

accomplish His martyrdom and, enraged at His continued escape from this, they finally sent the police to His home, just one month before my arrival, commanded every guest to leave the place instantly, and forbade 'Abdu'l-Bahá to receive any western friends henceforth. Meanwhile a questionnaire was drawn up to be sent to 'Akká by a special committee. According to its plan if 'Abdu'l-Bahá filled out the questionnaire His answers would be so incriminating, that there could be no difficulty in obtaining the Sultan's signature for His sentence of death. All these danger threats were in the background of my rendezvous with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, but I knew nothing of them.

AT THAT time I had heard various histories of the emotional experiences of those who came into the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá at 'Akká.

Some had fainted, some had fallen at His feet in uncontrollable weeping, all of which behavior I was sure disturbed Him greatly. So I considered carefully how I might avoid such calamitous exhibitions. I was familiar with the story of Victor Hugo and his antagonists of the classic drama in 1830. I remembered that the young Romantacists selected the word Iron as indicative of their invincibility and self-control in contact with their classic opponents. Cold, impenetrable as iron, they met their enemies, successfully. So I decided when I came into the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, if my lips began to tremble and my knees to shake, I would mentally repeat the little word Iron, Iron and become unimpressionable as its black substance. Of course had I prayed at such a moment the emotional disturbance would have been intensified instead of eliminated.

Sure enough as the wonderful figure of 'Abdu'l-Bahá appeared in the doorway the expected result arrived with Him, but I gazed upon Him, squaring my shoulders, while my mind fastened itself purely upon the black little word Iron, Iron! Can I ever forget how He looked at me with laughing eyes, and began to relate all the tortuous journey that had brought me to 'Akká, meeting plague and quarantine at every port, and pouring out the contents of my thin pocket book, until it seemed as if nothing would be left in it if I ever reached the bleak walls of the ancient town.

He laughed at me saying: "Many people come here in a gala journey. They stop at the best hotels. They come here when they have nothing to fear, they travel in a company of friends and are a gay crowd! They do not realize they are on a pilgrimage to a holy place—and that they must pray much before they can understand it. If they do not pray before arriving, they must pray after they come here, but you have been forced to pray for guidance during the entire route, and so you are filled with the sense of prayer. You have lived and attained only through prayer."

Then he went on telling one amusing story after another, perceiving all the perturbation of my poor nerves, until my knees no longer shook and I was at peace.

But one thing was registered disconsolately in my mind: This radiant and

powerful person, this centre of wisdom and love! I knew that I could never ask Him a question, and how should I ever discover all the facts I wanted to know about His great teachings, those teachings which were not yet in printed words for the world to study, but the realities of which were constantly pouring into my consciousness.

Then began the marvelous days which followed, days which transformed and rebuilt, creating certainties from doubts, and eternal realities from ephemeral possibilities.

Can I ever forget the setting of this phenomenal drama? A little gallery ran all around the second story upon which the family of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá lived, and each chamber opened upon the gallery. Also the door of each room was a different and gay color. There were pink, yellow, green and white doors, but no black ones. I asked once why the doors were all different colors, and was told it was because the family never had money enough for more than one door at a time in those dark and dubious days of imprisonment!

The little room in which I stayed and in which the significant conversations with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá took place, was of the simplest description. The floor was covered with matting, the narrow iron bed and the iron wash stand with larger and smaller holes for bowl and pitcher were of that vermin proof description with which I had become familiar. Everything was scrupulously clean, and there was an abundant supply of sparkling water for bathing and drinking. A wide window looked over the huge town wall upon the blue Mediterranean and before this stretched a divan upon which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sat when He came to see me.

UPON MY arrival in ‘Akká my mind was filled with pain caused by the vivid description I had heard in Paris of another terrible martyrdom of Bahá’ís that had occurred in Persia. These martyrdoms continued from the period of the Báb’s Declaration until the advent of the present Shah of Persia, who put an end to all religious persecutions. The description of these particular atrocities was so detailed that finally I could bear no more and cried out my protest, exclaiming “but don’t you realize that the martyrs are in a state of bliss from the moment the torture begins, and feel none of the pain inflicted upon them?”

Where upon the assembled company turned upon me in deep disgust, and reproached me severely saying: “How dare you say such things! You are taking away all the glory of martyrdom!”

I remained abashed but not convinced, and felt that I must ask ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for the settlement of this disturbing question, but I never asked it. The first morning that He came into my little room He did not sit down, but walked back and forth in the narrow space and presently remarked, while I listened with awe, “There are many kinds of martyrdom. How many times have I prayed for it, but instead of that I have lived on in prison as if with the sword of Damocles suspended by a hair over my head! Each morning as I waken I feel that before the day ends I may be dragged to the public square and shot

to death. But nevertheless I have been very happy in this long martyrdom, for no victim suffers from the cruelties inflicted upon him. The instant the torture begins he is in a state of bliss, and feels nothing but the joy of Heaven which surrounds him.”

He paused, looking out through the wide windows at the blue Mediterranean, the view of which beyond the huge walls seemed to eliminate their imprisoning power. Then he added, “So Christ never suffered upon the cross. From the time the crucifixion began His soul was in Heaven and He felt nothing but the Divine Presence. He did not say, speaking in Aramaic: ‘O God; O God why hast Thou forsaken me?’ But this word Sabacthani is similar in sound to another which means glorify, and he actually murmured, ‘O God! O God! How thou dost glorify me.’”

Then He repeated to me such a story of martyrdom as I have never heard elsewhere and which I have not time to relate here. But I can never forget its dramatic expression of joyous deathlessness.

OF ALL these hours spent with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá however, the most memorable and eloquent were those in which He described the economic future of mankind. At that period, in 1907 the labor saving machines had not yet affected the labor market to a serious extent, nor produced what must be generally recognized as a high degree of permanent unemployment but the change was working and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá well understood its righteous conclusion.

Sometimes He sat still as He discoursed, speaking in that marvellous, colorful voice, such as none has used I am sure since Christ talked upon the mountainside or in the homes of His friends. Then He would rise in the excitement of what He portrayed, and walk back and forth conscious of nothing but the ideals which possessed Him.

He said: “Today the dynamic energy of the Holy Spirit has poured in such volume through the Messenger of God that even the masses of men have received it, and that was not possible before. Always in the past specially sensitized souls received the influence and acted upon it. But today for the first time the minds of all people have been touched by the spirit, and the result is that the designs of labor saving machines have been clearly revealed to them. It may seem strange to you that the Holy Spirit should give designs for labor saving machines,” he added, “but in reality every creative impulse of the brain can arise only through contact with the spirit. Without that the brain is merely capable of conventional and traditional action.

“The civilizations of the past have all been founded upon the enslavement of mankind and the poor working class has suffered every oppression for the sake of the enrichment of the few. This limited wealthy class has alone had the privilege of developing individuality. The down trodden worker after laboring long hours each day, has not had sufficient mental capacity at the conclusion of his task to do anything but eat and sleep.

“That all mankind might have opportunity, it was necessary to shorten the

hours of labor so that the work of the world could be completed without such demand of strain and effort, and all human beings would have leisure to think and develop individual capacity.

“The labor saving machines were given to create leisure for all mankind.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá repeated this several times. He was so deeply impressed with this fact that as He spoke He arose and walked back and forth in the little room, His face and eyes shining with joy over the happy future into which He gazed.

“The first decided shortening of the hours will appear,” He declared, “when a legal working day of eight hours is established,” and this of course took place in 1917 when Woodrow Wilson enacted the legal day of eight hours for all federal workers, and really for the workers of the United States.

“But this working day of eight hours is only the beginning,” went on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. “Soon there will be a six hour day, a five hour, a three hour day, even less than that, and the worker must be paid more for this management of machines, than he ever received for the exercise of his two hands alone.”

Speaking in 1907, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, “You cannot understand now, how the labor saving machines can produce leisure for mankind because at present they are all in the hands of the financiers and are used only to increase profits, but that will not continue. The workers will come into their due benefit from the machine that is the divine intention, and one cannot continue to violate the law of God. So with the assurance of a comfortable income from his work, and ample leisure for each one, poverty will be banished and each community will create comfort and opportunity for its citizens. Education will then be universal at the cost of the state, and no person will be deprived of its opportunity.” All these eloquent words and many others which I have not time to note here, were spoken to me by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá without the asking of a single question. His utterance, as always, was directed toward the inner urge of the mind He addressed, and He was perfectly aware that the mentality seeking Him at the moment was deeply interested in the problem of banishing poverty.

THERE IS not space to mention many incidents connected with this visit to ‘Abdu’l-Baha. One was very curious. Invariably as I sat with Him I was conscious of a growing lightness of body, so that I said to myself, if He stays much longer, I shall not be able to keep my feet on the floor, I shall float up to the ceiling! Invariably then He rose and swiftly left the room with that rapid gliding movement which made one feel He was flying rather than walking. On the last day of my visit He left me in this fashion, and I stood by the little table in the centre of the room. As I gazed after Him the words flashed through my mind, “I have been here, I have seen Him, and everything is just as I knew it would be.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá paused on the threshold, looked back at me with His eyes full of laughter and repeated the words that had in the same instant passed through my mind: “You have been here, you have seen me and everything is just as you knew it would be!”

The wonderful words He said to me in farewell I can never forget. In expressing my profound appreciation for all His gracious kindness to me and the wealth of knowledge and illumination he had given me, I finally cried out, “O ‘Abdu’l-Bahá! Why cannot all the world come here to see You as I have done and receive this understanding of life and its meaning, this light of the Spirit!”

He looked at me for a moment with a sort of sadness, and then replied, “Dearly beloved, many people cross the ocean and cross the desert and come here to see me. They stay sometimes a week—a month—a year and then they go away. They have not seen me at all.” He paused a moment with a far away look in His eyes and added, smiling as He took my hands—“It is better to meet me in the worlds of love!”

METADATA

Views3505 views since posted 2024-06-05; last edit 2025-09-30 13:02 UTC;

previous at archive.org.../ford_interview_abdul-baha

Language

English

Permission

public domain

Share

Shortlink: bahai-library.com/6516

Citation: ris/6516

select Collection:

Archives

Articles

Articles-unpublished

Audio

Bibliographies

BIC

Biographies

Books

Chronologies

Compilations

Compilations-NSA

Compilations-personal

Documents

East-asia

Encyclopedia

Essays

Etc

Excerpts

Fiction

Glossaries

Guardian

[Histories](#)
[Introductory](#)
[Letters](#)
[Maps](#)
[Music](#)
[Newspapers](#)
[NSA-documents](#)
[NSA-letters](#)
[Personal](#)
[Pilgrims](#)
[Poetry](#)
[Presentations](#)
[Resources](#)
[Reviews](#)
[Scripts](#)
[Software](#)
[Statistics](#)
[Study](#)
[Talks](#)
[Theses](#)
[Transcripts](#)
[Translations](#)
[UHJ-documents](#)
[UHJ-letters](#)
[Video](#)
[Visual](#)
[Writings](#)

[home](#)

[sitemap](#)

[series](#)

[chronology](#)

[search:](#)
[author](#)

[title](#)

[date](#)

[tags](#)

[adv. search](#)
[languages](#)

[inventory](#)

[bibliography](#)

[abbreviations](#)

[links](#)

[about](#)

[contact](#)

[RSS](#)

[new](#)

— An Interview with 'Abdu'l-Baha (Used by permission of the curator)