

A Wise Man from the East

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By Felicia R. Scatcherd ("Felix Rudolph")

Reprinted from the "International Psychic Gazette."

WHEN Abdul Baba first came to England, I refused all invitations to visit him. I had met those who had made pilgrimages to his prison-home in Akka, and they talked so much about "the Blessed Perfection" and "The Manifested Splendour" that, though interested in what seemed a useful enough form of hero-worship for those to whom it appealed, I had no desire to see Abbas Effendi for myself.

Yet from the first moment that I heard of the Bahai movement I recognised its value, and in London and Paris promoted its interests whenever the occasion occurred.

One day in February, 1907, I met that earnest Bahai, Mr. Arthur Cuthbert. He introduced his companion, Mr. Sidney Sprague, as one who had come from America to spread the Bahai teaching. Mr. Sprague had been sometime in England, but progress had been slow, and he was slightly disheartened.

I took my card from my pocket, and giving it to Mr. Sprague, said: "tell the Editor of the Review of Religions I want him to interview you. If he does this, and becomes your friend, you will have all the impetus you need."

That one page interview in the March number

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of the Review of Religions for 1907, written by Mr. W. W. Stead, still seems to me one of the clearest summaries of the Bahai teachings.

From time to time I attended Bahai assemblies, but remained as aloof from its influence as ever.

In European Turkey where it was most needed it made little progress. I had pointed out to

Aluned Riza, then President of the Turkish Chamber, and others, how grievous it was for their country, that the Young Turk Reformers

were mainly Positivists or Atheists, and

suggested the initiation of a movement that should attempt to bring out the spiritual truths of Islam while dropping the accretions of the ages. But these well-intentioned Rationalists only began to attend the orthodox services in their mosques, and the people despised them yet more heartily for this sad surrender. So I had only made matters worse. I was somewhat indignant that the drawing rooms of London, Paris and New York were coquetting with this never faith, instead of endeavouring to spread it among the peoples whence it had sprung, who were in sore need of its enlightenment.

Then in the spring of 1911, a dear friend compelled me to accompany her to a reception of Abdul Baha, then, as now, the guest of Lady Blomfield, of 97, Cadogan Gardens. The submissive sweetness with which the venerable man received the homage of his followers affected me strongly. I wondered whether, like the gifted Heinrich Heine, he ever shrank from the burden of an enforced role of divinity. And an impulse seized me to see him converse with an intellectual and spiritual peer. But when I cast about to find such a one, I realised the true greatness of the man in

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Those presence I found myself. I did not go forward with the rest to greet him on this first occasion. I stood at the door busy with my thoughts. And as if he knew these thoughts, as he passed out, he gave me a playful slap on the arm, as one would administer reproof to a wilful child, and his eyes danced with merriment. Again and again I have noticed evidence of his awareness of the mental states of those around him. And I am assured that this keen intuition has been observed in his correspondence. Those whom he has never seen have been amazed to receive, from the Prophet in Akka, correct perceptions of conditions pertaining to them in America.

Then it occurred to me that Mr. Stead was the person I wished to see in converse with the teacher from the East. During that memorable meeting I gained much insight into the characters

of these two remarkable men. Abbas Effendi was delighted when he learned that, from its inception, the Review of Reviews had been already a pulpit from which the leading tenets of Baháism had been vigorously enunciated.

To explain how I obtained the portrait published in this month's Gazette, I will quote from one of my note books :-

Alex:andr.'a, Sun. 21 Jan., 1912. A beautiful morning, my second Sunday in Egypt. We are on our way to see Abbas Effendi, Dr. and Mr. Platon Drakoules and myself. I had met this leader and inspirer of his fellows many times before under the grey skies of London, when his smile of sunny welcome seemed to atone for the absence of the sunshine, due even on an English autumn day.

Years ago, Mr. Sidney Sprague, had been the guest of Dr. Drakoules, and had held a Baháist meeting in the Doctor's Oxford home, when he had ardently desired that the Greek Reformer should make the personal acquaintance of the "Great Teacher from the East." And now by a strange coincidence this wish was to be realised, and Mr. Sprague was to be the interpreter between these two devoted souls-the younger standing for the Social Age of Mankind, the elder representing Spiritual Illumination and Unity.

In London surrounded by the leaders of Western thought, Abdul Baha had rendered null and void Kipling's dictum :
„ For East is East, and West is West,
But they twain shall never meet."

Here in the East, I wondered what effect would be produced upon us, where his picturesque personality had no longer the charm of uniqueness.

We found him in a villa, opposite the new Victoria Hotel, Rameleh. Although only 10 a. m., he had been astir for hours, attending to his enormous correspondence, and receiving visitors. Again, in his presence, the old sense of goodness and simplicity overwhelmed one. The venerable figure in its Persian costume, was just as unique in its Eastern setting, as in London.

Of middle-stature, and broadly-built, he yet strikes one at times, as if he were tall, and is undoubtedly imposing. Oval-faced, and large-featured, with heavy eyebrows, a nose resembling that of General Booth, he has the compelling personality of all born leaders of men. His grey eyes are unusually expressive. In moments of excitement they become dark and deep in the piercing intensity of their gaze. I have seen them flash as if generating a kind of lightning, and then they soften and brighten and change expression with all

the varying moods of his active mentality. But whether under the influence of sorrow or joy, indignation or pity, they are always surcharged with sympathy. One who knows no word of Persian can share the emotions of his soul by watching the lights and shadows in his eyes. When, as often, he closes them, then one need only follow the movements of his no less wonderful hands.

I will not dwell on the details of the glad welcome, the oriental hospitality, the fragrant Persian tea, and the groups of waiting disciples from all quarters of the globe. I will only summarise the points in the discussion not generally dwelt on:- Dr. Drakonles asked, whether Abdul Baha did not think that injustice in industrial arrangements, resulting in antagonism between classes, owing to the existence of extreme poverty and excessive riches, militated against his teaching of Love and Unity.

He replied, that he could assure him on the authority of his father, Baha'u'llah, that the legislation of the world was approaching a time when it would become illegal to own more than a certain amount of wealth. He added that the principle of unity was asserting itself more and more, and that under its influence class antagonism will be recognised as immoral. This led the conversation to the subject of ethics, especially in relation to the lower animals.

Dr. Drakonles asked, whether he did not hold it to be inhuman to exploit the sub-human races for our benefit, either in the domains of science, diet, or amusement?

Abdul Baha gave a definite reply in the affirmative. That is, he emphasised his belief that the destruction of humble life for the benefit of human life was inconsistent with the principle of Unity. He said, that this teaching would become accentuated later on. At the present time mankind is not ripe for certain aspects of truth. Even as Jesus, the Christ, refrained from saying to the world at large what he deemed it necessary to impart to his esoteric circle, so he, Abdul Baha, felt his general teaching circumscribed by the same necessity. But further manifestation of the Divine would lead to freer and fuller exposition of the fact of the Oneness of all Life-the basic principle of unity or love.

While in Cairo we made the acquaintance of other members of Abdul Baha's family. His daughters came to see us, and we visited the Bahai centres there, as well as the home of our good friend Mr. Sprague, who had married a niece of the Master, to whose cause he is devoting his life.

On our return to Alexandria, I went again to

Rameleh, to obtain permission for a Greek painter, of great talent (Madame Thalia Caravias), to make a painting of the Master. This permission was accorded, mainly I believe, owing to his daughter's persuasion. You see, I felt unless the prophet adopted the veil the women were casting on one side he could not avoid portraits being taken. One fine one had already been made, and he had been photographed several times without permission. Then he gave me the now well-known photo at the head of this article, with leave to do what I liked with it, so I have let the Editor use it for his portraiture.

I visited Mr. Lewis to see Mr. E. Fendley for himself. Mr. J. H. Infield kindly arranged an interview for us on the 2nd of January.

Mr. Child, the well-known painter, also accompanied us. I longed, in the interests of science, to get impressions of those marvellous hands, should Abdul Baba not object.

Mr. Lewis put questions on reincarnation, the immaculate conception, etc. In answering the latter question, Abdul Baba finished with one of his quaint observations, to the effect that to those who accepted the creation of the first man without any human parent, it should not be difficult to accept the birth of a being with one human parent only!

His answer about reincarnation was very interesting. In the Contemporary Review last year, an article appeared by that able writer, Constance Maud: in which the Master's views on the subject are given at length.

Then delicious tea was served in Persian fashion. It made me feel I was back in Egypt, and I dared again to make a request. The kind and eloquent interpreter (Mirza Ahmad Sohrab) explained my wish, and Abdul Baha submitted to the process of having an impression of his hands taken, with the utmost graciousness and good-will, and signed the four imprints, which I hope will appear in next month's Gazette, with Mr. Child's delineation.

"Now, Mr. Editor, what are your impressions of this teacher from the East?"

Here is my thought. I quote him with-

out his permission, and he will have to let it stand or fill up the gap it leaves:-

He is the positive strong man, the father, the pioneer, the leader, the man of dogged determination and perseverance; compared with the negative gentle man, the mother, the shepherd, the man of patience and sympathy, intuitive and spiritual, teaching by symbols and parables, rather than by logical appeals to the intellect. He is the master and the initiate who has received His divine illumination in the silence and the solitudes, and whose greatest difficulty in life will probably be to find in this mundane world, audiences to understand and appreciate his mystical inspirations.

Now, for a word as to the Bahai religion and its teaching.

Their existence of a Supreme Being, the Goal of all religions, and of a spirit in man which survives the death of the body, are regarded as foundation principles, never to be called in question.

The chief Positive Teachings may be briefly summed up as follows:-

The union of all races and religions.

The abolition of Warfare and the establishment of international arbitration.

The adoption of a universal language.

The equality of the sexes.

Monogamy, as opposed to celibacy or polygamy

The equal education of all children-girls as well as boys-as a religious duty.

The exercise of some profession, art or trade, compulsory for all adults

The provision of work for all.

The principal Prohibitions are equally wise and essential:-

Any special privilege, apart from the law, asceticism, or living in seclusion, mendicancy, slavery, cruelty to animals, gambling, the taking of opium and alcoholic beverages, are all alike, strictly forbidden.

I will conclude this desultory paper by quoting from Abdul Baha's Tablet to the Bahais of England--

" O ye Sons and Daughters of the Kingdom !

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" It is easy to accept the Kingdom, but it is difficult to endure therein, for the tests are hard

and heavy. On all occasions the English are firm ... being neither prone to begin a matter ... nor ready to abandon it for a little reason ... \erily in every undertaking they show firmness. "My hope is this :-that the out breathing of the Holy Spirit be inspired into your hearts; that your tongues begin to reveal the mysteries and to expound the meaning and the truth of the Holy Books. May the friends become physicians, to cure by the Divine Teachings the deep-rooted diseases of the body of the world, to give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, life to the dead, and awakening to the sleepers. Be sure that the blessing of the Holy Spirit will descend upon you, and that the Hosts of the Kingdom will come to your aid. "Upon you be the Glory of God."

(Given at Ramleh, Egypt, May, 1911. Translated by "famadum ul folk).

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