

Bahá'u'lláh, who had the key!"

Mrs. Isabel Grinevsky, a Russian poet in Leningrad two decades ago, gave a great impetus to the Bahá'í Movement and to world art in her three famous writings, the two dramas, "Báb" and "Bahá'u'lláh" and a narrative called "A Journey to the Countries of the Sun." The last named is an account of her visit to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1910 when He was in Ramleh, Egypt. While the last is in prose it has verses introduced so that we might almost say that the three form a trilogy in poetic form presenting the new universal religion of the oneness of mankind proclaimed by those three heavenly Personages, the Báb the Forerunner, Bahá'u'lláh the Revealer of the Word, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá the Center of the Covenant of the Bahá'í Movement.

From the point of view of art the dramas rank high. Mr. Wesselitzky, President of the Foreign Press Association of London, in 1905 wrote of this drama "Báb": "I was at once attracted by the rare combination of philosophical thought with great power of expression, beauty, imagery, and harmony of verse. I keenly felt the delight of reading a new, great poem and discovering a new first-rate poet." In another lecture in London in 1907, which was afterwards published in pamphlets in English and French,** Mr. Wesselitzky writes: "Amidst the sorrows of disastrous war and those dreadful inner troubles, that book, ' Báb,' was my only happy impression, and it remains since a permanent source of

* Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned by order of the two Muhammadan nations, Persia and Turkey.

** Pamphlets in French and English, London, 1907 at the Press of "Cronide," 29 Besborough Street, London, S. W.

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joy and comfort as a manifest proof of the vitality of Russia and its creative genius.

"The romantic side of this drama, too, is quite original. The plot is not based on free love as in the French drama, and not on seduction as in 'Faust,' but on renouncement and self-sacrifice. The romantic side of the Báb is closely allied with the metaphysical-ethical side. The drama has so much of the latter that every act may seem to be a sermon and the drama itself a suite of sermons. Yet all that preaching is relieved by genuine enthusiasm, eloquence of the heart and real passion. The conflict in the soul of the hero is not between passion and reason, but between two passions—human love and love divine—the latter being stronger and more ardent than the former. It is that manifestation of the power of the higher aims in the heart of man which is the chief feature of this book and the secret of its irresistible charm."

I have before me as I write this article a clipping sent from Russia from the

“Herald” of January, 1904: “The play BĀB appeared in May of last year, 1903, the most inconvenient time for the appearance of a book. Nevertheless the pens of critics began to move in the journals and magazines in order to compose hymn-songs of praise to the author. Moreover an enlightened Persian society sent her an inspired letter of thanks; and above all, Mrs. Isabel Grinevsky had the spiritual satisfaction that among those who eulogized her drama was the lion of contemporary Russian literature, Leo Tolstoy. The impression was such that it made us think that amidst the statistics representing the Persian throngs were real Persians; it seemed as if the scenes exhaled the perfume of the roses of Shīrāz!”

When I wrote asking Mrs. Grinevsky about these dramas she sent me several letters and clippings of the book reviews. The “Journal de Saint-Peterbourg,” January, 1912, has a large headline “Bahá’u’lláh,” and I quote paragraphs from the review of this second great drama: “Bahá’u’lláh means the Glory of God—such is the title of the new tragedy with which Mrs. Isabel Grinevsky has enriched Russian dramatic literature. We must praise without restriction a work whose high, dramatic significance is combined with admirable form. The author of the drama ‘Báb,’ that work of such strong thought, has never attained such a powerful conception as this poem.

“The mind of the reader, attracted by a rhythm of an unspeakably harmonious poetry, rises imperceptibly to summits where the most grave problems are discussed, problems over which thoughtful humanity bends with fear and despair, helpless to solve them. The characters are analyzed with great psychological insight.

“Bahá’u’lláh, the central figure, is depicted with the clearness and power of an antique high-relief. The complexity of that elect-nature is presented with the authority and truth of the great masters of the classical theater. What a lofty lesson, what eloquence sursum corda in that life of pure bounty, of selflessness in that wide desire to spread peace!

“How not to be moved, fascinated by the nobility of this Apostolic character?
...

“The origin of a Faith analyzed with the help of true science is carried forward with great art, beginning with the first thought which moves the heart of the Apostle, who loves mankind as He loves His family and His own country.

“The author gives a vision, a revelation of all that is hidden of moving, precious depths in that supreme struggle. The liberating pain, the majesty of effort, the active bounty—all these elements of that struggle remain ordinarily unattainable for the crowd which cannot fathom under their austere dogmas, one of the beautiful forces of human unity.

“The love, the deep necessity which lives in each human heart passes throughout the tragedy as an undercurrent, the fountainhead of which, never drying, remains hidden to the exterior world.

“That beautiful and bold work points a return to the school of majesty and aesthetic morality, the aspiration to the eternal truth which are the indelible character of permanent works.”

Mrs. Grinevsky visited ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Ramleh, Egypt, for two weeks in December, 1910. He praised the two dramas. (I do not know that He ever saw the narrative.) When He held the manuscript of “Bahá’u’lláh” in His hands, He blessed it and prophesied to

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the author that these two dramas would be played in Tíhrán!

"A Journey to the Countries of the Sun," a narrative of her visit to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, was completed in 1914; it is a book of five hundred and fifty pages, but owing to the world war it was not published, nor has it yet been translated into other languages. May Mrs. Isabel Grinevsky, this great Russian poet who has made such a cultural contribution to literature and to the Bahá’í Movement, some day see all her works translated into European languages! The English reading world eagerly awaits them, I know, for many inquiries come from the United States and Great Britain asking where it is possible to get these books in Russian, in French, or in German!

The first man in Poland, so far as is known, to write anything about the Bahá’í Movement was Dr. Joseph Kruszynski, now President of Lublin University. When this generation is gone, none will be left who can tell the world about meeting ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and what He said to them and how His great and gracious presence impressed them, so on May 31, 1932, I called upon Dr. Kruszynski in Lublin in the heart of Poland. I found him a tall, handsome, scholarly, kindly, interesting man with eyes full of light. His whole expression beamed a welcome and hospitality to the writer because he knew that she, too, had known ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. “Are you the Roman Catholic priest who visited ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Palestine in 1914, and was the first to write about the Bahá’í Movement in Poland?” I asked, and he replied that he was that priest.

He said that while in Haifa he heard of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, such a world-renowned spiritual teacher living there, and decided to call upon Him. “How well I remember that day,” said President Kruszynski. “It was July 14, 1914. I went at eleven o’clock in the morning. My card, I recall, read ‘Joseph Kruszynski, Roman Catholic Priest, Doctor and Professor of Old Testament in Wloclawek Roman Catholic Seminary, Wloclawek, Poland.’ He led me to His drawingroom and had me sit at His right. He expressed how glad He was that I was in His home and we spoke of many matters; oh, our discourse was very interesting.”

First they spoke of Poland and of Polish writers, and the Catholic priest said he was astonished that this Persian scholar knew so much about the history and the sufferings of the Poles and that He had read their literature. He said that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told him that Sienkiewicz’s works had been translated into

Arabic and He had read them and considered Sienkiewicz a great man, but He added that Tolstoy was a great man, too, that there was no greater writer in Europe than Tolstoy.

“I asked ‘Abdu’l-Bahá,” said Dr. Kruszynski, “what is the Bahá’í Movement? He told that it is a religion of brotherhood and explained to me about a Mashriqu’l-Adhkár, a great Bahá’í Temple which is being built in Chicago and gave me a picture of it. He said that after many years the Bahá’í Movement will be very great, that there will be many believers in this religion. He said it was His hope that all peoples can be united in these Teachings.

“I asked ‘Abdul’-Baha, ‘Who is Christ?’ and He answered that Christ was only one of the great Prophets, World Teachers, that Moses was a great Prophet but that Jesus Christ was greater than Moses and came to make the world better than it was in the time of the Jews. He said Muhammad came to make people better, and now in our time all these religions are not sufficient, and Bahá’u’lláh (‘Not I, but My Father Bahá’u’lláh came,’ He said to me) to make better the Muhammadan religion, the Christian religion, the Jewish religion, all the religions. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also said that the Bahá’í religion was better for this epoch than Christianity and Muhammadanism.”

I give you Dr. Kruszynski’s reply which, though it shows that he is not a Bahá’í, still it sincerely expresses tolerance and sympathy for the aim of the Bahá’í Cause. “I told ‘Abdu’l-Bahá,” said he, “that the correction of His Father is very great, but only for the Muhammadan religion because the Muhammadan religion is an exclusive one, but His Father has made religion less exclusive and more a religion of brotherhood. However, in the Christian religion, we believe in a revealed religion; we believe the Bible is a Revelation direct from God and that Jesus Christ is God and man in one, and

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this cannot be changed. I know that among the Christian believers are abuses, faults, but the idea of our religion is correct. And ‘Abdu’l-Bahá considered that the religion of His Father, Bahá’ is the last and best religion. So between our viewpoints there was just this difference.

“I believe the Bahá’í religion has many principles for the social life: I believe the foundation of the Bahá’í Teaching is suited to our times; questions of the social life in our age are very great. The relation of Bahá’u’lláh to Moses and Muhammad I think is correct, but the relation to Christ is not correct. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá knew very well about Christianity, I was convinced of this, but the Teachings of Christ are inspired, the Books of the New Testament are inspired and I believe in these Revelations.”

Again Dr. Kruszynski said: “I believe the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh are the teachings of a very great philosopher. I consider that Bahá’u’lláh has been the greatest philosopher in our times, but His principles are no other

than a great philosophic system adapted to our epoch. He has given the world a philosophical system uniting religious beliefs with social foundations. I remember one sentence I said to 'Abdu'l-Bahá: 'I believe your reformation is very great, very good for Muhammadans because they are intolerant, very exclusive, they will not participate in or associate with other religionists; Christians are more tolerant. For example, I believe in my religion, but I myself honor your religion. A Muhammadan would be intolerant to all other religions. You have reformed religion so that your believers will be more friendly, more cordial to Catholics. I thank you very much, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, because You are bringing people nearer to the Catholic religion than Muhammad has brought them.' ”

This first article ever written about the Bahá'í Movement in Poland, Dr. Kruszynski told me, appeared in "Słowa Kujawskie" ("The Word of Kuiavia") in Wloclawek. I could not get a copy of it, but he told me it contained a short history of the Bahá'í Movement and all that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had said to him during that memorable visit.

Down in the south of Poland Miss Thelkla Zawidowska, a school teacher in Rava Ruska, came into the possession of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's "Paris Talks" a few years ago and translated the book into Polish. It was the first Bahá'í book ever published in Polish, and when about two years ago Bahá'ís in other countries heard of it and wrote to ask her, she replied: "I read the book with such ecstasy, I cannot express it. I translated it and at that time a rich elderly gentleman here paid for its publication. I should love to read similar books along this line of thought, if it is possible to get them."

The first Bahá'í book published in the Czech language was "Zjev Hnuti Miroveho Na Vychodê," a peace movement of the East, by Milos Wurm, a young university student whose home was in Brno. His mother, Pani Jindriska Wurmova, is one of the two greatest peace workers in Czechoslovakia. The second book published in Czech was "Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era," translated by Mrs. Pavla Moudra, the other great peace worker of this land. She has also translated "Iqán" into Czech, and Professor Dr. V. Lesny, Professor of Indology and Old Persian in the Charles University, Praha, has promised to write the introduction for this latter book. He is an author well known, his book on "Buddhism" is famous, as are also his studies about Indian Philology, Philosophy and Culture, which appear in Czech, German, English and French.

I had a most interesting conversation with Professor Lesny in my hotel in Praha about the Bahá'í Movement. He said among many other things that the conditions are so changed now, since the technic of the present time has destroyed the barriers between nations, that the world needs a uniting force, a kind of super-religion, and he added: "I think the Bahá'í Movement could develop to such a kind of religion. I am quite convinced of it, so far as I know the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

He continued: "I do not blame Christianity, it has done a good work for

culture in Europe, but there are too many dogmas in Christianity at the present time.” He compared Christianity with Buddhism, saying that Buddhism was very good for India from the sixth century B.C. and the Teachings of Christ have been good for the whole world; but as there is a progress of the mind

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there must be no stopping, and in the Bahá'í Faith one can see the continued progress of religion.

This distinguished professor also said: “Czechoslovakia is a religious country, but we have always been against any kind of tyranny in religion. We were for freedom of thought already in the time of our Jan Hüs, and in the fourteenth century we had already fought for the freedom of thought in religion in our country, and we are in favour of every movement whose goal is for religious freedom and development. Everything must be done on a democratic basis, there must be international brotherhood. We must learn to have confidence in ourselves and then in others. One path to learn this is through inner spiritual education, and a good way to attain such an education may be through the Bahá'í Teachings.”

It is a pleasure to state what Mrs. Draga Ilitch, a poet and journalist of Belgrade, Yugoslavia, who translated “Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era” into Serbian and who is now a radiant Bahá'í, has written; in it I hope you will see the soul of the Serbs: poetic Serbia's greatest charm is spiritual. Here are her own words: “When I received the book ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's ‘Paris Talks’ in the spring of 1932, while I was still in London, it was as if subconsciously I had known Bahá'u'lláh and ‘Abdu'l-Bahá and Their Teachings from my childhood. Since then the book was precious to me, I never parted from it but read it often. Reading it again and again, in September last, I had the wish to translate it into Serbian, not knowing the richness of Bahá'í literature and that there are many Bahá'í books that can be translated.

“Then in February, 1933, out of the blue, destiny sent me a true Bahá'í, Martha Root, who asked me to translate ‘Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era’ into our language. This book helped me to have a clear understanding of the Bahá'í Movement, which I consider to be the best renewal of religion and the one just needed for this universal age. It is not only a Faith, but it is a social religion in which is found the solution of present day problems, and especially it contains the new conception of the oneness of mankind. Despairing Yugoslavs who have come through the Great War and attained their cherished ideal of Yugoslav unity, now have a deep longing for unity spiritually at home and then with all mankind. So I think these Bahá'í Teachings will be accepted, because for a long time they have been yearned for in our country.

“Personally I can say that this Bahá'í Teaching came to me in just the time of my life when I needed it most. Although all my life I have been wishing to help others, sometimes there was bitterness in my heart because those for whom I sacrificed so much were not conscious of the price I gave in order to

bring them happiness and success. Also, I felt that those whom I loved and who loved me, in the most important moments did not understand the purity of my feeling and the unselfishness of my actions; this realization always brought me great torment and loneliness. Now that I am a Bahá'í, the feeling of bitterness has wholly passed from my life, and I am happy that I have done what I did for others. Now that I turn to God, I never feel alone; I have the Company of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. My life is filled with happiness and I have serenity in my heart.
(Signed) Draga Ilitch.”

Bulgaria, too, is a Slav country and its inhabitants are deeply spiritual. I remember a great Balkan writer saying to me once, after I had lectured in Sofia about the Bahá'í Movement: "The Bulgarians may be the first of the Balkan countries to accept these Teachings and to carry them the farthest, for they are seekers in religion.”

Once I spoke with Colonel Marinov of Sofia about the Bahá'í Teachings when I interviewed him at the Disarmament Conference in Geneva where he was one of the Bulgarian delegates. He had not known much about the Bahá'í Cause but he said: "I shall study these principles. For the fifty—five years that Bulgaria has had an independent life, she has produced a very rich literature. I mention this only to tell you of the universality of Bulgarian thought; it dwells gladly on the problems, the sufferings, the hopes of mankind. Our nation, Bulgaria, which has created the third European civilization, which has shattered the religious conscience of the medieval Europe, and which

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has paved the way for Reformation, is today, too, in the first rank of workers for a better world and for a more spiritual life.” So in all these five Slav countries one can see there is a celestial fire burning.

Albania, playground of heaven, the little country of glorious sunshine, deep blue skies, brilliant moonlight, bright stars, has made its contribution, too, to the Bahá'í Movement. Several Bahá'í books have been translated into Albanian by the devoted Bahá'í, Mr. Refo Chapari. As one Tirana editor wrote: "The Bahá'í Movement takes the God-part of all the religions.” This tiny kingdom is very liberal. His Majesty King Zog I. says: "I do not care whether my people are Muhammadans, Catholics or Greek Orthodox if they are loyal Albanians; religion is a private matter.”

Mr. K. Kotta, President of the Parliament in Tirana, whom I met again on my second visit in June, 1933, said to me that all religions are honored in Albania. All men respect one another no matter What Faith they profess. He also said that for the development of Albania the only way of progress is everlasting peace. He had seen the articles about Albania in "The Bahá'í Magazine" and said to me: "When you meet Shoghi Effendi, give him my best regards and best wishes for the development of the humanitarian Bahá'í Movement.”

Mr. Herman Bernstein, American Minister in Tirana, and he is also an author who has taken a deep interest in the promotion of peace and international good-will, said to me at the American Legation in June, 1933: "First of all Albania is one of the very few countries where religious hate and prejudice are not to be found. As far as I could observe the Kingdom of Albania and the Albanian people they are genuinely peaceloving; their code of honor is very high." Mr. Bernstein said he would like very much to see the editions of "The Bahá'í World" and learn more of the progress of the Bahá'í Movement in other countries. He explained how he had heard of the Bahá'í Cause in the United States, read some of the Teachings and found them very noble.

Professor M. Vekshi in Tirana wrote an interesting introduction to the Albanian edition of "Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era," the closing paragraph of which is: "The holy Bahá'í books point out that the duty of man is to work courageously, because whatever is for love, peace, and the salvation of the world is a divine inspiration and a dominant power. To promote these Bahá'í ideas in Albania it is necessary, (1) to establish a Bahá'í center in Tirana; (2) to found a library in that center; (3) to publish a monthly Bahá'í magazine, the name chosen is 'The Supreme Pen'; (4) to organize conferences.

Mr. Paul Ligeti, an architect of Budapest, Hungary, in an interview gave me a remarkably illuminating idea of the history of human and spiritual culture and a way out of chaos. The conversation turned to spiritual culture and he said: "When we see the whole way from the remote past until this time, we can understand that a period like our chaos has been like other movements in history, thus we can believe we can make the same way out of chaos in this epoch." He showed how when an age is poor in culture, it is only poor in civilization but it is often very rich from another point of view, this chaotic period is always a time of great religious conception. Man is not a thinking animal and in those plastic periods when life is easy he enjoys living, but in the cataclysm when there is one catastrophe after another then he truly thinks, and philosophy, religion and the most vision-like art which is music is born.

He has written a little about the Bahá'í Movement in his Hungarian book, "The Way Out of Chaos," because as he says: "I was impressed; it was something that I believe. I saw that the Bahá'í religion coming from Persia states that each great religion is in its essence the same and this same essence must return from epoch to epoch. I heard no more until you came, and now I am delighted to hear the Bahá'í Movement is going forward and I shall study it profoundly. We must not wait. We must have a new seriousness, a new feeling for our duties; we must be strict with ourselves and kind to the unhappy humanity around us, and I am quite sure it is enough to have the deep feeling to return to the old God to attain the bounty of the new God—because there are no old Gods and no new Gods, it was in every time the same

God who has spoken in a new manner to evolving humanity!”

Mr. Zsigmond Polgar, a keen and illumined Jewish Bahá'í in Budapest, told me that today there are many Jews believing in Christ. He felt that Judaism has a very great mission; it was partially fulfilled in Jesus Christ but only partially. “Now is the time,” he says, “when our Lord has sent a new Prophet, Bahá'u'lláh, to humanity and we should accept His Teachings, otherwise we lose Christ a second time.” He also said that anti-semitism as such does not exist; it is only hatred in the world. When the hatred from one human being to another can be eliminated, when attacks of the strong against the weak can be made to cease, there will be no anti-semitism. The divine means to stop this evil is the Bahá'í Teachings.

Professor Henry Marczali, one of the great professors and writers of Hungary, said to the audience after one of my lectures on the Bahá'í Movement: “Yes, the unity of God must have for consequence the unity of mankind.”

Young Denis Balint Szanto, a Bahá'í boy sixteen years old, in Budapest wrote: “The Bahá'í Movement is the finest religion; I hope that this beautiful idea will conquer the hearts throughout the world.”

I had tea with Dr. Edmond Privat and his wife in Geneva, the last of April, 1932, just after their return from India where they had been with Mahatma Gandhi for several months. Dr. Privat, this erudite writer and keen analyzer of men who has himself read many of the Bahá'í books (and he is one of the greatest lights in the Esperanto world), said to me: “You will be interested to know that Mahatma Gandhi knows the Bahá'í Teachings very well and thinks they are excellent.”

Sir Ahmed Hussein (Nawag Amin Jung Bahadur) of the Court of the Great Nizam in Hyderabad, Deccan, India, says: “The object of the Bahá'í Movement is to make people understand religion and religious institutions in their true spirit—the spirit of faith and service which underlies all religions of the world. Peace and good-will are consequences that flow from faith and service.

“The Bahá'ís work and suffer in the spirit of faith and service, in order to attain worldwide peace and good-will. They take nothing from any religion except its spirit of faith and service; in this sense the Bahá'ís are of all religions, though they are not bound to follow any particular practice of any particular religion. It is for the preachers and missionaries to explain what is the spirit of faith and service that underlies any religion; I believe the Bahá'ís understand it well.”

The Bahá'í Movement is being broadcast considerably and the microphone speeches prove the susceptibility of the mass of the people to the spoken word. Psychologically people sometimes listen eagerly to words which perhaps they would not trouble to read if they were only printed; the talk over the air often inspires them to get the Bahá'í literature to find out what is this Bahá'í basic simplicity of the inner life. How does it throw open the doors of serenity and certainty to a restless and bewildered humanity? I agree with

Sir John Ervine who says we do not yet sufficiently understand the influence which the microphone has and which it will increasingly have on our lives. The salient fact is that the microphone is influential, not because of its mechanical, but because of its personal quality: it makes a voice that is talking to millions sound as if it were talking to one!

So the greatness of the Power of this Bahá'í Movement is being manifested over the air, and in the literature of more than fifty nations and in the lives of millions of people, though it is still only in the first century of its history!

METADATA

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