

America holding an important position in a cotton mill. He always spent his summer vacations in Europe and it was on a boat crossing the Channel in the summer of 1901 that he had met May Bolles' friend, Mrs Milner, who told him of May and her friends in Paris, although she did not mention the Faith. As May talked to Thomas on the beautiful summer's day in 1901, she discovered a rare person of high standing and culture, simple, natural, and intensely real in his attitude towards life and humanity.

Although at that first meeting no mention was made of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Breakwell studied May with a searching gaze and asked if he might see her the following day.

"My heart was aflame with love..."

He arrived the next morning in a strangely exalted mood. May wrote, "His eyes burned with a hidden fire and looked at me earnestly, he asked if I noticed anything strange about him. Seeing his condition I asked him to sit down and reassured him, saying he looked very happy!

'When I was here yesterday,' Breakwell said, 'I felt a power, an influence that I had felt once before in my life when for a period of three months I was continually in communion with God. My heart was afire with love for the supreme Beloved - I felt at peace, at one with all my fellow men. Yesterday when I left you, I went alone down the Champs-Elysees. The air was warm and heavy, not a leaf was stirring when suddenly a wind struck me and whirled around me, and in that wind a voice said, with an indescribable sweetness and penetration, Christ has come again! Christ has come again!'. "With wide startled eyes he looked at May and asked if she thought he had gone crazy. "No," she said smiling, "You are just becoming sane."

Over the next few days Breakwell became drunk with love for the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. May told him about the Bab and thousands of martyrs who shed their blood so that the Faith might be established, of His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh who had given to mankind the law of God for this age, and of 'Abdu'l-Bahá who was still at that time a prisoner in Akka.

Breakwell's heart was filled with such longing that he gave up his journey, cancelled his plans, and became determined to go and gaze upon the face of the Master. Having met another young American Bahá'í who was on his way to Akka, Breakwell sat down and wrote a brief but poignant message:

"My Lord, I believe, forgive me.

Thy servant, Thomas Breakwell."

Meeting 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Akka

The two of them set off for Port Said in Egypt to await the Master's

reply. That evening May went to the entrance of her apartment and discovered a cablegram from 'Abdu'l-Bahá. It read "You may leave Paris at any time." Thus she was able to rejoin her mother and brother, having completed her mission - a mission of which she had had no previous knowledge - the induction of a rare soul, Thomas Breakwell, into the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

When Thomas and his companion arrived in Akka they were ushered into a spacious room at one end of which stood a group of men in oriental clothing. Breakwell suddenly felt ill and weak, thinking that he had failed to recognise 'Abdu'l-Bahá. His mind buzzed with confusion - why had he come here? Why had he given up his vacation to come to a remote prison seeking... whatever. He became desperate and depressed.

Suddenly a door opened and in the opening he saw what seemed to him the rising sun. So intense and brilliant was this light that he sprang to his feet and saw approaching him from out of this light the figure of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

The days in Akka were spent wrapt in the Master's loving care and attention. Breakwell literally burned away with love. When he informed 'Abdu'l-Bahá that the cotton mills he worked in used young children as workers, 'Abdu'l-Bahá looked at him sadly and said "Cable your resignation." Breakwell obeyed immediately and in doing so severed all ties with his old life.

The guiding star for the Paris Bahá'ís

Returning to Paris, Breakwell became like the candle which 'Abdu'l-Bahá had often mentioned, which wept away its life drop by drop in order that it might give out light. He became the guiding star for the Paris Bahá'ís, his calmness and strength, his simplicity and powerful speech quickened the souls of all who heard him. One day, May recalls they were crossing a bridge over the River Seine when Thomas noticed an old woman laboriously pushing an apple cart over the bridge. He immediately climbed down off the bus and joined the old woman in the most natural way, helping her with her load over the bridge.

The Bahá'í Revelation had penetrated his soul, giving him real insight into human needs, an intense sympathy and genuine love for all. Those afflicted with sorrows were drawn to him like a magnet and would leave his presence uplifted and revitalised. He was the first westerner to pay Huququ'llah and he lived in a cheap and distant part of Paris, walking miles to the meetings in order to save his money to give to the fund. He was particularly kind to May's mother and knew the value of imparting happiness.

Thomas Breakwell, however, was a sick man who suffered from tuberculosis. His life was far too short and within just a year of

learning of the Faith, which had set his heart aflame and would, in turn, transform the entire planet, Thomas lay dying in his apartment in Paris. Even at this stage he wrote to 'Abdu'l-Bahá asking if he could possibly leave Paris in case one of his parents in England became sick. His parents, however, arrived in Paris to try to take him back. Breakwell was faithful to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's instructions though, and so impressed his father that he too embraced the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. Breakwell died a few months later. In his last letter to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's secretary he wrote, "Suffering is a hardy wine. I am preparing to receive that bounty which is the greatest of all. Torments of the flesh have enabled me to draw much nearer to my Lord... I wish life to endure longer, so that I may taste more of pain. That which I desire is the good pleasure of my Lord. Mention me in His presence."

Heartbroken at the passing of Thomas Breakwell, although miraculously no-one had told him it had happened, 'Abdu'l-Bahá revealed the most moving and inspiring Tablet, telling his translator to translate it so that all who read it would weep:

O Breakwell! O my dear one! Where are thy beautiful eyes? Thy smiling lips? Thy princely cheek? Thy graceful form? O Breakwell! O my dear one! At all times do I call thee to mind, I shall never forget thee. I pray for thee by day and by night. I see thee plain before me, as if in open day. O Breakwell! O my dear one!

A year later 'Abdu'l-Bahá received a letter from Breakwell's father. It was a small violet. On the card was written: "He is not dead. He lives on in the Kingdom of God... This flower was picked from Breakwell's grave. Praise be to the Lord that my son left this world for the next with the recognition and love of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. "

" ...so shall your powers and blessings be."

Imagine if you will a young man, shining as the brightest example to the youth of Europe. A young man who clearly proved that such detachment, that such a depth of faith and devotion to the covenant of Bahá'u'lláh is possible and can be achieved. The spirit of Thomas Breakwell - the courage to fight battles for the Army of Light and win triumphant victories despite the poorest physical health - is a spirit which lives on among us here, now. In the words of the Master As ye have faith, so shall your powers and blessings be... This is the balance. This is the balance. This is the balance.

See the UK Bahá'í Heritage Site Picture Gallery of Early British Bahá'ís for a photo of Breakwell.

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