

Foreword to 1982 Edition ¹

It is with great pleasure and a sense of the appropriateness of the time that we publish this new edition of *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, for this year, 1982, marks the seventieth anniversary of the historic visit of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, son of Bahá’u’lláh, the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá’í Faith, to the American continent—an event that was to have a profound impact both on the young Faith’s evolution throughout the world and on the lives of countless individuals. In 1908 the Young Turks Revolution had overthrown the tyrannical regime of the Ottoman Sultan ‘Abdu’l-Ḥamíd. One of the first actions of the new leadership released all former political and religious prisoners, one of whom was ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Who had shared with His father forty years of persecution and exile, as well as sixteen additional years after His father’s death.

Freed from the straitened and often dire circumstances under which He had conducted the Bahá’í Faith’s affairs throughout the early years of His ministry as His father’s appointed successor, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at once began to contemplate a sojourn to the West. Such a trip would serve both to strengthen the faith of the isolated groups of Bahá’ís throughout the European and North American continents and to garner publicity for the Faith. Thus ‘Abdu’l-Bahá first traveled from the Holy Land to Egypt, then to Europe in 1911, returning to Egypt again for the winter. On 25 March 1912 He sailed from Alexandria—His destination: New York, and a journey that ultimately would take Him across the entire North American continent, with stops in many of the major cities of the United States.

For nine months, 239 days in all, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá traveled constantly, up and down the Eastern seaboard from Maine to Washington, D.C., into the Chicago heartland, and back again, stopping in such cities as Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Cleveland, finally traversing the continent via Montreal, Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Denver to the west coast, after which He returned to New York, pausing for extended periods in some of the cities He had already

¹ See online at bahai-library.com/anonymous_forward_introduction_pup

visited. When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sailed from New York on 5 December 1912 He had completed one of the most strenuous teaching journeys in all recorded religious history, the more remarkable because it was accomplished by a man of sixty-eight Whose health was broken by long years of deprivation and imprisonment. He left behind Him a band of believers whom, though scattered and separated by long distances, His patient and persistent efforts had welded into a nascent Bahá’í community.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace is a compilation of many of the talks ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gave during His visit to the United States and Canada, talks that expounded the principles of the Bahá’í Faith as promulgated by Bahá’u’lláh. Time and time again, to all who came to listen, Bahá’ís and non-Bahá’ís alike, He spoke of the equality of men and women, the harmony of science and religion, the need for universal education and a universal language, the independent investigation of truth, the oneness of God, the oneness and continuity of the Prophets of God, the oneness of mankind, and the elimination of prejudices of all kinds—all essential for the universal peace that Bahá’u’lláh came to bring, and that gives the book its theme and title.

Though *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* is a compilation of talks and, therefore, not strictly speaking a work by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, yet it has a unique “style” of its own and a unique place in His collected writings and talks. His Will and Testament, written in three sections, provides the authority for the Administrative Order of the Bahá’í Faith and ensures its integrity and unity. The Secret of Divine Civilization is a treatise on the general state of modern civilization. *A Traveler’s Narrative* chronicles the early history of the Bábí and Bahá’í Faiths. *Memorials of the Faithful* contains ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s remembrances of seventy-nine early Bahá’ís, all bound by their love for Bahá’u’lláh. *Some Answered Questions* is perhaps closest in format to *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*—a series of discourses on a variety of topics. But *Some Answered Questions* was shaped by questions put to Abdul-Bahá. In *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, for the most part, chose the topics—chose them with care and determination, sometimes even with deliberate repetition. For He had come to the West, not as a tourist, but as an emissary, as it were, of His father. Upon His arrival in New York He stated that “It is my purpose to set forth in America the fundamental principles of the revelation and teachings of Bahá’u’lláh.”

And that is exactly what He did. This new edition of *The Pro-*

mulgation of Universal Peace enables us once again, seventy years after the talks were first given, to sit in the front row and listen as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá patiently explains facet after facet of the Bahá’í Faith, showing how each can help bring hope and peace and balm to our troubled world, until we have the courage, as He said we must, “to give these principles unfoldment and application in the minds, hearts, and lives of the people.”

Introduction to 1922 Edition

Two years before the crash of world war shook the continents and upheaved oceans 'Abdu'l-Bahá 'Abbás visited the United States of America, proclaiming the Glad Tidings of Universal Peace and the oneness of the world of humanity. In His message He reviewed social, religious and political conditions of the nations, foretold clearly the impending clash and conflict of militarism, summoning mankind to the standard of divine guidance upraised in this cycle of the cycles by the manifestation and teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. His visit, extending from April to December 1912, covered an itinerary across the continent and return, involving an extraordinary and incredible expenditure of energy on the part of One Who at the threshold of threescore years and ten had spent practically His whole lifetime in exile and imprisonment for the Cause of God.

This treasury of His words is a compilation of informal talks and extemporary discourses delivered in Persian and Arabic, interpreted by proficient linguists who accompanied Him, and taken stenographically in both Oriental and Occidental tongue.

Upon the day of His arrival in New York He said, "It is my purpose to set forth in America the fundamental principles of the revelation and teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. It will then become the duty of the Bahá'ís of this country to give these principles unfoldment and application in the minds, hearts and lives of the people." 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words, therefore, will be found characterized by a broad, clear simplicity and practical basis, marked by an absence of metaphysical flights, philosophical speculation and mere rhetorical eloquence, always reflecting the pure beauty of the Word of God, that primal, essential, eternal foundation upon which rest religion, science and all human advancement.

Everywhere in His journeying throughout the United States 'Abdu'l-Bahá was received and welcomed in a spirit of love and reverence. Temples and churches of all denominations, synagogues, peace societies, religious and educational institutions, colleges, women's clubs, metaphysical groups and new-thought centers opened their doors, pulpits and platforms willingly And

without reservation to His message. He attended peace conferences at Lake Mohonk, visited the open forum at Green Acre on the Piscataqua, addressed large gatherings at Columbia and Leland Stanford Universities, spoke before scientific associations, socialistic bodies, ethical cults, welfare and charitable organizations, attended receptions and banquets in the mansions of the rich, visited the poor and lowly in their humble homes, carried the light of hope and uplift to darkened souls in Bowery Mission—in brief, proclaimed His message and teachings universally to every degree and capacity of humankind, with such pure and sincere motive that all heard Him gladly and without prejudice or antagonism. Furthermore, His beneficent activity in the Cause of God and loving service to mankind was without money and without price, for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in no instance accepted remuneration, a most unusual precedent and a wholesome variation from the money-getting methods of other visitors from the Orient. On the contrary, it was His custom to make liberal donations to needy churches and religious bodies, often assisting by generous gift and contribution societies and associations devoted to universal principles and ideals. Standing in the doorway of Bowery Mission one night He distributed two hundred dollars in silver to a long line of poor, disconsolate men, speaking words of uplift and encouragement as they passed before Him. Under all circumstances ‘Abdu’l-Bahá refused to accept money for Himself or the Cause He represented. When the Bahá’ís of this country received word of His intended visit, the sum of eighteen thousand dollars was subscribed toward the expense of His journey. He was notified of this action, and a part of the money forwarded to Him by cable. He cabled in answer that the funds contributed by His friends could not be accepted, returned the money and instructed them to give their offering to the poor.

Briefly, the visit of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to the United States was unique and characteristic of His high, holy mission, reflecting an unmistakable altruism of purpose and purity of motive. Philosophers, scientists, agnostics, materialists, professors, diplomats and officials were found in His audiences intently listening, sincerely questioning His presentation of the exalted principles and perfect ideals of the Bahá’í revelation in their application to the education, uplift and unification of mankind. Everywhere in editorial comment and publication of news concerning Him the daily press was reverent and respectful in its tone and statement, instinctively recognizing His high purpose and the manifest virtue of His teachings to the world.

An understanding of the mission and significance of this radiant herald of the New Day would not be complete without vision of the cumulative chain of religious history which extends backward from the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's appearance here to a period practically contemporary with the birth of American Independence in 1776. This is of especial importance, too, in the light of the fact that when Bahá'u'lláh sent epistles to the kings and rulers of the earth in 1868 He addressed one to the republic of the United States, in which He said, "O concourse of rulers! ... Bind ye the broken with the hands of justice, and crush the oppressor who flourisheth with the rod of the commandments of your Lord, the Ordainer, the All-Wise."² A very brief summary will be sufficient to show this spiritual sequence and historical progression of which 'Abdu'l-Bahá is the apex and consummation.

The earliest dawning rays of the effulgent Sun of Truth, the Word of God which shone forth from the heaven of the divine will upon the horizon of the human world in this luminous cycle, were reflected in the pure mirrors of sanctity Shaykh Aḥmad-i-Aḥsá'í and Ḥájí Siyyid Kázim-i-Raṣhtí. As stars of morning precede the coming of the mighty luminary of day, these brilliant souls arose successively in Persia toward the close of the eighteenth century, piercing the somber shadows of night and proclaiming the splendor of the approaching manifestation. This mission completed, the lamps of their physical existence were extinguished in 1826 and 1844 respectively.

On 23 May 1844 Mírzá 'Alí-Muḥammad, the Báb, suddenly enkindled the world by declaring in Shiráz, Persia, that the Day of God was at hand. For six years as Herald and Forerunner this winsome messenger of the kingdom sounded His heavenly call, until in 1850 the flaming tongue and pen of His eloquence were stilled in the throes of a glorious martyrdom.

Then the heaven of religion overspread with the brilliant radiance of Bahá'u'lláh, the Glory of God, the manifest Word and Sun of Reality which poured its bounty upon the world of mankind forty years, extending to the time of its occultation [i.e., Bahá'u'lláh's passing] in 1892. Throughout these years this glorious being was subjected to continuous exile, imprisonment and oppression by earthly rulers, until after infinite hardships and suffering He as-

² The Tablet was actually addressed by Bahá'u'lláh to the "Rulers of America and the Presidents of the Republics therein". (See Bahá'u'lláh, *The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh to the Kings and Leaders of the World* [Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1967], p. 63.)

cended from these abject conditions and surroundings of religious and political tyranny to His abode in the supreme world.

But the equation of divine purpose was not yet complete. The coming of Bahá'u'lláh had fulfilled the prophetic promises of the sacred books of the Jews, Christians, Muslims, Zoroastrians, Hindus, Buddhists and others. Like mighty rivers restricted to their own watersheds these separate systems of religious belief and worship, incapable of mingling in their courses, had found their destined union and confluence in the infinite ocean of Bahá'u'lláh's utterance. Furthermore, the supreme and ultimate product of divine revelation, the apotheosis of prophecy and the universal outcome in which all the heavenly religions would consummate was that quintessence of the cycles, that "Mystery of God", a perfected "Servant" in whom the divine and human wills had found complete blending. This sanctified personage was to appear in the great Day of God, that Day of universal splendor when "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together."

In the latter half of the nineteenth century the nations and peoples of the world had become so closely associated and wrought together in their physical existence, so interwoven and interdependent in the necessities and requirements of life, that the problems and politics of one government now affected and influenced the conditions of them all. The world had become one vast human family wherein interests were intimately related, responsibilities mutual and problems universal. Therefore, the Word of God revealed by Bahá'u'lláh was universal in its provision and remedy for the conditions of mankind—conditions which, although they were direct outcomes of human will and making, had been eternally foreseen by the omniscient eye and spoken by the tongues of prophets as recorded in all the holy books. Great numbers of brilliant souls throughout the east had accepted and followed this manifest standard of unity and reconciliation. In religious heredity, training and belief they had been diverse, hostile and irreconcilable, but under the benign, penetrating influence of the Holy Spirit of the Word made flesh in Bahá'u'lláh, they attained the blessed station of oneness and love in the heaven of the kingdom.

To strengthen, safeguard and increase this unity and love Bahá'u'lláh appointed a successor to Whom all should turn for guidance and illumination after His own departure, naming in the Book of the Covenant written by His own blessed hand His eldest son, the Greatest Branch, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Center of the Covenant in Whom Bahá'ís throughout the world recognize the authority of perfect

servitude at the threshold of the manifest Word. This is the essence of His title, entity and being, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Servant of Bahá.

The great wisdom of this appointment is shown in many ways. It is particularly evident when we realize that from His earliest childhood 'Abdu'l-Bahá had been inseparably associated with Bahá'u'lláh. Born in Ṭihrán 23 May 1844, the day and date of the Báb's declaration, His very birth foretold the significance of His life and being in the divine processes and consummations of this luminous cycle. At the age of eight years He was one of the little band of exiles who crossed the Persian border into 'Iráq, sharing vicissitudes and suffering with heroic strength and subjected with the rest to continuous imprisonments in various cities until they reached the prison-fortress of 'Akká in Syria [now Israel], 31 August 1868. Throughout this long and faithful vigil of devotion to Bahá'u'lláh and loyalty to the Cause of God, the record of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's life is pure and spotless, wonderful in its exaltation and effulgent with the beauty of holiness. When the tyrannous regime of Sulṭán 'Abdu'l-Ḥamíd ended, the gates of 'Akká were thrown open and 'Abdu'l-Bahá came forth free upon the fortieth anniversary of His entrance into that neglected and unspeakable place. This was 31 August 1908. In 1911, two years after His release from a living martyrdom of fifty-six years and at the age of sixty-seven, He visited Europe, returning to Egypt from whence in 1912 He sailed for America as stated.

Thus far the evidences of divine forces and influences surrounding the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá should be sufficient to impress and convince any thoughtful soul that we are viewing an unusual and majestic personality, a world-commanding figure Who has appeared for the uplift, unification and peace of mankind. Dark indeed are the world horizons unless we behold the shining beauty of this Sun of Reality. The human world, plunging deeper and deeper with ever-increasing momentum into seas of materialism, is crying out in its crucial need and stress for help and remedy, for a new creative spirit of life and regeneration, a power and healing direct from God. And just at this time 'Abdu'l-Bahá, messenger of Universal Peace and the oneness of the world of humanity, is sounding His call of salvation to the nations of the earth in heavenly words fortified by an impelling dynamic spiritual power and surcharged with the pure breaths of the Holy Spirit

'Abdu'l-Bahá's station of servitude in the divine Cause is ... worldwide and universal, beyond the limitation of race, denomination, creed or nationality, a station supreme in its loftiness, per-

fect in its humility—Servant of the servants of God. Significant indeed is His visit to the shores of the western world; pregnant indeed are His words to the highly organized material civilizations of the Occident; potent indeed His message of peace and unity of mankind, cementing the east and the west in spiritual solidarity, blending the world that is old and the world that is new under the beneficent laws of the heavenly kingdom.

In obedience to the direct command of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, this Introduction has been written by a humble follower of His light and a devoted lover of His beauty. May the Glory of God illumine this heart and guide this pen to do His will in this most great responsibility.

Howard MacNutt

Extracts from Tablets

To his honor Mr Howard MacNutt, Brooklyn, New York, U.S.A.

O thou old friend!

... Thy intention to print and publish the discourses of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá which thou hast compiled is indeed very advisable. This service shall cause thee to acquire an effulgent face in the Abhá kingdom and shall make thee the object of praise and gratitude of the friends in the East as well as the West. But this is to be undertaken with the utmost carefulness so that the exact text may be reproduced and that all errors and deviations committed by previous interpreters shall be excluded.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá ‘Abbás

(Haifa. Palestine. 13 April 1919)

To his honor Mr Albert R. Windust, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A.

O thou servant of His Holiness Bahá’u’lláh!

... Name the book which Mr MacNutt is compiling “The Promulgation of Universal Peace”. As to its Introduction, it should be written by Mr MacNutt himself when in heart he is turning toward the Abhá kingdom so that he may leave a permanent trace behind him.

Send a copy of it to the Holy Land.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá ‘Abbás

(Bahjí, ‘Akká, Palestine, 20 July 1919)