earn part of his living through his music.¹ Thornton Chase later became a professional actor and perhaps aspired to success in Boston's many theaters, which provided opportunities not available in Springfield. Perhaps

1. *Field and Farm*, 20 March 1886, p. 4. The column "Reminiscences" (which included the section on Thornton Chase) was written by L. W. Cutler. *Field and Farm* is a Colorado periodical. I am indebted to Marie Griffith for finding an original of this column.

he remained in Boston to pursue an acting career at night while he held various jobs during the day.

The primary source of information about the next four years of Thornton Chase's life is a letter he wrote to the Rhode Island Superior Court in 1878, when Annie filed for divorce. It gives only one side of the story, but other sources corroborate some of its information and reinforce the impression that the letter is relatively honest and complete.

By the summer of 1874 it became clear to Thornton Chase that he could not remain in Boston, for he had been unable to support his family adequately there. Because of the continuing economic depression, work was not available in the cities. Hence he decided to try the frontier instead. He heard of a job in Fort Howard (the modern city of Green Bay), Wisconsin, and spoke to his wife about taking it. Possibly the job was connected with the timber industry, which was—and still is—the mainstay of Green Bay's economy. Annie agreed that he should take the job. According to Thornton Chase, he departed Springfield for the West on 17 July 1874. As he left their house in Springfield, Annie stood at the door, weeping, and said "God bless you!"² These proved to be the last words she spoke to him.

Fort Howard was a small city of two thousand people.³ To the east was Lake Michigan; to the south, rolling land that was just being extensively cleared and farmed; to the north, hilly forest. Thornton Chase notes he was "in frequent correspondence" with Annie until 10 February 1875, when he received a letter from her

2. James B. T. [Thornton] Chase to Newport Superior Court, Newport, R.I., 12 February 1878, in the divorce record of Annie E. L. Chase and James B. T. [Thornton] Chase, Court Records of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Providence College Library, Providence, R.I. (copy in author's personal papers).

3. *Asher and Adams' New Commercial, Topographical, and Statistical Atlas and Gazetteer of the United States: With Maps Showing the Dominion of Canada, Europe and the World* (New York: Asher and Adams, 1874), 209.

that said "she did not wish to see his face again and commanded him never thereafter to appear in her . . . presence."⁴ Nevertheless, he continued to write to her and did not relinquish hope that their marriage could be saved.

In March 1875 he moved to Chicago, perhaps hoping that the big city would provide better job opportunities. However, the city was still suffering from the economic depression, which affected it particularly seriously, as well as from the Great Fire of 1871. Thornton Chase obtained employment as an actor in McVicker's Theater, one of Chicago's most important theaters.⁵ The pay was better—seventeen dollars per week—but he had to spend six or eight dollars per week on "stage wardrobe and accessories"; thus he was unable to support his family very well. He wrote to Annie in January 1876 and asked her to come to Chicago to live with him. As he later explained to the Superior Court:

[He] agreed to provide for her comfortable living in a respectable boarding house with himself, to which he received a reply that she would come to him, provided he should send the money sufficient for passage for herself, children and her mother, provided that her mother should come with her and be supported by him, the defendant, and that her household furniture should be brought with her from Springfield Massachusetts to Chicago involving a cost of one hundred dollars for freight, and provided further that he the defendant would procure a house in a fashionable part of the said city of Chicago where there was good society, thereby meaning such fashionable society as the said city of Chicago contained. That the defendant by reason of his small income was unable to comply with the exactions of his said wife.⁶

4. James B. T. [Thornton] Chase to Newport Superior Court, 12 February 1878.

5. Bessie Louise Pierce, *A History of Chicago*, vol. 3: *The Rise of a Modern City, 1871-1893* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957) 471.

6. James B. T. [Thornton] Chase to Newport Superior Court, 12 February 1878.

If Annie did write such a letter, then she had spoken at least one untruth, because in September 1875 her mother had remarried; in early 1876 Phebe Allyn Hopkins would have been living with her new husband in Newport, Rhode Island. Thornton Chase's daughter Jessamine confirms that he did ask Annie and their daughters to move to Chicago.⁷

In early 1876 Thornton Chase left Chicago for White Church, Kansas, a hamlet on the prairies a dozen miles west of Kansas City. It is not known why he moved to Kansas; a maternal uncle had lived in Topeka, Kansas, in 1865, and perhaps he had written to Thornton Chase about a job. In White Church he served as a teacher, apparently at a school for Black students. His salary, fifty dollars per month, was probably quite adequate in a small frontier town. He again wrote to his wife and asked her to join him, but she wrote back and asked for money instead. However, the job did not last because the school was broken up "by negro and political troubles."⁸ The only known comment in a local newspaper was "there is no school at present in White Church. Some enterprising teacher should apply for the situation."⁹ Perhaps Thornton Chase quit or was fired.

7. Marriage certificate of Stephen Albro Hopkins and Phebe Ann Allyn, 10 September 1875, Newport City Hall, Newport, R.I., notes in Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 8.11. Charles Lawton recalls that Jessamine mentioned to him on "different occasions" that Thornton Chase had asked the family to move to Chicago; telephone interview with Charles Lawton by the author, 22 May 1987, author's personal papers.

8. James B. T. [Thornton] Chase to Newport Superior Court, 12 February 1878. A photograph dated 1865 of Thornton Chase's uncle in Topeka, Kansas, is the personal property of Thornton Chase Nelson (photocopy in author's personal papers).

9. *The Wyandotte Gazette*, 17 November 1876, p. 3, col. 2. The paper mentions that the county had a school for Black children as well as schools for White children, but it is not clear whether the school for Black children was at White Church. White Church is literally a White church; it was established originally as a Methodist mission to the local Indians. It is six miles west of Kansas City, too far for urban Blacks to send their children daily, but it might not be too far if the Blacks the school served were rural farmers. Further research on the subject is needed.

In November 1876 he moved again, to the hamlet of Wabunsee, Kansas, thirty miles west of Topeka, where he earned a meager salary as a voice instructor. The village was so small it was not even on contemporary maps of Kansas; probably he had been hired by a particular family to teach their children. By his own admission Thornton Chase was unable to send his wife any money at all during the year 1876.¹⁰

Finding his luck in Kansas to be poor, on 17 August 1877 Thornton Chase moved to Del Norte, a small mining town of a thousand inhabitants, at the edge of the San Juan Mountains in southwestern Colorado. He now lived on the frontier. Colorado had become a state only a year earlier in 1876. On 25 June 1876—as the nation celebrated its centennial—the Sioux Indians massacred George Armstrong Custer and his Seventh Cavalry only a few hundred miles north of Colorado. The San Juan Mountains had just been wrested from the Ute Indians; the first prospectors had entered the mountains in 1873 and 1874. Del Norte had sprung into existence when silver had been discovered nearby in 1873. The mountains had so much precious metal that they became known as the “Silvery San Juan,” and one publication extolled them as “the most richly mineralized spot on the face of the great round globe.”¹¹

In Del Norte Thornton Chase was “unsuccessful in his endeavors beyond procuring food and fire for himself.” In February 1878 he received a notice from the Rhode Island Superior Court, sitting in Newport, that his wife had filed for divorce. (Annie had moved

10. James B. T. [Thornton] Chase to Newport Superior Court, 12 February 1878.

11. Del Norte is described in Frank Fossett, *Colorado: Its Gold and Silver Mines, Farms and Stock Ranges, and Health and Pleasure Resorts. Tourist Guide to the Rocky Mountains*, 2d ed. (New York: C. G. Crawford, 1880), 90–92, 156. The quotation about the San Juans is found in Sidney Jocknick, *Early Days on the Western Slope of Colorado and Campfire Chats with Otto Mears, The Pathfinder, From 1870 to 1883, Inclusive* (Denver: Carson-Harper Co., 1913), 161.

to Newport and was living there with her mother.) Her petition stated that

he [Thornton Chase] hath deserted the said Annie E. L. Chase for the period of five years last part, during which time she has not seen him, and . . . for the last six years past he has utterly failed to support said Annie, and her two children, he being able to do so. And she further represents that she has no knowledge of the residence or whereabouts of said James B. T. Chase and does not know when he may be found.¹²

Certainly the claim that he had deserted her for five years is an exaggeration; he had left for Wisconsin only three and a half years earlier. Their daughter Jessamine was not yet four years old. Annie's statement that she was unaware of her husband's whereabouts was perhaps reasonable, for he had moved frequently during the previous several years, and she stated that she had not received any letters from him for sixteen months. Thornton Chase, in his reply to the court, mentions a letter he wrote to Annie in November 1876, fourteen or fifteen months before she filed for divorce, but he does not mention any subsequent correspondence.

It seems certain that Thornton Chase had failed to provide for Annie and his family, for his reply to the court never claims that he did provide for them. He says that he had done his best, but even he implies that support had been inadequate. Thornton Chase was not a lazy man and possessed considerable talent, as his previous life experience had already demonstrated. Either a string of extraordinarily bad luck, a series of bad employment decisions, or inner turmoil over the purpose and direction of his life, or a combination of all three factors, caused his failure.

12. Petition for divorce by Annie E. L. Chase to the Superior Court, Newport, R.I., [January 1878], in the divorce record of Annie E. L. Chase and James B. T. [Thornton] Chase, Court Records of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Providence College Library, Providence, R.I.

Thornton Chase received the court notice in Del Norte, where it had been forwarded from Wabaunsee. He wrote in reply a certified letter in which he pleaded that his marriage not be ended:

And the defendant further sayeth that notwithstanding that he has been interdicted by the said Annie his wife from seeing her he has on several occasions during the years 1872, 1873, 1874 and 1875 sent and forwarded to her such sums of money from time to time as he could possibly give her by the most economical living, and still is making unremitting exertions by teaching, laboring and singing to regain his lost fortunes and to provide for the support of his said family as heretofore.

That he is strictly of temperate habits and through all the many years since his departure from his said family by and with his wife's consent for the said purpose and since said tenth day of February 1875 he has received no encouragement or expressions of love or affection yet in all respects he has been faithful to his marriage vow and has been contending with his successive misfortunes aforesaid with the constant and faithful purpose of regaining her distressed affections and for the purpose of further providing for her wants and necessities and for the support of his children.

That by reason of his present poor condition he is now debarred from attending in person the hearing of this case, but nevertheless answers the complaint or petition of the complainant his wife, that justice may be done in the premises as this Honorable Court shall order and decree.

Wherefore the defendant prays that the complaint or petition of the said complainant Annie E. L. Chase his said wife be dismissed and that he be hence relieved from making any further answer or defense in this behalf and for such other or further relief in the premises as to justice and good conscience may seem meet.¹³

13. Letter from James B. T. [Thornton] Chase, quoted in petition for divorce by Annie E. L. Chase to the Superior Court, Newport, R.I.

This is not a letter from a callous deserter of wife and children; such a man would not reply at all, let alone request that the marriage—and his parental responsibilities—be continued. Rather, one senses in the letter a sincerity of purpose and a genuine distress over the possibility that his marriage might be terminated. Nevertheless, it is difficult not to sympathize also with Annie, who had two young children to support. One wishes that the chain of job opportunities had taken Thornton Chase east instead of west, or that Annie had been more willing to move with her husband.

Descendants of Thornton Chase through Sarah, his older daughter, recall that everyone wanted Annie to reconcile with Thornton Chase. Sarah had “her heart set on it” because she “adored” her father, but Annie refused.¹⁴ When the Superior Court met in March 1878 it sympathized with her, not Thornton Chase, and granted Annie a divorce.

Annie Chase was now free of her husband. Subsequent records show that she continued to live in Newport, Rhode Island, until her death on 2 March 1918. Her mother, Phebe, lived with her from the time of Mr. Hopkins’s divorce of Phebe in 1882 until her death on 30 April 1910.¹⁵ The Newport city directory annually listed Annie as “widow James B. T. [Thornton Chase]”; in this way she avoided the stigma of divorce, which was great in the late nineteenth century.¹⁶ According to her descendants she earned a meager living

14. Personal interview of Margaret Hansen, granddaughter of Thornton Chase, by Robert Stockman, 30 August 1985, Venice, Calif.; author’s personal papers.

15. Death record of Annie Allyn Chase, Newport, R.I., City Clerk’s Office, notes in Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 8.1; petition for divorce by Stephen Hopkins against Phebe L. Hopkins, Newport Superior Court Records, Newport, R.I., book 24, p. 117, notes in Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 8.12; death notice of Phebe Lincoln Hopkins, in *Newport Daily News*, 30 April 1910, p. 4, col. 7.

16. See, for example, *The Newport City Directory, 1884. Containing a Directory of the Citizens, Street Directory, The City Record, and Business Directory, also Directory of the Summer Residents* (Boston: Sampson, Davenport, and Co., 1884), 64. Similar entries exist for other years such as 1887, 1888, and 1889.

through embroidery and fancy sewing work; later she was partly supported by Jessamine, who never married, lived with her mother, and made a living as a music teacher.¹⁷ Annie may also have published poetry for use by children in school; there are several poems authored by an "Annie Chase" or "Annie E. Chase" in poetry collections published for use in schools.¹⁸ However, her descendants have no recollection of her writing poems; hence the works may have been composed by another woman with the same name.

Presumably Thornton Chase was informed by the court that his wife's request for a divorce had been granted. The evidence suggests he was devastated by the news. He left Del Norte and went into the San Juan Mountains, wandering in search of gold and silver and of a new life. After five years of doing his best to earn a living and find a vocation, his hopes and dreams had been shattered. The only account we have of these days, although exaggerated, speaks of his pain:

The state of Colorado is prolific with unique characters and in the literary profession there is a full quota of queer representatives. We are reminded of one Thornton Chase, who penetrated the silver San Juan in the early day. He had heard the story that there were very ancient workings near Rico, and this was his only clue to the whereabouts of a hidden treasure amounting to exactly \$250,000. He was undoubtedly crazy and searched the mountains high and low. Anything of an ancient appearance had a charm for him and he kept constant watch on his

17. Personal interview with Margaret Hansen, 30 August 1985.

18. Annie Chase, "Motion Song—Daisy Fair," in Charles R. Skinner, ed., *Arbor Day Manual: An Aid in Preparing Programs for Arbor Day Exercises* (Albany, N.Y.: Weed, Parsons and Co., 1890), 57–58; Annie Chase, "A Flock of Birds," in Skinner, *Arbor Day Manual*, 182–83; Annie E. Chase, "Flag Song for Washington's Birthday," *Werner's Readings and Recitations No. 49: Washington Celebrations*, Stanley Schell, ed. (New York: Edgar S. Werner and Co., 1912) 88; Annie Chase, "Spring," in Lizzie J. Rook and E. J. H. Goodfellow, eds., *Tiny Tot's Speaker, Designed for the Wee Ones, Composed of Recitations, Motion Songs, and Concert Pieces* (Philadelphia: Penn Publishing Co., 1913), 28.

companions for fear that they would find it. He was a fine-looking man and very bright in some ways. . . . He had a keen-edged, long-bladed knife with which he declared he would kill his step-mother when he found the treasure. This knife he used to sharpen on a whetstone (although the knife was never used) two or three times a week. He would run his thumb along the blade and say to himself "Ah, that's good; that's fine," and then, between his teeth, "Curse her!" Then his plan was to have John Roach to build him a fine vessel, with two catamarons [*sic*], to bring him provisions. He would search the world for fifty females (twenty-five blondes and twenty-five brunetts [*sic*]) representing every type of female beauty, and would then never set foot on land. . . . In Boston he was a salaried member of the choir of the two leading churches, receiving a salary of \$1000 in one (morning) and \$600 in the other (evening service). It is needless to say he never discovered the treasure.¹⁹

Most likely some facts of the account—published in 1886, about eight years after Thornton Chase's divorce—are exaggerated. For example, if he had earned \$1600 per year (\$32 per week), he would have had no financial troubles, and he would never have left Boston in the first place. A piece of information elsewhere in the account—that he was the youngest captain in the Union Army—may or may not be an exaggeration, but Thornton Chase himself is likely its source. Later events in his life confirm that he was a mountaineer, and this fact suggests another source of distortion: Thornton Chase's fantasy about women may be partly a product of the expectations and excesses of his rough mountaineering companions, or at least of the memory of the mountaineering companion who wrote the account.

Because the account does not come from Thornton Chase himself, because it may not offer a well-rounded account of his mountain days, because his personal papers do not offer any caveats or corrections, and because Thornton Chase is no longer able to

19. L. W. Cutler, "Reminiscences," *Field and Farm*, 20 March 1886, 4.

explain, the account of his fantasies must not be relied on to draw hard and fast conclusions about him. However, the description of the fantasies about women matches the fact that he had never been successful in his relationships with them. He may have felt keenly the irony that his mother—the only woman who had loved him—was dead. Whether or not he actually wanted to kill his stepmother, clearly his relationship with her was very poor. Perhaps she had made his marriage difficult or had made it impossible for Jotham Chase to hire his son when Thornton Chase's business had failed, or perhaps Thornton Chase blamed his problems as an adult on her relationship with him during his childhood.

The statement that he sought a harem of fifty women, true or not, is consistent with the frustration that Thornton Chase must have felt after his divorce; for a harem theoretically represents a situation in which a man dominates and controls his relationship with women. Finding a buried treasure would have provided him with the money to obtain control over his life and to cease his painful struggles, enabling him to float around the world on his own yacht, living a life of luxury and pleasure.

One is struck by the contrast between this alleged reaction to adversity—a fantasy—and Thornton Chase's previous reaction—his mystical experience in Boston. The contrast underlines the greater severity of this crisis and suggests a more profound sense of failure. Nevertheless the vision ultimately proved more powerful than the fantasy because Thornton Chase never made the latter his life's goal. While he never found an ancient treasure, he eventually did find the equivalent—silver—in the San Juans. However, he did not make the fortune into an opportunity to renounce his struggles and live a life of luxury; he continued to develop his talents. He also controlled any hedonistic tendencies, overcame his fears regarding a marital relationship, and considered a second marriage.

CHAPTER 8

Pueblo

Thornton Chase's wandering in the Colorado wilderness did not last long. Two years after Annie divorced him he was ready to try marriage again. On 6 May 1880 he married Eleanor Francesca Hockett Pervier at the Plymouth Congregational Church in Des Moines, Iowa. He probably met her through Ella Sheldon, Eleanor's friend who lived in Pueblo, Colorado. Thornton Chase worked for Mrs. Sheldon or her husband after the wedding and may have worked for them before as well. (Marcellus Sheldon, a prominent local politician and one of the city's wealthiest men, ran a lumberyard.)¹

It was the second marriage for both Eleanor and Thornton Chase. Apparently it matched him with a more compatible partner, even though his new wife was eleven years younger than he. Eleanor Francesca Hockett was born on 5 January 1858. In 1876 she lived in Prairie City, Iowa, then in Des Moines. In 1877 she went to Chicago to marry Edwin S. Pervier, who was "at the point of

1. Marriage certificate of J. B. T. Chase [Thornton Chase] and Eleanor F. Pervier, 6 May 1880, in Mrs. Chase's application for veteran's widow's pension, United States Government Archives, Washington, D.C.; General Affidavit of Dora Kirkpatrick, 28 March 1916, application of Eleanor F. Chase for a veteran's widow's pension, United States Government Archives. Mr. Sheldon's life is extensively described in *History of the Arkansas Valley, Colorado* (Chicago: O. L. Baskin & Co., 1881), 811-13.

death." He died shortly thereafter—on 17 October 1877—of typhoid fever.² At age nineteen she was a widow.

Eleanor returned to Des Moines. Probably at some point she went to Pueblo to visit Ella Sheldon, either to stay with her or to work for her, and thereby met Thornton Chase. After they were married, the couple traveled to Prairie City to visit her friends there and then settled in Pueblo.

In 1880 Pueblo, located at the edge of the Rocky Mountains, 112 miles south of Denver, was a small but booming city of 5,500 people. Because of its distance from the mines it was not a rough frontier town; rather, it was a marketing and manufacturing center, distributing goods from the mountains to the east and sending eastern goods into the mountains on its network of rail lines. In 1880 a telephone company for local calls only was established with fifty customers, and a gas company brought gaslight to the city. During the previous year a horse car company (a company that provided public transportation using horse-drawn buses) had been established to provide public transportation; the fare was ten cents. A public library had existed for many years, and plans for a hospital had begun.³

The Chases lived in Pueblo for three years, where Thornton Chase held various jobs; one was city editor for the *Pueblo Republican*.⁴ He was also active as an inventor. On 18 June 1881 Thornton

2. George H. Tokuyama, registrar of the State of Hawaii, to the author, 6 April 1988, author's personal papers; General Affidavit of Dora Kirkpatrick, 15 January 1913, application of Eleanor F. Chase for a veteran's widow's pension, United States Government Archives; General Affidavit of Clayton C. Pervier, 24 March 1915, application of Eleanor F. Chase for a veteran's widow's pension, United States Government Archives.

3. Frank Fossett, *Colorado: Its Gold and Silver Mines, Farms and Stock Ranges, and Health and Pleasure Resorts. Tourist's Guide to the Rocky Mountains*, 2d ed. (New York: C. G. Crawford, 1880), 157. Isabel Stevenson Daney, *Pueblo's First Cross* (Denver: Big Mountain Press, 1966), 29–30.

4. *The [Denver] Inter-Ocean*, 5.22 (10 June 1882): 395. (Copies of only a few issues of *Inter-Ocean* have survived. They may be found in the Colorado State Historical Society Library, Denver, and the Denver Public Library.)

Chase filed an application for a patent for a "prospecting-tool for miners &c." The patent, number 252,184, was granted on 10 January 1882. According to his description of the device, "The object of my invention is to furnish a hand-tool especially adapted to the use of prospectors, geologists, miners, and coal-workers." It was a "combined pick and hammer" with a hook mounted in the base of the handle for use in mountain climbing and in prying rocks.⁵ The Colorado *Chieftain* noted on 30 March 1882 that

Mr. J. B. T. Chase [Thornton Chase] has received an offer of \$10,000 from parties in Canada for the sale of his patent prospector's pick in that territory. He has not yet decided to sell, but has the matter under consideration. We most heartily congratulate him upon the prospective success of his invention, and believe that it is bound to become a necessity among miners before long. It is sure to greatly lessen the labor of the miner and prospector.⁶

It is not known whether Thornton Chase sold the rights to his pick, nor whether he ever made any money from the invention.

With a happy marriage and financial stability Thornton Chase's musical and literary talents underwent another flowering. *The Chieftain*, Pueblo's principal daily newspaper, provides most of the information about this period of his life. Not long after settling in Pueblo with Eleanor, Thornton Chase was instrumental in organizing the Arion Club, Pueblo's first musical and dramatic society. He became its musical director and conductor; Eleanor sang in its productions.

The club's first program took place on 17 May 1881; the second on 3 June. They were held in Pueblo's opera house; in the nineteenth century every American hamlet and town that aspired to any importance had an opera house where local musical groups put on shows, traveling musicians and acting troupes performed for a few

5. Patent number 252,184, issued to James B. Thornton Chase of Pueblo, Colorado.

6. *The [Colorado] Chieftain*, Thursday, 30 March 1882, p. 4, col. 4.

nights, and lecturers traveling the lecture circuit stopped to speak on every conceivable subject of popular interest. In a day before the advent of television, movie theaters, concert halls, and convention centers, opera houses were the places Americans went to be entertained. In the early and mid-nineteenth century, no sharp distinction between "popular" or "lowbrow" culture versus "highbrow" culture was recognized; lectures, plays by Shakespeare, and operas in English translation were much more popular and familiar to urban Americans than they are today.⁷

The Arion Club's concert contained a mixture of religious, "classical," and "popular" music that was typical of musical programs of the time.⁸ Piano and violin solos by Mendelssohn and Gottschalk were performed. The *Ave Maria* was sung. Quartets performed *Professor at Home*, a light, humorous work, and *Where Would I Be?* A full chorus performed various pieces, including the very popular "Anvil Chorus" from Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Il trovatore*. Thornton Chase himself sang in one quartet and two trios and directed the entire evening program as well. The newspaper gave the concert an excellent review even before the first performance:

The members of this musical society have been in constant rehearsal for several weeks past, and under the drilling of Mr. Chase, the musical director, have acquired wonderful proficiency in their several parts. It is really a pleasure to listen to good music, and this company of ladies and gentlemen is fully capable of meeting the approbation of one and all. . . . We promise the people that they will listen to music that is superior to that of most troupes visiting this section of the world. The chorus singing is magnificent, and the soloists will acquit themselves with much credit. We have listened to several rehearsals and

7. The great popularity of Shakespeare and opera in America through the 1870s—and the reasons for their decline in popularity—are ably described in Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), especially pp. 3–5, 30–31.

8. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 90–91, 104–9.

have no hesitancy in stating that the music to be rendered is all of a high order, and that the singing is first-class in every respect.⁹

The concert was held as a benefit for St. Peter's Episcopal Church. The review of the first performance was equally positive. In spite of inclement weather the opera house was "jammed with one of the largest and most attentive audiences that has ever assembled in Pueblo." The quartet that sung *The Professor at Home*—in which Thornton Chase played the professor—had to sing the piece a second time as an encore. The newspaper concluded, "we trust Mr. Chase will remain with us and that this will not be the last concert given by the society under his able direction."¹⁰ Such an enthusiastic reception was not guaranteed in nineteenth-century America, where audiences did not hesitate to throw objects ranging from eggs and vegetables to dead animals and chairs at the stage if they disliked a performance; hence the positive review indicates that the performance was indeed a great success.¹¹

Although the Arion Club did not survive—its two shows lost too much money—the club was not Thornton Chase's last musical effort. On 29 October the "Social Musical and Dramatic Club" held a successful performance. The First Presbyterian Church subsequently arranged to have "Prof. Chase" lead them in an hour of gospel singing every Sunday afternoon.¹² On Christmas Day 1881 the cantata "Santa Claus" was performed at the opera house. The First Presbyterian Church Sunday School put on the show with Thornton Chase conducting and playing Santa Claus, appropriately dressed.¹³ A few days later a new musical society, the Philharmonic

9. *The [Colorado] Chieftain*, 3 June 1881, 4.

10. *The [Colorado] Chieftain*, 4 June 1881, 4.

11. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 26–28, 180.

12. *The [Colorado] Chieftain*, 30 October 1881, 4; notes in Robert H. Stockman, Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 12.14, author's personal papers; *The [Colorado] Chieftain*, 4 December 1881, 4, notes in Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 12.14A.

13. *The [Colorado] Chieftain*, 26 December 1881, 4.

Musical and Dramatic Union, held its opening concert at the opera house. The concert, a medley of tunes including piano solos, trios, quartets, and a full chorus, was a success, although the newspaper's praises were more reserved when compared to its review of the Arion Club's June concert.¹⁴

The musical society began to plan a far more ambitious program. On 17 February 1882 it performed the four-act comedy *Esmeralda* at the opera house, with costumes and accessories imported from New York, where the play had been a great success. Thornton Chase played Mr. Elbert Rogers, the leading male role, and Eleanor Chase played Esmeralda, Rogers's daughter. The storyline of the play—a family from the mountains of North Carolina finds ore on their farm, sells it for a very large sum of money, and goes to Paris to live—must have struck a chord among Pueblo's residents. The principal plot is a sentimental Victorian love story: Esmeralda has fallen in love with Dave, the virtuous owner of a neighboring farm, but domineering Mrs. Rogers refuses to allow her daughter to marry him because he is poor. Dave follows the family to Paris but is unable to see Esmeralda, who, unaware that her love is nearby, nevertheless remains true to him despite pressure from her mother to marry a rich French marquis. Then a letter arrives from North Carolina saying there was ore on Dave's farm all along, and he is wealthy also. Mrs. Rogers drops her objection to the marriage; the two lovers are reunited, marry, and live happily ever after.¹⁵

The Chieftain especially lauded Thornton Chase, whose "indefatigable energy" made the production possible, and noted that each member of the musical society was "deserving of exuberant praise." It expressed the hope that the society "may soon again favor our citizens with a rich treat of this character." Demand for the play was so great that a second performance was planned for

14. *The [Colorado] Chieftain*, 30 December 1881, 4.

15. *The [Colorado] Chieftain*, 16 February 1882, 4.

March 4th, and on March 2nd the musical troupe traveled to Colorado Springs to give a performance in that town's opera house as well.¹⁶

In early April the Philharmonic and Dramatic Union put on *Belshazzar*, a five-act play about the Babylonian captivity of the Jews under Cyrus the Great. Performed for the benefit of the Ladies' Benevolent Union, the play received some notice in the paper, but the scantier coverage, compared to that of *Esmeralda*, suggests it was less successful. Another source notes that

the venture, though not a very great musical success, was for a first event fairly creditable; financially it was a dismal failure, and Mr. Benson, who acted as financier, found the account balanced with \$160 in red ink. Cold weather, a small-pox scare and the rivalry of the opposition accounted for the small attendance.¹⁷

Most likely Thornton Chase's involvement in music extended beyond the references that have been found in the newspapers; for example, he probably sang in one or more church choirs every Sunday in addition to his activity in the various musical clubs. While the newspaper articles about his musical activities mention two churches, there is no reason to assume that he joined any particular church in Pueblo.

Music was not the only outlet for Thornton Chase's artistic talents. In 1882 he became a published poet. His poetry provides glimpses into his interests, his religious beliefs, and even into his personal life.

Thornton Chase's oldest known poem is "Decoration Day," published 21 May 1882 in *The Chieftain* and carried a week later by *The Inter-Ocean*, a weekly literary and news magazine. Thornton

16. *The [Colorado] Chieftain*, 18 February 1882, 4; 1 March 1882, 4.

17. Paul Porchea, *The Musical History of Colorado* (Denver: Charles Wesley, 1889)
128. Porchea apparently wrote the account from memory; as a result it frequently contradicts facts given in contemporary newspaper accounts.

Chase wrote the work to commemorate the Civil War and read it "in a faultless manner" at Pueblo's annual Decoration Day (Memorial Day) commemoration. His was the third poem read at the commemoration; when finished he received "round after round of applause." *The Inter-Ocean*—not known for the rigor of its literary criticism—declared it "the best [poem] ever written on the subject."¹⁸

Each of the twenty-three stanzas had six verses. The poem was notable for its appeal to the veterans of the war, its Victorian sentimentality, its reconciliation of the two sides, and its emphasis on the higher values brought out by the conflict. Pueblo, like most of Colorado, had been settled by Southerners as well as Northerners. Thornton Chase's poem viewed the war in a way that respected both sides:

Let the nations look and wonder,—
Peaceful flowers have hushed war's thunder,
Lulled the battle-hounds to sleep;
While the Blue and Gray combining,
Sympathetic garlands twining,
Over mutual losses weep.

In addition to emphasizing the values of love, peace, and sacrifice, the poem closed with an allusion to Christ and His sacrifice:

And the graves of those who suffered,
Are with floral tributes covered,
Proving death's, not love's, decease;
Brought by those who fought beside them,
Brought by those who once defied them,
Friends and foes,—all friends in Peace.

18. *The [Colorado] Chieftain*, 21 May 1882, 4; *The [Denver] Inter-Ocean*, 27 May 1882, 352, 356.

Surely, He who died for mortals,
 Looking down from Heavenly portals,
 From His throne in Paradise,
 Smiles on this Commemoration,
 Proof of true appreciation,
 Of the worth of sacrifice.

Encouraged by success, Thornton Chase published his second poem only a week later in the 3 June 1882 issue of *The Inter-Ocean*. "Sabbath Bells" was a tribute to the wave of pealing church bells that sweeps across the United States, from Atlantic to Pacific, every Sunday morning. In his introduction to the poem, Thornton Chase noted that the wave of sound was "a note of triumph proclaiming the victory of a Christian Republic over ignorance and heathenism," suggesting that he still saw churches as extremely important institutions in American society. The poem even closes with an appeal for Coloradans to attend church:

Come, ye men of Colorado,
 Come from every home and hamlet,
 Come from every gate and portal;
 Leave your worldly thoughts behind you,
 Break all worldly cares that bind you,
 Come and look on things immortal.

.....

Do not linger, do not falter,
 Gather here before the altar,
 Ask forgiveness for misdoing;
 Humbly bow the knee in prayer,
 Lowly bend and meekly there,
 Pardon ask, your vows renewing.

Rising then with gladdened faces,
 Sing to God your heartfelt praises,
 Glorify His truth and power;

Listen to His servant's teaching,
 Nought of ill, all good beseeching,
 Give to Him this Sabbath hour.¹⁹

While the poem demonstrates a Christian piety typical of the day, it is noteworthy that no Christian theology is mentioned. Although Thornton Chase refers to asking for forgiveness, he makes no specific reference to repentance; he mentions misdoings but not sins. He refers to God, but not to Christ. Singing is an important aspect of the service. The church bells calling for worship of the Creator could be Catholic as easily as Protestant. Thus the poem hints that in 1882 Thornton Chase's religiosity consisted not of adherence to a particular church or creed, but to basic Christian values.

"Ring, Ring Ye Vibrant Swinging Bells," a poem he published at Christmastime 1882, is similar. Christ is mentioned, of course, but not orthodox Protestant doctrines like sin and salvation. Rather, the Sermon on the Mount provides much of the language and imagery:

Blessed the rich, who scatter comforts round them,
 Like as an oak which feeds the land with leaves;
 Blessed the poor when human love has found them
 Drying the tears of every one who grieves.

.....
 Blessed the faith which looks for life immortal;
 Blessed the trust which clings to Him who died;
 Blessed the soul to whom this life's the portal
 Leading to Heaven's eternal Christmas tide.

The poem also refers to adoring Christ.²⁰

Not all of Thornton Chase's poems treated religious themes. He also wrote about Colorado. "Voices of the Mountains," published in *The Inter-Ocean* on 5 August 1882, was "dedicated to the dauntless

19. *The [Denver] Inter-Ocean* 5.21 (3 June 1882): 381.

20. *The [Denver] Inter-Ocean* 5.51 (23 December 1882): 1.

'old timers' of Colorado."²¹ With three cantos of six or seven stanzas each, it was Thornton Chase's most ambitious published work. The first canto offered a well-crafted description of nature in Colorado before the arrival of the Europeans:

The scream of the Eagle in sight of his prey,
 Has hush'd the shrill chatter of Squirrels at play;
 The rustle of Deer thro' the undergrowth hedges
 The splash of the Beaver in pond-nurtured sedges,
 Have followed the rattle of down-falling stones,
 O'ertopped from peaks which have been their proud thrones;
 And the sighing of winds thro' the tops of the spruces,
 Has drown'd in the roaring of watery sluices.

Colorado's paradisiacal peace, however, was shattered by the advent of the prospectors and by their efforts to extract wealth from the ground:

Chug! Chug! Chug! Chug!
 Deep in the tunnels where powder has dug,
 With movement staccato,
 And style agitato,
 The steam-drills are playing a vigorous fugue;
 Drumming and battering,
 Piercing and shattering,
 Adamant walls, which for ages have guarded,
 Silvery treasures in hidden vaults hearded [*sic*].

The poem thus became a tribute to the taming and civilizing of the wilderness. The third canto focused more specifically on the prospector and on the prospector's steely determination to find silver and gold:

21. *The [Denver] Inter-Ocean* 5.30 (5 August 1882): 1-2.

In the shafted sunken room,
 Where the rocks the air entomb.
 And the glaring,
 Flick'ring, flaring
 Lamp-light casts a yellow gloom;
 In the sunless, low-arched halls,
 Where the slimy moisture falls,
 Oozing, slipping,
 Trickling, dripping
 From the frowning, ragged walls;

Deep in artificial caves,
 Where he deadly dangers braves
 Striving, toiling,
 Nature foiling,
 Paths to wealth the miner paves;
 Climbing where the beasts would quail,
 Mounting thro' the cloudy vail,
 Conq'ring giant,
 Rocks defiant,
 "KNOWING NO SUCH WORD AS FAIL."

Thornton Chase's poem was read widely and commented on in several newspapers. *The Chieftain* was unrestrained in its praise of a fellow citizen:

The poem which appeared in the last issue of the *Denver Inter-Ocean* . . . is a grand and sublime conception. Few men could grasp the subject and handle it with the clearness and force, and at the same time with the sweetness and brilliancy of wording that Mr. Chase has done, and he has truly earned the title of poet laureate of Colorado.²²

22. *The [Colorado] Chieftain*, 10 August 1882, 4, in Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 12.21-12.21A.

By late 1882 Thornton Chase's life had achieved a significant sense of direction and success. He was successful in music and in poetry, he had a successful marriage, and he had been successful in earning a living. One scrap of evidence also suggests that, while living in Pueblo, he underwent development in his religious thinking as well. In May 1902, writing a letter to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, then head of the Bahá'í Faith, Thornton Chase remarked that "for twenty years, and more, in poverty, in trial, in injustice, in comfort, in health, in all and greatly changing conditions, in sickness and sin and striving, I have felt that it was in God's Mercy that I was being fitted to be of some service here for Him."²³ Thornton Chase was a very precise writer; elsewhere in the same letter, when he mentioned another event in his life, he wrote "eight years" but scratched it out and replaced it with "seven years and more" because eight years had not yet elapsed. Thus it seems a safe assumption that twenty years before May 1902—in 1881 or 1882, while living in Pueblo—Thornton Chase felt some sort of intimation that God had some as yet unknown work for him. He must have wondered what that work would be, whether it would involve the talents that he had developed, and when it would come to him.

23. Thornton Chase to 'Abdu'l-Bahá (copy), 12 May 1902, 2, TC.

CHAPTER 9

Denver

In the late summer of 1882 Thornton and Eleanor Chase moved from Pueblo to Denver, Colorado, where he accepted a job in a large music store being opened in the same block as the new opera house.¹ Undoubtedly the greater theatrical opportunities offered by Denver were another reason for the move—with 35,000 people, Denver had seven times the population of Pueblo and was the hub of business and culture for the Rocky Mountain states.² References to Thornton Chase's theatrical activities in Denver are few—a systematic examination of Denver's numerous and lengthy newspapers is not practical—but sample references suggest that his acting success continued. One source lists "Thornton B. Chase" as the basso for both the Denver Opera Club and Denver Chorus Club, and as a soloist in several choirs. The source apparently refers to his activities in 1883, the year after he arrived in Denver. Another source, probably also referring to 1883, mentions him as a "popular actor." In December 1887 Thornton Chase is known to have sung in Handel's *Judas Maccabens*, performed by the Denver Chorus Club.³

1. *The [Colorado Daily] Chieftain*, 20 September 1882, 3, in Robert H. Stockman, Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 12.21, author's personal papers.

2. Denver's 1880 population statistics are available in *Compendium of the Tenth Census June 1, 1880*, pt. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1883) 452.

3. Paul Porchea, *The Musical History of Colorado* (Denver: Charles Wesley, 1889), 164. In its card catalog of historical subjects, the Denver Public Library has a card

Thornton Chase continued to earn part of his living through publishing; the 1883 Denver city directory lists his occupation as "journalist."⁴ The bulk of his writing, however, consisted of his poetry. Just after his move to Denver he wrote his best-remembered Colorado poem, the only one to have been recently republished. The value of "Tom Bowen's Ride" lies not in its poetic quality as much as in its subject matter, which was not only dramatic but also very topical when the poem was written. Thornton Chase explained that he wrote the poem "between Saturday noon [16 September 1882] and Sunday morning, and the next day sold it for one hundred dollars cash."⁵ Its eighteen stanzas appeared soon thereafter in the Denver *Inter-Ocean*. The poem describes the mad dash of a wealthy mine owner and former state judge to the Denver Republican convention, where he is a candidate for United States Senator:

In Denver the war of election was hot,
And both of the factions, engaged at the spot,
Were massing their forces with utmost exertion
Each claiming a triumph with ardent assertion;

on Thornton Chase that refers to an article in the *Rocky Mountain News* of 13 April 1883, p. 5, col. 1, which calls Thornton Chase a "popular actor." No such reference to Thornton Chase, however, was found when the author examined the paper itself. Presumably an indexing error was made, but the information on the card is probably accurate (notes in Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 12.9). Porchea, *Musical History*, 64.

4. Corbett and Ballenger's *Eleventh Annual Denver City Directory Containing a Complete List of the Inhabitants, Institutions, Incorporated Companies, Manufacturing Establishments, Business, Business Firms, Etc. in the City of Denver for 1883* (Denver: Corbett and Ballenger, 1883), 172.

5. *The [Colorado Daily] Chieftain*, 20 September 1882, 3. The poem has been reprinted twice in recent years: J. B. Thornton Chase, "Tom Bowen's Ride," *The San Luis Valley Historian* 10.4 (1978): 4-9; I am indebted to Ruth Marie Colville for sending me a copy of this journal. P. R. "Bob" Griswold, *Rio Grande: Along the Rio Grande* (n.p., n.d.), 96-98; I am indebted to Dean Stansbury for supplying me with a photocopy.

While, down in San Juan, from his home in the clouds,
 Tom Bowen was watching the dense-surgin crowds,
 And, seeing that matters there needed attention,
 Decided to start to the Denver Convention.

So down from the Summit, where golden ores hide,
 O'r roads hardly broken and roughest to ride,
 A twenty-mile ride brought him into Del Norte.
 From whence he could travel by rail to the sortie;
 But, reaching the depot just three minutes late,
 The train rolling off at a twenty-mile gait
 He saw on the plain, just a mile from the station!—
 Did he swear?—He said something concerning damnation.

Two hundred and eighty miles still left to go!
 The caucus next day! And no ghost of a show
 To get there! It might well have caused words heroic;
 And Tom isn't famous for being a stoic!
 But see! standing there by the side of the track
 A dirty old hand-car, with pump-handle rack!—
 But palace car never look'd half so inviting
 To Tom, as that hand-car, a half hope inciting.

Alamosa was thirty-five miles on the way,
 And, making connections, the train might delay,
 The chance was a slim one, but grit wouldn't shirk it:
 In less than a minute he'd hired men to work it.
 "All Aboard!" yelled the Judge, and each sprang to his place,
 Away sped the car in an earnest stern chase;
 And dimly the train, in the distance receding,
 Grew smaller as into the mist it was speeding.

Several stanzas describe the race of the handcar all the way to Alamosa, Bowen pumping during much of the trip, and its arrival at the town's train station. There,

He jumped to the platform—but found that the train
 Had gone, like the hope he'd relied on in vain!
 He stood for an instant completely confounded
 But only an instant, for in his ear sounded
 The hum of an engine just leaving its load,
 He saw it and rapidly ran down the road,
 And yelled as he leaped on the side of the tender
 "Go on! CATCH THE PASSENGER GOING TO DENVER!"

The driver, surprised, look'd at Tom with a stare,
 And said "where's your orders?"—The answer came "THERE!"
 "AS MUCH AS YOU WANT IF YOU CAN CATCH HER!"
 he added.—

And show'd up a pocket book thoroughly padded!
 "THE FIREMAN'S GONE HOME AND HE'S GOT A SICK KID"
 "DRIVE ON! DAMN THE FIREMAN! I'LL FIRE!" and he did;
 The engineer opened her throttle, and filled her
 Great lungs with steam breath, and she honor'd her builder.

She trembled and snorted and started away
 With a rush that said plainly it wasn't for play—
 And, out on the rails that stretched over the valley,
 The miles and the minutes together kept tally!
 As under the glare of its light the track whirled,
 It seemed like an engine devouring the world;
 And swifter it plunged into darkness defiant,
 As Tom cramm'd the coals in the heart of the giant.

Fort Garland, Trinchera and Placer were passed,
 And resolute Tom reached the mountains at last,
 But there was the end of the lower division—
 The engineer swore that he'd lose his position,
 As sure as he ran any further, they'd sack him,
 But Tom urged him on, vow'd the whole State should back him,
 And upward they went on the side of the mountains,
 While out from the engine poured steam-hissing fountains.

And as they ran on to the swift-rising grade,
 Tom battered the coal chunks with hammer and spade;
 And up on the side of the Sangre de Cristo,
 In front of the furnace, he looked like Mephisto—
 Arms bare to the elbows—all muscle and bone—
 And eyes gleaming red as the fire on them shown—
 A picture of pluck and unchanging persistence,
 As, shovel in hand, he defied time and distance.

.....

A long fifteen miles, rising three thousand feet,
 In twenty-two minutes!—what record can beat?
 And on a strange road in a black night to run it!
 But Pluck, Grit and Bowen had certainly done it.

And there stood the train which Tom Bowen had missed
 And as he jumped on, his big black blistered fist
 Was grabb'd by Jim Galloway, who had been raving,
 Because he thought Tom had got left beyond saving;

The rest of the trip, without labor or pain,
 Was taken by Tom on the regular train,
 And those who so boldly announced their intention,
 Did not run the State in the Denver Convention.

Tom Bowen and his friends seemed to like the poem; Galloway sent a copy to an eleven-year-old girl and asked her to memorize it. In reply she sent back a short poem, inspired by Thornton Chase's, that was published in a Denver newspaper. Even twenty years later Thornton Chase received a request for a copy of his poem, which he described as "political doggerel."⁶

6. *The [Denver] Republican*, 27 January 1883, in Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 12.1A; Thornton Chase to Thomas F. Dawson (copy), 3 May 1905, TC.

Soon after moving to Denver Thornton Chase wrote another significant poem, which was never published. "Lovest Thou Me?"—composed sometime in 1883—offers an invaluable glimpse into Thornton Chase's religious beliefs. It was inspired by John 21:15–17, in which Jesus asks Simon Peter three times, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs." The first two stanzas repeat the question and picture nature's reaction to it:

"Lovest thou Me?" The might Lord of Love
 Spake to the fisher by fair Galilee
 The waves grew bright, and, swelling up the beach,
 Sought but to touch his garment's hem, or reach
 The print, his sandals made: The trembling trees
 Shivered with conscious joy, and happy bees,
 Crooning and nestling at the lily's heart,
 Wondered to find that it could tears impart.

"Lovest thou Me?" The tender, thrilling words,
 Swift zephyrs hastened from his lips to seize,
 And bear aloft thro' space. The wandering birds,
 Filling the air with rival harmonies,
 Like winged thoughts, came flashing down to earth,
 And gentle beasts, from plains of grassy worth
 Drawn by the wooing music of his voice,
 Gathered about their Maker to rejoice.⁷

Nineteenth-century religious literature is filled with references to nature, but the use to which Thornton Chase put the images is

7. Thornton Chase, "Lovest Thou Me?" MS, TC. The manuscript is written in a smooth, cursive hand with occasional changes added in a shaky hand, suggesting that the original text was written in 1883 and the additions were made in the last few years of Thornton Chase's life.

significant. Nature is described in the poem as responding to the spiritual power of its Master and not as itself divine. Hints of pantheism, common in the writing of Ralph Waldo Emerson and other Transcendentalists of the time, are absent; Thornton Chase maintains a transcendent monotheism.

The third stanza considers Simon Peter's own reaction to Jesus' question:

"Lovest thou Me?" The humbled fisher heard
 The words, thrice uttered, and his heart was stirred
 With mingled grief and joy and bitter shame.
 Thrice had his voice denied his Master's name,
 Crying—"I know Him not!"—and thrice, ere dawn,
 The crowing cock accused the faithless one.
 Now, thrice, repentant, he, his soul outpoured—
 "Thou knowest that I *love Thee*, O my Lord!"

The fourth stanza contains Thornton Chase's personal meditation on the words, suggesting their importance to him in the good times he was then experiencing:

Almost a score of centuries—since then,
 The greybeard sexton, Time, has deep entombed;
 And still the question tries the hearts of men,
 Searching for Love in souls, by Truth illumed.
 When fortune smiles and life seems good to live,
 "Lovest thou Me?" asks He, who all doth give:
 When stern afflictions throng and sorely test,
 "Lovest thou Me?" cries He, who knoweth best.

The last two lines perhaps allude to the experience of love that Thornton Chase had when in the depths of his anguish. In the fifth and last stanza, Thornton Chase sets Jesus' love in a cosmic perspective:

The harmony of worlds,—the wondrous shoals
 Of starry wanderers in empyreal seas;
 The stedfast [*sic*] sun, to farthest globe that rolls,
 Sending his messengers with life and peace;
 The perfect Law, that all conditions suits;
 The growing food—the trees—the flowers and the fruits;
 All—far and near—His loving wisdom, tell;
 “Lovest thou Me?” asks He who doeth well.

The poem reveals Thornton Chase's mystical attachment to the figure of Jesus Christ. Like his previous poems that employ religious images, this poem does not contain traditional Protestant concepts such as sin, atonement, and salvation. Rather, the love of God and God's messenger is central to the religious experience to which the poem speaks. It also suggests that in 1883 Thornton Chase's religion focused not on mainline Protestant dogmas but on the mystical experience of God and God's love.

Strengthening this commitment to religious experience was Thornton Chase's decision to join the Denver Swedenborgian New Jerusalem Church in about 1883. Like standard American evangelical Protestantism, Swedenborgianism stressed the Bible as the Word of God but departed radically from evangelicalism in its biblical interpretation. Its founder, Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), was a Swedish scientist, natural philosopher, mystic, and poet. The son of a Swedish Lutheran bishop, he abandoned his prolific and successful scientific career at age fifty-seven in favor of writing theology. His principal work was the *Arcana Coelestia*, an eight-volume commentary on Genesis and Exodus, in which he developed most of his religious ideas. Central to them was his concept of *correspondences*, a belief that objects in the physical world correspond to, or represent, spiritual realities in another plane of existence. Biblical verses were also thought to represent spiritual reality in symbols. Swedenborg sought to expound an elaborate set of symbolic biblical interpretations that he believed had been revealed to him.

Swedenborg claimed his interpretations constituted the promised Second Coming of Christ.⁸

By advocating a symbolic meaning to biblical verses, Swedenborg was able to depart radically from the standard interpretations offered by evangelicals. He rejected belief in the Trinity and in Christ as the Son of God and rejected the emphasis on sin, atonement, and salvation that followed from the traditional Christology. Rather, Swedenborg saw God as an essence consisting of two primary qualities: love and wisdom, which he saw as corresponding to the warmth and light of a spiritual sun. Jesus Christ incarnated God's qualities of love and wisdom and brought them to a humanity that had progressively strayed farther from God.

Thus Swedenborg favored a mystical, love-centered approach to the Christian message, one that was very appealing to Thornton Chase, especially after he experienced his vision of God's love. In the fervently evangelical Protestant atmosphere of mid-nineteenth century America, Swedenborg's interpretation found considerable favor among others rebelling against the dogma of their childhood churches. Ralph Waldo Emerson, William James, and Bronson Alcott were among his admirers. Those who believed in alternative healing techniques (mesmerists, phrenologists, water curists), communication with the spirits of the departed (Spiritualists), and other unusual ideas often were interested in Swedenborg. His books sold widely and had a far greater influence than the number of his American followers suggests. The Swedenborgian movement, even after splitting into two sects over the question of the nature of Swedenborg (one group raised him to the level of Christ) had churches in most cities. Swedenborgianism's popularity only declined in the late nineteenth century, when evangelical Protestantism weakened its grip on American thinking sufficiently to make

8. Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, vol. 1 (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1975), 585-86; s.v. "Swedenborg, Emanuel," *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, Micropaedia*, vol. 11, (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1986): 437-38.

possible the growth and success of less explicitly Christian groups such as Theosophy, Vedanta Hinduism, Buddhism, and ultimately groups such as Transcendental Meditation.

Thus Thornton Chase's acceptance of Swedenborgianism signifies that in 1883 he had moved to the ideological frontier of Protestantism. No other religious group existed in the late nineteenth century that was as intellectually respectable or numerous and that had moved farther from mainstream Protestant beliefs.

Thornton Chase's references to his membership in Swedenborgianism are few. In one place he noted that he had studied the *Arcana Coelestia* "for years" and described Swedenborg as a "noble man." He later looked back on his involvement in the church from the Bahá'í perspective that he later acquired:

You know that for five years I studied Swedenborg daily and was a worker in the Swedenborgian Church. Although it is most beautiful and filled with wonderful Truth, yet it does not contain ALL Truth as is now brought to us [by the Bahá'í Faith]. Swedenborg was undoubtedly a "Divine Philosopher," but he was not the culmination of the Revelation of God, although he was a forerunner thereof. . . . Jesus was as Swedenborg depicted Him.⁹

Clearly Thornton Chase retained a deep respect for Emanuel Swedenborg and his ideas. After Thornton Chase became a Bahá'í he sought to tell the Denver Swedenborgians about his new faith, and in one letter to a German Bahá'í who had probably been a Swedenborgian, he even quoted Swedenborg.¹⁰

He never described what the Denver church was like or what his role in it was, but Swedenborgian records give a few details. A Swedenborgian society was first organized in Denver in early 1878; Richard De Charms (Junior) was hired as its pastor, and a chapel

9. Thornton Chase to P. M. Blake, (copy) 26 April 1902, 3, TC.

10. Thornton Chase to George Haigis (copy), 2 March 1911, TC.

was procured. By 1883 forty-eight persons had been baptized as church members, fifteen within the previous year. The church had a core of thirteen active members and twenty to thirty-five in attendance every Sunday. Catechetical classes were held frequently to instruct new members, and a Sunday school existed to teach the children. The entire congregation often traveled to nearby towns to hold services with Swedenborgians who could not go to Denver.¹¹

Like most churches, it had an active social life. A "New Church social club" organized monthly meetings for "social diversion and literary improvement."¹² In 1886 they held a "Japanese lawn party" at the home of a church member that also served to raise money for the society:

The lawn and veranda were decorated in Japanese style with lanterns, fans and umbrellas. Just outside the front gate, Japanese fireworks, managed by Mr. Howland and a score of assistants, flashed up into the sky, while people chatted and ate ice-cream, and strolled down a made-to-order "lover's lane," and said "My Lord" to "the Mikado," and "My Lady" to the pretty Yum-Yum who sat in the flower booth.¹³

Certainly Thornton Chase would have loved the use of themes from a play by Gilbert and Sullivan, but there is no reference in Swedenborgian records to his involvement in organizing the social or any other church event. Consequently there is no evidence (other than his own statement) that he was one of the active members of the church.

Thornton Chase's involvement in Swedenborgianism ended about 1888. Church records indicate that in 1888 the Denver Swedenborgian society split into two groups, one of which became the

11. *New Jerusalem Messenger*, 13 February 1878, 93; 21 February 1883, 107; *New-Church Messenger*, 30 June 1886, 356; 3 September 1886, 134; 10 October 1888.

12. *New Jerusalem Messenger*, 21 February 1883, 107.

13. *New-Church Messenger*, 28 July 1886, 50.

"Denver society of the Lord's Advent."¹⁴ Thornton Chase never mentions the split; hence its impact on his decision to leave the church cannot be evaluated. His explanation of why he decided to leave Swedenborgianism is a bit confusing. He notes that he could not in good conscience accept Emanuel Swedenborg's teaching of the Virgin Birth of Jesus, and hence he "abandoned all faith in the doctrines of the Christian Church." He adds that this decision occurred "about 26 years ago," or in 1880; but this dating contradicts his other statements that indicate he did not become a Swedenborgian until about 1883.¹⁵ One way to reconcile the contradiction is to infer that he abandoned the mainline Protestant churches in 1880 because of their teaching of the Virgin Birth, but that when he joined the Swedenborgian Church he temporarily suspended his rejection of the doctrine until about 1888. Possibly the split in the Denver church caused his faith in Swedenborgianism to wane and made its teaching of the Virgin Birth a more serious problem for him. When he left Swedenborgianism Thornton Chase had to resume his search after the religious truth for which he yearned.

When Thornton Chase lived in Boston and Chicago he may have been too concerned about his personal problems to study religion very much, and the hamlets and small towns of Wisconsin, Kansas, and Colorado would have offered very few opportunities. Hence his Denver years may have been his first opportunity to study other religions in depth. Probably by the mid-1880s Thornton Chase had read James Freeman Clarke's classic *Ten Great Religions*; first published in 1871, the book immediately emerged as America's most popular work on world religions. Nineteen editions were published in the next thirty years. By the 1880s many Hindu scriptures had been translated, Buddhism had emerged as a very popular subject of study, and comparative religion had begun to emerge as a

14. *New-Church Messenger*, 19 December 1888.

15. Thornton Chase to 'Abdu'l-Bahá (copy), 19 April 1906, 3, TC.

scholarly field.¹⁶ Thus many books were available through which Thornton Chase could pursue his quest.

Later in life Thornton Chase described his religious search in these words:

A man searched long for treasure. He delved in mines of ancient lore, seeking to reach pre-historic strata of learning, with the thought that the deeper into earthly records he could penetrate, the nearer he would come to the center and source of things and thus find the pure gems of original Truth. He considered not that Truth is Light, an ever shining Sun above the earth; that all things owe their origin to that light; that the same Sun shines now as at the beginning, and that whatever he might bring up out of the depths of the past could only prove its worth and beauty in the sunlight of to-day.¹⁷

Thus Thornton Chase's search in the 1880s was based on the history of religion and its ancient truths; he later contrasted the look backward to the "sunlight of to-day"—that is, the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. One example of the ancient teachings that Thornton Chase studied and came to accept is reincarnation. A comment he made in 1909—"for fifteen years the writer was a confirmed reincarnationist"—indicates that he began to believe in the doctrine around 1885, since he abandoned reincarnation around 1900.¹⁸

16. One of the best studies of Eastern religions in America is Carl T. Jackson's *The Oriental Religions and American Thought: Nineteenth-Century Explorations* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981). James Freeman Clarke's *Ten Great Religions* is summarized on pp. 125–29. Clarke was a Harvard classmate of Samuel Francis Smith.

17. Thornton Chase, "A Brief American History of the Bahai Movement," TS, 1, TC. Note: This typescript was later printed in *Star of the West* 5.17 (19 January 1915): 263, 265. However, when it was edited for publication, this statement was omitted.

18. Thornton Chase to Mrs. Louisa Johnson (copy), 16 January 1909, 7, TC. Chase also wrote about reincarnation to a Mrs. Preston (copy) on 9 June 1909 and to 'Abdu'l-Bahá (copy) circa June 1909 (the letter is undated, but 'Abdu'l-Bahá replied to the letter in September 1909).

Possibly he was reading books on Hinduism at the time. He may also have studied Theosophy, a movement that started in New York in 1875 and whose publications soon became very popular among Americans searching for religious alternatives. Theosophy was based on ideas from American Spiritualism (which focused on communication with the dead) and from Hinduism. Among Theosophy's interests were reincarnation and communication with "ascended" spiritual masters.

Thus the Denver phase of Thornton Chase's life saw partial religious fulfillment. It also saw financial success. In the summer of 1883 Thornton Chase went prospecting for silver in the San Juan Mountains with Stuart and Ed J. Maxwell. Ed Maxwell was a prominent lawyer in Pueblo, having moved to that city from New York in 1880; apparently Stuart Maxwell was his brother.¹⁹ Both men were friends of Thornton Chase; descendants have a photograph of Thornton Chase and the Maxwell brothers dressed as mountaineers. On 15 August 1883, the Maxwell brothers found silver on a mountain ridge above the treeline at an altitude of over 12,000 feet, a mile or two east of South River Peak and nineteen miles south of the modern town of Creede. On one side of the claim was a cliff of yellowish volcanic rock, which probably inspired the claim's name: the Gilt Edge Lode. On September 5th Thornton Chase and Stuart Maxwell went to the claim and erected four stone piles to mark its boundaries. The Maxwell brothers filed an official claim at Del Norte on October 22nd for a plot of ground 300 feet wide and 1,500 feet long. On the same day, the Maxwell brothers and Thornton Chase sold the claim to the Amity Gold and Silver Mining Company of Pueblo for \$250,000.²⁰

19. *History of the Arkansas Valley, Colorado* (Chicago: O. L. Baskin, 1881), 805.

20. Location certificate for the Gilt Edge Lode, claimed by Stuart Maxwell and Ed J. Maxwell, dated 22 October 1883, Office of the County Clerk and Recorder, Rio Grande County, Del Norte, Colo., bk. 16, pp. 367-68; Deed of sale of the Gilt Edge Lode by Thornton Chase, Stuart Maxwell, and Ed J. Maxwell, to the Amity Gold and Silver Mining Company, dated 22 October 1883, Office of the County

Such a sum was an enormous amount of money in 1883, when a typical white-collar worker earned about a thousand dollars a year and a house sold for about five thousand dollars. There are no known legal records stating how much of the fortune Thornton Chase received. Since the records suggest that he was not part of the party that first discovered the claim, it is possible he received very little. We know that he continued to work for a living; the Denver city directory for 1887 lists him as a "bookkeeper" for Floyd and Company, brokers in grain, provisions, and stocks. The next year, he had obtained a more promising job as the "state manager" of the Union Mutual Life Insurance Company, for whom he continued to work for the rest of his life.²¹

Having built a new and successful life in Colorado and undoubtedly still smarting from the pain of his first divorce, Thornton Chase apparently turned his back on New England. On 5 December 1884 his father, Jotham, died of "double pneumonia" in Springfield, and there is no evidence that Thornton Chase was notified.²² When Cornelia S. Chase, Jotham's wife and Thornton Chase's stepmother, filed a petition with the Hampden County Probate Court to be named administratrix of the estate—Jotham having died without writing a will—she listed all next of kin and stated that James B. T. Chase [Thornton Chase] was "in parts unknown, not having been heard from for more than eight years

Clerk and Recorder, Rio Grande County, Del Norte, Colo., Grantee General Index 1, bk. 10, pp. 213-14. Original photograph of Thornton Chase and the Maxwell brothers, in the possession of Thornton Chase Nelson.

21. *Corbett and Ballenger's Fifteenth Annual Denver City Directory Containing a Complete List of the Inhabitants, Institutions, Incorporated Companies, Manufacturing Establishments, Business, Business Firms, Etc. in the City of Denver for 1887* (Denver, Colo.: Corbett and Ballenger, 1887), 194; *Corbett and Ballenger's Sixteenth Annual Denver City Directory Containing a Complete List of the Inhabitants, Institutions, Incorporated Companies, Manufacturing Establishments, Business, Business Firms, Etc. in the City of Denver for 1888* (Denver, Colo.: Corbett and Ballenger, 1888), 223.

22. Death certificate of Jotham G. Chase, 5 December 1884, Springfield City Hall, Springfield, Mass., copy in author's personal papers.

and supposed to be dead.”²³ This was not true. There was, first of all, no reason to assume that Thornton Chase was dead. Further, Thornton Chase’s letter to the Newport Superior Court contesting Annie’s request for a divorce—of which Annie Chase was aware—had been written less than seven years earlier. Thornton Chase had last written Annie seven and a half years earlier. Annie supported Cornelia’s petition by signing it, yet she did not correct the error. When the estate was finally divided, most or all of it went to Cornelia; Thornton Chase received nothing, which he later resented considerably. Cornelia’s rejection of her stepson after his father’s death is final evidence of the antipathy between the two.

The 1880s found Thornton Chase in a considerably better position than did the previous decade. Literary, artistic, financial, and religious successes were crowned by domestic happiness, a goal that had eluded Thornton Chase all too long. A private poem that he wrote from Del Norte, Colorado, to his mother-in-law on 2 December 1883 suggests that he was finally part of a close and loving family:

Oh Mother dear! Dear Mother,
 Our Baby’s in the bed
 And says “Do write to Mother,
 For the pain that’s in my head
 Won’t let me think a minute;
 And if you’ll just begin it,
 You soon can write a letter,
 And then I shall feel better.”
 That’s what “our Baby” said.

And, so with such inviting,
 I can’t refuse the writing,

23. Petition of Cornelia S. Chase to the Probate Court of Hampden County, Springfield, Mass., 16 December 1884, in the Hampden County Probate Records, Springfield, Mass.

Nor would I, if I could;
 For, though I seldom show it
 (I'm sure, you, Mother, know it,
 I love you—as I should,
 For we are both your debtors
 For many kindly letters
 And pages of advice,
 Which give our Nellie courage
 And in her dear heart nourish
 Good thoughts to make her wise.²⁴

Thornton Chase's subsequent description of Eleanor's sickness and the efforts to cure her indicates familiarity with alternative healing practices, although it is unlikely that all of the methods were actually tried:

On last Thanksgiving morning,
 Old-fashioned pain gave warning
 That Nell would soon be sick;
 And, ere the saint and sinner
 Sat down to turkey dinner,
 The martyred fowl to pick,
 The ladies and the doctor,
 In Ether's power, had locked her
 To ease the cramping pain;
 For other drugs and lotions,
 And allopathic notions
 Had all been tried in vain.

24. Poem from Thornton Chase to his mother-in-law, Del Norte, Colo., Sunday, 2 December 1883, in the hands of Thornton Chase Nelson (copy in author's personal papers).

To mitigate her trials,
A host of flasks and vials
Gin, Turpentine and Brandy,
And pills, disguised as candy,
The syringe hypodermal,
And waters highly thermal,
The battery magnetic,
And feeding dietetic,
Flat-irons heated torrid,
And ice upon her forehead,
And fifty other horrid
Drugs, medicines and mixtures,
Machinery and fixtures
Fought with the cramps and strictures
Till baffled, foiled, defeated,
The aches and pains retreated,
Left Nellie's strength depleted.
But Danger's fairly cheated,
And now, with life remaining,
Each hour new vigor gaining
She's still "our little Nell."
She's on the pillows climbing
And laughing at my rhyming;
I think she's almost well.

The Sabbath bells are ringing
And soon I must be singing
Bass in a country choir:
And so, goodbye dear Mother
Some day I'll write another
If this one does not tire.
I'm not a Saxe or Shelly,
But just wrote this for Nellie
To make her well again.

Please, Mother, answer quickly.
For when Nell's feeling sickly,
Your letters ease her pain.

Your son,
Thornton

The poem captures Thornton Chase's love for his wife and mother-in-law as well as his wit and humor. His life had been rebuilt from the depths to which it had sunk in 1873-78. Only three things eluded Thornton Chase and prevented his joy from being complete. One was resolution of his unhappy relationships with his step-mother, his ex-wife, and his children. The second was his and Eleanor's failure to have a child. The third was his religious quest, which remained unfulfilled. Thornton Chase continued to read books and articles on religion, to meditate on the Bible, and to turn to the Lord of Love for sustenance. He would have to be patient.

CHAPTER 10

California

In 1888 Thornton Chase's success with the Union Mutual Life Insurance Company led to a promotion or a transfer, and he moved to California. He may have lived in San Francisco briefly; its city directory gives his business address, listing him as an "insurance agent" in 1889. He was also working for Union Mutual in 1892 at its San Francisco office, but during the intervening years he lived in Santa Cruz. The San Francisco city directory does not list Thornton Chase again until 1894, when he maintained an office in the city but not a residence (by that year he was actually living in Chicago).¹

1. *Langley's San Francisco Directory For the Year Commencing May, 1889. Embracing an Accurate Index of Residents and a Business Directory, also A Guide to Streets, Public Offices, Etc., and a Reliable Map of the City. Together with The Officers of the Municipal Government, Societies and other Organizations, and a great variety of Useful Information*, comp. W. H. L. Corran (San Francisco: Francis, Valentine and Co., 1889), 339. In his application for a veteran's pension, 17 March 1909, in his Veteran's records, United States Government Archives, Washington, D.C., Thornton Chase says he was in Colorado "until 1888" and San Francisco "to 1893." Probably by "San Francisco" Thornton Chase meant near San Francisco, since Santa Cruz is much smaller than San Francisco and relatively close to it. On 7 April 1892, Thornton Chase applied for a veteran's pension and stated his address was 419 California Street, Room 20, San Francisco; according to the city directory, that was the address for Union Mutual. Neither the city directory nor Thornton Chase gives a San Francisco residence for him. A photograph of a woman named Annie Sullivan notes that she was the nurse of Thornton Chase's son "from birth until four years old" (in possession of Thornton Chase Nelson; photocopy in author's personal papers). Since

In Santa Cruz one of Thornton Chase's desires was fulfilled; on 28 June 1889 Eleanor gave birth to a son. They named the boy William Jotham Thornton Chase, the name "Jotham" coming from the child's paternal grandfather. Numerous baby photographs speak of the parents' pride in their child. To help rear him they hired a nanny named Annie Sullivan. When neither parent decided to baptize their son—by 1889 Eleanor as well as Thornton Chase seemed to desire no contact with the churches—Annie Sullivan took the boy to a church herself and had him baptized.²

Santa Cruz, in 1890 a pleasant city of 7,000 people, contained three newspapers, four banks, a public high school, a public library, a street railway, electric lights, gas and water works, and a telephone company. Timber, wine, and shoes were among the city's products. Rail lines and steamships connected it to San Francisco.³ Because Thornton Chase is not listed in any state directories that include Santa Cruz, nor in any city tax or voting lists, and no city directories from the period have been found, exactly what he did for a living and whether he was involved in musical or theatrical groups cannot be determined. Nor are any poems from this period known, either published or in his personal papers. In 1905 he said to a Bahá'í who wrote poetry, "once in long years ago I used to 'dabble' a little in

the boy was born in Santa Cruz in 1889, this suggests the family remained in Santa Cruz from 1889 to 1893.

2. The date of birth of William Jotham Thornton Chase is given in his obituary in the Dartmouth Alumni Magazine, May 1967. His exact name cannot be ascertained because no birth certificate has survived; the State of California does not have birth records before 1905, and the birth records in Santa Cruz were destroyed by a flood. It is possible that "William" is not part of his legal name. The account of his baptism comes from Livinia Morris Chase, his widow, in a personal interview with the author. It was confirmed in a telephone interview of Thornton Chase Nelson by the author, 9 February 1988, in Robert H. Stockman, Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 40.3, author's personal papers. None of the churches in Santa Cruz have a record of his baptism, consequently it cannot be determined in which church he was baptized; Thornton Chase Nelson is under the impression that Annie Sullivan was a Catholic.

3. R. L. Polk and Company's *California State Gazetteer*, 1890, p. 975.

rhyme," which suggests a long hiatus in his poetic activities. Probably domestic responsibilities and work took much of his time. A photograph of a camping trip under Santa Cruz's redwoods suggests that the family spent time in the outdoors as well. Eleanor Chase acquired many "staunch friends" in Santa Cruz during their stay there.⁴

Information on Thornton Chase's California period is extremely sparse. The San Francisco earthquake of 1906 destroyed many records there that could have contained clues about his activities. Chase himself says nothing about this period of his life, but a little can be inferred about his religious interests. In a letter written in 1906 he notes that after abandoning the churches he "became for a period empty of all belief in any of their teachings."⁵ This note probably refers to his California years. Elsewhere he refers to receiving a "thorough instruction in hypnotism" and having "practiced it somewhat," probably in the early or mid-1890s. In the late nineteenth century hypnotism was often taught as a spiritual or self-help exercise, like transcendental meditation. Thornton Chase's instruction in hypnotism was part of his religious search, but he soon rejected it as a distraction from the spiritual and as potentially harmful.⁶

California must have provided Thornton Chase with new opportunities for studying religion. San Francisco had a public library more extensive than Denver's and probably had greater religious diversity as well. Even Santa Cruz had remarkable diversity. From 1888 to 1894 a Swedenborgian named Herman Carl Vetterling (but called Philangi Dasa) who had converted to Buddhism published the *Buddhist Ray* from his cabin in the mountains outside Santa Cruz. It

4. Thornton Chase to Louise Waite (copy), 22 October 1905, 4, TC. The photograph of the camp under redwoods near Santa Cruz is in possession of Thornton Chase Nelson (copy in author's personal papers). Thornton Chase to Ella G. Cooper, 1 April 1908, 4, Ella Cooper papers, San Francisco Bahá'í Archives, San Francisco, Cal.

5. Thornton Chase to 'Abdu'l-Bahá (copy), 19 April 1906, 3, TC.

6. Thornton Chase to John J. Abramson (copy), 13 April 1898, 7, TC.

was America's first Buddhist periodical. Although there is no evidence Thornton Chase knew its editor, it seems unlikely that in a small city such as Santa Cruz he would not have at least heard of Vetterling or his paper, especially when one considers their common religious interests.⁷

Thornton Chase's religious search had brought him to some conclusions about the religions of the world. In 1893 he wrote his first book, *Sketches*, which outlined the various reasons why one should subscribe to life insurance. It was published by his company. The booklet's earnest stress on practical and religious reasons for carrying life insurance suggests that Thornton Chase's own involvement in the industry was ideologically motivated.

One chapter discusses "practical religion," by which Chase meant the importance of the individual's helping himself or herself. Rather than just stressing Christianity, the booklet begins with an appeal to the basic values of all religions:

Throughout the great religions of the world runs a core of doctrine which is essentially the same in all. It is the precept to "Do good unto others."

Be the creed one of faith or acts, of trusting belief or of saving deeds, the "doing good" is inculcated as a necessary adjunct, and in many religions it is made the prime foundation for all future happiness, progress or salvation.⁸

Thornton Chase had studied the world's religions enough to feel capable of making general statements about them. The theme of the

7. Notes on the *Buddhist Ray*, in Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 15.4; Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1986), 130-32; the most complete account of Herman Carl Vetterling's life can be found in Thomas A. Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism, 1844-1912* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1992) 58-60.

8. Thornton Chase, *Sketches* (Portland, Maine: Union Mutual Life Insurance Co., 1893), 43.

next paragraph resembles, in a sense, the Bahá'í principle of Progressive Revelation, although Thornton Chase had not yet heard of the Bahá'í Faith. Of course, in keeping with the Christian bias of the surrounding culture, the order of the prophets is decidedly Christian:

Buddha, Brahma, Mahomet, Swedenborg, Confucius, Moses and The Christ, all teach it [doing good], and press it strongly upon their disciples; and even the atheist and agnostic magnify it as lovely, and to be desired above all things. It is the pith and sap of all the trees of knowledge which the great teachers of the world have planted.⁹

The list of religious teachers is not in chronological order; perhaps it represents the approximate importance of these figures to Thornton Chase in 1893.

He then argued that the principle of "doing good to others" is the basic principle of life insurance:

No Trade, no Union, no Philanthropy, no Profession, not even that of Ministry, and certainly no Business as thoroughly carries the religion of "Doing good unto others" into practice as does the business of Life Insurance. It is the *ideal* Religion made *actual*. Its essence and primal object is to effectively provide for the needy, the widows and the fatherless, to hold out to the sorrowful ones, not merely the hand of sympathy, but a hand filled with substantial comforts. . . .

Every insurance agent, perhaps unconsciously, but not less actually, is a practical minister of practical religion.¹⁰

Thornton Chase then is even more specific and offers a line-by-line interpretation of the "Parable of the Sower" (Matt. 13:3-8) from a life insurance perspective. The parable describes an insurance agent, Chase asserts, who sows some of his seeds and birds eat them; that is, other insurance agents gobble up some of his accounts. The agent sows some on rocky ground, selling policies to

9. Thornton Chase, *Sketches*, 43.

10. Thornton Chase, *Sketches*, 43-44; Chase's emphasis.

some who then allow their policies to lapse just before they are actually needed. He sows some seeds among thorns that choke the seedlings, selling some policies to those who become rich and, ceasing to appreciate their policies, let them lapse. But a few seeds are sown in good ground and bring forth their fruit a hundredfold; that is, some persons buy and continue their policies until they gain benefit from them. Thornton Chase concludes, "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath" (Matt. 13:12); he interprets the verse to mean "GOD HELPS THOSE WHO HELP THEMSELVES."¹¹

The rest of the book describes the various types of life insurance, the various kinds of life-insurance companies, and the advantages and disadvantages of each. It describes and rebuts the various arguments against life insurance. Practicality, planning ahead, and doing good to others—especially to one's wife and children—are stressed throughout.

Sketches indicates that Thornton Chase's religious search had led him to examine all the religions of the world and to ponder their basic teachings. It suggests that he found that they shared fundamental commonalities. However, he could not commit himself to any one of them. He respected them and, as he later put it, "found many items of truth everywhere (some truth in everything)."¹² But, he noted, "as the years went on, and I could not even find any satisfaction as to Who or What God was, and as nothing appeared for me to do for Him, Whom I could not find at all—even with the years of daily study and search into the teachings of the religions of the world, I began to despair."¹³ Although every other aspect of Thornton Chase's life had seen successes, his religious search—perhaps the basic element in his life—had not. Fortunately his wait was about to come to an end.

11. Thornton Chase, *Sketches*, 44–45.

12. Thornton Chase to Dr. C. M. Eells (copy), 8 February 1911, 1, TC.

13. Thornton Chase to 'Abdu'l-Bahá (copy), 12 May 1902, TC.

PART 2

Life Is Love

CHAPTER 11

The Search Ends

In 1893, the year Thornton Chase turned forty-six, he received a very important promotion within the Union Mutual Life Insurance Company. He was appointed a superintendent of agencies, one of the company's most important officers. Like most American corporations, Union Mutual had a board of directors that set company policy and made major decisions. The board consisted of a half-dozen prominent political and business leaders in Portland, Maine, where the company was headquartered, plus the company's six major officers: the president, vice-president, solicitor, secretary, actuary, and medical director. Beneath the six, came two officers in the field department, Thornton Chase and Edson Scofield. Both men were superintendents of agencies; Scofield was based in New York and handled the East Coast, while Thornton Chase was based in Chicago and handled the rest of the country. Both men probably reported directly to the vice-president.¹

Thornton Chase was now the seventh or eighth most important officer in a company with assets of six and a half million dollars. His salary, it is reported, was \$750 per month.² He was young enough to anticipate the possibility of promotion to vice-president or even president. He had finally achieved considerable material success.

1. *The Union Mutual*, vol. 16, no. 1 (January 1894), photocopy of last page in author's personal papers; Sandra H. Shryock [archivist of Union Mutual] to the author, 18 November 1982, author's personal papers.

2. *The Union Mutual*, vol. 16, no. 1 (January 1894), last page; O. Z. Whitehead, *Some Early Babá'is of the West* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1976), 5.

The new job required considerable travel because Thornton Chase had to visit the agencies to brief employees about company policy, evaluate their performance, and oversee their management of company investments. He also had to relocate from California to Chicago. One advantage of the move was that he was now only a thousand miles from New England, instead of three thousand, and occasionally he had to visit the company's headquarters in Maine. Thornton Chase had probably not seen his two daughters since he went west almost twenty years earlier, and he probably had not visited Springfield either. Time had been ample for his scars to heal. He could return as a successful man with a loving and close family. Sometime in the early 1890s he visited Springfield and effected a reconciliation with his stepmother, as photographs of his son as a young boy in the "Chase villa" in Springfield indicate. Thereafter the Chases visited Springfield annually; photographs of parties and plays held at the "Chase villa" show that good times were often had there.

At some point, Thornton Chase visited Newport as well. However, his success there was much more limited. On 30 April 1895 Sarah, his older daughter, married Charles Engs Lawton of Newport. Afterward Thornton Chase was able to have very little contact with Sarah. In February 1896 Charles and Sarah's first child and Thornton Chase's first grandchild, Edward Wing Lawton, was born. Eventually Sarah had four more children: Frances (August 1897), Richard (September 1899), Charles (April 1903), and Margaret (May 1904). Thornton Chase is not known to have visited the Lawton household after the birth of the grandchildren, and none of the grandchildren ever met him. It is unlikely he could have visited his younger daughter, Jessamine, because she lived with Annie. However, Thornton Chase was in correspondence with Jessamine, probably with Sarah, and with Alfred Langley, a Brown alumnus and close friend of Sarah and Jessamine.³

3. Marriage record of Sarah Thornton Chase and Charles E. Lawton, Newport, R.I., City Clerk's office, notes in Robert H. Stockman, Thornton Chase

Chicago had changed considerably since Thornton Chase had lived there in 1875. The population of the city had tripled to over one million.⁴ A great diversity of people inhabited the city; in 1890, 78 percent of the population was of foreign birth or parentage. The largest ethnic groups were, in descending order, Germans, Scandinavians, Irish, British (i.e., English, Scottish, and Welsh), and Canadians; immigration of Poles, Italians, Bohemians (Czechs), Slovaks, and Eastern European Jews was just beginning, noticeably shifting the city's character. Many fashionable neighborhoods existed, more than before the fire.

Chicago in 1890 was America's second largest manufacturing center. By virtue of its unique transportation system—the rail lines of the central United States all converged in Chicago, and its canal connected the Mississippi River to the Great Lakes—the city was the hub of the movement of goods for much of the country. Agricultural produce—wheat, corn, hogs, cattle—all converged there for processing and shipment to its final destination. It was not a coincidence that Sears—whose catalog brought all the civilized refinements of life to rural America, including prefabricated houses—had its headquarters in Chicago.⁵

To celebrate its growth to become America's second largest city, in 1893 Chicago hosted the World's Columbian Exposition, a world's fair to commemorate the four hundredth anniversary of

Research Notebook, p. 8.2, author's personal papers; birth records of the Lawton children, Newport, R.I., City Clerk's office, notes in Thornton Chase Research Notebook, p. 8.2; telephone interview with Charles Dudley Lawton, 23 May 1987, author's personal papers; telephone interview with Charles D. Lawton, 22 May 1987, author's personal papers. (Note: Charles Dudley Lawton is the son of Charles and Sarah Lawton.)

4. *Compendium of the Eleventh Census: 1890. Part I.—Population* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1892), 434.

5. An excellent summary of Chicago history can be found in Bessie Louise Pierce, *A History of Chicago*, vol. 3, *The Rise of the Modern City, 1871–1893* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1957). See pp. 22, 24, 27, 31, 32, 38, 64, 65, 68–69, 92, 108, 145–46.

Columbus's discovery of the new world. Millions flocked to Chicago to see the fair, which celebrated American technology and the American way of life. Part of the fair was a series of conferences, including one on religion. Titled the World's Parliament of Religions, the meeting was held from 11 to 27 September 1893; tens of thousands attended its sessions, and it received extensive newspaper coverage. Almost two hundred people gave talks about religion. Although evangelical Protestants dominated the proceedings and sought to use the forum as an opportunity to demonstrate the superiority of their beliefs, a few prominent Hindus and Buddhists also attended. The beliefs they advocated—and their criticism of Protestantism—received widespread attention.⁶

Thornton Chase never indicated whether he attended the World's Parliament of Religions. It is reasonable to assume that if he were in Chicago at the time he would have attended at least one or two of its sessions, but it is possible that he was on the road instead. In later years his typical pattern was to take a month-long vacation in New England during the month of August, visiting company headquarters in Maine before returning to Chicago; he would then start a lengthy business trip in mid- or late September, which often took him to the West Coast. Thus it is possible that Thornton Chase was absent while the historic conference occurred in his home city.

Considering Thornton Chase's devotion to world religions, he must have at least followed the newspaper accounts of the parliament. On September 23rd, a paper was read by the Reverend Henry H. Jessup, D.D., director of Presbyterian Missionary Operations in northern Syria. Titled "The Religious Mission of the English Speaking Nations," it described the social, political, moral, and religious superiority of the Anglo-Saxon "race" and its God-given mandate to Christianize humanity. Jessup closed his paper by quoting Bahá'u'lláh, prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith:

6. A summary of the World's Parliament of Religions can be found in Carl T. Jackson, *The Oriental Religions and American Thought: Nineteenth Century Explorations* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981), 243–58.

In the palace of Behjeh, or Delight, just outside the fortress of Acre, on the Syrian coast, there died a few months since a famous Persian sage, the Babi Saint, named Behâ Allah—the “Glorious of God”—the head of a vast reform party of Persian Moslems, who accept the New Testament as the Word of God and Christ as the deliverer of men, who regard all nations as one, and all men as brothers. Three years ago he was visited by a Cambridge scholar, and gave utterances to sentiments so noble, so Christ-like, that we repeat them as our closing words:

“That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease and differences of race be annulled; what harm is there in this? Yet so it shall be. These fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the ‘Most Great Peace’ shall come. Do not you in Europe need this also? Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind.”⁷

Jessup provided no reason for quoting Bahá’u’lláh other than the “Christ-like” quality of Bahá’u’lláh’s words; they must have impressed him as examples of Jesus Christ’s mysterious work in other cultures, for his quotation of Bahá’u’lláh bore no obvious connection to the rest of his paper. According to John Bosch, a friend of Thornton Chase, Thornton Chase saw or read Jessup’s talk and was impressed by Bahá’u’lláh’s words as well. He decided to investigate the Bahá’í Faith and searched libraries for information. Thornton Chase seems to confirm that he investigated the Bahá’í Faith first

7. Henry H. Jessup, “The Religious Mission of the English Speaking Nations,” in *The World’s Parliament of Religions* John Henry Barrows, ed., (Chicago: Parliament Publishing Co., 1893), 1125–26. Jessup’s quotation of Bahá’u’lláh comes from Edward G. Browne, “Introduction,” in [‘Abdu’l-Bahá], *A Traveler’s Narrative Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Báb*, trans. Edward G. Browne, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1891), 2:xxxix–xl. Jessup did not reproduce the quotation exactly as Browne gave it; I have preserved Jessup’s version because that is what Thornton Chase would have seen.

through books when he says in a letter that "before any American had found" 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Thornton Chase dreamed of meeting Him.⁸

Information should not have been difficult to find in a large public library. When he visited Iran in 1887–88, Edward G. Browne, a Cambridge University professor of Arabic and Persian, had become fascinated with the Bahá'í religion and with its antecedent movement, the Bábí Faith. About a quarter of his classic travelogue, *A Year Amongst the Persians* (1893), describes his meetings with the Bahá'ís of Iran and his discussions of religion with them. Browne summarized all the information he had acquired on the Bahá'í Faith in two articles, published in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* in 1889. The two articles, totaling 170 pages of text, describe most of the major works by Bahá'u'lláh as well as give a thorough account of Bahá'í history and a fairly good summary of Bahá'í teachings. Browne also acquired many manuscripts on his visit to Iran, and he translated and published two histories: *A Traveller's Narrative Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Báb*, by 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1891), and *The Táríkh-i-Jadíd or New History of Mírzá 'Alí Muḥammad the Báb*, by Mírzá Huseyn of Hamadán (1893). Browne's fifty-three-page introduction to *A Traveller's Narrative* included the description of Bahá'u'lláh that Jessup had quoted. As a result of these four works, almost a thousand pages of information on the Bahá'í Faith was available to those interested in studying it.⁹

8. John Bosch's account of Thornton Chase's conversion was repeated by him to Firuz Kazemzadeh in the 1940s. Dr. Kazemzadeh repeated it in a telephone interview with the author on 10 February 1982. The exact text of Dr. Kazemzadeh's recollection may be found in Robert H. Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America, Origins, 1892–1900*, vol. 1 (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985), 34. Chase's statement that he dreamed about meeting 'Abdu'l-Bahá is made in Thornton Chase to 'Abdu'l-Bahá (copy), 21 April 1905, TC.

9. Edward Granville Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians: Impressions as to the Life, Character, and Thought of the People of Persia Received During Twelve Months' Residence in that Country in the Years 1887–1888* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1984); Edward Granville Browne, "The Bábís of Persia. I. Sketch of their History, and Personal

Presumably Thornton Chase began to read about Bahá'u'lláh and the Bahá'í Faith. However, within a year the opportunity to learn of the Bahá'í Faith firsthand from a believer presented itself. According to Carl Scheffler, another friend of Thornton Chase, the opportunity arose in the following manner:

While writing a poem about God one day he [Thornton Chase] was interrupted by the visit of a business acquaintance who expressed an interest in his activity, perhaps because he was so busy typing. Mr. Chase read a portion of what he was writing and he was astounded when his friend told him that he had recently come upon a man who had declared that God had "walked upon the earth." Immediately Mr. Chase expressed interest and asked to be conducted to this person.¹⁰

Scheffler adds that he thinks the business acquaintance was William James, who was a thirty-six-year-old Chicago grain broker. The man whom James had recently come upon was Ibrahim Khei-

Experiences amongst them," *Royal Asiatic Society's Journal* 21 (July 1889): 485-526; Edward Granville Browne, "The Bábis of Persia. II. Their Literature and Doctrines," *Royal Asiatic Society's Journal* 21 (Oct. 1889): 881-1009; 'Abd u'l-Bahá, *A Traveler's Narrative Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Báb*, trans. Edward G. Browne, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891); Mirzá Huseyn of Hamadán, *The Tárikh-i-Jadíd or New History of Mirzá 'Alí Múharrir-nád íBe Báb*, trans. Edward G. Browne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893). An important selection of some of these texts has recently appeared: *Selections from the Writings of E. G. Browne on the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, Moojan Momen, ed. (Oxford: George Ronald, 1987). The work has extensive editorial notes and annotation using information from Browne's unpublished papers and information from the unpublished papers of the Persians whom he visited. The notes are valuable because Browne, to protect his sources, had to disguise their names, and these are now revealed. A short summary of the contents of Browne's works may be found in Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins*, 43-46.

10. Carl Scheffler, "Thornton Chase: First American Bahá'í," *World Order* 11 (August 1945): 153.

ralla (1849–1929).¹¹ Thornton Chase, in a short essay he wrote on the history of the Bahá'í Faith in America, said that he heard of Kheiralla in the month of June 1894. At the time, he was seeking someone to teach him Sanskrit; instead he encountered a Bahá'í.¹²

Kheiralla, who taught Thornton Chase the Bahá'í Faith, was born near Beirut in modern Lebanon. He had been brought up as a Christian and had graduated from the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut. In 1888, while living in Cairo, he met a Persian Bahá'í merchant who resided there. Kheiralla began to investigate the Bahá'í Faith by asking the Persian questions and by studying the Bible. Bahá'ís believe that Bahá'u'lláh is the fulfillment of many biblical prophecies, and the more Kheiralla studied, the more convinced he, too, became. He was not able to read very much of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh because most of those available from the Persian Bahá'ís of Cairo were written in Persian, a language Kheiralla did not know. Partly as a result, Kheiralla's Bible study assumed central importance in his investigation of the Bahá'í Faith. He came to many conclusions about Bahá'u'lláh and the Bahá'í Faith as a result of his reading of the Bible, conclusions that often bore little resemblance to Bahá'í beliefs. It is not known to what extent he communicated his interpretations to the Bahá'ís in Cairo. In 1890 Ibrahim Kheiralla became a Bahá'í.

Two years later he determined to travel to Europe, for he had designed and patented several inventions that he wanted to sell. He left Cairo about 9 June 1892, bound for Russia. Two weeks earlier Bahá'u'lláh had died. The Bahá'í community was plunged into grief; before Kheiralla departed for Europe, however, he heard that

11. Ibrahim Kheiralla's life is treated in considerable detail in Richard Hollinger, "Ibrahim George Kheiralla and the Bahá'í Faith in America," in Juan R. Cole and Moojan Momen, eds., *Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History*, vol. 2: *From Iran East and West* (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1984), 95–134; see also Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America; Origins*, 13–38.

12. Thornton Chase, "A Brief History of the American Development of the Bahai Movement," *Star of the West* 5.17 (19 January 1915): 263.

'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844–1921), Bahá'u'lláh's oldest son, had been appointed by Bahá'u'lláh as successive head of the religion.

Kheiralla was unable to sell his invention in Russia or Germany. A friend had attempted to sell another of Kheiralla's inventions in the United States and had also failed; consequently Kheiralla came to America to assist him, arriving in New York on 20 December 1892. Kheiralla was never able to sell any of his inventions, but he soon learned that he could earn a living by selling Oriental merchandise. In late 1893 he traveled as far west as Michigan, lecturing about the Middle East and selling goods.

About the time Kheiralla settled in Chicago in February 1894, he discovered a new way of earning money: He opened a healing practice. Kheiralla believed he had healing powers and sought to exercise them through the laying on of hands, praying with the patient, and having the patient smoke a hookah (water pipe). He charged two dollars for each visit. Since many of his patients were interested in alternative religious movements, Kheiralla began to tell them about his religious ideas. Religion attracted patients, and the healing practice attracted religious seekers.

William James was the first person attracted to the new religion. During the spring of 1894 three others also became interested in the Bahá'í Faith. One was Marion Miller, born in England about 1860. Another was Edward Dennis, an Indiana native who operated a small Chicago business. The third was Thornton Chase.

Thornton Chase consistently mentions a specific date in connection with his investigation of the Bahá'í Faith: Tuesday, 5 June 1894. On that day, he says, he "learned of the Blessed Manifestation [Bahá'u'lláh]" and "first heard the Glad Tidings of this Revelation." He calls it the "very beginning" of the Bahá'í Faith in America.¹³ He does not specify what occurred on that day, but there are three possibilities. He may be referring to the day that William James told

13. Thornton Chase to Mirza Moneer Zaine [Mírzá Munír Zayn] (copy), 9 June 1911, 2–3, TC; Thornton Chase to William Herrigel (copy), 5 May 1910, 2, TC; Thornton Chase to Charles Mason Remey (copy), 19 January 1910, 7, TC.

him of Kheiralla. This seems unlikely, however, because James had already heard of the Bahá'í Faith; thus that day, strictly speaking, was not the "very beginning" of the Bahá'í Faith in America. Thornton Chase might be referring to the time when the four Americans all accepted Bahá'u'lláh. But this, too, seems unlikely because records in the National Bahá'í Archives suggest that Thornton Chase and Edward Dennis were not formally accepted as Bahá'ís until 1895.

Most likely 5 June 1894 represents the first day that the four Americans met with Ibrahim Kheiralla to study the Bahá'í Faith together. Kheiralla says that after he arrived in Chicago he "began to preach the Appearance of the Father [Bahá'u'lláh] and the establishment of His Kingdom on earth." This probably represents the content of his first talks and agrees nicely with Thornton Chase's description of what happened on June 5th. Kheiralla adds that "it was hard work for me to make the Americans understand my deficient English speech."¹⁴ James, Miller, Dennis, and Thornton Chase were Kheiralla's first pupils; consequently they received his teachings in their least organized and most tentative form. Nevertheless Thornton Chase was impressed:

As the statements of the life and teachings of BAHÁ'O'LLÁH, and his son, Abbas Effendi, the "Greatest Branch," otherwise known as Abdul-Baha, accorded with the declarations of numerous sacred prophecies, and with the age-long expectations of mankind, it was deemed of value to investigate those claims as far as possible.¹⁵

Up to this point Thornton Chase's religious search apparently had not focused on biblical prophecy. His poetry used mystical imagery from the Bible, but not its prophetic passages. Study of Hinduism, Buddhism, Theosophy, or hypnotism would not have

14. Ibrahim Kheiralla, "Autobiography," in *O Christians! Why do Ye Believe Not on Christ?* (n.p., 1917), 167.

15. Thornton Chase, "A Brief History," 263.

entailed much attention to prophecy either. However, prophecy was an extremely important part of evangelical Protestantism. Preachers of Samuel Francis Smith's generation defended the validity of the New Testament narrative based on Christ's miracles and the prophecies Christ fulfilled. Some years before Thornton Chase was born, a New York farmer named William Miller had predicted that Christ would return in 1843 or 1844; first Miller was a sensation in America, then the nation's laughing-stock. In the 1890s many former Millerites were still alive; Thornton Chase had undoubtedly met some. The late nineteenth century saw the founding of annual conferences to discuss interpretations of prophecy. Swedenborg had interpreted prophecies, and Thornton Chase must have read about them just a decade earlier. Biblical prophecy was such a prominent aspect of American culture that one can be sure Thornton Chase was exposed to it, and the suggestion that the prophecy was now fulfilled would have been highly significant to him.

Thornton Chase began to study prophecy. He bought a new Bible and cut it up with scissors, pasting the prophetic passages on long sheets of paper. He titled the study "Prophecies of the New Day."¹⁶ Over the next decade, because Bahá'u'lláh's writings were largely unavailable in English, Thornton Chase and the other early American Bahá'ís studied the Bible, which perforce served as the first scripture of the American Bahá'í community.

We do not know about the process whereby Thornton Chase became convinced that he had finally found the truth for which he had searched so long. The process took at least six months, for he is not listed as a member of the Bahá'í Faith until 1895. Whether the delay resulted from his extensive business travels—the San

16. Telephone interview with Helen Bishop, 1 August 1982, in Thornton Chase Research Notebook, pp. 37.6, 37.8, author's personal papers. The author has not seen the sheets of biblical prophecies in the Thornton Chase papers, but Helen Bishop recalls seeing them when she helped John and Louise Bosch arrange the Thornton Chase papers many years ago. The sheets of biblical prophecies were not dated, but Bishop believed they dated back to the "very early days."

Francisco city directory continued to list Thornton Chase as having an office in the city until 1896—or from his caution cannot be determined.¹⁷

Perhaps Thornton Chase's conversion experience coincided with a new stage in his spiritual development, the one described by Bahá'u'lláh as the "Valley of Knowledge." In this, the third mystical level of growth, the seeker will "come out of doubt into certitude, and turn from the darkness of illusion to the guiding light of the fear of God . . . he will set ajar the gate of truth and piety, and shut the doors of vain imaginings."¹⁸ Although he would have doubts and fears in the future, and a few vain imaginings as well, Thornton Chase had given his faith to Bahá'u'lláh, whom he recognized as God's newest messenger. The commitment of his faith was one of the most decisive steps in his life.

By 1896 or 1897 Kheiralla had created a unique process for recognizing those who had accepted Bahá'u'lláh; they were "given the Greatest Name." The process may date back to 1894 or 1895. Islamic tradition maintains that God has one hundred "names," or principal attributes, ninety-nine of which were revealed in the Qur'án. The one hundredth, or "greatest," name was the subject of con-

17. "Supplication Book of Students in Chicago, Ill. from 1894 to [n.d.]," Bahá'í Membership List, United States, 1894–1900, microfilm collection K–4, National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, Ill.; *Langley's San Francisco Directory For the Year Commencing April, 1894. Embracing an Accurate Index of Residents and a Business Directory; also a Guide to Streets, Public Offices, Etc., and a Reliable Map of the City. Together with The Officers of the Municipal Government, Societies and other Organizations, and a great variety of Useful Information* (San Francisco: George B. Wilbur, 1894), 355. *Crocker-Langley San Francisco Directory for the Year Commencing April 1896 Containing An Alphabetical List of Business Firms and Private Citizens; a Directory of the City and County Officers, Churches, Public and Private Schools, Benevolent, Literary, and other Associations, Banks, Incorporated Institutions, etc., and a Complete Classified Business Directory, A Correct Map and an improved Street and Avenue Guide of the City*, comp. H. S. Crocker Co. (San Francisco: H. S. Crocker, 1896), 392.

18. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys and The Four Valleys*, trans. Marzieh Gail (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), 11.

siderable mystical speculation. Bahá'u'lláh said that the Greatest Name was *Bahá*—which in Arabic means “glory,” “light,” or “splendor”—and its superlative form *Abbá*, or “Most Glorious.” The name is used in various forms. *Alláb-u-Abbá*, “God is Most Glorious,” is used by Bahá'ís as a greeting to each other and as a prayer. Another form, *Yá Bahá'u'l-Abbá*, “O Thou the Glory of the Most Glorious!” is used as a prayer and as a pious expression. *Bahá'u'lláb*, “the Glory of God,” is another form, as is *Bahá'í*, “follower of Bahá.”

Kheiralla taught the new believers about the Greatest Name and its proper use. He instilled them with such respect for it that they hesitated to use it in public or even in a gathering of believers.¹⁹ The term “Bahá'í” was not used at all; “Beha'ist” was preferred among the believers, and “truth-seeker” was used when Kheiralla's lessons or pupils were mentioned to others.

About 1895, the Chicago “Beha'ists” purchased a seal with the legend “First Assembly of Beha'ists in America * Chicago * 1895.”²⁰ By the term “assembly,” they referred to their community, for until about 1920 “assembly” was the preferred term for the entire body of Bahá'ís in a locality. Thornton Chase now had a new identity and belonged to a new religion. The despair he had felt in the course of his search was replaced with the joy of discovery, and the challenge of searching was replaced by the challenge of serving the new religion and its fledgling community.

19. Thornton Chase to Alfred Lunt (copy), 30 June 1906, 1, TC.

20. A piece of paper with the impression of this seal may be found in TC; the seal itself is lost.

CHAPTER 12

Early Years as a Bahá'í, 1895–1898

Because Thornton Chase's personal papers are completely silent about his Bahá'í involvement before 1898, reconstructing his role in the community is difficult. Undoubtedly he wrote frequently to Ibrahim Kheiralla, especially when Chase was away from Chicago, but unfortunately none of the letters have survived in the Thornton Chase Papers. His diary, also, is no longer extant. As a result the account of his activities and efforts that can be reconstructed is undoubtedly incomplete.

Eleanor Chase's attitude toward the Bahá'í Faith is important but unknown. In later years she attended Bahá'í meetings only occasionally, hosted the Chicago Bahá'í women at least once, and wrote letters to Bahá'í women.¹ In short she was tied socially to the Chicago Bahá'í community and especially to individual Bahá'ís in some ways, although she never became a Bahá'í. In 1908 she "rather pride[d] herself . . . on saying she is not a Bahai," although she dis-

1. In Thornton Chase to Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl (copy), 13 March 1903, TC, Mrs. Chase is mentioned as having just attended her first Bahá'í meeting. In Thornton Chase to Sister Sanghamitta (copy), 9 January 1904, TC, she is mentioned as hosting the "nineteen day ladies meeting" in Chicago. In Thornton Chase to Louise Waite (copy), 22 October 1905, 4, TC, she is mentioned as writing a letter to Louise Waite; in Thornton Chase to Ida Finch (copy), 16 September 1908, 3, TC, she is mentioned as having written to Ida Finch. She also wrote to Helen Goodall about Thornton Chase's personal effects after his death (Eleanor F. Chase to Helen Goodall, n.d. [late 1912 or early 1913], Helen Goodall Papers, National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, Ill.).

cussed the religion frequently. She never affiliated with another religious group but became interested in Christian Science. After 1909 she became increasingly opposed to Thornton Chase's Bahá'í involvement.²

It is very likely that she was not interested in the Bahá'í Faith in the 1890s because her name is not on the list of persons who studied the Bahá'í Faith in North America through September 1899. Thornton Chase later noted that she was "not fond of Orientals," which probably included Kheiralla; indeed her lack of fondness for Orientals may have started with Kheiralla, for his personality often alienated people.³

Furthermore, Kheiralla had a rule that his students should not tell others about the details of his teachings; quoting words attributed to Jesus in Matthew 7:6, he told his pupils not to "cast . . . your pearls before swine." The best way to judge the fitness of others to receive the Bahá'í message, Kheiralla believed, was to invite them to attend his talks, where they would acquire the entire message in its proper order instead of learning pieces of it haphazardly. It is possible that Kheiralla did not formulate this rule until late 1895—when his classes began—and that Eleanor heard as much of Kheiralla's teachings as she desired to receive. Since Eleanor did not take Kheiralla's Bahá'í classes, her knowledge of her husband's new religion would have been limited. She may not even have known the name of the group other than its public appellation, the "Truth Seekers."

Thornton Chase's book knowledge about religion—and about the Bahá'í Faith—may have been important to the fledgling Chicago Bahá'í community and possibly to Kheiralla as well. Kheiralla later noted that when he taught the Bahá'í Faith in the United

2. Eleanor Chase's interest in Christian Science and her insistence that she is not a Bahá'í are mentioned in Thornton Chase to Ida A. Finch (copy), 16 September 1908, 3, TC. Her opposition to Thornton Chase's involvement is alluded to in Thornton Chase to Harlan Ober (copy), 28 November 1909, TC.

3. Thornton Chase to Ida Finch (copy), 16 September 1908, 3, TC.

States, "nearly all I knew, then, of the utterances [of Bahá'u'lláh] were those which I read in the books of Prof. E. G. Browne, of Cambridge, England, and a few communes and tablets which I copied in Cairo, Egypt, before I came to America."⁴ Much of the information about Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá that Kheiralla later gave to his students came from Browne. Thornton Chase notes that Kheiralla learned of Browne "soon" after beginning to teach the Bahá'í Faith in Chicago.⁵ It is possible that Thornton Chase introduced Kheiralla to Browne's works.

Thornton Chase may have recommended various books about religion to Kheiralla as well. In 1900, when Kheiralla finally published his lessons on the Bahá'í Faith, the book contained at least 122 citations of other works. He cited Browne the most; popular works on the Bible and world religions were the next most common references. Considering how poor Kheiralla's English was when he arrived in the United States, he probably had not read any books on the Bible, religion, or the Bahá'í Faith in English while he lived in Egypt. However, such works would have been exactly what Thornton Chase had been reading during the previous twenty years. Undoubtedly he suggested some of them to Kheiralla.⁶

The first American Bahá'ís asked Kheiralla many questions about religion, and he did not know the Bahá'í answers to some of them. One example was reincarnation. One early Bahá'í later noted that Kheiralla had been taught the idea by "the early group of believers—Thornton Chase, Stewart, etc. . . ."⁷ After accepting his pupils' belief in reincarnation Kheiralla taught it as a Bahá'í belief;

4. Ibrahim Kheiralla, *The Three Questions* (n.p., [1902]), 23.

5. Thornton Chase to Myron H. Phelps (copy), 19 December 1903, TC.

6. A description of the works that Kheiralla cited may be found in Robert H. Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins, 1892-1900*, vol. 1 (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985): 40-47, 210 n. 5.

7. Edward Getsinger, handwritten notes dated 30 September 1930 written on the back of his pilgrim's notes titled "About Daniel and John *Returning* in their reflected *Personality*: Table Talk at Acca with Abdul Baha, Dec. 1899 [1898]," TS, Albert R. Windust Papers, National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, Ill.

he had no access to Bahá'u'lláh's writings, which do not accept reincarnation.

In addition to asking Kheiralla questions, the first four American Bahá'ís told their friends about him, and they became interested in Kheiralla's teachings as well. Kate Ives, born on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, in 1863, became a Bahá'í in 1895. She became at least the fifth North American to accept Bahá'u'lláh. By the fall of 1895 enough people were interested in Kheiralla's teachings that he had to organize a formal class; apparently this was the first formal course of lessons on the Bahá'í Faith that he gave. When the course was finished on 19 January 1896, five or six more people became Bahá'ís. For the next two and a half years Kheiralla had at least one class in session almost all the time.⁸

The classes underwent some change from 1895 to 1900, when they were last given, but their basic form remained essentially the same. Drawing on his knowledge of Middle Eastern mysticism and metaphysics, Kheiralla first offered three lectures about the nature of the body, mind, and soul, including an attempt to prove human immortality. None of these lessons contained any teachings that were explicitly from the Bahá'í Faith. The fourth lesson focused on prayer; at its conclusion Kheiralla handed out typed copies of two or three Bahá'í prayers. The fifth through tenth lessons discussed biblical figures such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses. The lessons also contained some information on Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. In these lectures Kheiralla sought to demonstrate the unity of all the world's religions, their common origin in Judaism, their subsequent corruption by human interpretation and misrepresentation, and their promises of fulfillment in the coming of the "everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). Then Kheiralla taught three lessons: one about Bahá'u'lláh; one about His predecessor, the Báb; and one about 'Abdu'l-Bahá—describing the life

8. The life of Kate Ives and the creation of the Chicago Bahá'í community are described in Stockman, *Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins*, 36–40, 85–86.

of each in terms of the biblical prophecies They fulfilled. Finally he invited his pupils to write a letter to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who was confined in the Holy Land, and to receive the Greatest Name.⁹

The lessons Kheiralla taught in 1894 or 1895 were probably much simpler. Most likely they did not include the information on Eastern religions nor some of the biblical interpretations. Most likely between 1894 and 1896 the major change Kheiralla made to his teachings involved separating the discussion of biblical characters and prophecy from discussion of the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith. Thornton Chase's statements suggest that initially the two subjects were discussed together; whereas after 1895 Kheiralla taught biblical lessons first, without mentioning the Bahá'í figures directly, and told his students about them in the later lessons. It is also likely that many of the biblical interpretations that Kheiralla taught were the fruit of Kheiralla's and his first pupils' studying the Bible and Browne's books together for a year.

Kheiralla's classes were extremely successful; the majority of his pupils became Bahá'ís and received the Greatest Name. A month or two after the first class graduated on 19 January 1896, a second one started, continuing until 21 May. The summer was a bad time for regular classes—too many people were away—hence the next class began in September and ended on 8 December. The year 1897 dawned with thirty Bahá'ís in Chicago and more than thirty more people wanting to take classes. Two classes were started, graduating on 26 March and 6 April 1897, respectively; Chicago now had more than sixty Bahá'ís. With such a large increase in numbers, a more formal organization was necessary; hence the Chicago Bahá'ís established a treasury and opened a treasurer's book. Probably weekly community meetings for worship and Bible study started as well.¹⁰

9. For a detailed description of Kheiralla's teachings, see Stockman, *Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins*, 48–84.

10. Chicago membership lists, ca. 1897–1903, Chicago House of Spirituality Records, National Bahá'í Archives (hereafter referred to as "CHS"). This period of Chicago Bahá'í history is summarized in Stockman, *Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins*, 85–86.

The increase in membership and inquirers also made the publication of an introductory booklet more urgent. In 1896, probably late in the year, Kheiralla published *Za-ti-et Al-lah: The Identity and the Personality of God*.¹¹ It summarized his lecture on the nature of God. This lecture was not one of the formal lessons but, rather, a preliminary talk to interest inquirers in taking the lessons. The quality of the English is much better than what one would expect of someone who had been in the United States only a few years. Thornton Chase apparently edited one of Kheiralla's later works before publication; hence he may have edited *Za-ti-et Al-lah* as well.¹² It is possible that he also edited Kheiralla's second work, *Bab-ed-Din; The Door of True Religion*, which appeared in 1897.¹³ Its first half consisted of a new edition of *Za-ti-et Al-lah*, and the second half was an attack on the Protestant doctrine of Christ's vicarious Atonement.

With the increase in the number of Chicago Bahá'ís, a community came into existence. But Thornton Chase's involvement in Chicago Bahá'í community life would have been limited because of his travel, often for a week or two at a time and unexpectedly. Nevertheless, by 1898 he was teaching a Bahá'í class on the south side of Chicago with the help of a Mr. Jones.¹⁴ Perhaps Mr. Jones conducted the classes when Thornton Chase was away.

Thornton Chase also taught the Bahá'í Faith to a close friend named Charles Greenleaf. Chase may have known Greenleaf for many years; his uncle, Oscar H. Greenleaf, lived across Maple Street

11. Ibrahim G. Kheiralla, *Za-ti-et Al-lah: The Identity and the Personality of God* (n.p., 1896). Its contents are summarized in Stockman, *Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins*, 48-53.

12. The editing of Kheiralla's book *Behá Ullah* is described in Stockman, *Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins*, 140.

13. Ibrahim G. Kheiralla, *Bab-ed-Din; The Door of True Religion* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Co., 1897). Its contents are summarized in Stockman, *Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins*, 53-58.

14. Viola Tuttle et al., "Part of the Baha'í History of the Family of Charles and Maria Ioas," TS, p. 5, author's personal papers.

from Jotham Chase in Springfield, Massachusetts, and attended the same Baptist church. When Jotham died, Oscar helped Cornelia settle the estate. Oscar eventually became a Bahá'í. Charles had never lived in Springfield but was a resident of Chicago, where he became a Bahá'í on 5 October 1897.¹⁵ Charles's wife, Elizabeth Greenleaf, and their two sons also became Bahá'ís.

Because of Kheiralla's restriction on teaching the Bahá'í Faith, Thornton Chase would have been limited in his effectiveness as a traveling Bahá'í teacher. He rarely stayed in a city longer than a week, which was not enough time to offer Kheiralla's twelve or thirteen formal lessons to interested seekers. However, he did interest others in the Bahá'í Faith: He told Purley M. Blake and Henry "Harry" Clayton Thompson, two agents of the Union Mutual Life Insurance Company in Cincinnati, about the Bahá'í Faith in 1898 or 1899. They told their friends in Cincinnati; subsequently the Chicago Bahá'ís sent a teacher to that city to give Kheiralla's lessons, and a Bahá'í community was established.¹⁶

Cincinnati was not the first place outside Chicago where the Bahá'í Faith obtained a toehold. Kheiralla visited Enterprise, a small manufacturing town in central Kansas, in the summer of 1897, and a dozen persons became Bahá'ís there. In the fall of 1897 he traveled by train weekly to Kenosha, Wisconsin; as a result the second organized Bahá'í community in North America was established there in January 1898. From Kenosha the Bahá'í Faith spread north to Racine and Milwaukee. From January through July 1898 Kheiralla was on the East Coast. He taught the Bahá'í Faith in Ithaca, New York City, and Philadelphia. New York City became the site of the

15. Oscar Greenleaf signed a probate form in Hampden County Probate Court; a photocopy is in the author's personal papers. That Thornton Chase taught the Bahá'í Faith to the Greenleafs is confirmed in Charlotte D. Orlick to Mrs. Robley (copy), n.d., author's personal papers. For biographical information on Greenleaf, see Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins*, 4-5.

16. The establishment of the Bahá'í Faith in Cincinnati is detailed in Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins*, 132-34.

religion's third organized community in America. The Bahá'í Faith also spread to northern New Jersey, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C. To continue the lessons in Chicago in his absence, Kheiralla appointed Paul Dealy, a new convert, as the city's primary Bahá'í teacher.

Because Thornton Chase traveled extensively Kheiralla gave him addresses of Bahá'ís or inquirers in other localities. He asked Thornton Chase to visit Enterprise, Kansas, whenever he traveled to Colorado, to strengthen its new Bahá'í community. Apparently Thornton Chase was unable to stop there, but he did initiate correspondence with John Abramson, an Enterprise Bahá'í, and answered many of his questions about the Bahá'í Faith. Abramson had a brother who lived in Jerusalem and wrote to him for information on the Bahá'í religion, receiving three letters in reply. The first one contained mostly inaccurate impressions of the Bahá'ís gleaned from missionaries and other foreigners residing in Palestine. Later letters were based on published sources and provided Abramson with accurate information. Thornton Chase copied the letters for his own use, thereby learning about the Bahá'í Faith from a new source.¹⁷

Thornton Chase's correspondence with Abramson also provides the first glimpse into the nature of early American Bahá'í beliefs. Abramson wrote Thornton Chase on 21 March 1898 to ask him a series of questions about Kheiralla's teachings. Kheiralla taught that God had created only so many souls; what would happen, Abramson asked, when all those souls have been saved and are no longer "subject to the laws of birth and death"? Thornton Chase replied that Kheiralla's teachings do not say that everyone will eventually become "Children of God," but only those who "earnestly *seek* to become so"; and if everyone were saved God could create

17. "Copy of letter from his brother to John J. Abramson," 15 October 1897, TC; "Copy of letter # 2," 9 November 1897, TC; "Letter # 3," 15 December 1897, TC.

more souls or initiate an entirely new and different plan for creation.¹⁸

Abramson then asked a question involving interpretation of the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32).¹⁹ In the parable a man divides his goods between his two sons. The older son remains at home to serve his father while the younger son goes to live in a far-away country, where he squanders the wealth he was given. Eventually the younger son repents of his immoral lifestyle and returns home, humbly seeking to be a mere servant of his father, for he feels unworthy to be treated as a son. But the father, seeing his son is repentant, welcomes him home and honors him with a feast. This makes the older, loyal son jealous.

Thornton Chase offered an interpretation of the story that apparently came from Kheiralla. It spoke of the different spiritual stations of humans (the younger son) and angels (the elder son). The journey of the younger son to the far country is the descent of humanity to the earth, and his squandering of wealth represents humanity's denial that it was made in its Creator's image. The denial occurred in the Garden of Eden; but because the resulting fall of humanity gave it free will, humanity was now capable of recognizing its servitude to God and returning to God. Thornton Chase noted that this was what Kheiralla meant when he interpreted the story of Adam and Eve as a "fall up-stairs," because the fall had ultimately produced great gain by conferring free will on humanity. Thornton Chase also noted that many religions speak of the jealousy of angels for the spiritual station of humanity. He interpreted the first chapter of Hebrews to back up Kheiralla's teaching. Thornton Chase's reply reveals familiarity with different Bible translations and with the meanings of important Hebrew words and shows considerable thought about biblical passages.²⁰ It reflects

18. John J. Abramson to Thornton Chase, 21 March 1898, 1, TC; Thornton Chase to John J. Abramson (copy), 13 April 1898, 1, TC.

19. John J. Abramson to Thornton Chase, 21 March 1898, 1, TC.

20. Thornton Chase to John J. Abramson (copy), 13 April 1898, 2–3, TC.

an American emphasis on the idea of free will and an implicit rejection of the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination.

Detailed, often esoteric interpretation of biblical verses was common among the early American Bahá'ís. Letters of Thornton Chase to Purley M. Blake, a Cincinnati Bahá'í, give several examples. One letter says that a Chicago woman who went to Cincinnati to teach the Bahá'í Faith explained that there were two classes of angels: those who had been humans and those who had not.²¹ In another letter to Blake, Thornton Chase says, "I am satisfied that Jesus did give another Name of God to his disciples in strict secrecy [*sic*], not the Name, Jehovah, but another. Possibly it was the 'Abba' with which he addressed God his father."²² Apparently someone had speculated that if Bahá'u'lláh had revealed the Greatest Name, other Prophets may have revealed a name of God as well; "Jehovah" would have been the name revealed by Moses, and "Abba" (Father) the one by Jesus. Other letters by Thornton Chase are saturated with biblical phrases, terms, and imagery; the Bible very much shaped early American Bahá'ís' understanding of their faith.²³

Another excellent example of symbolic biblical exegesis is an essay by Thornton Chase titled *The Serpent*. The work appeared by 13 April 1900 but may have been written several years earlier; it is the earliest publication by an American Bahá'í on a topic related to the Bahá'í Faith.²⁴ The eighteen-page booklet consists of a commentary on the image of the serpent in the Old and New Testaments. It makes no mention of the Bahá'í Faith and thus may be influenced by Kheiralla's tradition of keeping the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith private.

21. Thornton Chase to P. M. Blake (copy), 18 November 1899, TC.

22. Thornton Chase to P. M. Blake (copy), 24 January 1900, TC.

23. See, for example, Thornton Chase to P. M. Blake (copy), 27 October 1899, TC.

24. Thornton Chase, *The Serpent* (n.p., n.d.). It is first mentioned in Anton Haddad to Helen Goodall, 13 April 1900, Helen Goodall Papers, National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, Ill.

John Abramson's third question to Thornton Chase probably reflected the confusion of the Bahá'ís in Enterprise about Kheiralla's teachings, and their inactivity as Bahá'ís. He asks:

Suppose a person, or a number of persons receive the teachings as Dr. K. has taught us, and also receive the Greatest Name, but, will not search nor study for the spiritual blessings to be attained, what good is it to them? Are they any nearer the kingdom of God than if they had never heard anything about the teachings?²⁵

Thornton Chase apparently did not understand that Abramson was asking about a real situation. He responded that it was inevitable that those who had received the Greatest Name would search for the spiritual blessings that had become available to them.²⁶

Abramson's fourth question addressed a passage in a prayer by Bahá'u'lláh that Kheiralla had given his pupils. In the prayer, one repeated the sentence "every time I try to mention Thee my dreadful sins and awful crimes prevent me." Abramson asked, what should one think or do if one had never committed a crime? Does the passage refer to crimes committed by one in one's previous incarnations? Thornton Chase replied that recourse to past incarnations was unnecessary because the passage referred to the sins that any person inevitably commits and therefore could apply to anyone.²⁷

Abramson's fifth question regarded the nature of the afterlife: Does a departed soul have the privilege of visiting the earth to see his or her loved ones? Thornton Chase doubted that such a possibility would be a privilege: "not that they love their loved ones the less but that they may love Another One the more."²⁸

25. John J. Abramson to Thornton Chase, 21 March 1898, 1, TC.

26. Thornton Chase to John J. Abramson (copy), 13 April 1898, 4, TC.

27. John J. Abramson to Thornton Chase, 21 March 1898, 2, TC; Thornton Chase to John J. Abramson (copy), 13 April 1898, 4-5, TC.

28. John J. Abramson to Thornton Chase, 21 March 1898, 2, TC; Thornton Chase to John J. Abramson (copy), 13 April 1898, 5, TC.

Abramson's five questions reflected well the mixture of teachings given by Kheiralla. There was a strong emphasis on the Bible and on the esoteric truth deemed important for the individual's spiritual development. Kheiralla said nothing about the Bahá'í mystical, spiritual, or social reform teachings; hence Thornton Chase and the other early American Bahá'ís were completely unaware of those aspects of the Bahá'í Faith.

One question Abramson asked almost as a postscript reflected the early American Bahá'ís' interest in "metaphysical" teachings—that is, fascination with communication with the dead, study of hypnotism and associated techniques, and devotion to anything unusual or esoteric. He wondered whether "these Teachings assist us to develop psychic or occult powers latent within us?" Thornton Chase's reply was emphatic:

No! Those who seek these teachings for the purpose or with the hope, that they may thereby gain some occult powers wherewith to "astonish the natives," are not "Truth-seekers." The only object of the really honest and earnest seeker after Truth, is the satisfaction of his *soul-hunger*. He seeks because he *keenly feels his need, his own personal need*. Whoever seeks from any other motive, is a "Thief and a robber" at heart.

Thornton Chase added that "occult" powers were but "chaff in the wind" compared with the spiritual powers that were accessible to the true believer.²⁹ His reply reflects his own search and the power of his own "soul-hunger," a deeply felt spiritual yearning that the Bahá'í Faith had satisfied.

In a letter to Purley M. Blake, Thornton Chase makes a similar statement:

Can anything partake more of the character of "moonbeams and superstition" than miracles, *supernaturalism* and the doctrines founded

29. John J. Abramson to Thornton Chase, 21 March 1898, 3, TC; Thornton Chase to John J. Abramson (copy), 13 April 1898, 5-6, TC.

upon them? They will not bear the light of day: Before clear, cool, untrammelled . . . reason, they fade out of sight. . . . Faith is the EVIDENCE of things unseen, not as usually stated "the evidence of things UNSEEN.[?]"³⁰

Both of Thornton Chase's replies bear on an issue that eventually became crucial: Is the Bahá'í Faith a transcendent, monotheistic religion with a revelation from God, which implies the necessity of obedience and faith, or is it a set of wise teachings, some of which one can accept and some of which one can reject according to one's own ideas? It is a question of where the focus is to be placed: on God or on the individual. The Bahá'í writings very clearly proclaim their divine origin, but the implications of this claim—faith and obedience—were not completely clear to the Bahá'í community until the 1920s. In the 1890s very few Bahá'í teachings and even fewer Bahá'í writings were available in North America, but the implications of the Bahá'í Faith's claim to possess a divine revelation, nevertheless, were understood by a few Bahá'ís. Thornton Chase was one of them.

One point in particular separated Kheiralla's teachings from those of other religions and philosophies: faith in Bahá'u'lláh and in His appointed Interpreter, 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Kheiralla taught that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was the Return of Christ—contrary to Bahá'í scripture, which says that Bahá'u'lláh is the Return of Christ—consequently the American Bahá'ís yearned to contact 'Abdu'l-Bahá. But in 1898 no American had gone to the Holy Land to meet 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and for an unknown reason no letters from 'Abdu'l-Bahá had been received by Americans. Contact with 'Abdu'l-Bahá was nonexistent, hence Kheiralla—who claimed to be the official Bahá'í teacher in North America, even though he had received no such authorization—represented 'Abdu'l-Bahá's authority.

30. Thornton Chase to P. M. Blake (copy), 27 October 1899, 3, TC. The quotation comes from Hebrews 11:1.

In the spring of 1898 Ibrahim Kheiralla's Bahá'í friend Anton Haddad returned to the United States, stopping first in 'Akká to meet 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Thornton Chase, in his letter to Abramson, described what Haddad had told the New York Bahá'ís about 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

In reply to your Question as to what the Christ is doing today, I will say that I am informed by a credible eye-witness, who had the great privilege to be received within the circle at the headquarters very recently, that He is devoting Himself unsparingly to instruction, to deeds of kindness and especially to helping the down-trodden and unfortunate. He is so besieged by hungry souls that He scarcely permits Himself to sleep, taking but little in any night and often going without sleep all night in order to give the food of life to those who crowd upon Him. He is "A Most Lovely One" and is the personification of sweetness and goodwill. Yet He is greatly feared and obsequiously honored by all who know Him or of Him and who are not in the knowledge of the Truth. By the "Believers" He is ardently loved and honored. He is a "Lion" in majesty and power, and a "Christ" in loveliness, knowledge and sympathy with mankind.³¹

Devotion to the figure of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as described above was a key characteristic of those nineteenth-century Americans who had accepted the Bahá'í religion.

With the establishment of contact with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Americans' devotion could be directed toward a real person instead of being vicariously directed to 'Abdu'l-Bahá through Ibrahim Kheiralla. It was a momentous shift for the North American Bahá'í community and a momentous shift for Ibrahim Kheiralla.

31. Thornton Chase to John J. Abramson (copy), 13 April 1898, 6, TC.

CHAPTER 13

Years of Testing, 1898-1900

The arrival of Anton Haddad in North America also coincided with the arrival of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's first letter, or tablet, to North American Bahá'ís. Possibly Haddad himself was its courier. Addressed to William James, Maude Lamson (Ibrahim Kheiralla's secretary), George Kheiralla (Ibrahim Kheiralla's son), and Thornton Chase, the letter reached Chicago on 29 April 1898. It said, in part:

O ye beloved of God and His sincere friends!

By the life of God! The hearts are cheered whenever you are mentioned, the souls are comforted in your love, the holy spirits are captivated by your fragrance, the eyes are expecting to see you and the hearts are longing to meet you, owing to the fact that your hearts were kindled with the fire of the love of God. . . .

Blessed are ye, O children of the Kingdom of God! Glad-tidings to ye, O friends of God! as He hath made your destiny great. . . .

God will show forth your endeavor, increase your spirit and fragrance, perfume the different directions with your perfume, enlighten the horizons with your light . . . will cheer the souls with what you have accomplished and cause . . . the banner of remembrance of you to wave through all the ages; your fame and praise to encircle the horizon and the tongues to speak of your virtues and good endeavors.

By the living Truth! That bounty is great and great and the Lord is supreme in majesty! The confirmation is successive and success is con-

tinuous, and the kindness of your God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, will surround you from all sides.¹

The stilted English of the tablet bespeaks its age; the phrase "great and great," for example, probably translates two similar Arabic words. Later tablets were better translated because of the experience acquired from translating the earlier ones. 'Abdu'l-Bahá knew none of the individuals to whom the letters were addressed and may have sent one tablet in reply to four different letters. As a result the epistle is very general in content, neither citing nor responding to any questions previously directed to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Neither does the tablet offer any specific advice. Instead 'Abdu'l-Bahá encourages the recipients (encouragement is a major portion of most of his tablets to individuals), praises them for their deeds, and emphasizes the historic importance of their endeavors. In spite of the tablet's brevity, it must have excited the American Bahá'ís very much, for the epistle was the first they had received from their "Lord."

The American Bahá'ís also must have been excited at the prospect of obtaining another book on their religion. In the summer of 1898 Ibrahim Kheiralla retired to Lubeck, Maine, for several months to write a textbook giving all his lessons in detail. Entitled *Behá 'Ulláh*, the book reached a length of five hundred pages when finished. Kheiralla's plan was to go to 'Akká to present the completed manuscript to 'Abdu'l-Bahá for approval. A few American Bahá'ís would accompany him.²

1. 'Abdu'l-Bahá to William James, Maude Lamson, George Kheiralla, and Thornton Chase, received in Chicago on 29 April 1898, in *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, vol. 2 (Chicago: Bahai Publishing Society, 1915): 346-47. The text in the book does not give names or the date of the tablet; this information comes from a typed copy of the tablet in TC. No translator is given; most likely it is Ibrahim Kheiralla.

2. Thornton Chase to John J. Abramson (copy), 13 April 1898, 8, TC.

By the time Kheiralla had finished two-thirds of the manuscript, a perfect opportunity to go to the Holy Land presented itself. Two very active American Bahá'ís, Lua and Edward Getsinger, traveled to California and taught the Bahá'í Faith to Phoebe Hearst, widow of Senator George Hearst and mother of William Randolph Hearst. Phoebe Hearst had already made plans to visit Egypt that fall, and she now wanted to add a visit to 'Abdu'l-Bahá to her itinerary. She also volunteered to pay the way of the Getsingers and the Kheirallas, should they agree to accompany her. Kheiralla jumped at the opportunity.³

He only had a few weeks before sailing East. He hurriedly finished the manuscript, then visited Chicago and Kenosha to make sure their Bahá'í communities would function during his absence. He gave a copy of his manuscript to Thornton Chase, apparently for editing. Then Kheiralla visited New York and Philadelphia, where he gave farewell addresses to the Bahá'ís. In New York he gave another copy of the manuscript to Howard MacNutt, who would also edit the text.⁴

Kheiralla invited Thornton Chase to accompany the historic first pilgrimage of Western Bahá'ís to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Chase yearned to go, but it was impossible for him to obtain the time off from his company. As he explained to Kheiralla, "I am heart broken to learn that you are going . . . and it is impossible for me to join you."⁵ His own pilgrimage would have to wait. However, he did write to 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

3. The details of Hearst's plans are given in Robert H. Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins, 1892-1900*, vol. 1 (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985), 138-39.

4. The details of Kheiralla's departure for 'Akká are given in Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins*, 140.

5. Thornton Chase to Ibrahim Kheiralla, 19 September 1898, quoted in Richard Hollinger, Foreword, in Thornton Chase, *In Galilee* (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1985), viii-ix.

To the Greatest Branch ['Abdu'l-Bahá!]

I beg from Almighty God, the Single One, for Knowledge, Faith and Love; and that He in His Great Mercy, will so reveal to me His acknowledgement and acceptance of me that I may be made strong for service for Him, and that His Will may be my only desire.

I desire greatly that I may be of service to GOD, the All-Powerful One My Creator; and I humbly beg for the privilege of teaching His Truth, and that I may be chosen as a means whereby many shall learn of Him and come to acceptance of Him.

I beg earnestly for the Power of Perception, that I may perceive the truth from the false, the real from the apparent.

For the Power of Logic, that I may reason correctly, and be able to detect and overthrow erroneous reasoning,

For the Power of Expression, that I may teach with such power and clearness that I may convince the hearts of the people, and that they may be led to desire and seek for the Truth and for the Real God.

I humbly beg that I may be given from Thy generosity, a tablet for myself to use in prayer for spiritual help and strength.

I also ask the favor of some little material token from Thy Hand, Oh Greatest Branch, my Master!

Accept me, I beg of Thee, as Thy humble and loving servant.⁶

Thornton Chase's devotion to his new religion and his desire to become one of its major teachers are clear in the letter. In striking contrast to later letters he wrote to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, this letter consists of a series of requests for qualities for himself. Thornton Chase's later letters reflect his greater familiarity with 'Abdu'l-Bahá and consist more of meditations on his own spiritual life.

On 19 September 1898 he mailed the letter to Kheiralla, probably with the letter of regret saying that he could not accompany him on pilgrimage. Kheiralla was to carry the former letter to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Three days later, on 22 September, the pilgrims left New

6. Thornton Chase to 'Abdu'l-Bahá (copy), 19 September 1898, TC.

York for the Holy Land. Among them were Ibrahim Kheiralla, Marion Kheiralla (his wife), Phoebe Hearst, Edward Getsinger, and Lua Getsinger.⁷

Kheiralla arrived in 'Akká 11 November 1898 and delivered to 'Abdu'l-Bahá the various letters he had been asked to carry to the Holy Land. 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote replies to them promptly. Thornton Chase's answer arrived in February 1899:

O thou who hast been attracted by the Magnet of the Kingdom!

Note that thy Lord hath manifested the Magnet of the souls and hearts in the Pole of the existing world, to which all the sacred hearts are attracted from the far distant lands and countries.

The iron body is attractable although at long distances away; but the earthen one is not although in contact and very close.

Therefore, thank thou God for being an attractable body, to be drawn to the Magnet of the Kingdom of God.⁸

The tablet was not a reply to Thornton Chase's letter as much as an acknowledgment of its receipt; it did not address any of his requests. Probably 'Abdu'l-Bahá had not had time to have the letter translated. Consequently 'Abdu'l-Bahá's tablet was one of praise and encouragement.

About the same time the tablet arrived, Thornton Chase received a letter from Lua Getsinger about her pilgrimage. She had been overwhelmed by the love and kindness showered on her by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and His family as well as by the dignity of their life despite the material simplicity of their surroundings and the severe restrictions on their movement. She offered the following description of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

7. The pilgrimage has been described in detail in Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins*, 136-57.

8. 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Thornton Chase, sent from 'Akká on 29 January 1899, translated by Anton Haddad, *Tablets of Abdul-Baha*, 2:328-29.

The Face of the Master—is gloriously beautiful—His eyes read one's very soul—still they are full of divine love—and fairly melt one's heart! His hair and beard are white, but soft and fine like silk. His features are finely chiseled and very classical—His forehead high and full—and His mouth supremely beautiful, while His hands are small and white like a woman's. Now I have tried to describe Him—but you see it is a feeble attempt, and I assure you it is inadequate in the extreme!⁹

Lua did not write to Thornton Chase about the trials that Kheiralla was experiencing in 'Akká. She and Edward Getsinger were receiving instruction daily from 'Abdu'l-Bahá and from leading Persian Bahá'í teachers in 'Akká, and often their talks contradicted the teachings that Kheiralla had given. The contradictions became clear not only to the Getsingers but also to the Persian Bahá'ís (who became extremely concerned), to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and to Kheiralla himself. The Persians tried to correct Kheiralla. Even 'Abdu'l-Bahá tried to reason with him and explain that some of his ideas were contradicted by the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, Whose words define Bahá'í teaching. But Kheiralla refused to reconsider his beliefs. Since most of his problematic beliefs were given as official Bahá'í teaching in his book, it was impossible for 'Abdu'l-Bahá to approve its publication. Thus Kheiralla failed to attain the primary goal of his pilgrimage.¹⁰

Kheiralla also realized that the Getsingers, upon their return to North America, would not remain silent about the contradictions between his teachings and Bahá'u'lláh's. As a result, Kheiralla made a momentous and disastrous decision: He chose to discredit the Getsingers. He hurried to make sure he reached New York first, arriving about 1 May 1899. There he praised 'Abdu'l-Bahá highly but privately warned the New York Bahá'ís not to listen to the Getsingers, who, he said, were not reliable sources of information

9. Lua Getsinger to Thornton Chase, 15 February 1899, TC.

10. This is a summary of Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins*, 149–55.

about the Bahá'í Faith. After two weeks he traveled to the Chicago Bahá'í community.

Shortly thereafter the Getsingers arrived in New York from 'Akká. Their presentation of the Bahá'í Faith was captivating and persuasive. When they were told of Kheiralla's warning they returned kindness for unkindness and praised Kheiralla highly. As a result, Kheiralla's attack backfired, and his own reputation was tarnished.¹¹

Kheiralla was furious, but he was in Chicago, not New York; hence there was nothing he could do. When Lua Getsinger came to Chicago in August to speak of her pilgrimage, Kheiralla apparently said nothing to her directly, but after she left he began to speak against her and spread rumors against the Getsingers. This, and a controversy over Kheiralla's role in the Chicago Bahá'í community, caused severe disunity among the Chicago Bahá'ís. As a result contributions to the Chicago Bahá'í fund began to fall precipitously after August 1899.¹²

No information about Thornton Chase's reaction to the controversy is available, but it seems likely that at first he felt loyalty to and affection for his teacher, then became increasingly disturbed by Kheiralla's behavior. Until 1898 Kheiralla had functioned as the head of the Bahá'í Faith in North America, and there had been no reason to question his role. No communications from 'Abdu'l-Bahá had been received, no one had visited 'Akká, and no one other than Kheiralla could speak about the Bahá'í Faith from personal experience. Thus Kheiralla was the undisputed leader of the American Bahá'ís, and the American Bahá'ís, though uncomfortable with his autocratic tendencies, had no grounds on which to question his leadership. But now Americans could write to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and were receiving letters from Him; Americans had met Him and could claim to have spoken to Him as much as had Kheiralla. Now there

11. Kheiralla's return to America and subsequent events are detailed in Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins*, 158-65.

12. Chicago contribution journal, 1897-1901, CHS.

was reason to question the reliability of Kheiralla's teachings. Kheiralla's overreaction to the erosion of his authority simply discredited him more. Edward Getsinger did not ignore Kheiralla's attacks, sometimes responding in an unkind or devious way as well; Lua Getsinger, however, did not speak against Kheiralla. Thornton Chase, like most other Chicago Bahá'ís, must have been extremely disturbed by his teacher's vindictiveness.

Brightening Thornton Chase's life, however, was a second tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Fearing that his first letter had not been understood, on 21 April 1899 Thornton Chase had written to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and had again requested a prayer for his personal use. He also thanked 'Abdu'l-Bahá for a bunch of violets and a rose that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had blessed and which Lua Getsinger had apparently mailed to him; it constituted the "little material token" he had requested. Thornton Chase also expressed the wish that "I may be permitted before long, to visit Thy Abode, and that I may see Thee with mine own eyes and receive the blessing of Thy Gracious Presence."¹³

However, 'Abdu'l-Bahá still intended to respond to Thornton Chase's first letter. Trouble with the Turkish authorities, the time it took for letters from Americans to be translated, and the crush of His correspondence—letters needing reply were flooding in from Iran as well as from the Occident—had caused His correspondence to be delayed. In October 1899, thirteen months after Thornton Chase first wrote to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, he received 'Abdu'l-Bahá's reply:

O thou whose heart has been filled with the love of the Beauty of God!

I have read thy kind letter and voiced thy words which show the excess of thy love to God, the greatness of thine adherence to the Cause of God and the abundance of thine attraction to the Kingdom of God. From a man like unto thee such words are always expected and it is your duty thus to proclaim.

13. Thornton Chase to 'Abdu'l-Bahá (copy), 19 September 1898, TC; Thornton Chase to 'Abdu'l-Bahá (copy), 21 April 1899, TC.

I do greet thee from this Exalted Place, while thou art in that far distant country, and present thee salutations and praise, and I see thee with the eye of the heart as though thou were present here and I speak to thee by the tongue of the Spirit, saying "Blessed thou art with every blessing! Then preach to the beloved of God in that country the glad tidings of El-Baha."¹⁴

'Abdu'l-Bahá began His reply by singling out Thornton Chase's love for God. His reply seems quite concrete when compared to the tablets He wrote to some other Americans. He singled out Thornton Chase's great faith and stated matter-of-factly an expectation that Thornton Chase's actions live up to his words. The statement "I see thee with the eye of the heart" must have particularly struck Thornton Chase, for by it 'Abdu'l-Bahá claimed to perceive his spiritual capacities. The encouragement in the closing paragraph to teach the Bahá'í Faith was an exhortation 'Abdu'l-Bahá' commonly made to Americans.

The tablet closed with a prayer that 'Abdu'l-Bahá revealed for Thornton Chase in answer to his earlier request:

O God, my God! Thou art my Hope and my Beloved, my highest Aim and Desire! With great humbleness and entire devotion I pray to Thee to make me a minaret of Thy love in Thy land, a lamp of Thy knowledge among Thy creatures, and a banner of divine bounty in Thy dominion.

Number me with such of Thy servants as have detached themselves from everything but Thee, have sanctified themselves from the transitory things of this world, and have freed themselves from the promptings of the voicers of idle fancies.

Let my heart be dilated with joy through the spirit of confirmation from Thy kingdom, and brighten my eyes by beholding the hosts of

14. 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Thornton Chase, sent from 'Akká in October 1899, translated from Arabic by Anton Haddad, in *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Baha Abbas*, 2:329.

divine assistance descending successively upon me from the kingdom of Thine omnipotent glory.

Thou art, in truth, the Almighty, the All-Glorious, the All-Powerful.¹⁵

Presumably 'Abdu'l-Bahá revealed a prayer that He believed matched Thornton Chase's potential. The opening paragraph begins with a declaration of one's devotion to God. Then one asks to be a source of two qualities—love and knowledge—and to be a symbol or representation of a third—divine bounty. With his dedication to the quality of love and his considerable knowledge of religion and spirituality, Thornton Chase certainly had great potential to develop and express the first two qualities. To be a representative of divine bounty presumably means to give unto others divine qualities such as love, wisdom, and patience, and with a nearly divine generosity. Development of the ability to love and to teach others presupposes the development of this trait as well. It seems reasonable to assume that 'Abdu'l-Bahá singled out these three qualities because He saw them especially manifest in Thornton Chase.

The second paragraph asks for the quality of detachment: from materialism, from erroneous ideas and beliefs, indeed, from everything except God. Acquisition of such detachment would result in a purity and steadfastness of faith, a quality for which 'Abdu'l-Bahá later singled out Thornton Chase.

The third paragraph asks for the joy that follows from a sense of confirmation and for divine assistance to accomplish the tasks that become possible when one has faith. Bahá'í prayers almost always close with a list of divine attributes; this prayer singles out God's might, power, and glory—attributes that one might call upon in particular when requesting assistance.

15. *Bahá'í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), 57–58. The text given is the current authorized translation. For the translation that Thornton Chase had, see *Tablets of Abdul-Baba Abbas*, 2:329–30.

Considering that Thornton Chase requested the prayer twice before it was received, it is very likely that he would have memorized it and recited it daily. It would have focused his attention on crucial areas of his spiritual development and strengthened him for the tests that lay ahead.

A major task in which Thornton Chase was soon called to participate was the reorganization of the Chicago Bahá'í community. On 19 November 1899 thirty-two Bahá'í men met and appointed a committee of five to make recommendations about reorganization. Thornton Chase was designated chairman of the committee. Five days later the committee issued a report—typed on Thornton Chase's typewriter—recommending that the Chicago Bahá'ís elect a president, three vice-presidents, a recording secretary, a financial secretary, a corresponding secretary, a treasurer, and a historian—nine officers in all. (There is no evidence, however, that the nine were to function together as a body.) The committee also recommended that the community write to 'Abdu'l-Bahá to request permission to become legally incorporated as the "Society of Behaists."¹⁶

Subsequently a simple set of by-laws was drafted, apparently by Dr. Chester Thacher, a prominent Chicago Bahá'í. On 1 December 1899 the Chicago Bahá'ís chose Thacher as their president. Thornton Chase was made the historian, a post he had probably proposed and sought. His interest in preserving the history of the American Bahá'í community, later so strong, was thus manifested at quite an early date. Notably absent among those chosen as officers were Ibrahim Kheiralla and most of his supporters. Fannie Lesch, a Chicago Bahá'í, later wrote that Kheiralla himself had "arranged" for Thacher to become president and had then moved to the south side of Chicago, where he severed himself from the Bahá'ís of the west side, who were spearheading the reorganization.¹⁷

16. Recommendations of the committee of five, 24 November 1899, Albert Windust Papers, National Bahá'í Archives.

17. Untitled by-laws of the Chicago Bahá'í community, MS, on "Thacher Magnetic Shield Co." stationery, Windust Papers; minutes of business meeting of

To his surprise Thornton Chase received another tablet 'Abdu'l-Bahá in December 1899. It had been hand-carried to America by Anton Haddad, who had gone to visit 'Abdu'l-Bahá to report on Kheiralla's behavior. The tablet is not a response to Thornton Chase's letter of April 1899, so one wonders what prompted it. Perhaps it constitutes a kind of acknowledgment that Thornton Chase's letter had been received, although it is not mentioned at all in the tablet. Perhaps Haddad had spoken highly of Thornton Chase's qualities to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, thereby prompting the tablet. Perhaps 'Abdu'l-Bahá, knowing the severe tests immediately facing the American Bahá'ís, was writing Thornton Chase to strengthen him.

The tablet is very short and contains no words of encouragement. Rather, it seems to speak to the mystical experience of love that Thornton Chase had experienced and exhorts him to spread the "fragrances of God" to others:

O thou who art turned to the Kingdom!

In truth, I say unto thee that if a spark of the fire of the Kingdom of God should fall into a heart, its flame will increase gradually, until the breeze blows upon it, until the sparks of the flame reach the Kingdom, providing the necessary preparations are made to kindle the fire in thy heart, to shed the tears from thine eyes and to bring patience to an end for the purpose of being drawn into the Kingdom of El-ABHA.

In truth, I say unto thee, if thou hear this call, do not relax in mentioning God, nor grow weary of spreading the fragrances of God. Then rejoice at the good news of the gifts which shall shine as a light in the highest culmination of America.¹⁸

the Chicago Bahá'í community, 1 December 1899, Windust Papers; "In Reply to I. Thatcher [sic], Chicago, Illinois. Notes by Mrs. Fannie G. Lesch," TS, Windust Papers.

18. 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Thornton Chase, brought from 'Akká by Anton Haddad, December 1899, translated by Anton Haddad, in *Tablets of 'Abdul-Baha Abbas*

Haddad also brought a message from 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Kheiralla. The message indicated that Kheiralla could not be the head of the Bahá'í Faith in America, because the religion has no clergy. Kheiralla had hoped that 'Abdu'l-Bahá would appoint him to some sort of position, thereby preserving his authority over the American Bahá'ís. As this was not possible within the framework of Bahá'u'lláh's writings, Kheiralla's hopes were now dashed. He began to speak out against 'Abdu'l-Bahá, expressing doubts about His station, but only mildly, in order to see how many American Bahá'ís would respond and show loyalty to him instead of to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. His action created more confusion in the community; Kheiralla did obtain some support, and that encouraged him to widen the rift between himself and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The American Bahá'ís began to draw into two camps, those loyal to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and those loyal to Kheiralla.¹⁹

Tensions in Chicago were sharpened when the Getsingers visited on 11 February 1900. Haddad had received considerable advice from 'Abdu'l-Bahá about the role of personalities in the Bahá'í Faith, and apparently the Getsingers took up the task to disseminate the information to the believers. Included in Haddad's notes from his pilgrimage, published in January 1900, were such statements of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as "the guides and teachers . . . must eliminate from their minds the word 'Ego' or 'I,' and be servants of all, faithful and honest shepherds."²⁰ The statement seemed to be an implied criticism of Kheiralla's egotism and was taken by him as such.

The Getsingers may also have told the Chicago Bahá'ís about Bahá'u'lláh's teachings on the organization of Bahá'í communities, which the pilgrims would have learned about while in 'Akká. Bahá'u'lláh had forbidden the establishment of a clergy in the Bahá'í Faith but had commanded that every Bahá'í community establish a

19. Kheiralla's gradual distancing from 'Abdu'l-Bahá is described in Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins*, 167.

20. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in Anton Haddad, *A Message from Acca* (New York: [Bahá'í] Board of Counsel, n.d.), 4.

House of Justice, which should consist of at least nine members. The House of Justice would have collective authority over all Bahá'í activities in a locality, while its individual members would have personal authority. Either 'Abdu'l-Bahá, or the Getsingers, or Haddad had coined the term *Board of Council* to refer to the Houses of Justice as they were to be constituted in North America.²¹

Thornton Chase and probably Chester Thacher took the lead in organizing a Chicago Board of Council for the Bahá'ís who remained loyal to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. When the board was elected around 16 March 1900 neither Kheiralla nor any of his followers were among its ten members. Elected were Arthur Agnew, Charles Greenleaf, George Lesch, and Chester Thacher, as well as Thornton Chase himself. Agnew and Greenleaf were close friends of Thornton Chase. Most of the ten remained active leaders in the Chicago Bahá'í community for the next decade. Presumably the gathering of Chicago Bahá'ís who elected the board was small; only thirty people contributed money to the Chicago Bahá'í fund that month. Kheiralla responded by organizing a "House of Justice" of his own followers a few weeks later.²²

A split had occurred, but there was no reason for it to be permanent. Both sides hoped for reconciliation. As Thornton Chase wrote to P. M. Blake:

I believe that "God wants Dr. K's soul" and that it is necessary to unite with him in all things that are good and to be kind and loving in our dealings with him, in order that possibly when he begins to awake from his delusion, he will know who are his true friends, and not fe

21. See Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, trans. Bahá'í World Centre (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1993), 29. A more detailed discussion of the establishment of Bahá'í governing bodies can be found in Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins*, 169–70.

22. Thornton Chase to P. M. Blake (copy), 21 March 1900, TC; Chicago contribution journal, 1897–1901, CHS; Thornton Chase to P. M. Blake (copy), 2 April 1900, TC.

utterly alone. Further, it seems necessary in order that he may awaken, possibly through being attracted by the unselfish love and kindness of those who cannot agree with him in his doubts.²³

Aware of the agitation Kheiralla was creating among the American Bahá'ís, 'Abdu'l-Bahá sent an emissary to America—the man who had taught Kheiralla the Bahá'í Faith—to talk to him and attempt to bring him back into the fold. 'Abdu'l-Karím-i-Ṭíhrání arrived in New York from Cairo about 26 April 1900. He and Kheiralla immediately began to talk, and after two weeks the discussions bore fruit. A public meeting was organized in New York at which Kheiralla declared that his doubts had been dispelled and that he was ready to declare his loyalty to 'Abdu'l-Bahá.²⁴

The next day 'Abdu'l-Karím issued a circular letter to all American Bahá'ís announcing Kheiralla's recantation. It caused Kheiralla to lose face with his followers, especially those in Chicago who had separated from the Bahá'ís loyal to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and had organized a community of their own. They complained to Kheiralla about his action, and as a result Kheiralla refused to put his pledge of loyalty in writing. He then returned to Chicago. 'Abdu'l-Karím desired to follow him but had no money; Thornton Chase, Thacher, Agnew, and P. M. Blake contributed the money to pay for the train tickets of 'Abdu'l-Karím and his two translators. They came to Chicago and resumed negotiations with Kheiralla, but the effort proved fruitless. Kheiralla refused to pledge his loyalty to 'Abdu'l-Bahá.²⁵

23. Thornton Chase to P. M. Blake (copy), 15 April 1900, TC.

24. 'Abdu'l-Karím's negotiations with Kheiralla are summarized in Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins*, 173–74, and in Richard Hollinger, "Ibrahim George Kheiralla and the Bahá'í Faith in America," in Juan R. Cole and Moojan Momen, eds., *Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History*, vol. 2: *From Iran East and West* (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1984), 118.

25. The crisis in the Chicago Bahá'í community and Kheiralla's subsequent return to that city are detailed in Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins*, 174–77.

As a result by early June 1900 Kheiralla could no longer be considered a Bahá'í in good standing. Rather, he was a violator of Bahá'u'lláh's covenant—that is, Bahá'u'lláh's command to the Bahá'ís that, after his death, they turn to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. 'Abdu'l-Karím spent much of his time in America telling the Bahá'ís about Bahá'u'lláh's covenant to make it clear to them that claiming to be a follower of Bahá'u'lláh also entails loyalty to 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Although at first Kheiralla had several hundred followers in Chicago and Kenosha, within a few years the number dwindled to a few dozen. Kheiralla was also singularly unsuccessful in converting new people to his group. He never rejoined the American Bahá'í community, and his own group of Behaists steadily declined. Kheiralla eventually died, impoverished, in 1929.²⁶

Thornton Chase had hoped that his teacher would realize the folly of his ways and must have been greatly disappointed when he did not. But Thornton Chase did not dwell on Kheiralla's errors, for few references to Kheiralla can be found in his letters. Rather, Thornton Chase devoted his effort to reorganizing the Chicago Bahá'í community, for few Chicago Bahá'ís had remained openly loyal to 'Abdu'l-Bahá; most of the seven hundred members had become confused and inactive. Thornton Chase sought to acquire the true Bahá'í teachings, for now tablets from 'Abdu'l-Bahá were being received and a few writings of Bahá'u'lláh were being brought to America and translated into English. The era when Kheiralla's lessons were the Bahá'í teachings had come to an end, and the days when the Bible was the American Bahá'í scripture were numbered.

'Abdu'l-Karím had not explained the Bahá'í teachings to the Americans very well—his own grasp of them was limited and dominated by his Muslim background—but he had brought with him many tablets from 'Abdu'l-Bahá for the Americans. To Thornton Chase's delight, among them was a fourth tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá,

26. Kheiralla's life after leaving the Bahá'í community is described in Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins*, 177–84.

a response to his second letter. It consisted of another prayer for him to say daily:

My God! My God!

I am a servant, miserable, humbled, submissive and low at the door of Thy Oneness, supplicating Thee with a heart full of Thy love and a face rejoiced at Thy glad-tidings!

O God! Make me of those who are drawn unto light and [who] detest darkness; with a heart overflowing with the lights of Thy love among mankind; a tongue fluent in mentioning Thee in the assemblies of worship (remembrance); a breast, cheered and widened with Thy knowledge when uttering explanations; an eye consoled with seeing Thy traces in all directions; a foot firm in Thy Covenant, which I have received from the traces of the Supreme Pen; a spreader of mysteries to those who are heedless of them, who have veiled themselves with doubts and suspicions.

Verily Thou art the Almighty, the Powerful, the Generous!²⁷

Like the previous prayer, this one mentions devotion to and love of God, and calls for the diffusion of love and knowledge to others. It also stresses firmness in the covenant, a quality particularly important at the time Thornton Chase received the prayer. The prayer helped Thornton Chase to prepare for the tests that lay ahead, because the recovery of the Chicago Bahá'í community would not be easy, and Thornton Chase would take on much of the responsibility for its reestablishment himself.

27. 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Thornton Chase, received through 'Abdu'l-Karím-i-Tihrání in Chicago, June 1900, translated by Anton Haddad, *Tablets of Abdul-Baba Abbas*, 2:330-31.



Sarah Thornton Chase (1820-47),
Thornton Chase's Mother



Jotham Gould Chase (1816-84),
Thornton Chase's Father



Annie Allyn Chase (1848-1918),
Thornton Chase's First Wife, 1863



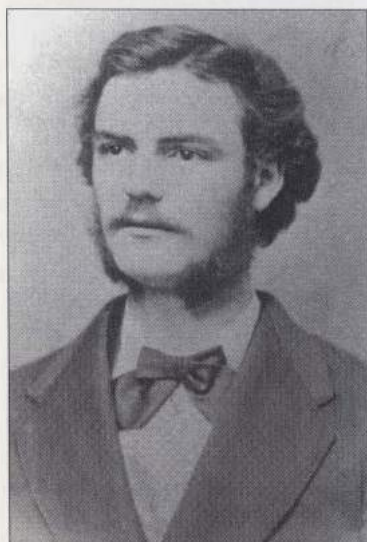
Sarah Chase Lawton (1871-1908),
Thornton Chase's Elder Daughter, and
Her Son Edward



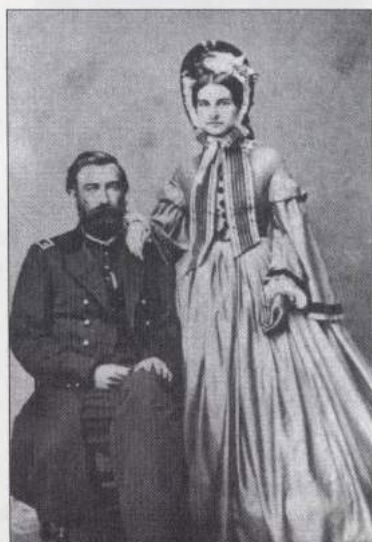
Jessamine Allyn Chase (1874-1947),
Thornton Chase's Younger Daughter



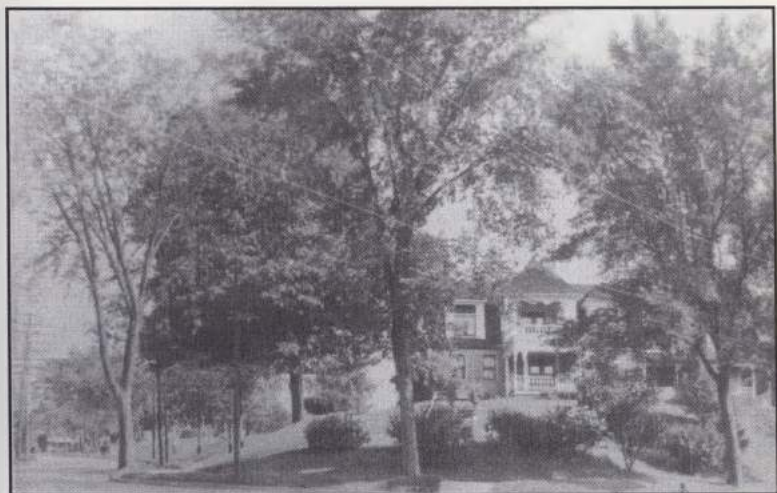
Thornton Chase, ca. 1863,
about Age 16



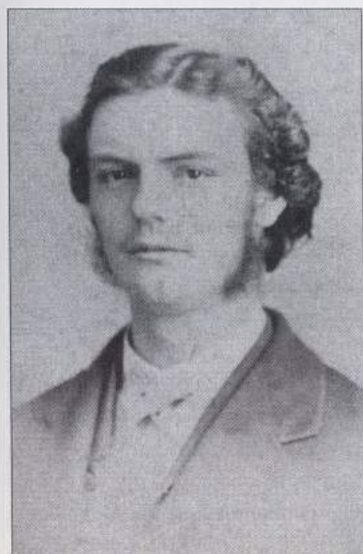
Thornton Chase, 1869,
Age 22



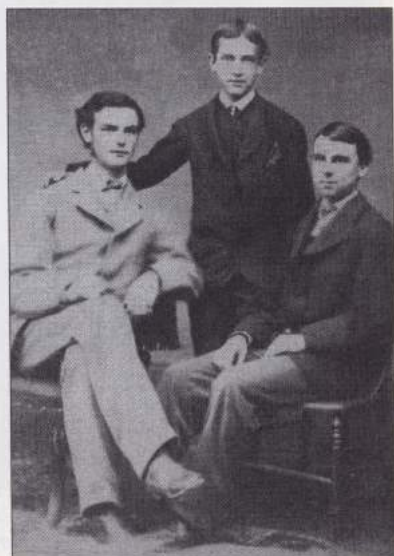
Julia Stillwell,
Thornton Chase's Maternal Aunt



Residence of Jotham and Cornelia Chase
Blake's Hill, Springfield, Massachusetts



Thornton Chase in Vermont,
Age 21



Thornton Chase (*left*) at
Brown University, 1866-67



Camping under the Redwoods
near Santa Cruz, California, 1889-93



Eleanor Hockett Pervier Chase (1858-
1933), Thornton Chase's Second Wife

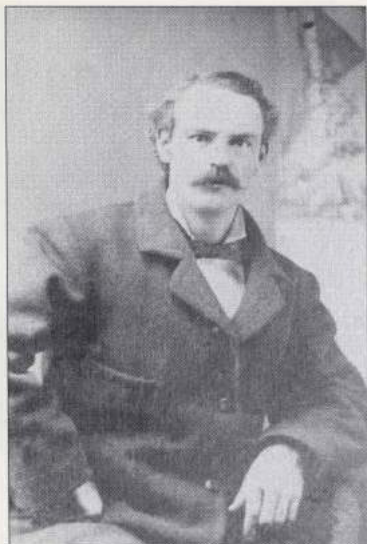
Thornton Chase as an Officer in the
Union Army, 1865, Age 18



Thornton Chase (*lower left*) and Eleanor Chase (*middle*) Posed
with a Stuffed Bear and the Maxwell Brothers of New York, 1884

Thornton Chase
in his room

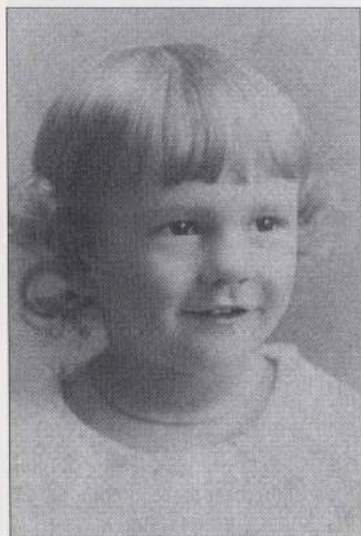
William Jackson (1885-1887)
Thornton Chase's room, ca. 1884



Thornton Chase
in His Thirties



Thornton Chase
in His Fifties



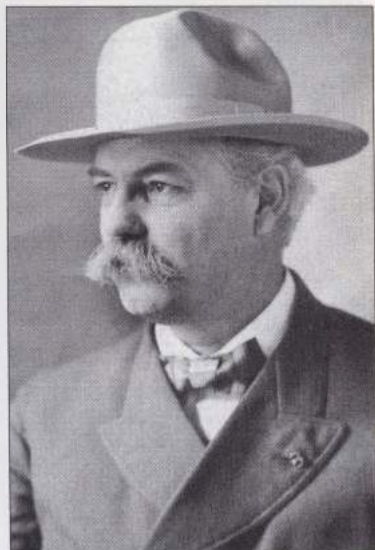
William Jotham Chase (1889–1967)
Thornton Chase's Son, ca. Age 3



Thornton Chase
in His Forties



William Jotham Thornton Chase,
ca. 1912



Thornton Chase



Thornton Chase in San Francisco,
ca. 1890



Thornton Chase, Age 39,
1886



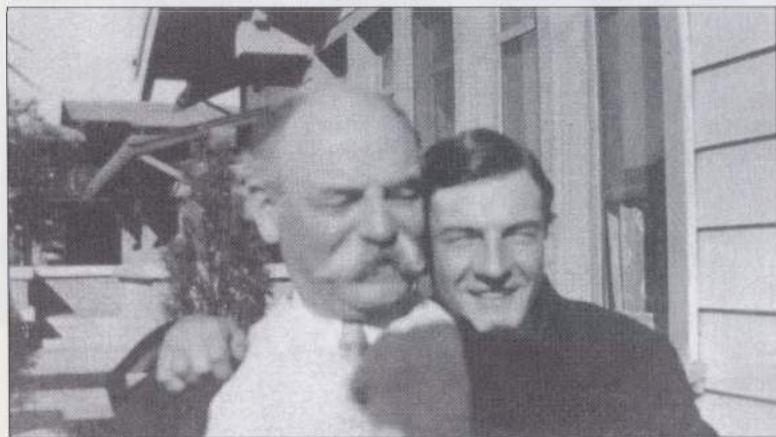
Thornton Chase with a Tuna He Caught Near Small Point, Maine.
Two separate photos were combined during the development process
to produce this "Fish Story."

Opposite: Thornton Chase
in Actor's Garb





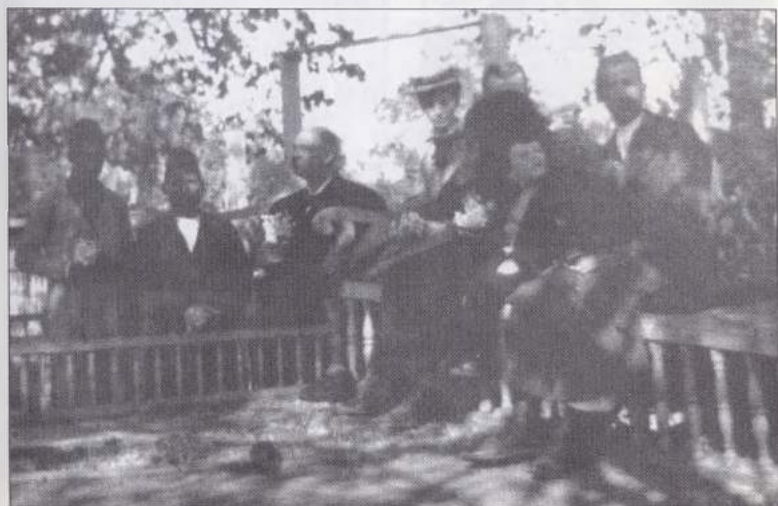
Thornton and Eleanor Chase
in Los Angeles, ca. 1909-12



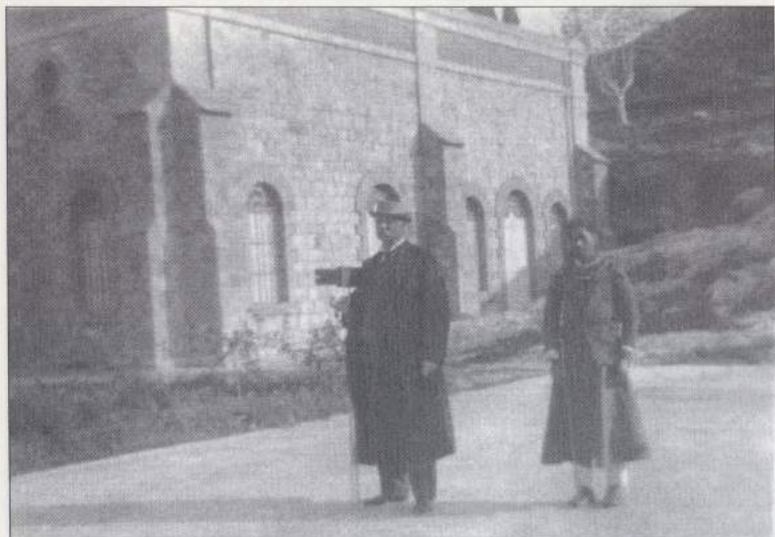
Thornton Chase with His Son,
William Jotham Thornton Chase, in Los Angeles



Thornton Chase
Climbing Mt. Carmel, 1907



Thornton Chase (*third from left*)
in 'Akká, 1907



Thornton Chase
at the Shrine of the Báb, 1907



Eleanor Chase
1929



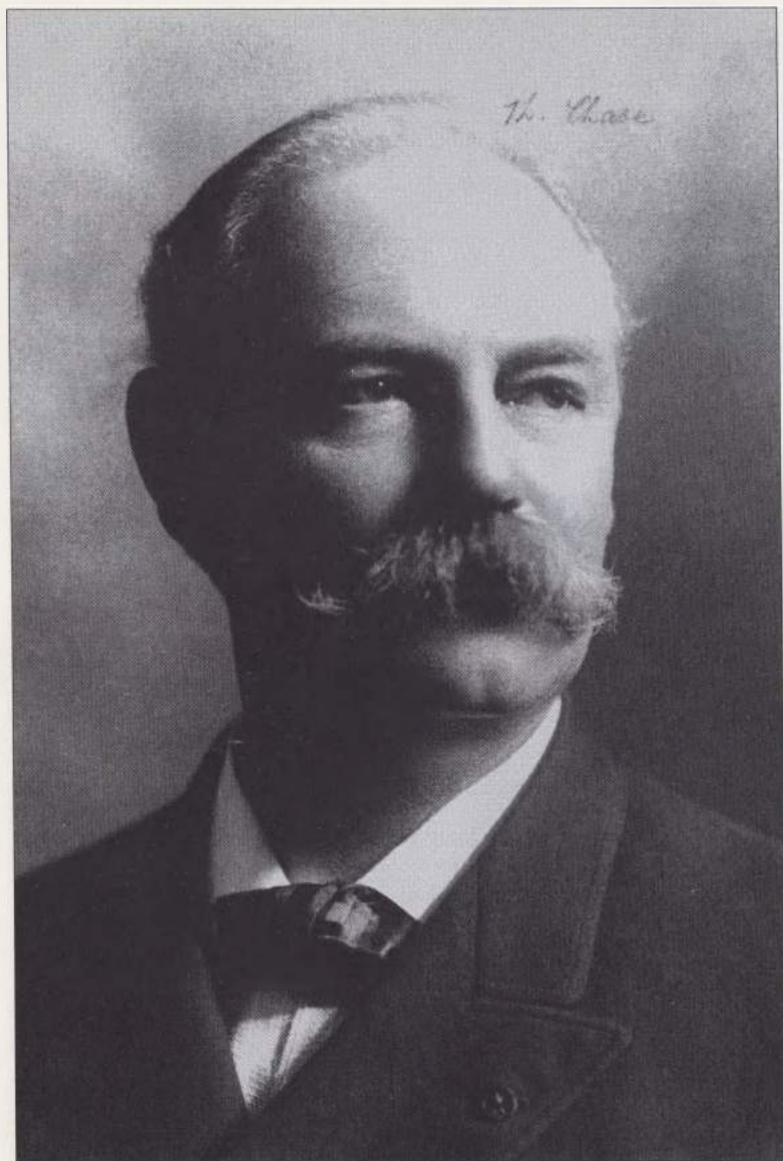
Thornton Chase (*right*) Visiting a House in
Haifa with (*left to right*) Mírzá Asadu'lláh,
Mírzá Mohsin, and Carl Scheffler



Thornton Chase
Playing Chess with Himself in a Photo He Created



Thornton Chase's House on Harvard Avenue, Los Angeles
1909-12



Thornton Chase,
The First American Bahá'í

CHAPTER 14

Leadership

'Abdu'l-Karím-i-Ṭíhrání remained in the United States for only three and a half months. After the negotiations with Ibrahim Kheiralla failed and Kheiralla left the Bahá'í community, 'Abdu'l-Karím stayed to explain the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh to the American Bahá'ís; but because of his own poor understanding of Bahá'u'lláh's writings or his inability to grasp the American situation, 'Abdu'l-Karím was able to teach the American Bahá'ís relatively little about their new religion. His talks stressed Bahá'u'lláh's statements about 'Abdu'l-Bahá's authority and high spiritual station and stressed the Bahá'í concept of covenant, but 'Abdu'l-Karím spoke very little about other Bahá'í teachings. When he sailed for Egypt in early August he left an American Bahá'í community that was ignorant of the basic teachings of the Bahá'í Faith and confused about which teachings of Kheiralla's were true.¹

'Abdu'l-Karím's one innovation was the reorganization—again—of the Chicago Bahá'í community. Although the Bahá'ís had elected a ten-member Board of Council of men in March 1900, he encouraged them to replace it with a nineteen-member board of

1. *Abdel Karim Effendi Teberani, Addresses By Abdel Karim Effendi Teberani: Delivered before the New York and Chicago Assemblies*, trans. Anton Haddad (Chicago: Behais Supply and Publishing Board, 1900). Detail is available in Robert Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Early Expansion, 1900–1912*, vol. 2 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1995), 17–29.

men and women. The larger body was selected in May or June 1900.²

The following six months were a time of quiet rebuilding. There is no evidence that the Chicago Bahá'í Board of Council met or functioned in some way during the summer and fall of 1900. Presumably meetings continued in Chicago, where the Bahá'ís read the Bible and the very few Bahá'í scriptures that were then available in English. A book of Bahá'u'lláh's mystical and spiritual utterances, *The Hidden Words*, had been brought to America by the first pilgrims and was published in an English translation in March 1900. Bahá'u'lláh's *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, or Most Holy Book, had also been translated into English and circulated among a few Bahá'ís in typescript. Browne's translations could be read as well, and a few tablets by 'Abdu'l-Bahá were available. The Bahá'ís read and clung to them.

'Abdu'l-Bahá was aware of the American Bahá'í community's need for assistance and soon sent them another, more capable teacher. Mírzá Asadu'lláh arrived in New York on 4 November 1900 with three companions: Hájí Hasan-i-Khurásání, Mírzá Husayn Rúhí, and Mírzá Buzurg. The last two were young Persian Bahá'ís who had learned some English in Egypt and served as translators. After giving talks to the New York Bahá'í community for three weeks, they left for Chicago, arriving there on Thanksgiving Day, 29 November 1900. The Chicago Bahá'ís were renting a building as a headquarters and gave the Persians accommodations there.³

2. The nineteen-member board can be reconstructed from two documents. Its number of members is given in 'Abdu'l-Karím-i-Tíhrání, "Regulations relating to the Chicago Board of Council," Windust Papers, National Bahá'í Archives. The fact that its members included women as well as men is stated in "In Re: Dr. C. I. Thatcher [sic], Chicago, Illinois. Notes by Mrs. Fannie G. Lesch," TS, 2, Windust Papers.

3. The arrival and early travels of the Persians are described in Thornton Chase, "A Brief History of the American Development of the Bahai Movement," *Star of the West* 5.17 (19 January 1915): 263. The work accomplished by the Persians is summarized in Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Early Expansion*, chapters 3-4.

To assist the Persians, Thornton Chase moved into the building and lived with them. This was possible because his wife and son had temporarily moved to Springfield, Massachusetts. Why they moved is uncertain; in a letter, Thornton Chase, deploring his separation from his family, said it had to do with "property and other conditions" from which he and his wife were trying to "escape."⁴ About 1895 Thornton Chase's stepmother, Cornelia, gave partial ownership of the "Chase villa" to him and Eleanor. In 1895 or 1896 Cornelia moved to Hartford, Connecticut, where she lived the rest of her life in her childhood home. About 1897 Eleanor and her son began living in Springfield, probably to guarantee that their claim to the property would be recognized. They remained there until 1902 or 1903, sometime after Cornelia died. Eleanor returned to Springfield in 1904, then moved back to Chicago permanently.⁵ Thornton

4. Thornton Chase to Isabella Brittingham (copy), 14 June 1902, 5, TC.

5. The complexities of the ownership of the "Chase villa" are outlined in Thornton Chase to Jonathan Barnes (copy), 6 December 1904, TC. Barnes was a Springfield lawyer. Cornelia Savage Chase apparently refers to the "Chase villa" in her will as the house "of the said Mrs. J. B. T. Chase"; the will was drawn up on 1 March 1895 (Connecticut State Library, Hartford, Conn.). Springfield city directories list Cornelia as residing at "Belmont Ave junc Fort Pleasant Ave." through 1895; see, for example, Price and Lee Co., comp., *Springfield Directory Including Chicopee and West Springfield. 1895. Containing a General Directory of the Citizens, Classified Business Directory, Street Directory, Map, A Record of the City Government, Churches, Societies, Etc.* (Springfield: Price and Lee, 1895), 85. The 1896 directory says she "rem[oved] to Hartford" (Price and Lee Co., comp., *Springfield Directory, Including Chicopee and West Springfield. 1896. Containing a General Directory of the Citizens, Classified Business Directory, Street Directory, Map, A Record of the City Government, Churches, Societies, Etc.* [Springfield: Price and Lee Co., 1896], 95, 96). The 1895 directory lists "Chase, Thornton, Mrs." at the same address as Cornelia Chase. Her address remains the same through 1902; the 1903 directory says she "rem[oved] West" (Price and Lee Co., comp., *Springfield Directory, Including Chicopee and West Springfield. 1902. Containing a General Directory of the Citizens, Classified Business Directory, Street Directory, Map, A Record of the City Government, Churches, Societies, Etc.* [Springfield: Price and Lee Co., 1902], 109; *Springfield Directory, Including Chicopee and West Springfield. 1903. Containing a General Directory of the Citizens, Classified Business Directory, Street Directory, Map, A Record of the City Government,*

Chase could not move to Springfield because he would have had to quit his job; he remained in Chicago.

Living in the same house as Mírzá Asadu'lláh, Thornton Chase quickly got to know him quite well despite the language barrier. Mírzá Asadu'lláh (1826–1930), one of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's trusted lieutenants, had been assigned the difficult task of bringing the remains of the Báb from Iran to the Holy Land for interment.⁶

Asadu'lláh understood the Bahá'í Faith well and began to explain it in weekly talks. In Thornton Chase he found an attentive and quick pupil. Because the Americans were especially interested in the Bible, Asadu'lláh focused his talks on interpretation of Genesis and biblical prophecy. He filled his lectures with quotations from Bahá'u'lláh, especially from the Kitáb-i-Íqán, Bahá'u'lláh's principal work on biblical interpretation. Asadu'lláh also told the Chicago Bahá'ís about Bahá'u'lláh's religious laws: daily obligatory prayer; the

Churches, Societies, Etc. [Springfield: Price and Lee Co., 1903], 111.) Cornelia Savage Chase died on 10 December 1901 (death certificate of Cornelia Savage Chase, Hartford, Conn., City Clerk's Office, copy in author's personal papers.) In Thornton Chase to Isabella Brittingham (copy), 14 June 1902, TC, Thornton Chase says that Eleanor is still in the east, where she was tied up by property matters. The 1904 Springfield City Directory shows that Eleanor was boarding in Springfield (Price and Lee Co., comp., *Springfield Directory, Including Chicopee and West Springfield. 1904. Containing a General Directory of the Citizens, Classified Business Directory, Street Directory, Map, A Record of the City Government, Churches, Societies, Etc.* [Springfield: Price and Lee Co., 1904], 113). Possibly she was there to arrange the sale of the "Chase villa." Thornton Chase to Eleanor Chase (copy), 12 March 1904, 2, TC, indicates that William Jotham Thornton Chase was going to school in Springfield. The 1905 city directory lists her as "rem[oved] West" again (Price and Lee Co., comp., *Springfield Directory, Including Chicopee and West Springfield. 1905. Containing a General Directory of the Citizens, Classified Business Directory, Street Directory, Map, A Record of the City Government, Churches, Societies, Etc.* [Springfield: Price and Lee Co., 1905], 117). The son began attending Morgan Park Academy, Chicago, in the fall of 1904.

6. Asadu'lláh's birth and death dates are given in Mirza Assad Ullah Fareed, *My Will and Bequest* (A Spiritual Will), translated by Dr. Ameen U. Fareed (Santa Monica: Ameen Fareed, 1953), preface.

Bahá'í month of fasting (2–20 March) during which time one abstains from eating and drinking from sunrise to sunset; and the laws of Bahá'í marriage and divorce. As a result Thornton Chase and other Chicago Bahá'ís began to observe Bahá'u'lláh's laws. Under Asadu'lláh's guidance Bahá'í holy days began to be celebrated in North America for the first time.⁷ He did not offer the Chicago Bahá'ís much information about the Bahá'í social reform teachings, however, because he understood them little and did not recognize their importance. As a result of Asadu'lláh's teaching, a friend of Thornton Chase was able to say in March 1901, four months after Asadu'lláh's arrival, that

we are beginning to understand what in reality was taught by the Manifestation [Bahá'u'lláh] and explained to us by Abdel Baha; these [lectures by Asadu'lláh] are being printed from time to time . . . you, no doubt, will find them as we have found them, so powerful, so direct, so simple, that there will be no question as to what we will teach.⁸

Asadu'lláh also sought to reorganize the Chicago Bahá'í community, for 'Abdu'l-Bahá had written him about the subject. Apparently the Board of Council had met little and done little, probably because it was unsure what its duties and responsibilities were. Asadu'lláh explained the purposes of a Bahá'í governing body to the Chicagoans and provided them with translations of tablets that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had written to the Tehran Bahá'í governing body. Thornton Chase drew up an election call and a document explaining how the election

7. Asadu'lláh's teachings were published as two works: Mirza Assad'Ullah, *Instructions Concerning Genesis and the Mystery of Baptism*, trans. Mirza Alla Khuli Khan [Ali Kuli Khan] (Chicago: Bahais Supply and Publishing Board, 1901), and Mirza Assad'Ullah, *Explanations Concerning Sacred Mysteries* (Chicago: Bahais Supply and Publishing Board, 1902). The works are summarized in Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Early Expansion*, chapters 4–5.

8. Arthur Agnew to Andrew J. Nelson of the Racine Bahá'í community, 13 March 1901, Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Racine, Wis., Records, National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, Ill.

would take place. On 15 May 1901 the Chicago Bahá'ís chose nine men to serve on their governing body; among them were Arthur Agnew, Thornton Chase, Charles Greenleaf, and George Lesch. Notably absent was Chester Thacher.⁹ Women were excluded from election to the body, apparently because of Asadu'lláh's interpretation of certain statements of Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas about Houses of Justice.

A few days later those elected met and made several important decisions. They decided that the body should go by the title given to it by Bahá'u'lláh: the House of Justice. They elected officers: Charles Greenleaf became chairman and George Lesch secretary. Lesch remained secretary until 1910, but Greenleaf soon began to miss meetings; Thornton Chase was generally made temporary chairman in his stead.¹⁰

The House of Justice also decided to increase its membership to twelve. Over the summer it increased its membership further to fifteen or sixteen. A Women's Auxiliary Board was established on 23 May 1901. In September a tablet of praise addressed to the Chicago Bahá'í House of Justice arrived, and the Bahá'ís celebrated 'Abdu'l-Bahá's recognition of the establishment of their governing body.¹¹

In late September 1901 another Persian Bahá'í teacher, Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, arrived in Chicago. He remained in the city for three months until December, giving regular talks on Bahá'í topics. Abu'l-Faḍl was the Bahá'í Faith's most profound scholar, having been a

9. Minutes of the Chicago House of Justice, 24 May 1901, CHS. The election, the nature of the Chicago Bahá'í House of Justice, and its first few months' activities are described in detail in Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Early Expansion*, chapter 4.

10. Minutes of the Chicago House of Justice, 24 May 1901, 28 May 1901, CHS.

11. Minutes of the Chicago House of Justice, 20 May 1901, 6 August 1901, 13 August 1901, 10 September 1901, 26 January 1902, CHS; 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Chicago House of Justice, received in Chicago on 1 September 1901, translated by Ali Kuli Khan, in *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Bahai Publishing Society, 1909), 1.

professor at Al-Azhar University in Cairo until his Bahá'í membership had been exposed. After he had been expelled from the institution, he was asked by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to travel to Europe and the United States. He immediately set to work writing an introductory book on the Bahá'í Faith, which, when published in 1902, provided the American Bahá'ís with thorough and accurate information on the history and teachings of their religion for the first time. Thornton Chase came to know Abu'l-Faḍl fairly well, corresponded with him after he returned to Egypt, and wrote a beautiful farewell letter to him when he sailed home in December 1904.¹²

The year 1901 was one of slow and quiet consolidation in the Chicago Bahá'í community. Great differences existed among the Bahá'ís because they understood relatively little of the Bahá'í teachings; hence their respective understandings of religion tended to reflect their pre-Bahá'í interests. However, the differences did not create disunity until 1902. At the House of Justice's first meeting in January 1902 five members tendered their resignations; apparently they had become tired of the burden of work and responsibility that resulted from being a member of the House of Justice. Three of the members were convinced to remain, but two were dropped, and three new members were added.¹³

Later that month the House of Justice met with the Women's Assembly of Teaching, as the Auxiliary Board had been renamed, and the objectives of the two bodies came into conflict. The Assembly of Teaching wanted Bahá'í meetings moved away from

12. Abu'l-Faḍl's arrival in Chicago is mentioned in the minutes of the House of Justice, 24 September 1901, CHS; he is last mentioned in the minutes of 15 December 1901. Abu'l-Faḍl's book is *Bahá'í Proofs* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983). It is summarized in Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Early Expansion*, 81–86. His departure date is given in Edward G. Browne, comp., *Materials for the Study of the Bábí Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918), 153. The farewell letter written by Thornton Chase was House of Spirituality to Mirza Abu'l-Faḍl (copy), 29 October 1904, TC.

13. Minutes of the Chicago House of Justice, 5 January 1902, 12 January 1902, CHS.

the building that was being rented for the Persians (because it was not conveniently located) and wanted community functions held downtown instead. The House of Justice, unable to pay the current building's rent, could not imagine leasing a more expensive facility downtown.¹⁴

Furthermore, the women apparently questioned the legitimacy of the House of Justice on two accounts: its exclusion of women from its membership and the length of the term of its membership.¹⁵ If the term were one year, then a reelection would soon be necessary. Because the women constituted the bulk of the volunteers who carried out Chicago Bahá'í activities but were excluded from membership on the House, there was a gap between the Chicago Bahá'í leadership and its human resources.

Thornton Chase was distressed by the increasing disunity among the Chicago Bahá'ís. As if in anticipation of the troubles ahead, he received an encouraging tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá in April 1902. It said in part:

Verily I pray unto my Lord with all humbleness, meekness, obedience and submissiveness—which demolisheth every edifice of self-exaltation—that He shall strengthen thee by the fragrances of holiness and the breath of the Spirit of Truth and cause thee to be dedicated (or severed) unto God, purged and purified from the dross of the world, holy and sanctified from carnal passions, sacrificing thy soul to the beloved of God, contented with that which the Lord hath granted thee in the world, anxious to perform noble and good deeds while following the teachings of God, and in all things adhering to the law of God.

As God liveth! Shouldest thou be honored by attaining to this station, thou wilt find thyself in the center of Paradise (*Ferdowse* [*firdaws*]), the highest of paradises!¹⁶

14. Minutes of the House of Justice, 26 January 1902, CHS.

15. Minutes of the House of Justice, 9 February 1902, CHS.

16. 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Thornton Chase, translated by Mírzá Ḥasan Rúhí, received April 1902, in *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, vol. 2 (Chicago: Bahai Publishing Society, 1915), 332.

In late April and early May three blows fell successively on Thornton Chase and the House of Justice. First the Assembly of Teaching decided to rent a facility downtown and hold Bahá'í meetings there themselves, without official support from the House of Justice. Since many of the prominent women were wives of House of Justice members, considerable tension resulted within families. When the House deliberated about whether it should support the downtown meetings, the vote was split. Those who wanted to support the meetings lost, and many ceased to attend subsequent meetings of the House of Justice.¹⁷ Among the absent was Greenleaf; as a result Thornton Chase was often made the chairman pro tempore of House of Justice meetings. Those who continued to come to sessions of the House of Justice found the rent for the building where the Persians stayed impossible to bear. The House of Justice was no longer able to muster a quorum—which was understood to be nine members—but continued to meet anyway.

Thornton Chase saw that the House of Justice was crumbling as an institution, and he feared it would dissolve. He had spearheaded its creation and had been the main force behind most of its activities; its near collapse and the disunity in the Chicago Bahá'í community was a severe blow to him. As he explained to a close Bahá'í friend, Isabella Brittingham:

I too have been going through hell this week. Last Sunday about noon . . . my head began to ache. Then followed a series of most exasperating occurrences one after another, beginning with lunch time, mail matters, the [Sunday worship] meeting, and the following meeting of the House of Justice. My head throbbed and pounded, and it seemed as if all the powers of evil were working together and unrestrained to

17. Minutes of the House of Justice, 9 April 1902, 13 April 1902, 4 May 1902, 16 May 1902, CHS. The question of when to reelect the House is presented in Thornton Chase to 'Abdu'l-Bahá (copy), 19 April 1902, 1, TC. The downtown meetings are mentioned in Thornton Chase to Isabella Brittingham (copy), 2 May 1902, 1, TC, and Thornton Chase to Isabella Brittingham (copy), 17 April 1902, 5, TC.

work the destruction of the Assembly [Bahá'í community] and the Cause in this City. . . .

All night I thought and thought, and my head refused to rest. On Monday it was worse. I had to come away from business. I doubted everything. At night I tried to worship (On Sunday, and all Monday up to bed time I could not pray at all) and seeing my Bible lying on a little table by the couch where I kneel, I took it on an impulse and threw it open to a perfect description of my condition, the 73rd Psalm. I had indeed been "envious at the foolish" [Psalm 73:3]. . . . I slept a little Monday night, and I felt comforted, but on Tuesday (head ache gone but still feeling very much oppressed and sore) I found myself still in that condition of doubt regarding all things, and very miserable. Tuesday night, again I took the Bible and opened to Jeremiah, Ch 2. 18-19, and again it reproved me, stating correctly concerning a fit of angry passion I had flown into during the day, after which I had been sick and more discouraged than ever. Then, as I read that and prayed, I suddenly exclaimed "How can I know God at all?" and as I did so, I threw over a portion of the Bible and my eyes fell on Mal. 3.10 which answered the question.¹⁸

But Thornton Chase had worse to come. The second blow against the House of Justice was inadvertent: On May 3rd Mírzá Asadu'lláh received a tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá that ordered the name of the Chicago Bahá'í governing body to be changed to the "House of Spirituality or Spiritual House."¹⁹ The command prompted speculation in Chicago that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had found the House of Justice unworthy and thus had stripped it of the title.

In fact 'Abdu'l-Bahá had decided at least two years earlier that the title "House of Justice" could be misunderstood and might cause persecution of the Persian Bahá'ís; consequently he had decided

18. Thornton Chase to Isabella Brittingham (copy), 17 April 1902, 1-2, TC.

19. "Extract from a Tablet from the Master, Abdul Baha, to Mírza Assadullah, received in Chicago on the 3rd of May, 1902," CHS. The original Persian of this tablet probably no longer exists, nor is a complete English translation available. Presumably Ameen Fareed was the translator.

that Bahá'í governing bodies should be called by a less political-sounding name. However, Asadu'lláh and the Chicago Bahá'ís remained unaware of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's true reason for changing the name of Chicago's governing body until the fall of 1902. 'Abdu'l-Bahá had not ordered the title changed in his first tablet to the Chicago House of Justice, presumably so as not to discourage the Chicago Bahá'ís or show any initial displeasure about their election. The House of Justice changed its name to the House of Spirituality on 10 May 1902.

The change of name created a cloud over the legitimacy of the House. It could only have made Thornton Chase feel more depressed and overburdened. Then the biggest blow fell: In early May Mírzá Asadu'lláh hastily left Chicago for the Middle East. He had been supported financially by Phoebe Hearst, but Asadu'lláh had angered her by inviting his son Ameen Fareed to come to Chicago from the Holy Land and asking her to support him as well. She misunderstood Asadu'lláh's motives; he had invited Ameen because he knew English, and Asadu'lláh had no one to translate for him after the other Persians left Chicago. Hearst told Asadu'lláh that if he left before the beginning of June she would pay for his ticket, but after that date he would receive no further assistance from her. On May 12th Asadu'lláh took a train for the East Coast, leaving Thornton Chase alone in the house, except for Ameen Fareed, a homesick adolescent in need of nurturing.²⁰

The last blow was a severe one for Thornton Chase. He wrote to Asadu'lláh a month after the latter's departure:

As I saw the train moving away with you, my heart went with it, and it seemed to me as if the very heart and sustenance of the Cause of God in this City was being carried away, and that we were left scattered in the wilderness infested with wild beasts of personal ambitions, greed, selfishness and all sorts of impurities. I presume it was weak and foolish of me to feel so, but it was so. It seemed as if I were left *alone*,

20. Thornton Chase to Isabella Brittingham (copy), 25 May 1902, 5-6, TC.

surrounded by wolves only waiting to tear me to pieces, and, Dear Teacher, it was *not* myself at all that I thought of, but the Blessed Cause for which I have tried to stand through the years. Of course I am not so proud or vain to think that God's Cause requires me to uphold it, but I could not see where else it was being upheld in reality and purity, and as you went from us, it seemed as if a great treasure which had been entrusted to me, (so great that existence were impossible without it) were wrenched away from me, and I was left standing empty handed, alone, helpless.²¹

In such a state of loneliness Thornton Chase turned to the only person who could comfort him: 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He wrote a five-page letter, carried to 'Abdu'l-Bahá by Asadu'lláh, that thanked 'Abdu'l-Bahá for the recent tablet and expressed Thornton Chase's anguish:

I thank Thee for the Tablet which I have recently received from Thee through Hadji Hassan Khorassani. O my dear Master, how can I thank Thee for Thy great Goodness and Mercy to me, Thy prayers for me. When I see my own misery and weakness and unworthiness, and discover but even a portion of the depths of selfish and wicked tendencies in me; when I find with sorrow the strength of the evil habits that possess me and my lack of ability to control them or cast them out; when I consider the dust that I am and the unthinkable Majesty of GOD, it is impossible for me to conceive in the least the greatness, the depth and breadth, the hight [*sic*] and grandeur of His Mercy, that He should condescend to open before my sight the doors of the possibility of attainment of "Ferdowce," of nearness to Him, of His Kindness, of His Love, as expressed to me in this blessed Tablet from the hand of His Greatest Servant, Thy Own Unknowable Self. More worthy am I of His Wrath, His destruction, than of this blessed Kindness. Surely, all that is left of my life is His and Thine as far as it is in my power, with His Aid, to give.²²

21. Thornton Chase to Mírzá Asadu'lláh (copy), 17 June 1902, 1, TC.

22. Thornton Chase to 'Abdu'l-Bahá (copy), 12 May 1902, 1, TC.

This letter is considerably more introspective than his first one to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Thornton Chase then explained the spiritual cause of his anguish: that he had long sought to see the face of Bahá'u'lláh in a vision but had never succeeded. Because of the tests he had been experiencing in Chicago, he desired to see Bahá'u'lláh's face more than ever, and his failure caused him to doubt his acceptability to God:

Others told me of seeing Him in vision, and for years I prayed constantly to Him to grant me to see Him or to realize Him in such a manner that all the hosts of air or earth could not cause me to doubt the certainty that I knew Him. My prayers have not been answered, and more and more, I feel like one who is in a sea of deadly waters, swimming still, and hoping for help, but far away from land or help, and growing weaker and weaker, nearer and nearer to sinking entirely to utter destruction. I know not how it is with others. I stand for the Truth with a bold front and assert my unwavering confidence and certainty, and strive to uplift and encourage every one with assurance, and while doing so, I feel assured and certain myself; but when I go into my room and fall on my knees and beg God for the ten thousandth time to show me Himself, that I may KNOW the Truth, I find myself sinking, sinking in fear and doubt, because I know not to Whom or to What I pray, and because I am as one talking through the telephone, but utterly unable to find any answer or any person at the other end. Dear Master, I beg with humbleness, with sincerity, well-knowing that I am nothing but a most miserable sinner and without one particle of worth, but I am sure that there is no Truth to be had in this world if it be not in Thee, and no knowledge of Truth if not from Thee, and therefore I beg of Thee from an aching heart to tell me, to Whom, or to What, I can pray.²³

Thornton Chase's desire is not uncommon to mystics who seek an experience like that of Moses on Mount Sinai, wishing to see the

23. Thornton Chase to 'Abdu'l-Bahá (copy), 12 May 1902, 1-2.

face of God. But even Moses was only allowed to see God's back (see Exodus 33:18–23).

Thornton Chase's sense of utter unworthiness, while exacerbated by the troubles of the Chicago Bahá'í community, was not triggered by the troubles, for he had apparently felt unworthy for some time. Nor should his feelings of unworthiness be traced to the belief in Original Sin stressed by his Calvinist ancestors. Rather, he seems to have experienced the utterly uncrossable gulf between God and God's creatures. The famous Protestant theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher described this as a "feeling of dependence." Rudolf Otto, a twentieth-century scholar of mysticism, uses the terms "absolute overpoweringness" and "absolute unapproachability" to describe the aspects of God that produce the sense of utter dependence.²⁴ The Bahá'í Long Obligatory Prayer expresses the same feeling in individual terms:

Whenever I ponder my evil doings and Thy benevolence, my heart melteth within me, and my blood boileth in my veins. By Thy Beauty, O Thou the Desire of the world! I blush to lift up my face to Thee, and my longing hands are ashamed to stretch forth toward the heaven of Thy bounty.²⁵

Thornton Chase did not write to 'Abdu'l-Bahá merely to express his desire to see Bahá'u'lláh's face, however. He also believed his leadership in Chicago had failed. In different words, he told 'Abdu'l-Bahá what he had earlier said to Isabella Brittingham:

... so far, all my efforts to teach, to serve Him in any way, have been in vain, and still I am seeking Him and His Will, and striving, as best I

24. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 19–20.

25. *Bahá'í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), 14–15.

can, to obey His Commands, to become fitted to be of some use in His Cause. My heart has been torn with jealousies and envyings of others who have been commanded to go forth and work and who have developed abilities to do so, while I could do nothing but try to help a little in correcting translations. I have battled within myself to overcome those awful sins of jealousy and envy, and I think God is helping me to do so. With His help, they shall not possess me.²⁶

Thornton Chase asked a few other questions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as well. He requested an explanation of the value and justice of innocent suffering. He asked whether every individual is immortal, or whether immortality is conferred only on a chosen few. Finally, he asked a question that reflected his own spiritual struggle: How is it not contradictory to be ambitious for spiritual advancement?

How can we possess ambition to attain the highest possible stations in the Kingdom of God, and at the same time seek to be evanescent and as dust and nothing. God has placed within us desires and hunger for all that it is possible to attain of nearness to Him and of His glorious attributes. He has given to us appreciation of Justice, Wisdom, Knowledge, Beauty, Mercy, Generosity, Kindness, and Service, and has endowed us with the ambition to seek and gain, to strive for these attributes with all our might, and at the same time we are taught to lay aside every particle of ambition and to pray and strive to be eternally evanescent and nothing. Dear Master, I am determined to want nothing for myself save that which God has ordained for me, because I am ignorant and He is Wise; I am weak and He is Mighty; I am poor and He is Wealthy; but I crave to receive from Thy favor more light upon this matter.²⁷

26. Thornton Chase to 'Abdu'l-Bahá (copy), 12 May 1902, 3, TC.

27. Thornton Chase to 'Abdu'l-Bahá (copy), 12 May 1902, 5.

Thornton Chase closed his letter with a final and beautiful plea for assistance. Remarkably, it was a plea that minimized his own spiritual pain even though that pain was great:

Dear Master, Thou seest that I am laying my heart bare before Thee, hoping that Thou mayest give me some balm for my misery. I am in comfort, and Thou in discomfort; I am free and Thou art imprisoned; I am oppressed but slightly and Thou art the object of the venom of the World; but O my Lord, Thou Knowest God, and I can only seek Him. Thou art in the full blaze of His Favor, and I am groping blindly for Him thro' the darkness of my evil self: I believe that Thou hast the Power of Salvation, and I, more than most men, need salvation. Dear Master, Help me!

Forgive whatever in this letter may be improper. I know not what is proper or improper, in addressing Thee. Thou art the Mystery of God; how unfathomable a mystery art thou to man! I only seek to come into Thy presence, to tear away all hypocrisies from my heart and ask thee to see it as is, and to give medicine for it, that shall heal it with the health of the favor of God and immortal Life in His Service and Presence.²⁸

Most likely the very act of writing to 'Abdu'l-Bahá made Thornton Chase feel better, for he had thereby defined and expressed his spiritual problems. He already knew how slow correspondence with 'Abdu'l-Bahá could be; indeed, 'Abdu'l-Bahá ultimately wrote four tablets to Thornton Chase in reply to the letter, and the first was not received until nine months had elapsed. Meanwhile the situation in Chicago began to improve almost immediately. The House of Spirituality, though greatly depleted of active members, continued to meet, and the deliberations, freed from the disruptions of the more refractory members, became more unified. The House of Spirituality continued to organize weekly meetings for discussion of the Bahá'í Faith. The gatherings were attended by both men and

28. Thornton Chase to 'Abdu'l-Bahá (copy), 12 May 1902, 3-4.

women. The House of Spirituality also turned to a new activity—correspondence with the Bahá'í communities in Iran and Egypt—and became excited about the results.²⁹

The downtown meetings sponsored by the Women's Assembly of Teaching and its male supporters continued until August, when lack of funds forced them to cease. The Women's Assembly had learned a hard lesson: Good ideas must be accompanied by plans, organization, and the means to be realized. Those who had stopped attending sessions of the House of Spirituality now returned. In September a tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá arrived that explained why the name of the House had been changed to prevent a misunderstanding of its purpose, thereby lifting the cloud over its legitimacy. With the debt on the building rented for the Persians paid and no more Persians to house, the women and men began to work together to plan a weekly Bahá'í worship service in a rented facility downtown. The service, begun on 22 February 1903, was an immediate success, and services continued for at least a decade.³⁰

Thornton Chase's leadership in Chicago was thus vindicated. Time undoubtedly assuaged his spiritual pain as well. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's first tablet in reply singled out Thornton Chase for his spiritual attainments:

Verily I read thine eloquent letter, the composition of which was beautiful, words excellent and significances interesting, and I thanked

29. Correspondence was initiated in the minutes of the House of Justice, 9 March 1902, CHS; the letter sent to the Asian Bahá'í communities is Chicago House of Justice to "the holy souls in ——" (copy), March 1902, CHS. Many of the replies arrived in May and June 1902.

30. Thornton Chase to Isabella Brittingham (copy), 14 September 1902, 2, TC; 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Chicago House of Spirituality, received on 9 September 1902, translated by Ameen Fareed, *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, 1:6. Efforts to plan new weekly meetings downtown are mentioned in the Minutes of the House of Spirituality during November and December 1902, CHS. The beginning of the Chicago weekly meetings is mentioned in Thornton Chase to Mr. C. M. Gates (copy), 4 March 1903, 1, TC.

God that He hath chosen certain souls for His knowledge and love, deposited in their hearts His mysteries, manifested from their faces His lights and made them signs of His Kingdom. . . .

O thou, my honorable friend! Verily I scented the fragrance of meekness and humbleness from the orchard of the meanings of thy letter and was caused to rejoice, smile and be made glad that God hath made thee humble and submissive to His beloved.³¹

‘Abdu’l-Bahá then responded to Thornton Chase’s closing comment about His imprisonment:

O thou friend! Be not sorrowful because of my imprisonment and lament not for my difficulties; nay, rather ask God to increase my hardship in His path, for therein lies a wisdom which none are able to comprehend save the near angels.³²

‘Abdu’l-Bahá also spoke of the Persian Bahá’í martyrs and their suffering. He said that martyrdom was “a favor from God which He bestoweth upon whomsoever He chooses” and that it was what the “holy ones in the Supreme Kingdom yearned for.”³³ Apparently ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was trying to help Thornton Chase understand the nature of great sacrifice for the Bahá’í Faith, which encouraged him to arise and sacrifice even more.

Two other brief, encouraging tablets arrived in March and April 1903. One apparently acknowledged another letter that Thornton Chase had sent to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, possibly one he wrote on behalf of the House of Justice on 19 April 1902.³⁴ The fourth tablet from Abdu’l-Bahá, received in late July, replied to both of Thornton Chase’s letters.

31. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to Thornton Chase, translated by Ameen Fareed in Chicago on 22 January 1903, in *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, 2:332–33.

32. *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, 2:333.

33. *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, 2:333.

34. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to Thornton Chase, translated by Ameen Fareed in Chicago, 18 March 1903, in *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, 2:334; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to Thornton

In the letter that Thornton Chase wrote to 'Abdu'l-Bahá on behalf of the House of Justice, he expressed concern about the active role that women were playing in the American Bahá'í community. It was probably the women's initiation of separate Bahá'í public meetings downtown that prompted him to write, but Thornton Chase's longstanding difficulties with women surfaced as well. Apparently 'Abdu'l-Bahá sensed Thornton Chase's distress with their activities. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's response was unequivocal:

If, in the letters to the maid-servants of the Merciful, there hath been written . . . encouragement . . . the purport is that some women in this wonderful age have surpassed some men, and not that all women have surpassed all men. The members of the House of Spirituality must give unlimited encouragement to women. In this age, both men and women are in the shadow of the Word of God. Whosoever endeavors the most will attain the greatest share, be it of men or of women, of the strong or of the weak. . . .

As to the number of Tablets to women, this is due to the fact that most of the letters which come to the Holy Land are from women. Rarely do letters come from men and, naturally, to women the most are written.³⁵

'Abdu'l-Bahá answered Thornton Chase's other two questions:

You also ask: "To whom shall we turn?" Turn to the Ancient Beauty [Bahá'u'lláh]. If it be the will of God, the blessed likeness (of the Manifestation) will be sent in its proper time, so that, in the world of the heart, thou mayest direct thyself to that holy likeness and thus be saved from imagination and phantasy. . . .

As to the subject of babes and infants and weak ones who are afflicted by the hands of oppressors: This contains great wisdom and

Chase, received at Detroit on 2 April 1903, in *Tablets of Abdul-Baba Abbas*, 2:335. Thornton Chase to 'Abdu'l-Bahá (copy), 19 April 1902, TC.

35. 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Thornton Chase, translated by Ameen Fared in Chicago, 24 July 1903, in *Tablets of Abdul-Baba Abbas*, 2:336-37.

this subject is of paramount importance. In brief, for those souls there is a recompense in another world and many details are connected with this matter. For those souls that suffering is the greatest mercy of God. Verily that mercy of the Lord is far better and preferable to all the comfort of this world and the growth and development of this place of mortality. If it be the will of God, when thou shalt be present this will be explained in detail by word of mouth.³⁶

With resolution of his spiritual tests and of the tests facing the Chicago Bahá'í community, Thornton Chase's life had passed a significant milestone. Adversities of similar intensity would not beset him again for several years. In the interim his opportunities to serve his religion would increase greatly, and his accomplishments multiply.

36. *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, 2:337-38.

CHAPTER 15

Organizer

With the resolution of the crises in Chicago, Thornton Chase had many new opportunities to serve the Bahá'í Faith. Soon he was the regular chairman of the Chicago Bahá'í Sunday worship service. The service included a short talk, which he usually delivered. He also devoted much of his energy to the House of Spirituality. The return of some of the dissident members to active membership caused temporary disunity, but by 1903 the House of Spirituality had learned to function well as a body. After May 1902 Thornton Chase was its regular temporary chairman when Greenleaf, still the official chairman, was absent from the sessions. When the body elected its officers in 1904 Thornton Chase became its permanent chairman.

Undoubtedly much of the House of Spirituality's unity and success can be traced to Thornton Chase's grasp of the Bahá'í concept of consultation. Mírzá Asadu'lláh had taught him about consultation, and as late as 1912 Thornton Chase was one of the few American Bahá'ís who used the word *consultation* in correspondence or who advocated its principles. In 1908 he described consultation as practiced by the House of Spirituality and stressed its effectiveness:

How beautiful is the method we have adopted, (under wise advice), in each case of difference of opinion, to go around the circle, asking each (without exception. Even the Chairman cannot escape), to state his ideas openly and clearly. And once in a great while we have had to

go around the circle a second time, and, I think, never a third time that entire unanimity did not result, and the final decision was the decision of all (excepting not one). Surely our results have been more sure and better in every way, than when we adhered to the "old style" of voting. "Consultation and Kindness": These will solve all problems, if adhered to steadily.¹

Unanimity was a principal reason the House of Spirituality was effective. Another was organization. In the summer of 1904 the House of Spirituality drew up a constitution that defined and codified the procedures it had adopted.²

With unity and organization the House of Spirituality emerged as the most important Bahá'í governing body in the Western world. The House of Spirituality shouldered the responsibility of coordinating the translation and distribution of virtually all North American correspondence with 'Abdu'l-Bahá. It issued circular letters regularly to the North American Bahá'í communities to inform them of upcoming holy days and widely publicized the Bahá'í Fast. It advised Bahá'ís about teaching the Bahá'í Faith in their localities and about how to handle conflicts with other Bahá'ís. It received letters of inquiry about the Bahá'í Faith from all over the United States and coordinated the trips of traveling Bahá'í teachers. In short, by 1903 or 1904 the Chicago House of Spirituality functioned as a national, as well as a local, Bahá'í governing body.

In recognition of the importance of archiving original materials, the House of Spirituality decided on 5 July 1902 to authorize Thornton Chase to collect "Tablets, letters and manuscripts connected with this Religion, so that they may be preserved intact for

1. Thornton Chase to House of Spirituality, 15 December 1908, CHS, National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, Illinois.

2. "Constitution of the House of Spirituality," TS, TC. The constitution is described in detail in Robert H. Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Early Expansion, 1900-1912*, vol. 2 (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988), 167-69.

future reference."³ This established Chicago as the repository of the national Bahá'í archives and confirmed Thornton Chase's role as informal community historian, a role he had begun in 1899.

Among the House of Spirituality's projects that soon acquired national importance was the construction of a Bahá'í House of Worship. The construction of the first such House of Worship was begun in November 1902 in 'Ishqábád, a city in Russian central Asia. Mírzá Asadu'lláh wrote to Thornton Chase and the House of Spirituality about it, and on 7 March 1903 the House of Spirituality decided to build a House of Worship for Chicago.⁴ Serious efforts to build the House of Worship did not begin until 1907, but the scale of the project was so large that it became an international project and necessitated the creation of a coordinating body for all of the Bahá'ís in North America. The Bahai Temple Unity was established in 1909 and assumed the House of Spirituality's national coordinating efforts. Thenceforth the House of Spirituality's responsibility was confined much more to Chicago matters.

Publication was another major project of the House of Spirituality that was of national scale. As soon as writings of Bahá'u'lláh began to be translated into English there arose a need for their systematic publication. Thornton Chase initiated the effort in early 1900:

At the [lunch] table one day Mr. Chase took out of his pocket a booklet and laid it on the table and said ["what do you think of this? The most wonderful words ever given man, and the way it is gotten up [it] looks like an old rag.?"] He had with him a typewritten copy of the Arabic Hidden Words, and said to me [Arthur Agnew], ["You take this [and] see what you can do with it, see if you cannot dress it up as it should be.?"] So we bought some type and Mr. [Albert] Windust set the

3. Report to 'Abdu'l-Bahá of the 5 July 1902 meeting of the Chicago House of Spirituality, CHS.

4. Minutes of the House of Spirituality, 7 March 1903, CHS.

style of the composition setting a few pages at a time, and we got out the Arabic Hidden Words.⁵

After publishing *The Hidden Words*, the three men, with Frank Hoffman and Charles Greenleaf, organized the "Behais Supply and Publishing Board." Since all five members were eventually on the Chicago House of Spirituality, they consulted regularly with the House about publishing. In the fall of 1902 the board was renamed the "Bahai Publishing Society" and was legally incorporated as a non-profit organization in Illinois. Because the House of Spirituality was not legally incorporated and therefore could not own a company, the Society was made the property of Agnew, Chase, Greenleaf, and Windust (Hoffman had by then withdrawn from its activities). Thornton Chase served as the editor who revised manuscripts; Agnew and Windust were printers who designed, typeset, and proofread the text; and Greenleaf, as an accountant, presumably managed the finances. By 1909 the Bahai Publishing Society had established itself as the undisputed leader in Bahá'í publishing; it produced 40 percent of all Bahá'í publications that appeared in the United States and Europe between 1900 and 1912, double the number of its nearest competitor. As a result it set the standards of quality and decided difficult matters such as the proper spelling of Bahá'í terms. Today the organization still exists, operating under the aegis of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, but now it is called the Bahá'í Publishing Trust.

Thornton Chase improved the translation of Bahá'í sacred texts both through editing and through tutoring the translators—who were young Persians—in English. His effort helped to make it possible for some of the early translations to endure to this day. Carl Scheffler, a young protégé and close friend of Thornton Chase's, described his efforts at translation:

5. Arthur Agnew Recollections, 1901–1922, National Bahá'í Archives.

I vividly recall an afternoon at . . . the headquarters of the Bahá'í Community. Mr. Chase was endeavoring to assist a young Persian (Ameen Fareed) in the first attempt to translate into English the [Persian] *Hidden Words* of Bahá'u'lláh. My part was, with the help of several dictionaries, to look up words or synonyms. The young Persian had some knowledge of English, but Thornton Chase's demands for words that might adequately express the meanings that were concealed in the Persian taxed him beyond his capacity. The translation that finally was obtained was, of course, only for our own satisfaction. Mr. Chase had no idea of preparing it for general use, but his burning desire for the Words of Bahá'u'lláh and his readiness to understand the significance of the words as they were in a painfully painstaking manner translated, made a deep impression on my youthful consciousness.⁶

To further his ability to edit translations, Thornton Chase took Persian lessons from Ameen Fareed. Thornton Chase's notes, preserved in the Thornton Chase Papers, reveal that he mastered the Persian alphabet and had acquired some basic vocabulary.

As editor, Thornton Chase had to suggest changes to authors, a task often difficult and delicate. His remarkable ability to offer criticism lovingly comes through most clearly in an October 1905 letter to Louise Waite about several articles she had submitted to the Bahai Publishing Society. Thornton Chase began the letter by stating, "I have no 'axe to grind' and only desire *the truth*, and especially that the utmost *caution* and *wisdom* shall be exercised," because misstatements about 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Bahá'í Faith by Americans had caused trouble in the Middle East. Chase emphasized the importance to Bahá'ís of "consultation" and praised the overall content of what she said while carefully, clearly, and logically describing several misleading statements in her articles without questioning her motives or the accuracy of her beliefs.⁷

6. Carl Scheffler, "Thornton Chase: First American Bahá'í," *World Order* 11.5 (August 1945):154.

7. Thornton Chase to Mrs. [Louise] Waite (copy), 22 October 1905, 1, 2, TC.

He then turned to the poetry she had submitted. Because he was dealing with a more subjective matter, he was even more kind and loving:

I thank you for the copies of the poems. Their thoughts and expressions are both very beautiful. Once in long years ago I used to "dabble" a little in rhyme, and once in a while I find in your beautiful verse a little bit of halting in rhyme or in meter, which I long to try with my weakness to assist. I almost fear to even mention this, but I feel that you will understand the motive, which is that every single little thing that goes out among the friends, or especially among the strangers, shall be as perfect as it can be made. It is audacious in me to even suggest this, but we are BAHAIS, and you know that offense, and not even criticism, is not intended; only the little possibility of helpfulness, and perhaps I have no competency even for that.⁸

Thus, even in his official responsibilities as editor, Thornton Chase always sought to show kindness and love for others.

In addition to editing, Thornton Chase wrote prolifically. He spoke frequently at the Chicago Bahá'í worship service, usually from a typed text. The Thornton Chase Papers contain more than sixty essays composed by Thornton Chase, works typically given first as talks. Many of these were popular enough to be informally circulated in typed form; one was even published by another man under his own name and without Thornton Chase's permission.⁹

Thornton Chase also wrote many long letters to those interested in the Bahá'í Faith, and these letters were often circulated in typed form as well. His own first publication on the Bahá'í Faith

8. Thornton Chase to Mrs. [Louise] Waite (copy), 22 October 1905, 4.

9. Jean Hazzard, "The Persian Revelation. No. II," *Occult Truth Seeker* 1.10-11 (March-April 1902): 185-90. The Thornton Chase Papers contain a copy of the periodical with Thornton Chase's comments ("My article—T.C." and "used without authority, T.C."), as well as Thornton Chase's first draft and typescript of the essay.

consisted of an unedited letter that he wrote to Mrs. Frank Fenno, who was not a Bahá'í, on 27 September 1902.¹⁰ Titled "*Before Abraham was—I AM!*" the pamphlet was intended to help Christians accept Bahá'u'lláh:

I quote from you: "*The same hard question is in my way. I have thought so long of my Master in the Father's Mansions, I fear to, as it seems to me, transfer my affections to this other Master, who to you is the same come again.*"

Yes! There is the very essence of loyalty and difficulty to a nature such as I conceive yours to be. The loyal soul fears ever an apparent temptation to disloyalty. To us, however, the word and work, the personality and mission of Jesus, the Christ, become clarified, glorified and made more precious through the light thrown upon them by the knowledge of *this* Manifestation. Knowledge of Him has increased our love of Jesus.¹¹

Thornton Chase's approach was typical of the Bahá'í scriptures and of the American Bahá'ís; he stressed the continuity between the Bahá'í Faith and Christianity, explaining that Bahá'ís felt even more love for Christ as Bahá'ís than they had as Christians. Thornton Chase then spoke of Jesus' true greatness. Following the approach found in Bahá'u'lláh's writings, he downplayed miracles, seeing them as a secondary proof, at best, of Jesus' station. Rather, Thornton Chase argued, "The GREAT MIRACLE, the *primary proof* of the Divine Authority and Mission of Christ, was the Word that He spoke! *He was the incarnated WORD.*"¹² He then described Jesus' poverty, humility, lack of formal religious education, and association with the downtrodden of society. Thornton Chase noted this was in contrast to the expectations of the ancient Jewish priests that

10. Thornton Chase to Mrs. Frank Fenno (copy), 27 September 1902, TC.

11. Thornton Chase, "*Before Abraham was—I AM!*" (n.p., n.d.), p. 3. The pamphlet was probably published by the Bahai Publishing Society in 1902 or 1903.

12. "*Before Abraham was—I AM!*" p. 5.

the Messiah would come from heaven, accompanied by angels and mighty signs:

Alas for the pride and short-sightedness of man! The WORD which *that One* spoke caused the fisherman to leave his livelihood and follow Him who seemed poorer than himself; caused the troubled, the oppressed, the sick unto death, to cling to Him; caused the learned and the great to be confounded; caused the powerful priests of the great Temple to tremble, and finally to clamor vehemently for His life . . . and it has swept on over a great section of the earth, causing untold millions to look to that WORD, to learn thereby the Way of Life, and to come into that Life by following, each in his own station, the Way *lived* before him by that Mighty One.¹³

Thus Thornton Chase stressed the Word and its transforming power, a frequent theme in his writings. And how did Jesus acquire access to the Word? Was it a result of developing his own potential? No, Thornton Chase replied,

it was the wonder-working power of the Holy Spirit, which dwelt within Him and spoke through Him. It was the invincible might of Divine Love, which poured itself forth for man through Him. It was the triumphant force of the example of patient suffering and sacrifice in the path of God for the sake of humanity. Of himself, he could do nothing, and claimed to do nothing; but the FATHER, who dwelt in Him, worked and spoke through Him that which all the hosts of earth and heaven could not accomplish otherwise.¹⁴

This, Thornton Chase said, was what Jesus meant when he said, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58)—that his reality was more than his personality or body; it was the indwelling Spirit. This Spirit had returned in Bahá'u'lláh.

13. "Before Abraham was—I AM!" p. 6.

14. "Before Abraham was—I AM!" p. 7.

However, Thornton Chase added, "the 'second coming' must bear evident marks of similitude to the first, in manner, character, instruction and in its Spirit, but it must be greater in results, wider in extension and different in effect."¹⁵ He then gave examples. Jesus said, "I came not to bring peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34), but Bahá'u'lláh said that "'the Most Great Peace must come,' and He established the laws and provisions for that time of peace."¹⁶ The Second Coming will reiterate the truths of the first but will elaborate on them and break the seals on the meanings of the books of the prophets. Instead of reaching just the Mediterranean region, as the revelation of Christ did in the first few centuries, the new revelation immediately reached the whole world:

Already, were you going to Persia, Egypt, Russia, India, China, Japan, France, England, Italy, Australia, or the islands of the Sea, to Mohammedans, Buddhists, Brahmans, Zoroastrians, Confucians, Jews or Christians, I could give you introductions, or even one Word [Alláhu-Abhá], which would cause you to be greeted with the utmost warmth, kindness and service, by those who, a little while ago, were of such varying faiths. We, here in Chicago, are constantly receiving the most beautiful, spiritual, sincere and loving letters from these scattered peoples, and they are written by men (and women) who are evidently not lacking in either ethical culture or spiritual knowledge. A network of love, friendship and loyalty to the One Cause and the One God and to His Holy Manifestations, past and present, a net of spiritual brotherhood and faith, tied with binding knots of sincerity, without regard to nationality, country or previous faith, is being woven around the world. It is the harbinger of that "Most Great Peace."¹⁷

The international spread of the Bahá'í Faith, so much greater today, was already impressive in the early years of the twentieth cen-

15. "Before Abraham was—I AM!" p. 8.

16. "Before Abraham was—I AM!" p. 8.

17. "Before Abraham was—I AM!" pp. 9-10

tury. Even today most Christians do not experience Christianity as an international religion as strongly as early twentieth-century Bahá'ís experienced the international dimension of the Bahá'í Faith. The Bahá'ís often saw the international spread of their religion as a proof of its truth.

Thornton Chase concluded by describing the glue that held the world Bahá'í community together: Bahá'u'lláh's life and the work of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Thornton Chase's description of 'Abdu'l-Bahá adhered to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's own statements about his station and avoided the error, common among the Bahá'ís of the day, of calling him the Return of Christ:

He is the Centre of the new Covenant, the Fulfiller of the Law, the Exemplar for all men. He lives the Christ-life before our sight. He teaches the Christ doctrines anew to ears that can hear. He interprets the Words of the Father, and calls the seekers of every land to come and drink of the sweet waters of Truth. . . . His great and constant claim is simply that of servitude to all the beloved of God . . . desiring self-abnegation in the Cause of God. His declared office is the *Servant of God and of man*.¹⁸

The argumentation of "*Before Abraham was—I AM!*" reflects the very Bible-centered point of view of the Bahá'í community in 1902. Other works by early Bahá'ís were similar, notably, Isabella Brittingham's *The Revelation of Bahá-Ulláh in a Sequence of Four Lessons*—which also centered on biblical prophecy—and Mirzá Abu'l-Faḍl's *Bahá'í Proofs*, which drew heavily on the Bible.¹⁹ All three works appeared within a year of each other. The honest, sincere, sensitive, matter-of-fact tone of Thornton Chase's pamphlet made it fairly

18. "*Before Abraham was—I AM!*" p. 10–11.

19. Isabella Brittingham, *The Revelation of Bahá-Ulláh in a Sequence of Four Lessons* (Chicago: Bahai Publishing Society, 1903); Mirzá Abu'l-Faḍl, *Bahá'í Proofs*, trans. Ali Kuli Khan, 2d ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983). These works are described in detail in Robert H. Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Early Expansion, 1900–1912*, vol. 2 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1995), 99–103, 81–86.

popular, and it was reprinted until the 1950s. Apparently Mrs. Fenno, the recipient of the original letter, was persuaded by his arguments and became a Bahá'í.²⁰

A year later Thornton Chase published another pamphlet, "What went ye out for to see?" It had the same layout and appearance as "*Before Abraham was—I AM!*" and therefore seems to have been designed as a companion work. It appears that he wrote it as a talk to be given on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's birthday on 23 May 1903; it was published in June 1904.²¹ The essay's title comes from the words attributed to Jesus, "But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet" (Matt. 11:9). Jesus was addressing those who went to see John the Baptist, but Thornton Chase used the quotation to refer to those who wished to learn about 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The five-page essay was a moving tribute and description of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

The fame of him has gone around the world. Many, from this country, led by various motives, have visited him, and we have seen and heard them after their return. Without exception they have agreed in declaring that they have seen the most wonderful being upon the earth. They tell how, going before him with varied expectations, curiosities or hopes, and finding themselves in his presence, they were overwhelmed

20. Thornton Chase, *The Reality of Christ* (Toronto: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, n.d. [1957?]) consists of an edited version of "*Before Abraham was—I AM!*" Thornton Chase to Mrs. Frank Fenno (copy), 14 November 1902, notes that Mrs. Fenno has decided to send a supplication to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, which probably means she wanted to write to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and declare her faith. Thornton Chase reports that Mrs. Fenno says she has been "led to the Light" in Thornton Chase to Mr. H. Alphonso Steigener (copy), 10 October 1902, 1, TC.

21. Thornton Chase wrote that he corrected the manuscript copy of "*What went ye out for to see?*" on 23 May 1903, on the back of the last page of the essay's typescript, in TC. In Thornton Chase to Mariam Haney (copy), 2 June 1904, TC, Thornton Chase says he has just published it. Apparently, Mrs. Haney had been circulating it in typed form during the previous year.

with awe, shame, fear, love, abasement or exaltation, emotions differing according to the conditions of each. They tell how they fell at his feet and longed to kiss even the dust on which he trod; how sudden consciousness of utter unworthiness oppressed them; how shame overcame them and made them long for sack-cloth and ashes; how immeasurable love possessed them and made them wish for death rather than separation from him.²²

Later Thornton Chase explained how 'Abdu'l-Bahá had such an effect on people:

no soul can enter and leave his presence without being changed—for better, or for worse. Each one, coming within the calm gaze of his eyes, finds a search-light of self-conviction piercing the inmost depths of his being. It needs not a voice to tell him of his life. Before that look, the heart of each becomes his own accuser, and he can well repeat the words of the woman of Samaria: "Come see a man which told me all that I ever did." (John 4:29.) But when such an one, walking in the valley of despair, pressed down with his own unworthiness, hears the tender words of His Love, he is lifted up and joyfully ascends the mountains of exaltation.²³

Thornton Chase noted that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words satisfy the illiterate and the educated alike, yet 'Abdu'l-Bahá never attended a school. Thornton Chase spoke of the Holy Spirit, manifesting itself in Bahá'u'lláh and now guiding 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He closed with a beautiful description of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and an invitation to the seeker to investigate 'Abdu'l-Bahá's life:

He is the Liver of the Word, the Exemplar of the life commanded by the Father: He is the Leader of men, traveling the Path before them and proving, through all suffering and indignity, the joy and glory of

22. Thornton Chase, *What went ye out for to see?* (n.p., n.d. [1904]), p. 1.

23. *What went ye out for to see?* p. 2.

treading the Way of God. He can say with One of old: "My father worketh hitherto, and I work." (John 5:17.) He is without blame, pure and righteous, and yet of all men the most humble and the servant of all. He is as gracious to the pauper as to the potentate, to the child as to the patriarch. His one claim is to be Abdul-Baha—the Servant of God.²⁴

In the earliest days of the Bahá'í Faith in America, when the Bahá'í teachings were poorly understood, devotion to 'Abdu'l-Bahá was central to the faith of the Bahá'ís. Thornton Chase clearly had developed that devotion very highly by talking for hours with those who had met 'Abdu'l-Bahá and by reading their accounts and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's tablets. But one senses something else: that Thornton Chase had vicariously met 'Abdu'l-Bahá through the descriptions of others and spoke almost from his own experience rather than from that of others. In one case Thornton Chase actually spoke of personally experiencing 'Abdu'l-Bahá through the reading of an account of a visit to him.²⁵ It constituted a preparation for the ultimate experience of actually meeting 'Abdu'l-Bahá face to face. Thornton Chase had prayed and yearned for that moment, which finally became a reality in 1907.

24. "What went ye out for to see?" pp. 4-5.

25. Thornton Chase to Isabella Brittingham (copy), 14 September 1902, 1-2, TC.

CHAPTER 16

Pilgrimage

Thornton Chase's desire to make a pilgrimage and to meet 'Abdu'l-Bahá was frustrated by his company's unwillingness to grant him an extended leave of absence. However, he never stopped dreaming. He noted in a letter to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1905, "ten years ago, before any American had found Thee, I hoped to then visit Thee."¹ His company's refusal to grant him time off in 1898 was a temporary setback; by May 1904 he had convinced Union Mutual to give him the time, once conditions in the prison city of 'Akká were right.

However, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was experiencing very difficult years. A commission of the Turkish government was attempting to convince the sultan to exile Him to a remote oasis in the Sahara, where He would be further cut off from visitors and communication with followers. Visitors to 'Akká, especially those from the Occident, could jeopardize the little freedom that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had. Consequently 'Abdu'l-Bahá granted permission to very few Americans to visit. When Thornton Chase asked for permission in the spring of 1905, at first his request was granted. He wrote to a friend who was a United States Senator and requested a letter of introduction to the governor of 'Akká, in case such a document would facilitate his visit.² Evidently, however, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had to cancel the pilgrimage because of the conditions in 'Akká. In the spring of 1906

1. Thornton Chase to 'Abdu'l-Bahá (copy), 21 April 1905, TC.

2. Thornton Chase to John F. Shafroth (copy), 16 March 1905, TC.

Thornton Chase again acquired permission and even booked a berth on a transatlantic ship, but had to cancel it because his company refused to give him the vacation time.³

In December 1906, writing to a Persian friend named Ali Kuli Khan, Thornton Chase complained that he could not go on pilgrimage during the upcoming spring. At that time a close friend Arthur Agnew, his wife, Mamie Agnew, and their infant son, Ruh Ullah, were going on pilgrimage. So were Corinne True and two of her daughters, who also were Chicago Bahá'ís.⁴ Apparently Thornton Chase had again asked his company for vacation time and had been refused. Later, for some reason, the company relented. Joyously Thornton Chase prepared for the trip to 'Akká.

Accompanying him was Carl Scheffler, a protégé who was in his mid-twenties. Thornton Chase, Carl Scheffler, and the Agnews left Chicago together on 14 March 1907 on a train bound for Boston. After attending a Bahá'í meeting there, they boarded the *SS Republic* on Saturday, March 16th. After stops in Ponta Delgada (the Azores), Madeira, Gibraltar, and Algiers, they reached Naples on Easter Sunday, March 31st. All the places fascinated Scheffler, and his letters home speak of hiking around the cities with Thornton Chase.⁵

In Naples the pilgrimage party met Corinne True and her daughters, who were on their way home; they described their pilgrimage for the travelers still heading to 'Akká. After five days of visiting Naples and vicinity—the Agnews even went to see Pompeii—Thornton Chase, Scheffler, and the Agnews boarded the German

3. Thornton Chase to Ethel Rosenberg (copy), 11 May 1906, 2, TC.

4. Thornton Chase to Ali Kuli Khan (copy), 19 December 1906, 5, TC.

5. Carl Scheffler to "Dear Folks" (copy), 14 March 1907, photocopy in author's personal papers; Carl Scheffler to "Dear Folks" (copy), 16 March 1907, photocopy in author's personal papers; Carl Scheffler to "Dear Folks" (copy), 4 April 1907, photocopy in author's personal papers. Carl Scheffler's letters were copied into a book, apparently by his cousin Sophie Loeding, and the book is in the possession of Mrs. Betty de Araujo, Scheffler's daughter. Thornton Chase's own account of the voyage exists as an untitled typescript that begins "In the houses or under them," TS, TC.

ship *SS Oceana* for Alexandria, Egypt.⁶ From there the khedivial steamer *Assuan* took them to Palestine. Thornton Chase describes the anticipation they felt as they approached Haifa:

Our hearts were so affected with thankfulness to God and with the beauty and import of that Land of Promise that we spoke but little to each other and in subdued tones. Our tongues were bound in golden silence, our eyes searched the ancient scenes and looked keenly to the north for the first glimpse of Mount Carmel and Acca and we longed for the approaching goal of our pilgrimage.⁷

They arrived in Haifa at 5 P.M. on April 8th and went to the Catholic-run "Hospice of the Little Child" for accommodations. That evening Mírzá Asadu'lláh, whom Thornton Chase had not seen since 1902, visited his old friend. Plans were made for the trip to 'Akká. Two days later the Agnews went to 'Akká while Chase and Scheffler waited in Haifa. That evening an American woman staying at their hotel who was not a Bahá'í told the other guests of her trip to 'Akká and of her brief visit with 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

She said the house of "The New Prophet" was pointed out and some one suggested that she might like to meet him. She assented, and one went into his garden and asked permission for the meeting, which was granted. He was a man of striking and attractive appearance and met her most graciously and presented her with a rose he was carrying. Through an interpreter she asked him several questions, which he answered in a courteous and gentle manner, and she could see no difference in what he said from the teachings of Jesus.

Considerable conversation ensued and one lady said she had heard that Americans sometimes came all the way there expressly to visit him

6. The party probably left Naples on 4 April; on that day Carl Scheffler wrote a letter to the "Dear Folks" at home from on board the *Oceana* (photocopy of letter in author's personal papers).

7. Thornton Chase, *In Galilee* (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1985), 5-6.

and receive his teachings and she wondered how they could be such fools. . . . Mr. Scheffler and I sat there longing to open our mouths and loosen our tongues, but beyond asking some simple questions, we remained silent.⁸

This was Thornton Chase's and Carl Scheffler's first experience of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Holy Land.

On their fourth day in Haifa the two men went up Mount Carmel to visit the Shrine of the Báb. 'Abdu'l-Bahá had begun construction of the tomb in 1898, when Kheiralla was on pilgrimage; by 1907 the basic, unadorned structure—a square of brownish-yellow limestone—had been completed. The Persian caretaker did not speak any English. He opened the tomb for them to enter and pray. Some Persians visited the tomb and, using gestures and a few simple words, conveyed the message to Thornton Chase and Carl Scheffler that the next day they would travel to 'Akká.⁹

A carriage stopped at their hotel the next morning, 12 April 1907, at seven. No road had yet been built to 'Akká, but the beach served the purpose well:

Then began the nine mile drive along the beautiful curve of the Mediterranean shore, most of the way in the water where the sand is hard and the surf plays "tag" with the carriage wheels, while the horse hoofs clatter and splash a quick tattoo through the gliding water. . . . When we crossed the two rivers that run into the sea, we rode out forty or fifty yards from the shore so as to follow the sand bars formed by the breakers as they meet the outflowing rivers. Sometimes the water was up to the box of the carriage and the horses had to strain to pull us through. We passed carriages coming from Acca, pack-trains of asses and camels, flocks of little, black, lop-eared goats, foot travelers, fishing boats and fishermen standing far out in the surf. . . . Ever

8. Thornton Chase, *In Galilee*, 13.

9. Thornton Chase, *In Galilee*, 14–17.

before us was the walled city, rising clearer and larger from the water by which it is nearly surrounded.¹⁰

The carriage finally reached the city and entered it. The streets were so narrow that the three horses filled them from side to side. The carriage took them right to the house of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, where Thornton Chase and Carl Scheffler entered and were shown to their room. A few minutes later the moment of meeting 'Abdu'l-Bahá finally arrived:

Some one said "The Master!"—and he came into the room with a free, striding step, welcomed us in a clear, ringing voice—"Mahrhabba! Mahrhabba!" (Welcome! Welcome!)—and embraced us with kisses as would a father his son, or as would brothers after a long absence. It is no wonder that some have thought that the Master loved them more than all others, because he hesitates not to express his love and he truly *loves all humanity in each one*. He is the great Humanitarian and each friend is to him the representative of all mankind.

He bade us be seated on the little divan; he sat on the high, narrow bed at one side of the room, drew up one foot under him, asked after our health, our trip, bade us be happy, and expressed his happiness that we had safely arrived. Then, after a few minutes, he again grasped our hands and abruptly left us. I think we had not spoken at all except to answer "yes" or "no." We could not. We knew not what to say. But our hearts were full of joyful tears, because we were "at home." His welcoming spirit banished strangeness, as though we had always known him. . . . Those were moments of deep happiness; yet I could not fully realize the great blessedness or [of] that meeting, which was the goal of my hope; but now its remembrance has become my joy and the treasure of my heart. I was filled with wonder at his simplicity, with admiration for his strength and dignity and love for his tenderness; these, mingled with delight and thankfulness, possessed me.¹¹

10. Thornton Chase, *In Galilee*, 19–20.

11. Thornton Chase, *In Galilee*, 27–28.

This was the beginning of Thornton Chase's spiritual adventure. His account, *In Galilee*, is one of the most articulate descriptions of a visit to 'Akká ever written. It provides a detailed portrait of his experiences:

Five days we remained within those walls, prisoners with Him who dwells in that "Greatest Prison." It is a prison of peace, of love and service. No wish, no desire is there save the good of mankind, the peace of the world, the acknowledgment of the Fatherhood of God and the mutual rights of men as His creatures, His children. Indeed, the real prison, the suffocating atmosphere, the separation from all true heart desires, the bond of world conditions, is outside of those stone walls, while within them is the freedom and pure aura of the Spirit of God. All troubles, tumults, worries or anxieties for worldly things are barred out there.¹²

In spite of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's confinement to the prison city, He was a very busy man with a constant stream of visitors. Thornton Chase's window overlooked 'Abdu'l-Bahá's courtyard, and from there he was able to watch 'Abdu'l-Bahá. A government sentry house that always contained an armed guard also had a full view of the garden and its surroundings:

. . . we saw Abdul-Baha and Mirza Assadu'llah walking back and forth on the paths, sometimes stopping and conversing earnestly. I could not but think of a lion pacing in his cage. . . . Later a soldier came, carrying his gun, delivered a message and went away. An old man with a cane came to the garden gate, about fifty feet from where Abdul-Baha sat in the tent. He bowed low with his hand on his heart, talked a while at that distance and then, with deepest respect, moved backward through the gate and away.

. . . Visitors, tourists and officials came and went constantly. One afternoon came three black robed Catholic nuns, one portly woman

12. Thornton Chase, *In Galilee*, 24-25.

with a black robe and no head-dress, and several ladies unveiled, with olive complexions. They were directed to the tent by the Master from his room window and he met them there later.¹³

Thornton Chase and Carl Scheffler had several personal audiences with 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He often visited their room unexpectedly, especially just before bedtime. He always began by inquiring about the pilgrims' health and happiness and then gave "an instructive discourse of ten or fifteen minutes, or possibly three or four minutes. We took no note of time."¹⁴ In addition, most pilgrims saw 'Abdu'l-Bahá at lunch and supper, when He usually gave a short talk at the meal table, which constituted the primary opportunity for pilgrims to take notes. Thornton Chase described the talks:

Each conversation started with some simple reference to a natural thing, the weather, food, a stone, tree, water, the prison, a garden or a bird, our coming, or some little act of service, and this base would be woven into a parable and teaching of wisdom and simplicity, showing the oneness of all Spiritual Truth, and adapting it always to *the life*, both of the individual and of mankind. All of his words are directed toward *helping men to live*. Unless questions of metaphysics, dogmas and doctrines be introduced, he seldom mentions them. He speaks easily, clearly, in brief phrases, each of which is a gem. Whatever the lesson may be it always culminates in some teaching of unity.¹⁵

Mírzá Asadu'lláh and Hájí Mírzá Haydar 'Alí visited the pilgrims daily as well to give them instruction, usually by amplifying a talk given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Yet Thornton Chase does not describe in his notes the content of the lessons as much as their cumulative effect:

13. Thornton Chase, *In Galilee*, 38–39.

14. Thornton Chase, *In Galilee*, 35.

15. Thornton Chase, *In Galilee*, 33–34. Interestingly, Thornton Chase never published his notes of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks with him, although a typescript of them exists in TC.

At Acca nothing in appearance is marvelous; all is simple, direct, natural, without effort or preparation. Yet the effect is deep, strong and wonderful, because all that is said or done is an expression of complete assurance in the Truth of God, entire reliance upon His Guidance, devotion to His will and love for His service. This certainty of rightness, this abnegation of self in favor of God and His will as expressed through His Messengers and Servants, causes a simplicity and power which penetrates the hearts and kindles in them quenchless flames of love, service and unity.¹⁶

Thornton Chase found the same lesson taught to him by all the Bahá'ís he met:

Everywhere among the friends, at Acca, Haifa, Port Said, Alexandria and Cairo, we were given lessons of humility, simple, loving service, unselfishness and happiness in living the life of the Kingdom. There is no ostentation or striving for effect, but courtesies and offerings, a flower, a cup of tea, a bit of candy, carrying a parcel or doing some service, are blended with such a simple, affectionate spirit that they charm and attract.¹⁷

Elsewhere in his account of his pilgrimage Thornton Chase notes that "wherever there were believers we found courteous, gentle, loving, earnest people, looking only for opportunities to serve one another."¹⁸

Thornton Chase's notes are filled with several references to the children of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's household and especially to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's oldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi. He found that even the children were examples:

16. Thornton Chase, *In Galilee*, 46.

17. Thornton Chase, *In Galilee*, 42-43.

18. Thornton Chase, *In Galilee*, 51.

The most visible effect of that power [of love] is in the lives of the believers everywhere, the pilgrims from every land, and the children. Such children I have never seen, so courteous, unselfish, thoughtful for others, unobtrusive, intelligent, and swiftly self-denying in the little things that children love, such as toys, candies, fruit, etc.¹⁹

In 1902, in a letter to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Thornton Chase had expressed his longing to see the face of Bahá'u'lláh. While on pilgrimage he was able to see a photograph of Bahá'u'lláh taken in 1868:

How often has imagination tried to outline his face; how eagerly have those been questioned who had looked upon him; how earnestly has the wish been that the knowledge of him and the pilgrimage to his presence might have been made in his day.

The picture is a large photograph taken of him during the later years of his life. It is a majestic face, that of a strong, powerful, stern man, yet filled with an indescribable sweetness. Even in the photograph the majestic power shows through the lines of light and shade. . . . No word was spoken. It was a time for silence.²⁰

In the same 1902 letter to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Thornton Chase had expressed his desire for certainty that Bahá'u'lláh was indeed God's manifestation for this day. While on pilgrimage he apparently achieved that certitude:

In his ['Abdu'l-Bahá's] presence, faith in God, in the power of the good, in the victory of the Spirit, became confirmed. Confidence was supreme in the impregnable certainty of the Cause of God. The feeling possessed us that the Day of God's triumph was shining, that we were admitted as humble factors in his work of gladness, and that the might of man's bondage to the tyranny of self was being illumined by

19. Thornton Chase, *In Galilee*, 51.

20. Thornton Chase, *In Galilee*, 39.

the Glory of God. Fear and trembling vanished; prayer and praise sang joyously within us.²¹

Undoubtedly the lesson of the pilgrimage for Thornton Chase was unity, love, and service. The account of his pilgrimage is filled with many gemlike descriptions of these qualities and their importance. Many such passages could be quoted, but one serves to summarize his experience:

Service is the key to unity, and Unity is the one great theme of the Teacher of Acca. Without unity nothing can be accomplished. . . . Unity of the few, the assembly [Bahá'í community], many assemblies, the country, many countries, the world. . . . And unity which is confined to the society or assembly alone is *not unity*; it must be open armed unity, seeking oneness of will, of purpose and of work with all other groups and assemblies. Each individual strengthens his individuality, not by maintaining it alone, but, on the contrary, by joining himself, his powers and abilities with others. Thus his own efficiency is enlarged and multiplied by cohesion with others. . . .

This in reality is the Message of Baha'o'llah in this Day—Unity, Love and Service in the Name of God; service in love, service to the friends and to all; living with such sweetness, usefulness, happiness and cheerfulness that the life itself attracts the notice of others and draws them to the beauty of such living; service to every one around, no discrimination in service, but simply a great desire to be of use in every possible waking moment to some one of God's creatures.²²

Thornton Chase was beginning to articulate his conception of the Bahá'í Faith, a conception radically simple yet radically different from any approach that Americans usually took, even to this day: that the Bahá'í Faith is a way of living, or, simply, living itself. The teachings themselves, often given as principles or formulae of

21. Thornton Chase, *In Galilee*, 46–47.

22. Thornton Chase, *In Galilee*, 59–60.

thought, are unimportant except to the extent they are internalized and lived by believers. This was why 'Abdu'l-Bahá rarely gave formal instruction beyond simple comments on how one should be. Thornton Chase summarized Bahá'í pilgrimage thus:

They come from every land, from every religion, from all kinds of training, each with his little cup or larger bowl, seeking answer to his quest. . . . And, after a week, a day, or an hour, they return to their distant homes, all *filled with love*, most of their questions unasked and forgotten, curious no longer, but satisfied and overflowing with love to the human race and a great longing to bear the Word of Revelation to their friends, and to serve every creature of God without regard to family, race or religion.²³

Particularly important was Thornton Chase's observation that pilgrims often forgot to ask 'Abdu'l-Bahá their questions. His notes of his visit to 'Akká make no mention of questions that he himself asked 'Abdu'l-Bahá and record very few words spoken by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Only once did Thornton Chase, Arthur Agnew, and Carl Scheffler ask questions; they had brought questions concerning the business of the Chicago House of Spirituality and the Bahai Publishing Society.

During one of their last evenings in 'Akká 'Abdu'l-Bahá held a supper for forty Persian and American pilgrims and asked Thornton Chase, Arthur Agnew, and Carl Scheffler to speak briefly. It was one of the few opportunities for Persian and American Bahá'í pilgrims to mingle; the Persians were delighted to meet their coreligionists from the West and listened to them with "utmost attention."²⁴ 'Abdu'l-Bahá passed among his guests, seating each one personally, giving them napkins, and serving them.

On the last day of the pilgrimage the women of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's household met the American men—something that would have

23. Thornton Chase, *In Galilee*, 50.

24. Thornton Chase, *In Galilee*, 63.

been impossible in most Middle Eastern homes in 1907. They asked the men to carry their love, hopes, and prayers to their sisters in America and to express their desire that the Bahá'í women of the West "so strive and work that they might accomplish not only their own duty in the Cause of God but also that of the helpless ones in the Orient."²⁵

The time to leave 'Akká had come. Thornton Chase did not want ever to leave, and he was scheduled to remain a few days longer. However, enemies of 'Abdu'l-Bahá had informed the governor that Americans were staying at 'Abdu'l-Bahá's house, placing the household in danger. Each pilgrim met 'Abdu'l-Bahá privately and briefly for a few final words. Thornton Chase described his meeting as follows:

Soon after the noon meal Abdul-Baha met me in the little upper court. He embraced this servant, and, moving away a few feet, he turned, looked steadily and pronounced a promise that is a precious memory and hope. Then he went into the apartments of the household.²⁶

'Abdu'l-Bahá apparently promised Thornton Chase that they would meet again. As he descended the stairs to leave the house, he told Carl Scheffler, "the Master has assured me that I will return to this place soon. This reconciles me to this unbearable departure."²⁷ The return, however, was not to take place physically.

The pilgrims were then taken two miles by carriage to Bahjí, to the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, where He was interred in 1892. Each entered the inner chamber alone and prayed as long as possible there. Thornton Chase described the visit as the "culmination" of the pilgrimage. Then they traveled to the garden of Riḍván, a Bahá'í property that Bahá'u'lláh had often visited to enjoy the trees and the stream. Finally they returned to their hotel. Thornton Chase noted

25. Thornton Chase, *In Galilee*, 45.

26. Thornton Chase, *In Galilee*, 66.

27. Carl Scheffler, "Thornton Chase: First American Bahá'í?" *World Order* 11.5 (August 1945):157.

that "through all the nine mile drive to Haifa we scarcely spoke," and Carl Scheffler says that Thornton Chase's tears did not finally dry until they reached the "Hospice of the Little Child," where they stayed overnight.²⁸

The pilgrimage, now over, was to exert a profound effect on Thornton Chase for the rest of his life. An experience that occurred when he was leaving 'Akká demonstrated the extent to which he had been transformed by his pilgrimage. He noted that as the pilgrims left the house of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and "entered the world again it was with a sort of chill as when one steps from a warm room into a cold night air." The carriage, pulled by two horses, carried them through the crooked streets of 'Akká and out through the city gate. There they stopped so that a third horse could be added to the team. While waiting,

we were surrounded by vendors and beggars calling out the names of the loved one we had left, evidently hoping thus to extract money from us. We had descended from a realm of happiness, peace and light to an underworld of greed and strife. Never before had we so perceived the ignorance and animalism which possesses men, and at first we shrank from them, but when we noted their condition, their sickness, their burdens and griefs, a longing tenderness welled up in our hearts toward them and to all creatures, a great wish to pour out on them the fragrances of peace, good-will and love, to lift them up from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge, from hell to heaven—and to serve them, even to the extinction of self.²⁹

Thornton Chase's transformation had gone so far that he yearned for death in his service to others. In a letter written to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1902 he had spoken of his longing desire to surrender his will completely to the will of God. In this act of dedication to others he had perhaps achieved that goal.

28. Thornton Chase, *In Galilee*, 68–70; Scheffler, "Thornton Chase," 157.

29. Thornton Chase, *In Galilee*, 67.

Nor was this transformation temporary. Eighteen months later in a book he wrote, Thornton Chase emphasized the primacy of service, identifying it with love:

the love of mankind is an affection for the welfare and highest good of each one and of all, recognizing that all are children of one Father and brothers of one family. It may cause but little emotion, but it demands service. Each member of humanity becomes a type of the whole, and love, that is, service, goes out unsparingly to all without regard to kinship or recompense. If there be any preference, it is for the poor, the needy, the helpless, because the essence of love is to exalt the low and feed the hungry.³⁰

Thornton Chase's statements are remarkable when one considers the racial prejudice that was taken for granted in his society, not only against Blacks but also against Orientals and even Eastern Europeans. Thornton Chase elaborated further about service:

We cannot serve God: He needs no creatures' service. Neither can we serve ourselves alone, because such selfishness results in death, not life. But we can serve others. We can train ourselves to grow in strength and ability to serve humanity, that is—our neighbor, the ones near to us and around us as well as those far away, excluding none from our service. That is God's service, for two reasons—because it is obeying his Command, and because it is the God-like in man that we serve. . . . Each human being has something of the "image of God" in him, and it is a blessing to us if we be able to serve that God-like quality and aid it to shine forth.³¹

Bahá'u'lláh, in His description of spiritual growth as a series of valleys, notes that after the valleys of search, love, and knowledge

30. Thornton Chase, *Bahai Revelation* (Chicago: Bahai Publishing Society, 1909), 155–56.

31. Thornton Chase, *Bahai Revelation*, 148–49.

come those of unity, contentment, wonderment, and true poverty and absolute nothingness. The valley of knowledge He calls the "last plane of limitation."³² Before his pilgrimage, the evidence suggests that Thornton Chase had traversed at least the first three valleys; now, perhaps, he entered the remaining four. He reached the station of seeing "in himself neither name nor fame nor rank, but findeth his own praise in praising God." He had tasted of "dying from self and the living in God, the being poor in self and rich in the Desired One."³³ This was the lasting legacy of his five days with 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Thornton Chase returned home, rededicated to serving the Bahá'í Faith. He redoubled his efforts to initiate the construction of a Bahá'í House of Worship in Chicago; he and Arthur Agnew and Carl Scheffler had spent a few moments discussing the project with 'Abdu'l-Bahá during their last day in 'Akká. The experience transformed Thornton Chase's view of individuals; his personal correspondence after the pilgrimage exudes a depth of love, devotion, and care for others that was previously absent. More important, the pilgrimage reawakened his literary creativity. In 'Akká 'Abdu'l-Bahá had picked up Thornton Chase's large fountain pen and commented that "the battle axe must fit the hand of the wielder."³⁴ After his return Thornton Chase picked up his pen to write two books, several essays, and, again, poems, all dedicated to his Lord.

32. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, trans. Marzieh Gail and Ali Kuli Khan (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), 17.

33. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, 18, 36.

34. Thornton Chase, *In Galilee*, 44.

CHAPTER 17

A New Name

Immediately upon his return Thornton Chase began to write about his pilgrimage to 'Akká. Surprisingly little of the trip is mentioned in his letters to friends; those passages that do mention it were later incorporated into *In Galilee*, his book about the experience.¹ The probable reason that few letters describing the pilgrimage survive is because Thornton Chase wrote the original version of the book as a letter to circulate among his friends. The Thornton Chase Papers contain the original typescript of *In Galilee*, which consists of a single forty-five-page letter addressed anonymously to "Dear Friend in the Cause of Truth." By December 1907 the letter was completed

1. For example, see Thornton Chase to Helen Goodall (copy), 27 June 1907, TC. The second paragraph on the first page appears in modified form on pp. 33 and 34 in Thornton Chase, *In Galilee*, 2d ed. (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1985). The last half of p. 2 appears, modified, on p. 50. The description of inventions in the middle of p. 3 appears on pp. 53 and 54. The bottom of p. 3 contains the description of a rainbow that appears on pp. 11 and 12. Similarly, Thornton Chase to Mrs. and Mrs. Bailey (copy), 19 June 1907, TC, has many passages that appeared in *In Galilee*. The first paragraph can be found on pp. 24 and 25. The first paragraph on p. 2 can be found on page 29. The second paragraph appears on p. 55. The text on the pp. 3 and 4 of the letter appears on p. 56, 58, 59, and 60. The text of p. 5 appears on pp. 48–49. Only p. 6 seems not to have been used by Thornton Chase in his later work. Many of the passages in these two letters are the most distinct and succinct ones in *In Galilee*; for this reason, many appeared in the previous chapter of the present work.

and was being copied for others by Gertrude Buikema, a Chicago Bahá'í.²

The typescript immediately proved popular. A Hawaiian Bahá'í wrote that she had been "living in Acca" ever since reading it, saying, "I feel now as though I knew my Lord . . . I have caught a glimpse of heaven." Thornton Chase was asked to publish the typescript as a book. The Bahai Publishing Society had no money for the printing; consequently the cost was borne by several "intimate friends" of Thornton Chase. His business travels slowed the proof-reading of the galleys, but on 19 August 1908 two thousand copies of the book came off the press.³ It was extensively illustrated by photographs that Thornton Chase had taken with his own cameras and developed himself.

In Galilee is characterized by a kind of soberness best commented upon by Thornton Chase himself:

We find on our return here that the friends look with eagerness to us for some great message, something new and strange, and some seem disappointed that we do not tell them of marvelous miracles, appearances, sensations, or experiences. It is not easy, indeed not possible to meet such expectations. One can describe the appearance of Abdul-Baha' as that of any man, but that is only the outward, not the reality. That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is of the Spirit is Spirit. The outer can be told, that which appeals to the record of the senses; that which is inwardly perceived, although sure and certain, can not be told; it can only be experienced.⁴

2. Thornton Chase to Harlan Ober (copy), 1 November 1907, 2, TC.

3. Agnes Alexander to unknown (copy), January 1908, TC, quotes the Hawaiian Bahá'í's praise of Thornton Chase's letter-version of the typescript. Its subsidy is mentioned in Albert Windust to Ethel Rosenberg (copy), 29 February 1908, CHS. The size of the print run and the time the book came off the press are given in Thornton Chase to Ethel Rosenberg (copy), 5 September 1908, 1, TC.

4. Thornton Chase to Mr. and Mrs. Bailey (copy), 19 June 1907, 1-2, TC.

But *In Galilee's* success can be attributed to Thornton Chase's remarkable ability to describe the Spirit as well as the flesh. In a sense, the "marvelous miracles," the "sensations and experiences" are there, but they are 'Abdu'l-Bahá's qualities and the experience of them. Those who expected, while on pilgrimage, to see 'Abdu'l-Bahá behaving in a spiritually superhuman fashion—performing acts such as healing people and predicting the future—were not disappointed, because He had the ability to be all things to all people. There are stories in pilgrims' notes of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's healing people, or appearing to them in dreams, or predicting events that later occurred in their lives. But Thornton Chase's vision was deeper—he had no need for superficial miracles—and his pen was able to recount his more profound observations.

Thornton Chase's pilgrimage also made a significant impression on 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In Thornton Chase's presence 'Abdu'l-Bahá revealed a tablet for him. In that tablet 'Abdu'l-Bahá reiterates the importance of spiritual and loving living, thereby reinforcing the potentialities of Chase's character:

O Lord! O Beloved!

The truthful servant, Mr. Chase, abandoned home, left his native land and crossed the great ocean until he reached the shore of the Holy Land and arrived at the Blessed Spot. He laid his head upon the threshold of the sacred dust; he implored and supplicated the Gateway of Unity and sought confirmation and strength. . . .

O Lord! Confirm him, aid and strengthen him through the hosts of the Kingdom, so that he may become the cause of the spread of the Word of God, the cause of joy and happiness to the friends and the means of awakening the negligent. Thou art the Mighty and Powerful and Thou art the Precious, the Almighty, the Wise!

O thou truthful servant of the Beauty of ABHA! With a power of the Kingdom, a divine attraction and a spiritual breath, return thou to that land; fill to overflowing the lives and hearts with the wine of the love of God; be the cause of joy to all and the means of unity and

agreement to all; because through unity and agreement do the beloved of God hoist the standard, shine with the light of the love of God and are tender to one another.

This is the attitude of the beloved of God and this is the example and life of the sons of the Kingdom of God.⁵

Thornton Chase received a translation of the tablet in Chicago on 5 June 1907, the thirteenth anniversary of the first major Bahá'í event in Chicago. Two months later he received yet another tablet in response to some questions about which he had written to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In addition to answering his inquiries, the tablet contained a momentous statement:

O thou herald of the Kingdom!

Thank God that thou didst come to the holy shrine, put thy head upon the holy dust, reached the gathering-place of the spiritual ones, became a member of the assembly of the Merciful, found friendship with Abdul-Baha and with utmost love and joy spent a few days there. Then thou didst receive permission to return so that thou mayest serve the Kingdom on the continent of America and show (to the people) the ways to heaven and lead them toward the Lord of Hosts. I hope that, with a divine strength and a godlike personality, with a heavenly guidance, with a divine attraction and with a spiritual zeal, thou wilt educate the people. . . .

O thou firm one in the Covenant! We give thee Thahbet [Thábit]⁶ (the Firm) for a name, so that this name be an example of firmness and in the future thou mayest, even more than before, be confirmed in service, and upon thee be El-Baha-el-Abha [the glory of the Most Glorious]⁷

5. 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Thornton Chase, revealed in 'Akká on 15 April 1907, translated by Ameen Fareed in Chicago on 5 June 1907, in *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, vol. 2 (Chicago: Bahai Publishing Society, 1915), 340.

6. Pronounced in Persian "saw-bet." Today it is usually translated "steadfast."

7. 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Thornton Chase, translated by Mirza Raffie in Chicago on 8 August 1907, in *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, 2:341-43.

'Abdu'l-Bahá often conferred titles on individuals. Americans would write to ask for a name for their newborn child, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá would suggest the name of a Bahá'í martyr or a biblical personage. This was how Ruh Ullah Agnew and Joseph Ioas had received their names.⁸ One American woman who wrote beautiful music was given the title of *Shahnáz*, meaning "Melody." Lua Get-singer, one of the most zealous American Bahá'í woman teachers, was given the title of *Livá*, meaning "Banner." Edward and Carrie Kinney were given the names *Şafá* and *Vafá*, meaning "Serenity" and "Fidelity," respectively.⁹ Only rarely did the Americans adopt the titles as their legal names, though they were often called by them.

But *Thábit* was a title of quite a different quality. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá explained to the Bahá'ís of Philadelphia in 1911, "It is easy to advance toward the Kingdom, but it is difficult to remain firm and steadfast. Therefore endeavor ye as much as ye can to make your faith firm like unto a well-rooted tree and produce blossoms and fruits."¹⁰ 'Abdu'l-Bahá's sister, Bahíyyih *Khánum*, once said that "all the virtues of humankind are summed up in the one word 'steadfastness,' if we but act according to its laws."¹¹ Bahá'u'lláh described steadfastness as "the first and foremost duty prescribed unto men, next to the recognition of Him Who is the Eternal Truth" and as "the king of all acts."¹²

8. The Agnews received a tablet, no longer extant, that gave their son his name. The source of the Ioas baby's name is mentioned in Viola Tuttle, Margarite Ullrich, Monroe Ioas, Paul Ioas, and Joseph Ioas, "Part of the Baha'i History of the Family of Charles and Maria Ioas," TS, 10, author's personal papers.

9. O. Z. Whitehead, *Some Early Bahá'ís of the West* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1976), 48-49.

10. 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the believers of God and the maidservants of the Merciful in Philadelphia, translated by Mirza Ahmad Sohrab on 28 April 1911, in *Star of the West* 2.5 (5 June 1911): 5.

11. Bahíyyih *Khánum*, in *Bahíyyih Khánum, The Greatest Holy Leaf: A Compilation from Bahá'í sacred texts and the writings of the Guardian of the Faith and Bahíyyih Khánum's own letters*, comp. Bahá'í World Centre (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), 148.

12. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, comp. and trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), 290.

Thus 'Abdu'l-Bahá conferred upon Thornton Chase a title that, for a Bahá'í, represented the pinnacle of spiritual aspiration. The title was not one to be conferred lightly. *Thábit* simultaneously represented Thornton Chase's great potential and his significant spiritual progress.

Thornton Chase was overwhelmed by the title. To Mírzá Munír Zayn he wrote, "O my dear Brother: pray to God for me that this servant may prove worthy of that glorious name!"¹³ Some three years later he still felt unworthy. In December 1911 he noted to Seattle Bahá'í Ida Finch that the name was a test similar to that which Jesus had given to Simon by calling him "Peter," meaning "Rock." He noted, too, that Peter had failed the test of steadfastness, denying his Lord three times.¹⁴ To 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Thornton Chase expressed his feelings most fully:

Thou hast offered to this servant the name "Thahbet"—the "Firm."

O dearest Lord! Pray for this servant that he shall remain in all humility—steadfast, and be confirmed in the Kingdom of El Abha, until that name shall be the crown of his existence. Praise be to His Holy Name—

O Abdul-Baha: Accept this servant as Thy servant and guide him to a wise, true and right service in the Kingdom.¹⁵

Thornton Chase did not reject the title given to him by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, but took it as a challenge and guide to his spiritual development. 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote a tablet in reply to express pleasure at Thornton Chase's reaction and to explain further the significance of the name:

13. Thornton Chase to Mírzá Munír Zayn (copy), 27 February 1908, 3, TC.

14. Thornton Chase to Ida Finch (copy), 17 December 1910, TC.

15. Thornton Chase to 'Abdu'l-Bahá (copy), 27 February 1908, 1, TC.

O thou Thahbet (Firm) in the Covenant!

Thy letter was received. It indicated firmness and steadfastness; therefore, it gave me joy and gladness.

Today the greatest of all affairs in the Cause is firmness and steadfastness. A tree will not give fruit unless it be firmly rooted. A foundation will not last unless it be firm. There is nothing in this world of man greater than firmness. A soul who is firm will become a son of the Kingdom of God and will be confirmed with the power of the Holy Spirit.

For this reason I have named thee Thahbet (meaning firmness) and I ask the True One and supplicate Him that thou shalt remain firm in the Cause of God as an unshakable mountain and that the whirlwinds of test shall never have any effect upon thee; nay, rather that thou shalt be the cause of the firmness of others.

With me thou art beloved and I ask God that thou mayest become the lighthouse of guidance in those regions and that thou mayest shine with the lights of oneness in this world of man.¹⁶

Thornton Chase had made a very strongly positive impression on 'Abdu'l-Bahá; subsequently he received many tablets from Him. The title and the tablets encouraged Thornton Chase to make a greater effort to sacrifice for the Bahá'í Faith and to be an example of the Bahá'í spirit to others. They also fostered his literary effort to capture the essence of the Bahá'í Faith and to put it on paper for others to consider and accept.

16. 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Thornton Chase, in *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, 2:343-44. There is conflicting information about the translation of this tablet. One source says it was translated by Mirza Ahmad Sohrab on 16 July 1908; another reports that it was translated by Mirza Raffie on 19 July 1908. Perhaps it was translated twice.

CHAPTER 18

The Bahai Revelation

Thornton Chase's effort to describe his pilgrimage in writing helped him to create an even broader work that described the Bahá'í Faith itself. He mentions the work as a "little book" in a letter written on 17 November 1908. Apparently the book appeared in late April 1909, for a letter dated April 23rd indicates that he planned to send a copy of the book to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in a few days.¹

Thornton Chase entitled the book *The Bahai Revelation*. His own appraisal of the work is that he did not make it simple enough.² But 'Abdu'l-Bahá evaluated it more positively, saying it was in the "utmost completeness, comprehensiveness and eloquence," adding, "I entreat from the bounties of the Blessed Perfection [Bahá'u'lláh] that in each day thou mayest attain a new confirmation, deliver an eloquent speech and compose a supreme epistle."³

The Bahai Revelation is arguably the most profound work produced by an American Bahá'í to date. Written to be an introduction to the Bahá'í Faith, it is also a meditation on love, for Thornton Chase considered love to be the basic Bahá'í teaching. In his mind love represented the essence of religion and living; hence he believed love had

1. Thornton Chase to Ethel Rosenberg (copy), 17 November 1908, 2, TC; Thornton Chase to Mirza Munir Zayn [Mírzá Munír Zayn] (copy), 23 April 1909, 3, TC.

2. Thornton Chase to Albert Windust (copy), 16 November 1910, 2, TC.

3. 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Thornton Chase (copy), received 18 August 1909, TC.

to be the central theme of any book that sought to explain the basics of the Bahá'í Faith. *The Bahai Revelation* thus represents the culmination of his thoughts about love.

The book begins by asserting the following basic assumption:

The claim of the Bahai (Glorious) Revelation is that it is the Word of God sent to men to remove the antagonism and differences between peoples of various religions and prepare the way for their coming together in harmony and love. . . .

It is simple, profound, purifying, searching, as is the Word of God always. It is divine in origin, human in presentation, sane, practical and applicable to life in its every phase. In belief, it inculcates naught but truth; in action, naught but good; in human relations, naught but loving service.⁴

Thornton Chase goes on to emphasize that humanity needs the Bahá'í Faith:

A world-religion is needed, a solvent of religious differences . . . a platform on which all believers and seekers for God and His truth may meet, from whatever race or training they may come. And that religion must recognize the divine elements which underlie all religions and meet each loyal soul upon his own ground without claiming advantage over him, but rather bringing the light of God's Word to shine upon the truths he already has. . . .⁵

The majority of Christians have long seen Christianity as such a world religion, but *The Bahai Revelation* asserts that Christianity cannot provide a basis for the reformation of human society because it "has endeavored to overthrow the religious conceptions of other nations in favor of its own" and because "the records of Jesus"

4. Thornton Chase, *The Bahai Revelation* (Chicago: Bahai Publishing Society, 1909), i.

5. Thornton Chase, *Bahai Revelation*, i-ii.

words" are probably "imperfect." Having acknowledged the discoveries of higher biblical criticism, Thornton Chase adds, Jesus' words "have brought comfort, hope and satisfaction to myriads of human souls, and if only his pure teachings had been presented, with their doctrines exemplified in the lives of the teachers, the whole world might have received them and loved them. . . ." The other religions of the world have suffered from a similar contaminating process, for, in Chase's words, "no religion . . . has remained pure. . . ."6

Thornton Chase believed the Bahá'í Faith offered the pure truth, but he approached the religion in a way different from that of any other early American Bahá'ís. Ibrahim Kheiralla and his lieutenant Paul Dealy had stressed reason and common sense as the main way to approach religion. Isabella Brittingham, another prominent American Bahá'í, never mentioned common sense or reason in her writings, but stressed faith and love as the principal means for approaching religion. Her approach was based more on Romanticism, a nineteenth-century philosophical and literary movement that had touched the East Coast and the more liberal-minded. *The Bahai Revelation* offers yet another approach, one based on Thornton Chase's meditations on Bahá'í scripture:

The truth of any religion can be proved and confirmed only by the heart, by testing its tenets in the life. The Bahai Revelation is unshaken in the arena of intellect, but powers of reasoning cannot make final decision concerning spiritual truth. . . . no judgment is just, no opinion reliable except that of the personal living and decision of the heart.⁷

Thornton Chase saw religion as being rational, but, as did the great Persian Bahá'í scholar Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl in his classic work *Bahá'í Proofs*, Thornton Chase demonstrates religion's logic through rational argument rather than through simple assertion.

6. Thornton Chase, *Bahai Revelation*, iii.

7. Thornton Chase, *Bahai Revelation*, v.

The Bahai Revelation explores the religions of the past, their commandments, and their promises. The first chapter focuses on "The Great Commandment," a reference to Christ's call to "love the Lord thy God" (Mark 12:29-31):

Love is attraction; it cannot be forced or commanded; it must be drawn forth by the lovable. The will may direct love's attention toward an object but can never compel its action. The desirability of the object, the longing for nearness and union with it, these are the inspirers of love. How can man love God, the Infinite, whom no one hath seen? No man can comprehend God or know him as he is. How can his whole being, heart, soul, mind and strength, be devoted to the love of the Unknown, the Unseen?⁸

The answer is that God has provided the means for acquiring knowledge of God through divine revelation, which comes to us through a human being. The next three chapters of the book discuss the *logos*, or Word of God, as it has appeared in the Manifestations of God, focusing especially on Jesus and His words as recorded in the New Testament. Thornton Chase describes the mission of Jesus as one to establish love. He also criticizes the stern Calvinism of his youth:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believed on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3.16)

What wonderful, what beautiful teaching! God was not angry with mankind, as some have taught. How could they teach so with these words flaming before their eyes? Was not the whole burden of Jesus' teaching—Love, the love of the Father? And that man should love God and love man, his neighbor? How could man love an angry God, a wrathful monarch? No! God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. . . .

8. Thornton Chase, *Bahai Revelation*, 1.

That representative of Divine Love, whose whole life was love, was not "given" to suffer anguish in the place of man, to be rejected, scorned and crucified, to bear the deserved punishment of men's sins and thus placate an offended father. Truly he suffered all these things because of the sins of men, but it was through the wrath of man, not of God, his Father.⁹

Thornton Chase stresses that belief in Jesus means primarily belief in Jesus' words, His divine revelation. In addition to the revelation of Jesus Christ, God has shown divine love for humankind by sending other revelations. Thornton Chase briefly describes the mission of Moses and notes that the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Gathas, and the Avesta are also examples of the Word of God.¹⁰ God has chosen the method of progressive revelation not only because the conditions and needs of humanity change as society develops but also, Chase notes, because over time "the waters of life became stained and adulterated by filtering through the brains of men. . . ."¹¹

The last time the process of adulteration of divine truth reached its height was the nineteenth century. But Chase also sees it as a time of divine response to the corruption. The next chapter discusses the "Fullness of Time," the time of the revelation of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh and the developments that occurred during Their lifetimes. Among the events occurring in 1844, the year the Bahá'í Faith began, were the prediction of the American preacher William Miller that Christ would return within the year, the invention of the telegraph, the prediction of the planet Neptune, and the granting of the Edict of Toleration by the Turkish government, which permitted Jews to reside in Palestine again. Thornton Chase also notes that science had attained an unprecedented flowering since 1844, but

9. Thornton Chase, *Bahai Revelation*, 10-11.

10. The Vedas and Upanishads are Hindu scriptures; the Gathas and the Avesta are Zoroastrian.

11. Thornton Chase, *Bahai Revelation*, 16-24, 25.

because of the world's spiritual state, it was being turned primarily toward the production of ever more destructive weapons of war. In a startling bit of prescience he notes that, unless spirituality entered the "minds and hearts," one could "foretell the extinction of humanity within a few years" because of war.¹²

However, science had potentially ushered humanity into a golden age. It had raised "man from a condition of comparative childhood to a manhood of knowledge. . . ." Above all, technology had unified the planet with rapid communication and transportation, spreading knowledge to all the peoples of the world. Even business interests were knitting the planet together through the bonds of trade. Thornton Chase saw all of this as nothing less than the dawn of the millennium:

In a vague sort of way the "Millennium" has been expected to arrive at some possible future sometime; but it is already at the door. Now, in the amazing increase of knowledges, the breaking down of barriers of ignorance, the widening of commercial interests, the closer acquaintance of peoples, in brief—in the acknowledged need of Unity, the first rays of that glorious dawn of human solidarity, universal welfare and prosperity are appearing above the horizon.¹³

In these developments Thornton Chase saw nothing less than the emergence of the "manhood of man." With social maturity would come spiritual maturity: "We are entering upon a human period when the motives of man shall be reversed, when his purpose shall be to serve rather than to be served. . . . Instead of oppression, greed and selfishness, the motive powers of man shall be justice, helpfulness and love."¹⁴ He attributed the change to the Word of God, specifically to the leavening power of the revelation of God through Bahá'u'lláh.

12. Thornton Chase, *Bahai Revelation*, 31–33.

13. Thornton Chase, *Bahai Revelation*, 40, 45.

14. Thornton Chase, *Bahai Revelation*, 46.

The second part of Thornton Chase's book, "History," is a fifteen-page description of the lives of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The book quotes the Orientalists' praise of these figures and provides a succinct, accurate description of Their lives. It also describes the bravery and dedication of the early Persian Bahá'ís, thereby carrying the description of the history of God's love for humanity forward to the present.¹⁵

The third part of the book, "Teachings," consists of a forty-seven-page compilation from the Bahá'í writings that were then available in English. As the leading editor and administrator of the Bahai Publishing Society and as one of the individuals who had helped to raise the quality of English in the translations of Bahá'í scripture, Thornton Chase was completely familiar with all of the Bahá'í sacred writings available in English at that time. He includes in this section statements on the nature of God, of the Manifestations, and of the spiritual path, and includes the entire "Tablet of the True Seeker," Bahá'u'lláh's summary of the steps that must be taken to follow the spiritual path.¹⁶ Thornton Chase also cites a few passages mentioning the Bahá'í social principles and several tablets by Bahá'u'lláh addressed to Christians and to the Pope.

Having told the reader about God's love of humanity through the Manifestations and Their words, Thornton Chase goes on to answer the question posed in the book's opening pages: How can the individual come to love God? The title of the book's fourth part is "Salvation," but Thornton Chase offers a definition different from that offered by traditional Christianity: "Salvation means attainment of the high destiny which God has made possible for every man." To be saved, one must be "born again." The term is defined with a quotation from 'Abdu'l-Bahá about the different

15. Thornton Chase, *Bahai Revelation*, 46, 51-61. The Orientalists and scholars mentioned are a Mr. Ussher, [E. Denison] Ross, and Edward Granville Browne.

16. The "Tablet of the True Seeker" is a popular name for a passage in Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán: The Book of Certitude*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1950), 192-99.

kinds of spirit—the vegetable spirit, the animal spirit, the human spirit, and the spirit of faith. According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, acquisition of the last of these is what it means to be “born again.”¹⁷

How does one acquire the spirit of faith? In answer to this question, Thornton Chase links the concept of the spirit of faith with the biblical stress on a faith in God that produces works of righteousness (James 2:26). He saw its origins in a personal longing for God, which is often sparked by personal suffering. Thus the answer to the question appears to be autobiographical:

This kind of faith has its first impulse in the will of man. It often arises from suffering and the sense of need and it always increases that consciousness. Faith is not an intellectual yielding to argument through being convinced that certain statements are correct, but it is rather from a hunger of the soul, a knowledge of personal helplessness and the perception of a possible Mighty Helpfulness. Faith cannot rely on any man, but in God only; the required help must come from a higher power than man. The soul is craving that which does not pertain to humanity in itself.¹⁸

From the first spark of search, the problem faced by the individual is sacrifice of personal will to the will of God. Human yearning for God leads to prayer, which will eventually change the individual’s “attitude from self-ward to God-ward.” But Thornton Chase offers a word of caution:

No prayer is prayer to God unless it be in God’s way, according to his Word, and with a sincere desire for his Will to be done regardless of the personal will. Prayer, in its essence, is the abandonment of the personal will in favor of the Will of God. And such prayer God answers, because it is in agreement with his law and can be answered.¹⁹

17. Thornton Chase, *Bahai Revelation*, 119–20.

18. Thornton Chase, *Bahai Revelation*, 123.

19. Thornton Chase, *Bahai Revelation*, 124, 125.

Thornton Chase saw the "whole question of salvation" as "one of the will of man." God has given free will to the individual and "will not unman him and make him an automaton." Rather, the individual must make a personal struggle to overcome free will. The Word of God provides the guidance to accomplish this victory. From it the individual "receives instruction of a higher object of devotion, who is Wisdom itself, Knowledge itself, Love itself, and then, in response to the invitation of the Word, he turns his spirit toward that One and sends forth the 'wireless' supplications from his heart to the Heart of the universe."²⁰

Thornton Chase wrote as one who had struggled a lifetime to sacrifice his will to God's and who had achieved a substantial victory:

As he does this in all sincerity, there comes to him an assurance, a confidence in a new connection, a new help, a new power, a presence and strength which are reliable, impregnable and Life-giving. His seeking spirit has been met by a Mightier Spirit, as was the prodigal son by the Father; his spirit has been quickened and impregnated by a Holier Spirit; a new conception, a new birth has taken place within him; his spirit has become the Spirit of Faith and is made alive with the Spirit of Holiness shining forth "from the presence of the Divine Unity on the luminous, light-seeking, human essence" of himself. Then his spirit, being at one with the Holy Spirit of God is "vitalized with the Attributes of their Source, God, who everlastingly was, and is, and shall be."²¹

The final section of *The Bahai Revelation* consists of a series of short chapters on various topics. Most are about two pages long and contain an equal mixture of quotations from the Bahá'í scriptures and Thornton Chase's brief commentary on them. The titles of the chapters summarize their contents most eloquently: "The Bahai

20. Thornton Chase, *Bahai Revelation*, 128, 130, 131.

21. Thornton Chase, *Bahai Revelation*, 131.

Revelation is an Invitation to Love God," "The Bahai Revelation is an Invitation to Obedience," "The Bahai Revelation is of Authority," "The Bahai Revelation Teaches the Religion of Living," "This Revelation is a Call to Sacrifice," "The Bahai Teaching is an Invitation to Service," "The Bahai Revelation is Needed," "The Object of the Bahai Revelation is Unity," "The Bahai Revelation Makes All Things New," and "The Revelation is Complete in Itself." The book closes with a tablet by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and a prayer by Bahá'u'lláh.

The theme of *The Bahai Revelation*—life and love—is best exemplified in the following passage from the section on "Universal Love":

The command of Unity requires the cultivation of Universal Love which is the love of God expressed in love to man. All love is given to man to teach him the value of love. . . . Love teaches sacrifice, especially of the personal will. The lover always seeks to learn the wish or will of the beloved, and then to make his own will serve that will. . . .

The manifestation or proof of love is giving, or sacrifice of self. . . . God, the Generous, the Giver, is Love itself. He gives all that is in existence. Everything that man has is a free gift, his power to think, to know, to live, to work, to enjoy, to be, is all the pure gift of God. What can he offer in payment? . . .

If love means giving, it may be asked, how can man love God if there is nothing he can give him?

God has provided for this by endowing man with the consciousness of individuality, independence and will, and then he asks man to give up all these great powers for love of him.²²

This, to Thornton Chase, is the paradoxical secret of loving God. Loving God is only possible because God has given humanity free will—otherwise humanity's love for God would be automatic, not chosen—but for the love to be true, the individual must give up his or her free will and obey God's will instead.

22. Thornton Chase, *Bahai Revelation*, 154–55.

Thornton Chase's meditations on the relationship between the individual and God are unique in American Bahá'í literature. His work remains one of the most significant works on Bahá'í "mysticism" written in the English language and remains one of the greatest literary products of an American Bahá'í. Its secret lies in its view of the Bahá'í Faith as a mode of living rather than as a mere collection of teachings. This insight gives the book its continuing relevance to Bahá'ís and to all humanity.

CHAPTER 19

Los Angeles

Not all of Thornton Chase's Bahá'í efforts were devoted to writing. He remained active on the Chicago House of Spirituality as well. He and Arthur Agnew, Carl Scheffler, and Corinne True had returned from pilgrimage with guidance from 'Abdu'l-Bahá about the importance of building a Bahá'í House of Worship in Chicago. As a result of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's encouragement the project finally started to move forward. Thornton Chase himself was little involved in locating a site—in fact, when Corinne True located a site in Wilmette, he opposed its purchase on the grounds that it was too far from Chicago for the Bahá'ís there to reach on public transportation. (The House of Worship was originally intended to serve as the center of the Chicago Bahá'í community's activities.)

Thornton Chase was actively involved in organizing the first national Bahá'í convention, at which the Bahai Temple Unity, the national body that was to coordinate construction of the House of Worship, was elected. He was almost elected one of the Chicago delegates to the convention—he received a tie vote for the position of third delegate and declined—but was appointed as the proxy delegate for the small community of Clyde, Illinois. The convention selected a nominating committee—among whom was Thornton Chase—to recommend nine names for the Bahai Temple Unity Executive Board. Subsequently the convention accepted all of the

nominees as members of the Board. Thus he played an extremely important role in the convention.¹

Thornton Chase also remained active in the Bahai Publishing Society. In addition to publishing *In Galilee* and *The Bahai Revelation*, the Society issued a first volume of tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1909 and typeset two more volumes, to be published when the Society had the money to print them. While on pilgrimage Thornton Chase and Arthur Agnew had shown 'Abdu'l-Bahá samples of the volumes and had obtained His permission for their publication.

However, planning the convention and editing *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas* proved to be Thornton Chase's last administrative tasks of importance. After the Bahai Temple Unity convention in March 1909, the Chicago House of Spirituality suffered from a lack of direction. Most of its responsibilities had been national in scope; now those responsibilities had been assumed by the new national consultative body. The Bahai Publishing Society was saddled with a debt so serious that its activity stopped entirely for a time. Thornton Chase was not able to suggest new tasks to the House of Spirituality as he had done in the past, and he was no longer able to pay the Publishing Society's debts.

Then, about July 1909, the Union Mutual Life Insurance Company asked Thornton Chase to take a demotion and move to Los Angeles to supervise the company's West Coast operations. The decision was apparently intended to remove Thornton Chase from Chicago in the hope that he would devote less time to Bahá'í activities if he lived elsewhere. His Bahá'í involvement had displeased the company for years. While traveling for the company, he spent much of his time meeting with local Bahá'ís or organizing Bahá'í meetings in cities where no Bahá'ís yet lived. He occasionally hired Bahá'ís as company agents, and sometimes they did not prove to be

1. For the details of the first national Bahá'í convention, see Robert H. Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Early Expansion*, vol. 2 (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988), 309–12.

good choices: In 1900 two Bahá'ís in Cincinnati, Purley M. Blake and Harry Clayton Thompson, misbehaved so seriously that Thornton Chase was almost fired. Blake circulated slanderous rumors about the president of Union Mutual, causing severe embarrassment because the rumors were partly true.² Thompson ran for governor of Ohio on the Socialist party ticket, a party very much opposed by conservative businessmen such as those who run insurance companies; as a result the company fired him.³

In 1903 Thornton Chase had a serious difficulty in the company. He described it to Isabella Brittingham in a letter:

For weeks. . . I have been having a very serious time with the Company with which I am connected in business, and through the wrong doings of others, I have been misunderstood, condemned, insulted, and brought under a pressure that only God's aid has enabled me to bear without becoming insane. Again has my interest in other than business affairs been brought up and made ground of accusation of neglect of business and inability to attend to business, etc. . . . The storm is subsiding somewhat I think, but my future is very uncertain, and I am seeking for some other means of living and supporting those dependent upon me.⁴

But the worst was to come in 1907. As the history of Union Mutual notes:

"we will not," wrote [company president] Richards to Thornton Chase, a Company supervisor, "consent to trust any man who is speculating in stocks, making investment in blind pools, or false banks, or who is a

2. George Stuyvesant Jackson, *A Maine Heritage: The History of the Union Mutual Life Insurance Company* (Portland, Me.: Union Mutual Life Insurance Company, 1964), 148.

3. Thornton Chase to Carl Scheffler (copy), 10 May 1910, 1, TC. In the early years of this century, the American Bahá'ís did not yet know that Bahá'í scripture prohibits running for elected political office.

4. Thornton Chase to Isabella Brittingham (copy), 29 March 1903, 1, TC.

fanatic in business, politics, or religion." The emphasis in this particular letter happened to be on fanaticism. An agent had just absconded from Cincinnati, taking large sums of the Company's money with him, and Mr. Chase had been, in Richards' opinion, the man responsible. Chase, as he did not deny, had as much as permitted the Cincinnati man to abscond because they were "co-religionists." Mr. Richards referred to the religion in question as a "cult"—a "fraternity of the Egyptian religion," the nature of which was such that—as Mr. Richards put it—"I believe it could not exist anywhere except in Chicago . . . a natural hotbed of anarchy." Richards ordered another Company representative to investigate rather than discharge Chase. The trouble was that Mr. Chase had been an excellent agent; and even though [vice-president] Bates and Richards might fear that he had now gone mad, it would still be hard to replace him.⁵

The agent's name is not given, but it may have been Purley M. Blake. Exactly what Thornton Chase did is not made clear, but it is difficult to imagine that he would have agreed to or knowingly allowed the theft of company funds. It is known that Blake asked Chase for a loan from the company in 1900; possibly he was unable to pay it back. The letter reveals that Union Mutual's president knew nothing about the Bahá'í Faith. Chase's superiors' suspicion of strange religions must have complicated his relations with them and placed a cloud over his work, a cloud that his earnest efforts to serve the Bahá'í Faith could have only made worse.

Thornton Chase made it clear in two letters that the Bahá'í Faith was the major cause for his demotion. In one he says, "you know I have lost my position in business, because of my attention to religious matters partly." In another he says the demotion occurred because of his "ardor in the Cause of God."⁶ He hoped to leave the company instead of accepting its demotion, move to Denver, and

5. Jackson, *A Maine Heritage*, 140–41.

6. Thornton Chase to John Crowley (copy), 10 September 1909, TC; Thornton Chase to Mírzá Munír Zayn (copy), 9 September 1909, 2, TC.

start a land company. He wrote to various friends to raise the necessary capital, but such investment was apparently not forthcoming.⁷ With a wife, a son in college, and an ailing mother-in-law to support, Thornton Chase could not retire, as he ardently desired, nor could he find another job at age sixty-two. As a result he had no choice but to accept the demotion and move to Los Angeles.

By sheer coincidence on 18 August 1909, when his anguish was near its peak, Thornton Chase received two tablets from 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The first praised *The Babi Revelation* highly. The second was tender and extraordinarily affectionate:

Praise thou God that thou art an assured believer, firm and established, a servant of the Kingdom and a speaker of Truth. Under all circumstances thou art near to me: in spirit thou art my intimate and in the servitude of the Beauty of Abha [Bahá'u'lláh], thou art my associate and companion. I beg for thee an inexhaustible share from the Bounty of the Day of Manifestation.⁸

In response Thornton Chase must have written to 'Abdu'l-Bahá about the trouble with his company, because a beautiful tablet arrived at Christmastime 1909, two months after he had settled in Los Angeles:

O thou who art firm (Thahbet) in the Covenant! . . .

Be thou not sad nor unhappy on account of the incidents which have transpired. As these trials have come to you in the Path of God, therefore they must become the cause of your happiness and rejoicing . . . the believers of the West shall receive a portion and a share from the trials of the friends of the East. Assuredly, in the Path of His Holiness, Baha'o'llah, they will become the target of the ridicule of the people of oppression.

7. See, for example, Thornton Chase to Harlan Ober (copy), 30 July 1909, 1, TC; Thornton Chase to Alfred Lunt (copy), 17 August 1909, 1, TC.

8. 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Thornton Chase (copy), received 18 August 1909, TC.

Consider thou, in the first period of Christ, how the apostles were afflicted with suffering and oppression for the sake of His Highness, the Christ. Every day they became the target of the arrows of derision and the curse of the Pharisees, and they accepted great persecutions, experienced prison and dungeon, and the majority of them drank the cup of the most great martyrdom. Now, unquestionably, you must become also my partner and sharer and take a portion from these afflictions and troubles.

However, all these things shall pass away. What remains and lasts is the eternal glory and everlasting life, and those trials shall be the cause of universal progress and development.⁹

Thornton Chase indeed now became a "partner and sharer" of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's sufferings. The remaining years of his life were shaped by a series of grave personal difficulties. The new position brought him only half the salary that he had been earning, out of which had to come the tuition for his son's study at Dartmouth College. The result was acute and ongoing financial difficulty. He continued to have trouble with his company. His wife, knowing that his Bahá'í activities had caused his demotion, became considerably opposed to his continued Bahá'í work. Furthermore, his health was failing. Bowel problems that had plagued him for twenty years became worse. More generally he was beginning to feel the limitations of his age, which made it difficult for him to continue to work a forty-hour week in addition to giving Bahá'í talks.¹⁰

However, these afflictions, rather than quenching the flame of Thornton Chase's spirit, made it burn brighter. In 1902, writing to

9. 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Thornton Chase (copy), translated by Ahmad Sohrab on 14 December 1909, received by Thornton Chase on Christmas 1909, TC.

10. Thornton Chase to Arthur Agnew (copy), 14 July 1911, 1, TC, notes that his salary in California was half what it was in Chicago. He describes the severity of his financial troubles in Thornton Chase to John Bosch (copy), 26 July 1912, 1, TC. Troubles with his company are mentioned in Thornton Chase to Albert Windust (copy), 22 June 1912, 1, TC. His wife's opposition to his Bahá'í work is mentioned in Thornton Chase to Harlan Ober (copy), 28 November 1909, 1, TC.

another American Bahá'í, he had asked why 'Abdu'l-Bahá welcomed martyrdom.¹¹ Perhaps now he had a better appreciation of the paradoxical qualities of suffering, the spiritual forces it sets in motion, and the secret victories hidden within outwardly apparent failure. As Bahá'u'lláh describes the soul in the Valley of Contentment:

In this Valley he feeleth the winds of divine contentment blowing from the plane of the spirit. He burneth away the veils of want, and with inward and outward eye, perceiveth within and without all things the day of "God will compensate each one out of His abundance" [Qur'án 4:129]. From sorrow he turneth to bliss, from anguish to joy. His grief and mourning yield to delight and rapture.¹²

Thornton Chase arose and acted. He disliked Los Angeles: "I cannot feel 'at home' out here," he confessed to a Chicago Bahá'í almost two years after moving. Yet he initiated the effort that transformed a scattering of southern California Bahá'ís into a functioning community. Greater Los Angeles had about thirty Bahá'ís dispersed in the area's various suburbs and towns. Nevertheless, on 8 January 1910, three months after Thornton Chase's arrival, the Bahá'ís elected a five-member governing board loosely patterned after the Chicago House of Spirituality. Thornton Chase was among its members; it was the tenth local Bahá'í consultative body to have been formed in North America. The Los Angeles Bahá'ís also started holding monthly meetings for worship and for the purpose of attracting religious seekers. An organized community now existed where none had previously.¹³

Thornton Chase's job took him on the road much more now than when he lived in Chicago; he frequently visited the Bahá'í communities in Seattle, Portland, Oakland, San Francisco, and Denver.

11. Thornton Chase to Isabella Brittingham (copy), 2 May 1902, TC.

12. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys and The Four Valleys*, trans. Marzieh Gail and Ali Kuli Khan, 3d ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), 29.

13. Thornton Chase to Mrs. Fannie Lesch (copy), 19 July 1911, 1 TC. *Bahai News* 1.2 (9 April 1910): 7.

Because of their distance from Chicago, the center of North American Bahá'í activity, these communities were less knowledgeable of the Bahá'í religion than the Bahá'í communities on the East Coast and in the Midwest were. Thornton Chase's frequent visits and talks did much to strengthen the Bahá'í Faith in the West. He never traveled east of Denver again.

No longer able to serve on the House of Spirituality and no longer a member of a very large Bahá'í community, Thornton Chase felt "out of it."¹⁴ However, he compensated for the lack of opportunities to serve the Bahá'í Faith directly by writing more letters. His letters from the California period are among his most beautiful, because his love for each recipient is tangible and contagious. In them one can sense what some developmental psychologists have called a *zone of liberation*—the ability of some people, through their wisdom and insight, to inspire others and help them feel free to change and grow.¹⁵ One singular example is Thornton Chase's letter to Willard Hatch, written to congratulate Hatch about the birth of his new son. The letter said in part:

Your letters are a prize to me: in spirit and in knowledge they refresh my soul. I thank you for them. I praise God that you have a son. Greetings to him who, becoming a father, gains a new appreciation of the meaning of Unity and of "oneness." Learning this lesson, he, too, shall become a divine Son. Congratulations to her who forgets her travail, "for joy that a man is born into the world," and thus she enters a new realm of the Kingdom of Love. Welcome and hope to the little one who has arrived "from the nowhere into the here," the white blossom, springing forth from "water and clay," and floating on the bosom of the sea of creative light. It has individualized into the kingdom of Time to prepare for self-conscious and joyful service in the Kingdom of Eternity. Another cell is come into being in the Grand

14. Thornton Chase to Albert Windust (copy), 21 January 1911, 1, TC.

15. James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 200–201.

Man of Humanity. May its mission be of great capacity and nobility under the Mercy of the Merciful One!¹⁶

Distinctive in the letter is a new, cosmic perspective on the world, a perspective that is absent in earlier writings. In very different words Bahá'u'lláh similarly exhorts religious seekers in his book *The Seven Valleys*:

O friend, the heart is the dwelling of eternal mysteries, make it not the home of fleeting fancies; waste not the treasure of thy precious life in employment with this swiftly passing world. Thou comest from the world of holiness—bind not thine heart to the earth; thou art a dweller in the court of nearness—choose not the homeland of the dust.¹⁷

Because of this cosmic perspective—one could almost say divine point of view—Thornton Chase tended to expound spontaneously on spiritual themes in his letters. Aware of the tendency, he occasionally apologized for “preaching” all the time.¹⁸ His letter to Willard Hatch provides a good example:

To all of the true and precious sentiments in your letters goes forth the cry,—Amen! What but the love and enlightenment of God could bring them forth! They are contrary to the desires of the natural man, who, thus, could never devise them. The world is brilliant and warm with the holy Light of the Spirit, and the clear mirrors [pure souls], which have been purified through stress, suffering, and sincerity, are reflecting that Light gloriously. Truly they are “A host of Hearts filled with the love of God; A host of Voices sounding the praise of God!”

Knowledge must promote humility, because each bit of knowledge proves but a key to unlock the doors to gardens of knowledges, and as more and more appears until we are amazed at the magnitude, the

16. Thornton Chase to Willard Hatch (copy), [August 1911], 1–2, TC.

17. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys*, 35.

18. Thornton Chase to Carl Scheffler (copy), 17 November 1910, 7, TC.

infinity of that which we do not know, we must bow to the dust before the Owner of those paradises. Pride must melt before such grandeur, and be transformed into "Spiritual appreciation of the Glory of God." I thank you for these beautiful expressions. Indeed, I thank God for *Beauty!*¹⁹

Here Thornton Chase expresses in different words Bahá'u'lláh's statement that the effort to know God truly and completely leads to a confession of helplessness, which is "in itself the acme of human understanding, and marketh the culmination of man's development."²⁰ Thornton Chase had had an experience like that described by Bahá'u'lláh when a soul enters the Valley of Wonderment, where he is "tossed in the oceans of grandeur, and at every moment his wonder groweth. Now he seeth the shape of wealth as poverty itself, and the essence of freedom as sheer impotence."²¹

Yet Thornton Chase did not just send Willard Hatch a letter of congratulations, he also appended a poem. The last three years of his life saw him begin to write poetry again. He dedicated "The Warrior" to Hatch's newborn son. It, too, demonstrates a cosmic perspective on infancy and humanity:

Out from the East,—whence all creation springs,
 Where rosy Dawn provides all precious things,—
 An infant warrior suddenly appeared,
 Equipped with charms and powers—by heaven endeared,
 To meet life's battles on the fields of earth,
 And win swift honors from his hour of birth.

Coming with eager cry and clenched fists,
 He entered Life's arena. In its lists

19. Thornton Chase to Willard Hatch (copy), [August 1911], 2, TC.

20. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), 165–66.

21. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys*, 31.

He challenged love from all the hearts around,
 And, by his mighty helplessness, he crowned
 Himself with triumphs. None who could deny
 Him conqueror in arts of war, nor vie
 With him in victories! Thus, from above,
 Doth heaven arm infancy to conquer love.²²

Birth and death often bring out the most profound observations that a person can offer. Thornton Chase's other particularly remarkable letter was written to a French Bahá'í, Hippolyte Dreyfus, on the occasion of the loss of Dreyfus's father. The letter is even more remarkable because Thornton Chase was not writing to a close friend such as Willard Hatch to console him for his loss, but to a complete stranger. The letter is best quoted in full:

Your remembrance of this stranger-friend in the time of your bereavement touches my heart. It beats with love for you and sympathy with you and your good mother in the grief of separation which must be naturally your trial at this time. Accept my sincere regard and condolence.

Dear Brother-servant in Truth; Death bears a different aspect to me than it formerly showed. I never see now the form of one who has passed away, that a feeling of gladness does not possess me. I see, in a true imagination, founded upon a certain knowledge and faith, the released soul, escaped from its prison of dust, and flying upward in the glorious freedom of the "Spaceless," rejoicing in new found knowledge of its hidden powers, and glorifying in the atmosphere of the Spirit.

I sorrow for the living ones who are left behind, whose yearning sight is limited by fleshly bonds, and I long to say to them—Grieve not, for you must know that there is really no separation between those who love. Love is deathless, eternal; it is of God; it is God. It is the

22. Thornton Chase, "The Warrior," appended to Thornton Chase to Willard Hatch (copy), [August 1911], TC.

power that holds the atoms together, which holds the planets in their orbits, which binds human souls in unity, which shall bring those souls unerringly together in the eternal universe of the "unseen." Love shall save, revive, unite all in whom love dwells.

Wherefore, let us not grieve, but consider the joy of love and await patiently the time when we shall pass from the earth of dust, into the heaven of Unity, Love and Permanence.

Greetings and Joy to you in His Name, who is Love Eternal.²³

In this letter Thornton Chase describes the nature of his spiritual insight: It is neither a vision nor an intellectual conclusion, but a "true imagination, founded upon certain knowledge and faith."²⁴ Thus he describes it as a kind of mental faculty. Bahá'u'lláh promises that "death proffereth unto every confident believer the cup that is life indeed. It bestoweth joy, and is the bearer of gladness."²⁵ Thornton Chase had, indeed, experienced the fulfillment of this promise.

Thornton Chase's letter to Hippolyte Dreyfus, like the one to Willard Hatch, closes with an emphasis on love; indeed, it closes with the word *love* itself. Love had now come to possess and dominate Thornton Chase's entire being. Though he continued to work for a living, dealing with the endless paperwork of his insurance company, and though he continued to experience physical pain, yet a part of him lived in a different plane. Bahá'u'lláh describes a spiritual state that He calls the "Valley of True Poverty and Absolute Nothingness," which is the ultimate valley in the seven valleys of the spiritual life:

Ecstasy alone can encompass this theme, not utterance nor argument; and whosoever hath dwelt at this stage of the journey, or caught a breath from this garden land, knoweth whereof We speak.²⁶

23. Thornton Chase to Hippolyte Dreyfus (copy), 12 February 1911, 1-2, TC.

24. Thornton Chase to Hippolyte Dreyfus (copy), 12 February 1911, 1, TC.

25. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 345.

26. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys*, 39.

On a more prosaic level, developmental psychology offers metaphors for describing the human life cycle as it nears its end. Erikson sees the adult move through the challenges of intimacy versus isolation and generativity versus stagnation to a final stage, *integrity versus despair*. At this stage the individual, knowing his or her life is nearly over and knowing that she or he can no longer make choices that will significantly alter its course, looks back over life achievements and evaluates them as good or bad, as significant or meaningless. The individual also examines life through the lens of personal experience and either finds reconciliation and meaning or hopelessness, despair, even disgust.²⁷ With the aches in his bones daily increasing, Thornton Chase indeed was reviewing life and death and was integrating life events into a whole; he did not experience despair and meaninglessness. Erikson notes that one result of successful integration at this stage of life is one's reconciliation with death.

Another metaphor for Thornton Chase's stage of existence is offered by James Fowler, a developmental psychologist with considerable pastoral experience. He describes life as a series of *stages of faith*, as a progression of ways to make meaning and sense out of the world. His last stage he calls "universalizing faith":

This stage is exceedingly rare. The persons best described by this stage have generated faith compositions in which their felt sense of an ultimate environment is inclusive of all being. They become incarnators and actualizers of the spirit of a fulfilled human community. They are "contagious" in the sense that they create zones of liberation from the social, political, economic, and ideological shackles we place and endure on human futurity. . . . [They live] with felt participation in a reality that unifies and transforms the world. . . . The rare persons who may be described by this stage have a special grace that somehow makes them seem more lucid, more simple, and yet somehow more

27. Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963), 268-69.

fully human than the rest of us. Their community is universal in extent. . . . Life is both loved and held to loosely.²⁸

Whether one uses metaphors from the Bahá'í writings or descriptions from psychologists, the ultimate lesson of Thornton Chase's life is that he had the strength to live it. He had the courage to become and to be, or as Thornton Chase would say, to live. He could have given no higher lesson.

28. James Fowler and Robin W. Lovin, *Trajectories in Faith: Five Life Stories* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1980), 30–31. See also James Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 199–210.

PART 3

Love Is God

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PART 3

Love is God

CHAPTER 20

Final Years

From his Colorado days until about 1910 Thornton Chase is known to have written only two very short poems. One was a four-verse work to help the Bahá'ís remember how to pronounce the name *Bahá'u'lláh*.¹ The other was a brief poem of appreciation written in 1906 to Sarah Farmer, founder of Green Acre Bahá'í School:

O Farmer of this Acre Green:
Fear not to till its ground,
To sow the seeds of Truth therein,
Till Faith and Love abound.
Rejoice to reap with sickle keen,
God's harvests, year by year,
The wealth of ripened souls to bring
Unto the granary of thy King.
And find thy guerdon [reward] there.²

After Thornton Chase moved to California he wrote poetry frequently, probably as part of the process of integrating his life experience into a meaningful whole during his last few years. His oldest known work from the Los Angeles period is an undated and

1. Thornton Chase to Mrs. Emogene Hoagg (copy), 13 November 1907, 1, TC.

2. Thornton Chase, poem in 1906 Green Acre guest book, in Sarah Farmer papers, National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, Ill.

untitled work composed circa 1909 or 1910. It may have been intended as a hymn instead of a poem:

Behold the radiant morning!
 The Mighty Word appears:
 Resplendent in its dawning
 Uncovering doubts and fears.
 Baha'o'llah the Glorious:
 Revealer, King and Lord,
 Baha'o'llah victorious
 (By God's creative word.)

To him be praise and glory!
 From all below above!
 Who created the sweet old story
 Of God's redeeming love.
 Let joyful hearts receive Him!
 Let singing tongues proclaim!
 O doubtful souls, believe Him!
 Accept His Holy Name!

Baha'o'llah all glorious
 Triumphant dawn of light
 Baha'o'llah victorious
 O'er error's clouded might
 Beam forth O Throne of splendor:
 Revealed thy shining sword
 Thou great and strong Defender
 Of God's Eternal Word

Bright Sun of Revelation,
 Shine out from Orient Skies:
 Illumine every nation:
 To all mankind arise

With heavenly Light awake them,
 With love divine draw near;
 Thy sons of glory make them,
 Let heaven on earth appear.³

One significant change in the poetry Thornton Chase wrote after this piece is that it often had neither rhyme nor meter. Such poetry, in some ways simpler than metered, rhyming verse, relies much more on the arrangement of ideas and careful choice of words for its power. A good example is the beginning of "Travelers," an unpublished nine-page work composed in 1911 and read at the dedication of a new church in Los Angeles:

This traveling world is like a mighty wheel,
 Rolling its orbit way through roadless space.
 All things existent travel; all advance
 In their appointed journeys, passing on
 From destiny to destiny. They live,
 And move, and have their being under laws
 Of motion. Living is activity.
 There is no rest, no silence, no death.
 In all God's universe there's nothing still,
 Nor moveless, naught unmoved. For He alone
 Is changeless: He the independent One,
 And He the Essence of the central point
 And axis of all action everywhere.
 He is the Sun of every orbit. Yet
 Above all suns is He, the Infinite.⁴

The poem reflects the cosmic perspective Thornton Chase had developed and a resulting tendency to write didactically. He de-

3. Thornton Chase, untitled poem, TC.

4. Thornton Chase, "Travelers," TS, 1, TC.

scribes nature for two pages, then turns to humanity. He switches to rhyming, metered verse, yet even in this text only every other line rhymes (in his Colorado days, virtually every line was rhymed):

From realms unknown, through the gates of life,

The hosts of mankind appear.

From helpless cradle to helpless age,

They strive for a season here.

In endless procession they come and go;

Then vanish beyond our ken.

Can this segment of life be all man's part

In the plan of the Great AMEN?

The life of a bird, a beast, or a tree,

Is longer than life of man.

The planets, that swing in depths of space,

His cycles of life outspan.

Yet more than beast, than bird, or tree,

Or the earth beneath his tread,

Is he, whose spirit, whose mind, and will

Mark him creation's head.

The kingdom of earth is not his goal,

Who uses the talents given.

His way is not through the orbits of space:

But a journey from earth to heaven.

The soul is the traveler, and this life,

An inn for the transient guest.

He stays through the night, and then, with the light,

Speeds on for the mansions blest.

'Tis a night of trial, where evil hosts

And dangerous powers oppose;

And he who would win this journey's end,

Must triumph o'er all his foes;

But the darkness flies when the Sun appears,
 With healing in his wings;
 The dawning of Truth drives the night away,
 And the joy of victory brings.⁵

He then resumes using blank verse, concluding the section thus:

We all are travelers to the Holy Land,
 Our promised Heaven. He, who would serve the Lord,
 Must go into the wilderness, away
 From bricks and straw, from interests of earth,
 To sacrifice his first born love—himself,
 Endure the tests, and bear temptation's ills,
 And there build a tabernacle, fit
 For the indwelling of His Holy Name
 Where he may know God's presence. . . .⁶

Thornton Chase turns to Jesus' mission, then quotes Psalms—arranged as blank verse—that refer to the coming of the King of Glory, that is, Bahá'u'lláh. He closes the poem with a description of the Kingdom of God on earth:

The Holy Land, the New Jerusalem.
 Behold! God's tabernacle is with men,
 And He will dwell with them, and they shall be
 His people. God himself shall be with them,
 And be their God. And God shall wipe away
 All tears. . . . No more shall there be death, no more
 Of sorrow, crying, nor of pain. All these
 Are passed away. Behold, all things are new.⁷

5. "Travelers," 3.

6. "Travelers," 5–6.

7. "Travelers," 9.

In 1911 Thornton Chase wrote and privately published a poem titled "EL ABHA."⁸ It was a mystical meditation on the Holy Spirit, or the spirit that eternally fills the Manifestations of God. He attempted to describe the spirit of God by using nearly every applicable metaphor he knew. His own devotion to God and his submission to God's will come through strongly. The poem has nineteen stanzas, but a few suffice to convey the essence of the entire work:

I.

O Light Divine! Invisible!
 Immeasurable Light!
 Eternal as Divinity!
 Impenetrably Bright!
 The living universe bows down
 And veils its face before Thee.
 All angels and archangels bend
 And happily adore Thee.

II.

O Shining Spirit! Light of light!
 All-flooding, radiant beam,
 Eternally proceeding
 Forth from Him, the LORD Supreme;
 To all immensity of life,
 Himself Thou art revealing;
 With Thine intensity of light,
 Himself Thou art concealing.

.....

IV.

As light from flame, Thou art from Him;
 As fragrance from the flower,
 As colors from the prism'd light;
 As rainbow from the shower;

8. Thornton Chase, "El ABHA" (Los Angeles: privately printed, 1912). The poem was first written in April 1911; a partial typescript copy bears that date in TC. It was reprinted in *Star of the West* 3.12 (16 October 1912): 34.

As thought from mind; or word from thought;
 As deed by vision guided;
 So He and Thou art only ONE,
 Not dual, nor divided.

.....

IX.

O Word of God! Light, Love and Life
 Transmuted into speech!
 Thou mighty Logos—come from heaven,
 The Will Divine to teach!
 Incarnate Gift to happy men,
 Endowed with power perceiving,
 With speaking tongues and listening ears,
 With minds and hearts believing.

.....

XII.

Thy flame is Love, the living Fire!
 Thine alchemy divine
 Transmutes man's spirit into Life,
 The water into wine.
 Within thy crucible, O Love,
 With Thee this heart is blending;
 Its life out drawn, to be re-born
 From death to Life unending.

.....

XV.

Immortal Spirit! Loving Power!
 Thou dost my soul enthrall.
 I am in Thee, and Thou in me;
 Else were I not at all.
 For what I am, have been, shall be,
 Is Thine, not of my earning;
 A debtor I, with naught to pay,
 Except Thine own, returning.

.....

XVIII.

Thou All in all! The worlds of worlds
 Are filled with naught but Thee.
 Both light and darkness, heaven and hell,
 Thou art, O Mystery!
 Thou dost create, sustain, destroy;
 Yet Thou unchanged abidest.
 With seventy thousand veils of light
 The INFINITE Thou hidest.

XIX.

Ah, Wondrous Light! Invisible,
 Immeasurable Light!
 Begotten of Divinity,
 Impenetrably bright!
 Heaven-filled, the Universe, aglow,
 Unveils its face before Thee.
 All angels and archangels know,
 And happily adore Thee.⁹

Thornton Chase's declining health impeded his poetry writing as well as his other activities. In mid-June 1911 he entered a hospital for two weeks to undergo an operation to relieve his continuing bowel problems. He was able to return to his office by June 29th, but he remained in Los Angeles for the rest of the summer to recover. He wrote to a Bahá'í friend on July 13th, "I am nearly well now, but cannot walk very far yet. I think I shall be better than I have been for two years."¹⁰

9. Thornton Chase, "EL ABHA" (Los Angeles: privately printed, 1912).

10. Thornton Chase to Ahmad Sohrab (copy), 29 June 1911, 1, TC; Thornton Chase to Mirza Ahmad Sohrab (copy), 13 July 1911, 1, TC. Subsequent letters by Thornton Chase are written from Los Angeles; in Thornton Chase to Albert Windust (copy), 20 November 1911, 1, TC, Thornton Chase says he had just returned from a six-week trip that took him as far north as Seattle. Apparently it was his first trip after the operation.

Nevertheless Thornton Chase continued to be active. Whenever his health permitted he taught a Bible study class on Sundays at a local church, the Wilshire Christian Church, hoping thereby to introduce some of his pupils to the Bahá'í Faith. At one of the church's services he even gave a talk entitled "What sort of a Church does Our Age Demand?"¹¹ He also maintained his correspondence. Frances Johnson, a Hawaiian Bahá'í who planned to go to Japan, asked his advice about how to teach the Bahá'í Faith to Japanese. Thornton Chase replied that she should stress the concepts of beauty and honor, strong in Japanese culture, instead of God or the idea of love. His letter shows considerable appreciation of Japanese culture and bears no trace of the anti-Japanese prejudice that was then rampant in California.¹²

Thornton Chase's attitude toward women underwent gradual improvement, though not without at least one setback. In early 1910 several Bahá'í women opposed the creation of any Bahá'í committees in several communities because they believed 'Abdu'l-Bahá did not want the Bahá'í Faith to be an organized religion. He wrote a long personal letter to a Bahá'í friend of his, expressing frankly his feelings on the importance of organization and saying why he believed women should not serve on Bahá'í governing bodies:

Women are emotional, uncertain, unsteady, unwise in business affairs, carried away by "devotion," given to dreams and imaginations, and I am convinced that as long as the Cause in this land is so largely in the hands of women, it CANNOT PROSPER. They are extremists, lacking balance, unreliable, and this Blessed Cause needs the directly opposite qualities to uphold its banner among the whirlpools of occultisms and psychics that swirl everywhere in American society.¹³

11. Thornton Chase to Mirza Munir Zayn (copy), 9 June 1911, 3, TC; Thornton Chase, "What sort of a Church does Our Age Demand?" TS, TC.

12. Thornton Chase to Fannie Johnson (copy), 27 May 1911, 2-3, TC.

13. Thornton Chase to Charles Mason Remey (copy), 19 January 1910, 3-4, TC.

Of course Thornton Chase cannot now be asked what he meant by this statement, which was itself emotional and unreasoned. He knew women who were active Bahá'ís who were neither extreme nor unbalanced. He was in constant correspondence with Gertrude Buikema and Mrs. A. M. Bryant and even complained to them about the troubles some Bahá'í women caused. He also knew of Bahá'í men who fit the description above; indeed, he discussed several of them in the same letter. The early American Bahá'í community attracted many eccentrics, and many of them were women. Furthermore, American culture did not give women the same opportunities to develop their talents as men, especially in such areas as business and administration. Perhaps he confused their lack of experience with lack of innate ability.

A letter Thornton Chase wrote in 1911 to Nathaniel Clark, the only male Bahá'í in Denver (the rest of the community was female), gives what is perhaps a less prejudiced view of the differences between men and women:

It is one of the great desires of my heart to see strong, clear-headed, steady-minded, earnest-hearted men attain to this Fountain of Life [the Bahá'í Faith]. Of course, spiritually, there is no difference; men and women are the same; but there is an element of steadiness, calmness and permanence, which seems to abide more surely in men. . . . Man is more a creature of the head, and woman of the heart, but the real man must be a *heart*y man also if he is to be an universal man.¹⁴

In his letters Thornton Chase often wrote about the possibility of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visiting the North American continent. In mid-1911 'Abdu'l-Bahá traveled to Europe, visiting London and Paris. Many Americans, unable to wait for this visit, sailed to Europe to meet Him there. Thornton Chase noted, "it was a sorrow to me that I could not go, but it matters not so much, the physical meeting. He

14. Thornton Chase to Nathaniel Clark (copy), 7 August 1911, 3, TC.

who strives to be of service in God's work actually meets Abdul-Baha (the Servant of God), because he enters upon the plane of divine service."¹⁵ This statement reveals a remarkable change in attitude when compared to the statements in many earlier letters that express a yearning desire to see 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

After visiting Europe in 1911 'Abdu'l-Bahá returned to Egypt, to the disappointment of many Americans, but in early 1912 He traveled to the West again. Without stopping in Europe He boarded a ship in Alexandria that was bound for New York. Arriving in North America on 10 April 1912, He immediately embarked on a very active schedule of touring and lecturing. By July He had visited New York City; Washington, D.C.; Chicago; Cleveland; Pittsburgh; Washington, D.C., again; upstate New York; Jersey City; Boston; Worcester, Massachusetts; Montclair, New Jersey; New York and Philadelphia again; Newark; Englewood, New Jersey; and Dublin, New Hampshire. He gave as many as four talks a day, in Persian, which were translated simultaneously for the audience. At Dublin 'Abdu'l-Bahá finally rested for three weeks.¹⁶

Thornton Chase had hoped to travel to Chicago while 'Abdu'l-Bahá was there, but an "unusual and abominable business matter" forced him to remain in San Francisco for two months.¹⁷ Nevertheless he followed 'Abdu'l-Bahá's entire trip through correspondence and magazine articles and disseminated the details he had learned to others through his letters. He wrote what was perhaps his most thoughtful description to the Reverend Dr. George D. Buchanan of Portland, Oregon, who later became a Bahá'í:

You know that Abdul-Baha is in this country. . . . He was very weary when he arrived . . . and since then scarcely any rest has been permitted to him, and he is exceedingly worn and aged and weary. . . .

15. Thornton Chase to Nathaniel Clark (copy), 7 August 1911, 3, TC.

16. The best summary of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit in North America is Allan L. Ward, *239 Days: 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Journey in America* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979).

17. Thornton Chase to Albert Windust (copy), 22 June 1912, 1, TC.

... The newspapers of the east have treated him with so uniform courtesy that is a miracle in itself, when it is considered what opportunities for ridicule and satire are offered by his appearance, dress, mannerisms, etc. But there is evidently a certain strength, sincerity, righteousness, wisdom, knowledge, and nobility manifesting from him, as an aura of spiritual power, that even our flippant and calloused news men are restrained by it. As Kate Carew, a noted cynic and cartoonist wrote, after a long interview with him, accompanied with one or two unconventional situations which tempted her to "make fun" of him: "Several times in our interview I had thought: 'You dear old man! You fine old gentleman!' And now I thought it more than ever. As if anyone could ridicule that pure, white soul!" There you see it. The purifying, uplifting effect He has had upon even a Kate Carew.¹⁸

Thornton Chase also described 'Abdu'l-Bahá's impact on the crowds who went to hear Him:

He pays far more attention to the "strangers" than to the so called Bahais. It is as though *they* needed not his attention, but the masses, the rich, the poor, the ignorant, the learned, they are the ones to whom he gives his strength and counsel. They gather by the thousands to see and hear him. They rise involuntarily wherever he enters. They honor him. They seek to touch his hand, and he generously "shakes hands" with all, even the nearly two thousand women gathered at the Peace Society reception given to him at the Astor House, New York. They actually neglected the refreshments, after the addresses were ended, that they might reach him to touch his hand. And just before, he had visited a Mission in the Bowery, where were four hundred men gathered to hear him. When he had finished, he went down by the door, and as each man filed past him on the way out, he grasped his hand, and left in it a bright silver quarter as a souvenir of his visit. He had them prepared in a green bag. Over One Hundred Dollars he gave to the Bowery that

18. Thornton Chase to Dr. [George Davidson] Buchanan (copy), 12 June 1912, 1, TC.

night. And as he watched the approaching line, and saw a specially hard looking derelict approaching, he was ready for him and gave him two quarters instead of one. What do you think of that?¹⁹

After noting that 'Abdu'l-Bahá "has ten times as many invitations as he can accept" and listing all the churches, universities, and voluntary associations at which He had spoken, Thornton Chase summarized the message that 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave:

He talks of Peace. He says but little regarding metaphysics, unless in answer to some direct question. He talks to people only of Universal Peace; Equality of peoples and of sexes; the need of balancing material civilization with spiritual civilization. . . . The religion he is proclaiming is that of Practice,—to be kind to everyone and everything, to aid the forwarding of universal peace by influence and righteousness. He shows that true religion must prove itself in deeds among our fellow men; that religion and science must agree; that wars are useless, whether between nations or individuals. He preaches Universal Common Sense and the Commonwealth of the World. . . . He antagonizes nothing except ignorance and foolishness, and even these are only childish conditions to be removed by the good sense of human manhood.²⁰

Thornton Chase's summary reflects his own emphases on religious life and service and his own language ("human manhood" is an expression typical of Thornton Chase). However, it also accurately and perceptively summarizes the values that 'Abdu'l-Bahá repeatedly stressed in hundreds of talks and appearances across North America.

Thornton Chase was excited that his friends had met 'Abdu'l-Bahá for the first time, yet he worried about the impact that the meeting had on them. As he wrote to Albert Windust, "You have

19. Thornton Chase to Dr. [George Davidson] Buchanan (copy), 12 June 1912, 1-2.

20. Thornton Chase to Dr. [George Davidson] Buchanan (copy), 12 June 1912, 2.

seen Him now! What is your thought? Have you received strength? Have you found disappointments? . . . Did Abdul-Baha aid or encourage you in any way (tangibly or otherwise) in the manner of your [Bahá'í] publishing?"²¹ Especially significant was Thornton Chase's fear that meeting with 'Abdu'l-Bahá would be a spiritual test or disappointment for his friends.

The Bahá'ís of California, including Thornton Chase, greatly looked forward to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to their state. However, in late July, while resting in New Hampshire, 'Abdu'l-Bahá decided not to travel west again. As a result He wrote a beautiful tablet to Thornton Chase that invited him to come east:

O thou, my ancient Friend: my Companion and Associate:

Every day thou art remembered by me, and thy services are reviewed before mine eyes, and my good pleasure in thee is increased. In reality, thou hast labored hard in the Kingdom of God and thou hast undertaken infinite trouble. Thou didst become the cause of the guidance of many people.

Now the difficulties of the means of livelihood have obliged thee to travel to those parts. I know how thou art undergoing vicissitudes and hardships; therefore thou art unable to leave the place where you are. Notwithstanding this, as I expect to depart for the orient, and the California trip is canceled, if it is possible, and you can travel to these parts for a few days, so that the meeting may be realized, it is very acceptable and approved. But, if thy coming will be fraught with difficulties, unquestionably it is better to stay.

This epistle is written through the utmost longing. Under all circumstances I remember thee always, and beg for thee confirmations and assistance.²²

21. Thornton Chase to Albert Windust (copy), 22 June 1912, TC.

22. 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Thornton Chase (copy), translated by Mirza Ahmad Sohrab in New York City on 22 July 1912, TC.

It was the last tablet that Thornton Chase would receive from 'Abdu'l-Bahá. His love for Thornton Chase must have been exceptionally great, for the tablet has a personal quality, an intimacy, that is rare in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's correspondence.

'Abdu'l-Bahá also wrote to Willard P. Hatch to convey His intentions not to travel west again.²³ Someone—perhaps John Bosch—organized the California Bahá'í communities to telegram 'Abdu'l-Bahá asking Him to reconsider. All the Bahá'ís in southern California jointly sent a wire to Him; Thornton Chase personally sent one as well. Subsequently Thornton Chase was able to write to Bosch on August 9th that he had received two telegrams dated August 7th from 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The first read, "I hope from the favor of Bahaollah that means be brought about so that I may associate with all of you. Abdul Baha." The second added, "I hope that God may answer your request and with perfect happiness meeting be realized. Abdul Baha."²⁴

Thornton Chase was thrilled by the possibility that 'Abdu'l-Bahá would indeed come west, but he noted that the visit was not guaranteed. On August 9th he wrote a poetic letter of praise to 'Abdu'l-Bahá that repeated his yearning to see Him:

TO THE CENTER OF THE COVENANT: ABDUL-BAHA ABBAS.
May the Souls of all Mankind be a Sacrifice to Him!
 O thou David of the Promised Kingdom of God!
 Thou Princely Leader of all Humanity!
 Thou Warrior against the Tribes of Infidelity!
 Thou Conqueror of Darkness and Radiator of Light!
 Thou Bearer of the Banner of Divine Peace and Prosperity to the Nations!

23. 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Willard P. Hatch, trans. Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, 27 July 1912, Dublin, N.H., in Willard P. Hatch, "Early Days in Los Angeles Bahá'í Affairs," TS, 12, National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, Ill.

24. Thornton Chase to "My dear Brother" [John Bosch] (copy), 9 August 1912, TC.

Thou First Born in the Kingdom of Baha! Beloved of GOD and Men!

Thou First Citizen of the Royal and Holy City!

Thou *Branch* of the LORD, Beautiful and Glorious!

Thou *Greatest Branch* from the *Ancient Root!*

Thou Fruit-bearing *Branch* of the Divine Tree!

.....
Thou Lion of the Tribe of Judah!

Thou Lamb of the Sacrificial Love!

Thou Baptizer of Evanescence!

Thou Sum of Spiritual and Human Perfections!

Thou MYSTERY OF GOD!²⁵

Following the poem's nine stanzas, Thornton Chase concluded the letter with a request:

Reveal Thyself to those who can bear the Knowledge!

This grain of human dust, stirred by the Breath of the Spirit, longs for Thy Presence, for the Life-giving touch of Thy Glorious Love. These captives of Love yearn for Thy Nearness! These ignorant ones seek Thy instruction. These isolated ones hope for the Unity of Thy Meeting. These helpless ones trust in Thine Attraction to awaken the hearts of their friends and relatives.

O my Beloved! What can we say but to praise Thee; to thank GOD for Thee, His Greatest Gift to man; to implore Thee to pray for His Mercy upon these impotent ones, His Strength for these powerless ones, His Guidance for those erring ones, His Guard to protect us from ourselves!

Teach us to serve. Guide us in the paths of Knowledge and Wisdom.

25. Thornton Chase to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 9 August 1912, in *Star of the West* 4.11 (27 September 1913): 187-88.

Unite us in mutual purpose and aim, and grant us the favor of Thy personal Presence and Voice.²⁶

It is not known whether Thornton Chase actually sent this remarkable letter to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Nevertheless 'Abdu'l-Bahá decided to start west. After touring New England in late July and August He traveled to Montreal, visiting that city during the first week of September. He then visited Buffalo, Chicago, Kenosha, Minneapolis, Denver, Glenwood Springs, and Salt Lake City.

All of the Bahá'ís on the West Coast prepared for 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit. He was not expected to travel north or south of San Francisco, hence the Bahá'ís planned to travel there to meet Him. Thornton Chase had every intention of being among them. A trip to San Francisco was an easy task for him; at least once he had traveled there from Los Angeles for the weekend just to speak at a Bahá'í meeting.²⁷

However, Thornton Chase's health prevented him from attending. In early September he fell ill while on the road, presumably from a bout of his bowel troubles. Two brief hospitalizations were necessary.²⁸ After he returned to Los Angeles his condition suddenly became worse. On September 26th he was rushed to Angelus Hospital and was immediately scheduled for surgery. He hurriedly wrote to John Bosch:

They have just brought me to the hospital and are going to operate on me for obstruction of the bowels in about an hour. It is a very serious operation and will tie me up here for two weeks or more. Please let Abdul Baha know.²⁹

26. Thornton Chase to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 9 August 1912.

27. Lorne Matteson to the author, 1 September 1982, author's personal papers.

28. Los Angeles Bahai Assembly, "Letter from Los Angeles, California," *Star of the West* 3.12 (16 October 1912): 5.

29. Thornton Chase to John Bosch, 26 September 1912, TC.

The obstruction, probably a cancer, was not treated successfully; as a result Thornton Chase suffered five days of great pain. His age—he was sixty-five—and excessive weight were probably complicating factors. Always thinking of others, he had his secretary send a check for \$50.00 to John Bosch to repay a debt.

Informing 'Abdu'l-Bahá of Thornton Chase's condition proved difficult because He was traveling across Colorado and Utah; finally, on September 28th, probably while in Glenwood Springs, Colorado, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was contacted. He cabled to Thornton Chase that He was coming west and that "if it were God's will, he would see him soon."³⁰

On Sunday, September 29th, the Los Angeles Bahá'ís sent telegrams to Bahá'ís all over the West Coast, asking them to pray for Thornton Chase's recovery. On Monday morning Thornton Chase was "very low," but he rallied. That evening many of the Bahá'ís of greater Los Angeles gathered at his house to pray for him:

The sun had set when a little group of earnest souls, twenty in all, from various parts of Los Angeles, from Pasadena, Tropic and Glendale, assembled in silence on a street corner amid the bustle and din of the metropolis, to pray for the restoration of their brother to physical health and strength.

About seven o'clock we reached the home and had hardly entered before the telephone rang and we were informed that Mr. Chase had just passed away. Every head was bowed as Mr. Rice-Wray hung up the receiver and said "Friends, he has gone." Miss Wise arose and read the prayer for the departed, from the little prayer book, and Mr. Rice-Wray read two or three selections from Hidden Words, also another of which Mr. Chase was fond and which he had asked his wife to repeat to him often during his illness:

"With patience, then, the course of duty run.
God never does, nor suffers to be done

30. Los Angeles Bahai Assembly, "Letter from Los Angeles," 5.

But that which you would do, if you could see
The end of all events as well as He.”

Mrs. Rice-Wray went to the piano and the friends sang “Nearer, My God, to Thee.” Mr. Hall recited a beautiful poem, “He is not dead; he is just away,” and the friends departed, a great sadness upon each soul. We felt, indeed, that we had been in the presence of the Most High and had accompanied our brother as far as we could.³¹

31. Los Angeles Bahai Assembly, “Letter from Los Angeles,” 5.

CHAPTER 21

Thábit

Because Thornton Chase had been in reasonably good general health, his death was totally unexpected. In addition to grief, Eleanor Chase faced destitution, for Thornton Chase had been the sole means of support for her and for her mother, and—ironically—he had not purchased life insurance. Fortunately Thornton, Jr., had graduated from Dartmouth College in June 1912 and had a job; but to support herself Eleanor obtained a veteran's widow's pension and eventually took a job as a sorority mother at the University of Washington. Later she moved in with her son and his wife. She died at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, on 12 August 1933.¹

The American Bahá'í community was also grief-stricken by Thornton Chase's passing. Memorial gatherings were held in many places. *Star of the West*, the American Bahá'í monthly magazine of that day, contains more descriptions of Thornton Chase's life and death, and of memorial services held in his honor, than of any other American Bahá'í.

In a sense the American Bahá'í community's first tribute to Thornton Chase came five months before he died, at the annual

1. Eleanor Chase's application for a veteran's widow's pension may be found in the United States Government Archives, Washington, D.C.; her date of death is given in Captain Thornton Chase [Jr.] to the Disbursing Clerk, Veteran's Administration, 26 January 1934, United States Government Archives. A photograph of her and the sorority for whom she worked is in the possession of Thornton Chase Nelson.

convention of the Bahai Temple Unity, on Sunday, 28 April 1912. The convention resolved to send a greeting to "Mr. Thornton Chase, now in Los Angeles, but whose spirit is manifest by the effect of his early teaching and devotion, all present rising in recognition."² In this way the American Bahá'í community acknowledged his services.

After Thornton Chase's death, several tributes were published in *Star of the West*. The Reverend Dr. David Buchanan wrote:

Thornton Chase was a noble-minded and a large-hearted man. He understood the spiritual meaning of the Bahai life and had attained a height in his own experience reached by few. . . . Every one loved him because he was a supremely lovable man. He knew Abdul-Baha as but few knew him, and to have passed away on the eve of the arrival of the one he loved so much is one of the mysteries we can never solve. Thornton Chase had a mind deeply spiritual as well as philosophical and had a profound grasp of the Bahai movement.³

One of Thornton Chase's closest friends, Arthur Agnew, offered a particularly moving eulogy:

He was a man of great loving character, with a heart that drew to him warm friends and a love which seemed to reach out, surround and envelop you.

Oh, friend! when we consider thy loving heart, we do not feel that thou art separated from us. It seems that we should more naturally write to thee than of thee. Continue thou thine efforts for the good of the souls of men an hundredfold now that thou art free in the realm of might and power. Be nearer to the hearts of those in trouble and distress and cease not from thy labors until all the souls of men have

2. Joseph H. Hannen, "The Public Meetings of the Fourth Annual Convention of Bahai Temple Unity," *Star of the West* 3.4 (17 May 1912): 32.

3. Rev. David Buchanan, "A Tribute from Portland, Oregon," *Star of the West* 3.12 (16 October 1912): 6.

come into Peace and Love, and mayest thou always be in the fullness of happiness and joy in nearness to thy Lord and in His good will and pleasure.⁴

Yet the greatest tribute of all was paid to Thornton Chase by the One Whom he loved so much, 'Abdu'l-Bahá. On 30 September 1912 'Abdu'l-Bahá was taking the train to San Francisco. He presumably learned of Thornton Chase's death the next morning, on arrival in San Francisco. In His first public appearance on October 4th 'Abdu'l-Bahá reflected on the considerable difficulties that Thornton Chase had experienced during the last few years of his life and on the meaning of his sudden and seemingly premature death:

This revered personage was the first Bahai in America. He served the Cause faithfully and his services will ever be remembered throughout future ages and cycles. He has written many books in this Cause and they will be studied carefully by the coming generations. He traveled once to Acca and there we associated with each other for several days. Indeed he became free from the troubles of this world. No matter how long he might have remained here, he would have met nothing else but trouble. The purpose of life is to get certain results; that is, the life of man must bring forth certain fruitage. It does not depend upon the length of the life. As soon as the life is crowned with fruition then it is completed, although that person may have had a short life. . . . Praise be to God! the tree of Mr. Chase's life brought forth fruit. It gave complete fruit, therefore he is free. He attained to eternal rest. He is now in the Presence of BAHÁ'O'LLAH.

'Abdu'l-Bahá also reportedly told the San Francisco Bahá'ís that Thornton Chase's grave should be visited annually.⁵

4. Arthur S. Agnew, "A Tribute from Chicago," *Star of the West* 3.12 (16 October 1912): 7.

5. Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, "Abdul-Baha at the Grave of Thornton Chase," *Star of the West* 3.13 (4 November 1912): 14.

Because of exhaustion, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had not originally intended to visit any places outside the San Francisco Bay area. But Thornton Chase's death changed those plans. 'Abdu'l-Bahá had already missed the funeral; a beautiful service had been held on October 4th, after which Thornton Chase had been laid to rest in Inglewood Cemetery. Nevertheless 'Abdu'l-Bahá decided to pay His respects to the first American Bahá'í. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá later explained to the Bahá'ís in Oakland, "I would not visit Los Angeles were it not for the purpose of visiting the tomb of Mr Chase."⁶ 'Abdu'l-Bahá left San Francisco for Los Angeles on Friday, October 18th, and visited Thornton Chase's grave on Saturday afternoon, October 19th. He then took a train back to San Francisco on Monday, October 21st.

Twenty-five Bahá'ís accompanied 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Thornton Chase's grave. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's secretary, Maḥmúd-i-Zarqání, 'Abdu'l-Bahá walked straight to the gravesite without asking its whereabouts. He praised the beauty and verdure of the cemetery, then adorned the grave with flowers "with such love and affection that bystanders were astonished."⁷ After chanting a prayer, 'Abdu'l-Bahá revealed the following prayer:

O my God! O my God! Verily, this is a servant of Thine, who did believe on Thee and in Thy signs; verily he hearkened to Thy summons, turned to Thy Kingdom, humbled himself at Thy holy threshold, was possessed of a contrite heart, arose to serve Thy cause, to spread Thy fragrances, to promote Thy word, and to expound Thy wisdom.

Verily he guided the people to Thine ancient pathway, and led them to Thy way of rectitude. Verily he held the chalice of guidance in his right hand and gave unto those athirst to drink of the cup of favor. He presented himself at Thy lofty threshold, where he laid his brow on the

6. Maḥmúd-i-Zarqání, *Maḥmúd's Diary: The Diary of Mírzá Maḥmúd-i-Zarqání Chronicling 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Journey to America*, trans. Mohi Sobhani with the assistance of Shirley Macias (Oxford: George Ronald, 1998), 332.

7. Maḥmúd-i-Zarqání, *Maḥmúd's Diary*, 337.

fragrant soil of Thy garden and circumambulated Thy all-glorious and sublime abode, the traces of which are wide-spread and the fragrances of whose loyalty are sensed everywhere. Later he returned to these vast and extensive countries and proclaimed Thy Name amongst the people, until his respiration ceased and his outward sensation was suspended, returning to Thee with a heart throbbing with Thy love and with an eye opened to Thy direction.

O Lord! O Lord! Submerge him in the ocean of Thy glory. O Lord! O Lord! Usher him into Thy delectable garden. O Lord! O Lord! Usher him into Thy lofty paradise and cause him to be present in Thy meeting of transfiguration. O Lord! Submerge him in the ocean of Thy lights.

Verily, Thou art the Clement! Verily, Thou art the Merciful, the Precious, the Omnipotent!⁸

'Abdu'l-Bahá then offered a eulogy in which He praised Thornton Chase as patient and long-suffering. He said Thornton Chase had an "illuminated" heart and that he had "witnessed the lights of the Kingdom of ABHA, and he was guided by the lights of Guidance." He reiterated the importance of Bahá'ís' visiting Thornton Chase's grave and urged them to bring flowers there "on my behalf." He stressed that "the traces of this personage will ever shine" and that people "will honor this grave." He even added that the Bahá'ís must have "utmost consideration for the members of his family."⁹ Finally He kissed the grave.¹⁰

In Los Angeles 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave two talks that mentioned Thornton Chase. At the second, He urged the Bahá'ís to commemorate Thornton Chase's death annually not only by visiting his grave but also by spreading "a feast for the poor and giv[ing] char-

8. Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, "Abdul-Baha at the Grave of Thornton Chase," *Star of the West* 3.13 (4 November 1912): 15.

9. Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, "Abdul-Baha at the Grave of Thornton Chase," 15.

10. Mahmúd-i-Zarqání, *Mahmúd's Diary*, 337.

ity to those who are deprived.”¹¹ He also met privately with Eleanor Chase. He repeated to her many of His previous statements about Thornton Chase—for example, He again reiterated that Thornton Chase’s “value is not known, but will be in the future”—and He sought to comfort her:

I was exceedingly sad and heart-broken when I heard of the departure of Mr. Chase, for I loved him very much. . . . Be not sad nor grieved. Do not sorrow, for no man in this world is permanent. As there was a day for him to come, there is a day for him to leave. . . . Mr. Chase was heavenly. Mr. Chase was spiritual. Mr. Chase was radiant. You have not lost him. At most, there is now a temporary separation between you. In the Kingdom there will be a meeting. It is precisely like taking a journey. You will meet him. Do not sorrow. . . . Certain souls come and believe, and leave behind them an eternal light or radiance, which is the equivalent to a candle that never goes out. . . . You should be comforted. Thus may the spirit of Mr. Chase be pleased with your patience and forbearance. If you were sad, he would be sad, and you would not want to make him sad, too.¹²

Thornton Chase’s importance can best be understood when one considers the significance of the qualities he exemplified. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s sister, Bahíyyih Khánúm, offers an insight in the following description of steadfastness, the trait Thornton Chase particularly epitomized:

Steadfastness is a treasure that makes a man so rich as to have no need of the world or any person or any thing that is therein. Constancy is a special joy, that leads us mortals on to lofty heights, great progress, and the winning of the perfections of Heaven. All praise be to the Be-

11. H. C. W. [Harriet M. Wise?], “First Anniversary of the Passing of Thornton Chase: Los Angeles Bahais hold services in their Assembly Hall and at the grave,” *Star of the West* 4.13 (4 November 1913): 225.

12. “Words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to Mrs. Thornton Chase, at Hotel Lankershim, Los Angeles, California, October 19, 1912,” TS, copy in author’s personal papers.

loved's holy court, for granting this most wondrous grace to His faithful people, and to His favored ones, this best of gifts.¹³

In describing God's call to the attracted souls and its transforming power, Bahá'u'lláh affords a glimpse into the nature of Thornton Chase's spiritual achievement and the ecstasy that it brought to him:

Give ear unto that which the Spirit imparteth unto thee from the verses of God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting, that His Call may attract thee to the Summit of transcendent glory and draw thee nigh unto the Station where thou shalt behold thine entire being set ablaze with the fire of the love of God in such wise that neither the ascendancy of the rulers nor the whisperings of their vassals can quench it, and thou wilt arise amidst the peoples of the world to celebrate the praise of thy Lord, the Possessor of Names. This is that which well beseemeth thee in this Day.¹⁴

In this passage, Bahá'u'lláh could just as easily have been describing Thornton Chase, whose being was indeed "set ablaze with the fire of the love of God," and who did indeed "arise . . . to celebrate the praise" of his Lord. It is in this spiritual sense that Thornton Chase was the Occident's first Bahá'í and a lighthouse to all future generations to follow in their own odysseys to learn the mysteries of the love of God.

13. Bahíyyih Khánúm, in *The Greatest Holy Leaf: A Compilation from Bahá'í Sacred Texts and Writings of the Guardian of the Faith and Bahíyyih Khánúm's Own Letters*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), 148.

14. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, trans. Habib Taherzadeh (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1988), 265.

APPENDIX 1

The Thornton Chase Papers

The Thornton Chase Papers (TC) are the most thorough source of information about Thornton Chase and one of the most detailed sources of information about the American Bahá'í community in the years before 1912. Filling eleven archival boxes, the papers include carbon copies of the typed letters Thornton Chase sent to others, as well as his incoming correspondence. Thornton Chase kept typed copies of every tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that he could locate, and he included translation information on the copies whenever he could; thus the Thornton Chase Papers are an invaluable resource for dating 'Abdu'l-Bahá's correspondence (usually the Persian originals are undated). Thornton Chase also kept typed copies of his own talks as well as those by Isabella Brittingham, Mírzá Asadu'lláh, and Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, providing an opportunity to study the thought of these individuals.

The Thornton Chase Papers are incomplete. A first round of destruction was conducted by his second wife, Eleanor Chase, soon after his death. In a letter to San Francisco Bahá'í Helen Goodall, Eleanor noted

[i]t has taken all my strength to go through these papers—Fifteen hundred letters, I have burned—personal letters—

Dear Thornton, never gave up anything, in way of letters, clippings, visions, diaries etc.—¹

1. Eleanor F. Chase to Helen Goodall, undated, Helen Goodall Papers, National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, Ill. The letter mentions that John Bosch had just arrived to pack up Thornton Chase's Bahá'í correspondence, which dates the letter to October 1912.

Apparently Eleanor Chase destroyed the diaries, thereby eliminating a primary source for reconstructing Thornton Chase's life and spiritual development.

Within a month of Thornton Chase's death John Bosch arrived in Los Angeles to pick up Thornton Chase's Bahá'í correspondence and papers, for he had named Bosch his literary executor. John Bosch and Eleanor Chase packed up the remaining papers, and he took them to his home in Geyserville, California. Eventually the papers were sent to the National Bahá'í Archives, probably after the deaths of John and Louise Bosch in the mid-1940s. A second round of destruction of Thornton Chase Papers was conducted by the Bosches and was described by Louise Bosch in a letter to Mrs. Carl Scheffler:

Mr. Chase's letters to the people, if nothing else, would constitute his memorial. He kept a copy of every letter he ever wrote. He also kept every scrap of paper he ever received. These letters filled boxes and boxes. Many of these letters we have destroyed by reason of the private nature of their contents. That is to say, my husband and I destroyed them.

Then also all of Assad'ullah's and of Fareed's correspondence with Mr. Chase we have destroyed. We have kept only letters of spiritual import.²

The destruction of the letters from Asadu'lláh and Fareed was carried out because both men had rebelled against the Bahá'í Faith a year after Thornton Chase's death. However, destroying the letters has only made a study of their personalities more difficult and thus makes it harder to understand why they acted as they did. Apparently the Bosches destroyed many other letters Thornton Chase received; the papers contain only 68 letters he received, but 488 letters that he sent, and usually he wrote in reply to a letter sent to him. No letters to Thornton Chase from Isabella Brittingham, Arthur Agnew, Carl Scheffler, or Willard Hatch exist, even though Thornton Chase is known to have written to them often, usually referring to a letter he had just received. Probably the Bosches decided

2. Louise Bosch to Mrs. Scheffler (copy), 11 June 1936, author's personal papers.

that the incoming correspondence was not "spiritual" enough and destroyed it. Isabella Brittingham's letters, which often spoke about the troubles in the New York Bahá'í community (judging from Thornton Chase's replies to her), are a particularly lamentable loss.

The destruction of much of the Thornton Chase Papers is particularly unfortunate because Chase edited some of them for posterity. A letter dated 19 April 1901 from 'Abdu'l-Karím-i-Ṭihrání, mentions that a tablet by 'Abdu'l-Bahá had been sent to Thornton Chase a week earlier; Thornton Chase later wrote on the letter, "it never was received." In 1905 he wrote a letter to suggest revisions to an author who had submitted some works to the Bahai Publishing Society; Thornton Chase later wrote on the letter, "*this offended.*"³ These edits are clear indications that Thornton Chase intentionally preserved his correspondence for posterity. Fortunately, in spite of the destruction, a substantial Thornton Chase legacy remains.

3. 'Abdu'l-Karím-i-Ṭihrání to Thornton Chase, 19 April 1901, TC; Thornton Chase to Mrs. Louise Waite (copy), 22 October 1905, 4, TC.

APPENDIX 2

The Bahá'í Faith

The Bahá'í Faith, the religion of which Thornton Chase was the first American member, was established by Bahá'u'lláh, Whose name in Arabic means "the Glory of God." Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892) was born Mírzá Ḥusayn-'Alí Núrí into a Shiite Muslim family in Tehran, Persia (now Iran). In 1844 Bahá'u'lláh accepted the religion of the Báb (1819-1850), a Persian born in Shíráz, who claimed to be a messenger sent by God to reform Islam and to establish a new religion. After the execution of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh emerged as one of the leaders of the Bábí movement; in 1863 He announced His claim to be the Promised One foretold by the Báb and by other world religions.

Bahá'u'lláh claimed to be a *Manifestation of God*, an individual empowered to bring divine revelation to humanity. He said that Abraham, Moses, Jesus Christ, Muḥammad, Zoroaster, and the Báb were also Manifestations of God, that all of Them had been sent by God with inspired teachings, that He was Their successor, and that His teachings constituted the continuation of Their messages. Bahá'u'lláh also implied that other religions in the world were divinely inspired, and His authorized successors elaborated on His claim by stating that Buddha and Krishna were also Manifestations and that Bahá'u'lláh was the fulfillment of Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions as well. This constitutes the important Bahá'í principle of *progressive revelation*: that all the world's major religions have been part of God's plan for the guidance of humanity as it has evolved culturally, and that the Bahá'í Faith is God's most recent revelation.

Bahá'u'lláh was exiled from Persia and, because of His teachings, in 1868 He was incarcerated in the prison-city of 'Akká, in what today is

northern Israel (at the time it was part of the Ottoman Empire). He lived the rest of His days under various degrees of confinement, ranging from strict imprisonment to house arrest. He wrote extensively in Arabic and Persian. His most important literary works are the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, or Most Holy Book, which contains the laws and summarizes the basic teachings of His religion; the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, in which Bahá'u'lláh summarizes His claim to fulfill the prophecies of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; the *Hidden Words*, a collection of proverbial statements on religious life; the *Seven Valleys* and the *Four Valleys*, two short treatises on the mystic life; and the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, a compilation of many of Bahá'u'lláh's most important pronouncements, assembled by Bahá'u'lláh Himself.

Most of Bahá'u'lláh's writings were composed in response to questions put to Him by individuals, often in the form of letters they wrote to Him. Almost all of His books were responses to questions. Bahá'u'lláh composed a large number of tablets, which are either letters or treatises in letter form. The Bahá'í World Center in Haifa, Israel, currently possesses the originals or facsimiles of some 15,000 tablets by Bahá'u'lláh.¹ Although most are a page or two in length, a few are much longer. Among the most important are the tablets Bahá'u'lláh wrote to the kings of France, Germany, Russia, Iran, and the Ottoman Empire; the Tablet to Queen Victoria; and the Tablet to Pope Pius IX. In them Bahá'u'lláh claims to be a Manifestation of God and outlines many of His teachings regarding government and social organization. Also significant is a series of tablets Bahá'u'lláh composed after the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, titled the tablets of *Ishráqát*, *Bishárát*, *Tajallíyyát*, *Ṭarázát*, the Tablet of the World, and the Words of Paradise. In them He summarizes many of the major social teachings of the Bahá'í Faith. While the longer or more significant tablets of Bahá'u'lláh are usually translated and published as a whole, the thousands of smaller tablets are being translated and published in the form of compilations of statements by Bahá'u'lláh on specific subjects. Because of the volume of the corpus of Bahá'u'lláh's writings, compilations of His statements have always represented an important part of the Bahá'í sacred writings.

1. *The Seven Year Plan, 1979-1986: Statistical Report, Ridván 1983* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1983), 22.

Because Bahá'ís believe that Bahá'u'lláh is a messenger of God and that His writings constitute revelation, written statements by Bahá'u'lláh constitute the bedrock of Bahá'í belief and the core of its scripture. All other Bahá'í teachings are measured against the standard of Bahá'u'lláh's words.

A pivotal teaching of Bahá'u'lláh is His covenant, which provides for the clear succession of authority after His death. In clear and unambiguous language He appointed His eldest son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as His successor; commanded all Bahá'ís to turn to and obey 'Abdu'l-Bahá after His own death; authorized 'Abdu'l-Bahá to render binding and infallible interpretations of His own words; and extolled 'Abdu'l-Bahá's spiritual station. As a result, after Bahá'u'lláh's death, His religion did not break into sects. Bahá'u'lláh also implied that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had the authority to appoint successors. Finally, He commanded that His religion be organized by consultative councils termed Houses of Justice and abolished the institution of clergy. By establishing consultative councils at the local, national, and international levels, the Bahá'í Faith acquired a governing system that was flexible, efficient, and uniform throughout the world, a system that would maintain the unity of the religion against any attempts to split it into sects.

Bahá'u'lláh wrote about almost every imaginable subject. He discussed the unknowable nature of God and God's relationship with the human race; He explained the nature of the manifestations of God; and He interpreted many prophecies, religious terms, and teachings found in the sacred scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. He also discussed the spiritual nature of human beings. He composed prayers for individuals to say in various specific circumstances such as the death of a relative, the birth of a child, marriage, severe personal difficulties, or the desire to acquire spiritual qualities. Recitation of such prayers constitutes an important part of every Bahá'í's daily religious experience.

Bahá'u'lláh wrote about significant religious questions such as Original Sin, predestination, the purpose of prayer, and the nature of the afterlife. He advocated a spirituality that stresses marriage, the rearing of children, acquisition of a useful profession, charity, service to others, and involvement in human affairs. He wrote mystical works about the spiritual development of the human soul. He also established personal spiritual laws that require the daily repetition of a Bahá'í obligatory prayer, the bringing of

one's self to account each day before God, and observance of an annual period of fasting.

Bahá'u'lláh's teachings include a strong social component. He stressed the oneness of humanity and the importance of world unity. He advocated the abolition of war, the establishment of a world government, and the creation of a universal auxiliary language, which would supplement but not supplant national languages. His Most Holy Book advocates the creation of systems of welfare and universal education and offers economic principles. Bahá'u'lláh stated that women are equal to men and have the same right to education and a vocation. Among the various other teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are statements about the importance of music, principles of child rearing, and the importance of developing the agricultural sciences.

Originally most Bahá'ís were converts from the Bábí religion or from Islam, but in the 1870s a significant diversification of the Bahá'í community began. Jews, Zoroastrians, and even a few Christians became Bahá'ís in Iran, Iraq, and Syria. The Bahá'í Faith spread to India and Burma, and in Burma, Buddhists became Bahá'ís. Western Christian missionaries debated religious subjects with Bahá'í teachers in Iran, and in Russian Central Asia and in various British colonies, Western Christian merchants and officials came into contact with the new religion. Thus at a very early date the Bahá'í Faith began to move out of its Islamic milieu and emerge as an independent world religion.

During the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844–1921), from 1892 to 1921, a significant Bahá'í community formed in the United States, and communities were established in England, France, Germany, Canada, Australia, and Japan. Bahá'ís could also be found in China, Latin America, South Africa, Korea, and the islands of the Pacific. To consolidate the newly formed communities in the West, 'Abdu'l-Bahá visited North America and Europe from 1911 through 1913.

Like Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote extensively in Arabic and Persian; some 27,000 of His tablets have survived.² Like the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, these tablets are considered part of the Bahá'í scriptures, though

2. *Seven Year Plan*, 22.

they do not have the same sacredness of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh (for example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writings are not considered the Word of God). Like Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá primarily wrote letters to individuals rather than books. His work *The Secret of Divine Civilization* discusses reforms proposed in Islamic countries; it is a significant source of Bahá'í social teachings. *A Traveler's Narrative* is 'Abdu'l-Bahá's summary of Bahá'í history. The fourteen Tablets of the Divine Plan exhorted the North American Bahá'ís to take the Bahá'í Faith to the entire world, especially to minority peoples. Finally, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament appointed Shoghi Effendi as His successor and specified how the Bahá'í world was to establish the Houses of Justice that Bahá'u'lláh had ordained.

Many collections of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's tablets and talks have been published. Unless the exact text of a talk was later reviewed and approved by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, it is not considered part of the Bahá'í authoritative writings. One book that was reviewed and approved by 'Abdu'l-Bahá is *Some Answered Questions*, a work in which 'Abdu'l-Bahá answers eighty-four questions, mostly on Christian topics. 'Abdu'l-Bahá elaborated upon and clarified many of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings and enunciated some significant principles only implied by Bahá'u'lláh, such as the harmony of science and religion.

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá died in 1921, His grandson Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957) was a student at the University of Oxford, where he was studying to perfect his English. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's will declared Shoghi Effendi to be the *Guardian of the Cause of God* and empowered him to pronounce authoritative interpretations of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He commanded all Bahá'ís to turn to and obey Shoghi Effendi. Following the pattern of his predecessors, Shoghi Effendi wrote thousands of letters; some 17,500 of them have been collected in Haifa. His books are compilations of significant letters on administrative, moral, and religious subjects, except for *God Passes By*, which is a history of the first century of the Bahá'í Faith (1844–1944). Shoghi Effendi's English writings are an important addition to the authoritative Bahá'í writings because he interpreted and explained in Western language many Bahá'í concepts that were born in an Islamic milieu, in Western language. He also produced English translations of Bahá'u'lláh's writings that were of unprecedented clarity.

The Guardian took as his principal task the execution of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's blueprint for creating the Bahá'í Houses of Justice, which 'Abdu'l-Bahá had temporarily termed "spiritual assemblies." In 1921 there were only two consultative bodies in the Bahá'í world that functioned as national coordinating bodies, one for Iran and the other for North America; when Shoghi Effendi died in 1957, fifty-seven had either been established or scheduled for election. Local Bahá'í governing bodies existed in a few dozen cities and towns in 1921; by 1957 there were several thousand.

Shoghi Effendi also systematically coordinated the spread of the Bahá'í Faith to virtually every country in the world, first in Latin America (1937-1944), then in Europe (1946-1953), and finally in sub-Saharan Africa (1950-1963). In 1963 the crowning unit of Bahá'í governance, the nine-member Universal House of Justice, was elected by the members of fifty-six national spiritual assemblies, one of the first international elections in world history.

The Universal House of Justice, elected every five years, is now the head governing institution of the Bahá'í Faith. According to the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi, the Universal House of Justice can legislate on matters not explicitly explained by them, and obedience to the Universal House of Justice is explicitly enjoined in their writings. Thus the Bahá'í world turns to the Universal House of Justice. Under the Universal House of Justice, the Bahá'í communities of the developing world have emerged as the largest; for example, of the more than four million Bahá'ís in the world in 1992, almost two million were former Hindus in India. By 1986 the Bahá'í Faith had exceeded 1 percent of the population in such diverse places as Bolivia, Swaziland, Sikkim, St. Lucia, and Alaska, had exceeded 5 percent of the population in Belize and the Tonga Islands, and had reached 17 percent of the population of Kiribati. Bahá'í literature has now been translated into over 800 languages.³ Communities in the developing nations are taking the lead in Bahá'í social and economic development projects such as the creation of Bahá'í radio stations, universities, and schools.

3. Dr. Áhang Rabbání, "Achievements of the Seven Year Plan," *Bahá'í News*, no. 676 (July 1987): 4-5.

The developed countries, especially the United States, are the center of a flowering of scholarship on the history and teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, involving both Bahá'ís and people of other faiths. As a result of its rapid growth, and because of the savage persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran, the Bahá'í Faith is emerging from obscurity. Growing interest in the Bahá'í Faith among journalists, clergy, and statesmen coincides with a growing confidence by the Bahá'í community that it must offer its teachings on world peace, racial equality, and economic justice to a troubled world.

As of April 2000, the Bahá'í world comprised 182 National Spiritual Assemblies and 12,591 Local Spiritual Assemblies; Bahá'ís resided in 129,949 localities on the planet. With the continued growth of the Bahá'í Faith will come new opportunities for applying the Bahá'í teachings to society, new opposition, and deeper interest in the religion on the part of scholars and leaders of thought.

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