

Introduction

This compilation from the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi discloses new perspectives on the future of European civilization, "a civilization to some of whose beneficent features the pen of Bahá'u'lláh has paid significant tribute."

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No wonder that Europeans are so proud of their past. And yet their heritage may be considered both a glory and a burden. The glory comes from the remnants of its resplendent past, manifest in the beauty of artistic masterpieces, and in the profundity of the thoughts of great men, which are preserved in the pages of precious books as well as in the minds of their modern heirs, and realized in the best qualities of the European peoples. The burden comes from a culture, grown up within this heritage, which had made of Europe--as Shoghi Effendi wrote in 1947--the "darkest, most severely tested, spiritually depleted continent of the globe."

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This culture, characterised as it was in its worst aspects in the 1940s by a "crass materialism...an aggressive racialism...a haughty intellectualism...a blind and militant nationalism...a narrow and intolerant ecclesiasticism,"

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had transformed European peoples into "a materially highly advanced yet spiritually famished, much tormented, fear-ridden, hopelessly-sundered, heterogeneous conglomeration of races, nations, sects and classes."

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It was in those years that the first Bahá'í pioneers, the "vanguard of the torch-bearers of a world-redeeming civilization"

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arrived in Europe. Their arrival was "as unnoticed as the landing, two millenniums ago, of the apostles of Christ on the southern shores of the European continent,"

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and yet it opened a new age in the history of all European nations. In this compilation, four nations are specifically mentioned: Germany, France, Switzerland and Italy.

Great importance is given to Germany. The "vast measure of celestial grace"

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bestowed upon that community through the visits of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to a number of its cities and His correspondence with some of its most outstanding representatives may be viewed as both the cause of, and the divine response to, the spiritual receptivity of those "individuals...endued with perceptive eyes and attentive ears" who were "attracted to the principles of the oneness of mankind" and treated "all the peoples and kindreds of the earth in a spirit of concord and fellowship."

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But in the dialectic of crisis and victory those blessings were followed by a long period of trials. The "narrow and brutal nationalism"

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of the Nazi government disbanded the Bahá'í administrative institutions and reduced the Bahá'ís to silence for many years. And yet throughout these ordeals, the members of the "great-hearted, indefatigable, much admired German Bahá'í community"

(10)

displayed "virility" and "tenacity." And when "the shackles imposed" upon them were removed, they immediately put at the service of the Faith the best qualities "distinguishing the race to which they belong": "painstaking thoroughness, scientific exactitude and dispassionate criticism." 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi foresaw for them a "glorious future under the banner of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh": "to champion the Cause of God in Europe," to "spread out into Eastern and Southern Europe, and...into the heart of Northern Asia, as far as the China Sea," to give their contribution "in research and scholarship," to "lead all the nations and peoples of Europe spiritually."

Not less thrilling, although on a smaller scale, are the expectations from the other nations. France, which the Master visited thrice, was the seat of the earliest European Bahá'í community, founded at the end of last century through the efforts of May Maxwell. Many of the spiritual giants of the Bahá'í world--Laura Barney, Hippolite Dreyfus, Thomas Breakwell, Herbert Hopper, Agnes Alexander, and others--were transformed by the love of the Faith at that centre. France is described by the Master as a country endowed with "capacity," but in its cities "the power of nature is still triumphant over the power of religion." And yet He anticipates that as soon as its present love for material pleasure is turned into "a mighty passion in heavenly pleasure," and "souls profound in science and learning, of lofty aspirations, not bound by that which perisheth nor seeking the body's ease" will become attracted towards the love of Bahá'u'lláh, its cities will become "celebrated in every corner of the world and that clime

[will] become a garden of delight."

The Italo-Swiss National Spiritual Assembly, elected in Florence in 1953, is described by Shoghi Effendi as "the fairest fruit of the great European enterprise launched in pursuance of the second Seven Year Plan formulated by the American Bahá'í community." Switzerland is presented as a "peace-loving, high-minded, firmly-knit...nation." The Italian people are described "by virtue of their qualities of mind and heart, ...as one of the most distinguished on the European continent." Shoghi Effendi admonishes that, since the peoples of these two countries are "intensely conservative by nature, steeped in tradition, bound, for the most part, by the ties of religious

orthodoxy, sunk in materialism, and fully content with the standard they have achieved," the development of the Cause there will be "painfully slow, extremely arduous, and often highly discouraging." And yet he foresees for the Bahá'ís in those countries "a very great future" when, "at no distant date," they will be carried "upward from the shadowed valleys of obscurity to the sunny uplands of fame, prosperity and triumph."

Shoghi Effendi wrote in 1947 that "The hatreds that inflame, the rivalries that agitate, the controversies that confuse, the miseries that afflict,

[European] races, nations and classes are bitter and of long standing."

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It

seems that differences among races, cultures, and nations in Europe have been a cause of great problems. However, this compilation provides a key for the members of the now consolidated European Bahá'í communities to understand how these differences can be made a cause of progress, how each European can be enabled to hand down to posterity a contribution from his own national genius. This key can be summarized in four points recommended by 'Abdu'l-Bahá: "to firmly adhere to the Covenant of God and His Testament"; "to manifest the utmost affection and kindness toward one another, to love each other with heart and soul, to make the utmost endeavour to come to the assistance of each other"; "to manifest exceeding love and fellowship toward all the people of the earth"; to "never rest, but strive day and night to guide the people." This seems to be the way that Bahá'ís can help to change "the confusion, the anxieties, the rivalries, and the current crisis" which still afflict "the spiritually impoverished...morally disoriented masses" of the European continent into the future that Shoghi Effendi described as "bidding fair to eclipse the radiance of those past ages which have successfully witnessed the introduction of the Christian Faith into the continent's northern climes, the efflorescence of Islamic culture that shed such radiance along its southern shores, and the rise of the Reformation in its very heart."

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Julio Savi

End Notes

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. Shoghi Effendi,
Citadel of Faith. Messages to America 1947-1957 (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970)

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.Shoghi Effendi,
Citadel

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Shoghi Effendi,
Messages to the Bahá'í World: 1950-1957
(Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971)

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Shoghi Effendi,
Messages

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Shoghi Effendi,
Citadel

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'Abdu'l-Bahá,
Compilation

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Shoghi Effendi,
The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh
(Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1955)

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All the following quotations are from the
Compilation
unless otherwise stated.

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Shoghi Effendi,
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Shoghi Effendi,
Citadel

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