

## GLIMPSES OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ

Adapted from the Diary of Juliet Thompson

*'Akká: July 1909*

We drive along a wide white beach.  
Sea waves curl about our carriage wheels,  
Camels approach on the sand,  
cloaked Bedouins attending.  
Palm trees in a long, long line  
and in the distance domes and flat roofs,  
dazzling white.

Walls.

Walls within walls.

Menacing walls.

Tall, prison-like, chalk-white houses,  
leaning together, rising towards a rift of sky,  
slits of barred windows set here and there  
in their forbidding fronts.

Streets so narrow that our wheels  
graze buildings on either side—  
streets sometimes bridged by houses  
meeting in an arch at their second stories.

Pervading us,  
a sense of the divine joy towards which we travel,  
here in the Holy City, the New Jerusalem.

Before us, suddenly, a broad expanse:

a garden,

the seawall,

the sea,

and then the Master's door.

Too soon we have arrived,  
too suddenly, and unprepared.

He bursts upon us like the sun  
with His joyous greeting:

*Welcome! Welcome!*

His effulgence strikes me blind!

*Are you well? Are you happy?*

I cannot speak.

He takes my hand in His—  
in His so mysterious hand—  
delicately-made, steely-strong,  
currents of life streaming from it:

*Your heart, your spirit, speak to Me.*

*I hear. I know.*

*Do not think your services are  
unknown to Me. I have seen.*

*I have been with you.*

*I know them all.*

*For these you are accepted  
in the Kingdom.*

My services! Their pitiful smallness!  
And my lack of love!  
Pierced by shame I cry:  
'Forgive my failures!'

*Be sure of this. Be sure of this.*

My knees yield; my heart draws me down to His feet.

Later, my eyes upon His white-robed Figure,  
I listen as He dictates Tablets,  
see Him pace about a room grown suddenly too small.  
A force born of the energy of God—  
restless, uncontainable—  
spills from Him.  
The earth cannot contain Him,

nor yet the universe.

When He pauses by the window I sense His spirit,  
free as the Essence Itself,  
brooding over regions far distant,  
looking deep into hearts  
at the uttermost ends of the earth,  
consoling their secret sorrows,  
answering the whispers of far-off minds.  
Often in His leonine pacing  
He gives me a long, grave glance.  
And once He smiles at me.  
He smiles at me!

*Thonon-les-Bains, Lake Geneva: August, 1911*

A great white hotel, set amid oleander,  
flanked by mountains overhung with clouds.  
Beyond the green terrace and marble balustrade,  
the lake.

In the halls and through the grounds  
the artificial, dull-eyed people  
stroll and chatter.

Silently,  
majestically,  
unrecognized but not unfelt,  
He passes among them,  
the cream robe billowing,  
light glinting in His silver hair.  
The metallic voices break off.  
The shadowed eyes lift and follow,  
lighted for a moment with wonder.  
His presence is an affirmation,  
stirring them to recall their lost vision  
of a higher world and their own beauty.  
The eloquent assertion of His silence!  
His magnetic power!  
His holy sweetness!

At a country inn I see Him  
in a half-circle of children,  
girdled with children, festooned with them,  
waist-deep in children with violets to sell,  
the small ones, themselves a bouquet,  
pressing about Him, waving the purple clusters,  
their faces raised with grave astonishment,  
His own a benediction as He bends  
to buy their blooms, buy all their blooms,  
drawing from His pocket handfuls of francs,  
giving to each child bountifully.  
They beg for more.  
'Don't let them impose!'  
At the edge of the swaying crescent,  
a newcomer, the smallest,  
stares up in awe,  
timid as a fawn:

*To this little one I have not given . . .*

And the Master gave.

On the road back, suddenly, spectacularly,  
a waterfall,  
rolling from a great height,  
scattering diamonds as it froths down a  
black precipice.  
Full of excitement He hurries forward, alone,  
to sit in silence at the very edge,  
the swirling water far below.  
I see Him in profile,  
kingly against the cascade,  
intense rapture on His upturned face,  
and my tears flow.  
After a time, smiling:

*If I come to America, will you  
invite Me to see such waterfalls?*

I promise Niagara!  
'But surely, my Lord,  
Your coming to America does not depend  
upon my invitation!'

*My invitation to America will be  
the unity of the believers!*

A heavenly day of charming informality,  
taking tea,  
He talking gaily or tenderly,  
taking little notice of me.  
But in spite of this I glimpse something vaster  
than before,  
feel a new awareness of His unearthly power,  
His divine sweetness.

Coming upon Him as He stands talking with a friend,  
the sweetness of His love,  
that celestial radiance,  
again bring tears:  
If He never gave me so much as a word,  
if He never glanced my way,  
just to see that sweetness shining before me,  
I would follow Him on my knees,  
crawling behind Him in the dust forever!

*New York: 11 April 1912*

April 11th! Oh day of days!  
I awaken before daybreak with a singing heart,  
the moon's waning sliver  
framed low in my windowpane.  
I hasten to the pier.  
The morning is crystal clear, sparkling.  
I have a sense of its being Easter—of lilies,  
almost seen, blooming at my feet.

A mist settles over the harbour but at last,  
at last, I see a phantom ship,  
an epoch-making ship,  
coming closer, closer, ever more substantial,  
till it swims into the light, a solid thing.  
He sends His love and asks us to disperse—  
we are all to meet at four.  
Obedience is overruled by love: three of us  
conceal ourselves and wait.  
Stepping into the limousine,  
the Master turns and smiles at us!  
Three frozen statues dissolve in that bestowal,  
no love-born child-prank ever so rewarded.  
Oh the coming of that Presence!  
The mighty commotion of it!  
The hearts almost suffocate with joy and the eyes  
burn with tears at the stir of that step!  
Our skyscrapers had delighted Him:

*The Minarets of the West!*

What divine irony!

*New York: 19 April*

He shines in white and ivory,  
His face a lighted lamp  
illuminating the Bowery Mission:

*Tonight I am very happy  
for I have come here to meet My friends.  
I consider you My relatives,  
My companions, and I am your  
comrade . . .*

A sodden and grimy procession  
streams down the aisle,  
perhaps three hundred men in single file—

derelicts, failures, broken forms, blurred faces—  
and here 'The Servant' receiving each outcast  
as His beloved child.

Into each palm, as He clasps it,  
He presses His little gift of silver—  
just a symbol and the price of a bed.  
None is shelterless this night  
and many find a shelter in His heart;  
I see it in their faces,  
and in His face bent to theirs.

We drive up Broadway, aglitter with electric signs.  
He speaks of them, smiling, much amused.  
'It is marvellous to be driving  
through all this light  
by the side of the Light of lights.'

*This is only the beginning. We will  
be together in all the worlds of God.  
You cannot realize here what that means.  
You cannot imagine it. You can form  
no conception here in this elemental  
world of what it is to be with Me in  
the Eternal Worlds.*

*New York: 5 June*

I am to paint His portrait!  
Surprise, dismay, fear, joy, gratitude, flood me.  
He sits before me in a dark corner,  
His black 'abá melting into the background.  
I quail.

*I want you to paint My servitude  
to God.*

Only the Holy Spirit could do so, no human hand.

'Pray for me, or I am lost.  
I implore You, inspire me!'

*I will pray, and as you are  
doing this only for the sake of God,  
you will be inspired.*

Fear falls away.

It is as though another sees through my eyes,  
works through my hand.

Rapture takes possession of me.

My hand is directed in a sort of furious precision.

The points, the planes in the matchless face

are so clear

my hand cannot keep pace with the clarity  
of my vision.

Freely, in ecstasy, I paint as I never have before.

In half an hour the foundation is perfect.

Once, bidding Him rest, I find I cannot paint—  
what I see is too sacred, too formidable.

He sits still as a statue, eyes closed,

infinite peace on that chiseled face,

a God-like calm and grandeur in His erect head.

Suddenly, with a great flash, like lightning,

He opens His eyes.

The room seems to rock

like a storm-tossed ship

in the power released!

*West Englewood: 29 June*

A luminescent summer day

green countryside, and He our host.

The Unity Feast has ended and the darkness

settles in, gently smudging the outline

of the mighty trees.

Many of us linger, unable to wrench ourselves away.

Cricket songs—the scent of grass—

a breathless expectancy in the soft, warm air.

He sits in a chair on the top step of the porch,

some of us surrounding Him.

Below, dotting the lawn, on either side of the path,

sit others, the light summer skirts of the women

spread out on the grass,

lighted tapers in their hands.

In the dark, in their filmy dresses,

they become great pale moths,

and the burning tips of the tapers,

flickering fireflies.

Knowing our thirst, He speaks to us again,

words of consuming tenderness.

Rising, He starts down the path, still talking,

passing between the weightless, dim figures

with their lighted candles,

talking, still talking, till He reaches the road.

He turns and we no longer see Him.

Even then His words float back to us,

the liquid Persian,

and the beautiful, quivering translation,

the sound and the echo hovering and drifting,

an exquisite note almost unbearably held:

*Peace be with you. I will pray for you.*

Oh that voice that speaks out of His invisibility,

when He has passed beyond our sight!

May I always remember.

May I always remember and hear that voice!

*New York: 5 December*

The last morning.

I stand at His door, my brimming eyes

fastened upon that divine Figure  
as He moves about the room.  
Taking my hand, He consoles me:

*Remember, I am with you always.  
Bahá'u'lláh will be with you always . . .*

And then the ship, and His last spoken message,  
the Master pacing the crowded cabin  
filled with flowers  
and broken-hearted friends:

*. . . your efforts must be lofty.  
Exert yourselves with heart and soul  
so that perchance through your efforts  
the light of Universal Peace may  
shine. . . that all men may become  
as one family. . . It is My hope  
that you may become successful in  
this high calling, so that like  
brilliant lamps you may cast light  
upon the world of humanity and  
quicken and stir the body of existence  
like unto a spirit of life.  
This is eternal glory.  
This is everlasting felicity.  
This is immortal life.  
This is heavenly attainment.  
This is being created in the image  
and likeness of God. . .*

I sit opposite Him at a little distance,  
weeping quietly.  
At each parting I was left with the hope of  
another meeting, and now my question must be  
answered or I shall have no peace.  
'Will I see You again, my Lord?'

*This is My hope.*

'But still You don't tell me, my Lord.  
Not knowing, I feel hopeless.'

*You must not feel hopeless.*

Only that.  
That is all He said to me.

It is death to leave the ship.  
I remain on the pier, in the grey light,  
with the impervious, stolid pigeons  
and the anguished gulls.  
Tears blur my eyes.  
Through them I see the Master  
in the midst of the throng,  
waving a patient hand to us.

It waves and waves—  
that beautiful patient hand—  
till the Figure is lost to sight.

*Haifa: 9 December 1956: In Memoriam*

*Deplore loss much loved greatly admired  
Juliet Thompson outstanding exemplary  
handmaid 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Over half century  
record manifold meritorious services  
embracing concluding years Heroic  
opening decades Formative Age Bahá'í  
Dispensation won her enviable position  
glorious company triumphant disciples  
beloved Master Abhá Kingdom. Advise hold  
memorial gathering Mashriqu'l-Adhkár pay  
befitting tribute imperishable memory one  
so wholly consecrated Faith Bahá'u'lláh  
fired such consuming devotion Centre His  
Covenant.* Shoghi