



pursuits to be able to accept in practice a Revelation so spiritual, so universal. Time and again the violent extirpation of the Faith at the hands of tyranny seemed assured. Many there were in high places in diverse lands who knew of the Faith, who were informed of the cruel wrongs inflicted on its votaries and heard their protests and appeals for justice. But there was none who heeded or who helped.

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Strange and pitiful that an eager, inquiring Age which discovered so much of truth should have left the spiritual realm unexplored and should have missed the most important truth of all.

No Prophet has ever come into the world with greater proofs of His identity than Bahá'u'lláh: nor in the first century of its activity has any older Faith achieved so much or spread so far across the globe as this.

The mightiest proof of a Prophet has ever been found in Himself and in the efficacy of His word. Bahá'u'lláh rekindled the fires of faith and of happiness in the hearts of men. His knowledge was innate and spontaneous, not acquired in any school. None could gainsay or resist His wisdom and even His worst enemies admitted His greatness. All human perfections were embodied in Him. His strength was infinite. Trials and sufferings increased His firmness and power. As a divine physician He diagnosed the malady of the Age and prescribed the remedy. His teachings were universal and conferred illumination on all mankind. His power has been poured forth more abundantly since His death. In His prescience He stood alone and events have proved and are still proving its accuracy.

A second proof which every Prophet has brought with Him has been the witness of the past: the evidence of Ancient Prophecy.

The fulfillment in this Day of the prophecies contained in the Qur'án and in Muslim tradition has not prevented Islám from persecuting the Bahá'í Faith but it has been startling and notorious.

The fulfillment of the prophecies of Christ and of the Bible has been over a period of a hundred years or more matter of common knowledge and remark in the West. But the full extent of that fulfillment is only seen in Bahá'u'lláh.

The proclamation of His Faith was made in 1844, the year when the strict exclusion of the Jews from their own land enforced by the Muslims for some twelve centuries was at last relaxed by the Edict of Toleration and "the times of the Gentiles" were "fulfilled."<sup>1</sup> The Advent has been long delayed and has fallen in a time of oppression and iniquity of religious unreality and disbelief, when love for God and man had grown cold,<sup>2</sup> when men were immersed in material business<sup>3</sup> and pleasure. The Prophet came like a thief<sup>4</sup> in the night and was here in our midst while people were wrapped in deep spiritual slumber. He tried and tested souls, separated the spiritual from the unspiritual, true from false believers, the sheep from the goats;<sup>5</sup> and the people taken unawares

<sup>1</sup> Luke c. 21, v. 24; <sup>2</sup> Matt. c. 24, vv. 12, 48; <sup>3</sup> Matt. c. 24, v. 38; <sup>4</sup> Matt.

c. 24, v. 43; 5 Matt. c. 25, v. 33.

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were caught as in a snare<sup>1</sup> and knew not their danger till the retributive justice of God closed in upon them. Yet the appearance of the Faith and the rapidity and direction of its extension was as the lightning which flashes from the East to the West.<sup>2</sup> Christianity in contrast to the Revelation of Muhammad had spread from the East to the West and has been predominantly a Western Faith. The Baha'í Faith likewise has moved westward but with even greater speed and momentum than Christianity.

From the beginning of the Era, from the days of the Herald of the Faith, the Báb, the chronicles show a conscious sympathy of Christians with the New Teaching, which was in marked contrast with the attitude of their Muslim neighbors. The earliest instance of this perhaps is the kindly tribute of Dr. Cormick, an English Physician resident in Tihrán to the Báb whom he attended in prison when suffering from the effects of torture, and his record of the prevalent opinion that the Teaching of the Báb resembled Christianity. The first Western historian of the Movement, Count Gobineau, a French diplomat, wrote (1865) with enthusiasm of the Báb's saintliness, of the loftiness of His ideals, of His charm, His eloquence, and of the astonishing power of His words over both friend and foe: Ernest Renan in "Les Apôtres" (1866), Lord Curzon in "Persia," Professor Browne of Cambridge in several works, and many Christian men of letters of later date have written in a similar strain.

But among the many instances of this instinctive sympathy, the most spectacular is that which marked the execution of the Báb in the market square of Tabríz on July 9th, 1850. The officer in charge of the firing party was a Christian. He approached the Báb and prayed Him that on this account and because he had no enmity towards Him in his heart he might be spared the guilt of perpetrating so heinous a crime. The Báb replied that if his prayer were sincere God was able to fulfill his desire. The remarkable miracle by which this prayer was granted, and the martyrdom of the Báb carried out by another regiment under a Muslim officer, is a part of history.

The Christian West, though far from the scene of the Prophet's ministry, felt and responded practically to the divine World Impulse decades before the East. Poets, major and minor, Shelley and Wordsworth and many another, sang of a new Dawn. A new missionary effort spread the Christian Gospel through the earth: spiritual men and women sought to revive reality in religion: reformers arose to redress long standing evils; novelists used their art for a social purpose

<sup>1</sup> Luke c. 21, v. 35; <sup>2</sup> Matt. c. 24, v. 27.

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How different all this from the action of the corrupt, fanatical, persecuting East!

The Báb Himself identified His Teaching in spirit and purpose with that of

Christ which was a preparation for His own: and He quoted some of Christ's Instructions to His disciples as part of His own Ordination Address to the "Letters of the Living."

Bahá'u'lláh from the beginning seems to have realized the special capacity of the progressive and enterprising West. He took the most vigorous steps possible to bring the Truth of the Age to the knowledge of the West and its leaders. Debarred from delivering His message to Europe in person, He wrote from a Turkish prison a general Tablet to the Christians, and another Tablet to the Sovereigns and leading men of the world but especially to the rulers of Christendom: and He also addressed five personal Tablets, one to the Czar, another to the Pope, another to Queen Victoria and two to Napoleon III. In these, in ringing tones of power and majesty such as would become the King of Kings imposing commands upon His vassals, He declared this Age the Supreme Day of God and Himself the Lord of Lords, the Father Who had come in His most great glory. All that had been mentioned in the Gospel had been fulfilled. Jesus had announced this Light and His signs had been spread in the West, that His followers might in this Day set their faces towards Bahá'u'lláh.

These letters are indeed pronouncements of a far-sighted Providence: and the catastrophe of the West which has occurred since they were written gives to them now a tragic and a terrible interest. They are of some length but their drift may be generally indicated in a few paragraphs.

In His Tablet to Queen Victoria He commends Her Majesty for ending the slave trade and for "entrusting the reins of counsel into the hands of the representatives of the people." But they who entered the Assembly should do so in a spirit of prayer to God and of trusteeship for the best interests of all mankind. The human race was one whole and should be regarded as the human body which though created perfect had become afflicted with grave disorders. It lay at the mercy of rulers so drunk with pride that they could not see their own best advantage, much less recognize this mighty Revelation. The one real remedy for the world's ills was the union of all its peoples in one universal Cause, one common Faith. This could be brought to pass only through the Divine Physician. He called on the Queen to ensure peace, to be just and considerate to her subjects, to avoid excessive taxation, to effect an international union for the reduction

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of armaments and the joint resistance of all nations to any aggressor Power.

His Tablet to the Pope contains an impassioned, loving appeal to Christians that they will recognize this, the Promised Day of God, that they will come forth into its light and acclaim their Lord, and enter the Kingdom in His name. They were created for the light and He likes not to see them in the darkness. Christ purified the world with Love and with the Spirit that in this Day it might be able to receive Life at the hands of the Merciful. This is the coming of the Father of whom Isaiah spoke: the teaching which He now reveals is that which Christ withheld when He said, "other things I have to say unto you but ye

cannot bear them now." He bids the Pontiff take the Cup of Life and drink therefrom and "offer it then to such as turn towards it amongst the peoples of all Faiths."

The Tablet to Alexander II is in answer to a prayer addressed by the Czar to His Lord and in recognition of a kindness shown to Bahá'u'lláh when in prison and in chains by an ambassador of the Czar. He impresses on the Czar the supreme greatness of this Manifestation, tells him how the Prophet has subjected Himself to a thousand calamities for the salvation of the world and, having brought life to men, is threatened by them with death. He bids him expose this injustice, and in love for God and God's Kingdom offer himself as a ransom in God's path: no harm will come to him but a reward in this world and the next. Great, great the blessing in store for the king who gives his heart to his Lord.

In His two Tablets to Napoleon III, Bahá'u'lláh impresses on the Emperor the oneness of mankind whose many maladies will not be cured unless the nations, abandoning the pursuit of their several interests, agree together and unite in common obedience to the plan of God. The human race should be as one body and one soul. A far higher degree of faith than the world has ever reached before is demanded by God of every man in this Era. All are commanded to teach the truth and to work for God's cause: but no one will produce good results in this service unless he first purify and ennoble his own character.

Bahá'u'lláh bids the clergy give up their seclusion, mingle in the life of the people and marry. God is calling men to Him in this Age and any theology which takes its own theses as a standard of truth and turns away from Him is deprived of value and efficacy.

He has come to regenerate and unite all mankind in very deed and truth and He will gather them at the one table of His bounty.

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Let the Emperor call on His name and declare His truth to the people.

Grave warnings and open or implicit threats if the kings do not acknowledge the Manifestation and obey His commands are contained in all these Tablets, especially in this to Napoleon III. The collective Tablet addressed to all the kings is however stern and minatory beyond the rest. Bahá'u'lláh warns the rulers that if they do not treat the poor amongst them as a trust from God; if they do not observe the strictest justice; if they do not compose their differences, heal the dissensions that estrange them and reduce their armaments, and follow the other counsels now given them by the Prophet, "Divine chastisement shall assail you from every direction and the sentence of His justice shall be pronounced against you. On that day ye shall have no power to resist Him and shall recognize your own impotence. Have mercy on yourselves and on those beneath you."

Christ long centuries before had wept over the city whose children had ignored His visitation and refused His protection. Now at His second coming the same

event recurred. But they who brought down the wrath of God on themselves were not the members of a nation but of an entire world.

Before He passed away Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed: "The hour is approaching when the most great convulsion will have appeared." And again, "The time for the destruction of the world and its people hath arrived."

More than forty years after the dispatch of these Tablets 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the son of the Prophet and the appointed Exemplar of His Faith, being freed at last from prison by the Young Turks, made a three years' tour of Europe and America. Saddened by many things He saw, and knowing the doom to which the heedlessness of the nations was hurrying them, He was sparing of denunciation, reproach or criticism; instead, with words of cheer and indiscriminating love He summoned His hearers to high, heroic action. He spoke much of the spiritual and social goal set by God for this enlightened Age: "The Most Great Peace." He Himself in His joy, in His serenity, in His love for all, in His wisdom, His strength and resolution and utter submissiveness to God, seemed the incarnation of the Spirit of that Peace. His very presence brought receptive souls into touch with a state of being of which they might have heard but which none of them had ever known. Through many months of missionary work He explained the moral and spiritual conditions which would make possible the Most Great Peace, and developed in many addresses the practical means by which it could be approached. In the United

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States, at Wilmette on the shores of Lake Michigan, He laid the foundation stone of the first Bahá'í Temple of the West, round which are to be grouped buildings devoted to social, humanitarian, educational and scientific purposes, the whole to be dedicated as one scheme the glory of God and the service of man. He also saw in America the first beginnings of the building of the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

But the general response of the public was not sufficient to stem the tides flowing towards war. Before He left the United States, 'Abdu'l-Bahá foretold the outbreak of hostilities in two years' time.

When at last peace was made, He declared that the League of Nations as constituted could not prevent war; and before He passed away in 1921 He announced to His followers the outbreak of another war fiercer than the last.

To many, at the opening of the second Bahá'í century, mankind seems to be drifting in a helmless barque upon a stormy and uncharted sea. But to the Bahá'ís another vision is revealed. The barriers by which men blocked their path to progress are torn down. Human pride is abased, human wisdom stultified. The anarchy of nationalism and the insufficiency of secularism are thoroughly exposed.

Slowly the veil lifts from the future. Along whatever road thoughtful men look out they see before them some guiding truth, some leading principle, which Bahá'u'lláh gave long ago and which men rejected. The sum and essence of the

best hopes of the best minds today is garnered in such a simple statement as that of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's "Twelve Points." 1. Unfettered search after truth. 2. The oneness of mankind. 3. Religion a cause of love and harmony. 4. Religion hand in hand with science. 5. Universal peace. 6. An international language. 7. Education for all. 8. Equal opportunities for both sexes. 9. Justice for all. 10. Work for all. 11. Abolition of extremes of poverty and wealth. 12. The Holy Spirit to be the prime motive power in life.

The immense, complex, baffling task of unifying all peoples is set forth in its complete and inmost simplicity by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in seven pregnant phrases. 1. Unity in the political realm. 2. Unity of thought in world undertakings. 3. Unity of freedom. 4. Unity in religion. 5. Unity of nations. 6. Unity of races. 7. Unity of language.

Already the Bahá'ís have begun in deed and in fact to build the instrument destined to be the model and the nucleus of the Most Great Peace. The Administrative Order is as simple as it is profoundly

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conceived, and it can only be conducted by those whose lives are animated by love and fear of God. It is a system in which such opposites as unity and universality, the practical and the spiritual, the rights of the individual and the rights of society, are perfectly balanced not through arranging a compromise but through the revelation of an inner harmony. Those who have the experience of operating the Order testify that it seems to them like a human body which is made to express the soul within.

On the lake shore at Wilmette stands the completed Temple of Praise, a sign of the Spirit of the Most Great Peace and of the Splendor of God that has come down to dwell among men. The walls of the Temple are transparent, made of an open tracery cut as in sculptured stone, and lined with glass. All imaginable symbols of light are woven together into the pattern, the lights of the sun and the moon and the constellations, the lights of the spiritual heavens unfolded by the great Revealers of today and yesterday, the Cross in various forms, the Crescent and the nine pointed Star (emblem of the Bahá'í Faith). No darkness invades the Temple at any time; by day it is lighted by the sun whose rays flood in from every side through the exquisitely perforated walls, and by night it is artificially illuminated and its ornamented shape is etched with light against the dark. From whatever side the visitor approaches, the aspiring form of the Temple appears as the spirit of adoration; and seen from the air above it has the likeness of a Nine-Pointed Star come down from heaven to find its resting place on the earth.

But for the leading of the peoples into the Promised Land, for the spiritualizing of mankind, for the attainment of the Most Great Peace the world awaits the arising of those whom the King of Kings has summoned to the task-the Christians and the Churches of the West.

"Verily Christ said 'Come that I may make you fishers of men' and today We say

'Come, that We may make you quickeners of the world'. . . Lo! This is the Day of Grace! Come ye that I may make you kings of the realm of My Kingdom. If ye obey Me you will see that which We have promised you, and I will make you the friends of My Soul in the realm of My Greatness and the Companions of My Beauty in the heaven of My Might for ever."

— G. Townshend

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