



many years upon Persian Bahá'ís, may be likened to a wave whose concentrated force breaks upon a rocklike obstacle, then recedes to be gathered into the body of the sea. While the obstacle remains, the force has not been spent in vain. In future years the effect of this valiant faith will be fully disclosed.

Mrs. Ransom-Keller carried forward a mighty task on which the American Bahá'í community has exerted itself over a long period of time: the consolidation of the spiritual unity of the East and West in fulfillment of the universal principles revealed by Bahá'u'lláh. The chief obstacle to this unity has throughout the eighty-nine years of Bahá'í history consisted in the resistance made by Persia to the new conceptions of amity and fellowship created by Bahá'u'lláh, a notable expression of which was the work known as "The Mysterious Forces of Civilization" written by Abdu'l-Baha to inspire his fellow Persians with the true spirit of enlightenment and progress.

The present era of the Cause, dating from the appointment of Shoghi Effendi as Guardian in Abdu'l-Baha's Will and Testament, has witnessed a rapid development of the relations between the Bahá'í communities of Persia and America. By 1921, however, under Abdu'l-Baha's guidance, a lasting foundation had already been laid in the cooperation extended by American Bahá'ís in the work of the Tarbiat School at Tihiran, through donations for scholarships and also the important services rendered the School by Dr. Susan I. Moody, Miss Lillian Kappes, Dr. Clock, Dr. Genevieve Coy and Miss Elizabeth Stewart.

The Persian Bahá'ís, meanwhile, had made their own unique and eternal contribution to the American Bahá'í community through the visits of such influential Baha teachers as Mirza Abu'l-Fadl and Jinab-e-Fadel.

During 1925 an opportunity was afforded American believers to express their attitude of spiritual unity with their Persian coworkers by the transmission of funds for the relief of the believers afflicted by floods at Nariz. Since 1921, moreover, Dr. Genevieve Coy served for a term as teacher in the Tarbiat School, and her visit to Persia was followed by that of Miss Martha Root and Mrs. Siegfried Schopflocher.

In 1927 a fresh outbreak of persecutions led to the preparation of an appeal on the part of the American National Spiritual Assembly to His Majesty Reda Shah Pahlavi, copies of which were published and spread throughout the United States and Canada. Soon afterward a statement on the Cause prepared by the Assembly and addressed to leading Persian Moslems was translated into Persian by the Tihiran Bahá'í community, and printed copies of this statement were sent to many hundreds of influential people in that country.

[Page 390 has a portrait, with the caption:

Keith Ransom-Kehler, a Hand of the Cause and the first American Bahá'í martyr.]

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Again, early in 1932 the American Bahá'í Assembly addressed petitions to the Shah and his Prime Minister that the ban on entry of Bahá'í literature be removed. This formal representation failing in its purpose, on June 10, 1932, the American National Spiritual Assembly addressed a communication to His Majesty requesting the recognition of Mrs. Keith Ransom-Kehler as its representative duly chosen and empowered to present in person its renewed appeal. This letter, sent to Mrs. Ransom-Kehler as her credentials for the important mission with which she had been entrusted at Shoghi Effendi's request, stated in part:

“Mrs Keith Ransom-Kehler, an American citizen, a member of the Bahá'í community of this country, and a distinguished student of the teachings and history of the Bahá'í Faith, can, with your Majesty's gracious permission, amplify and supplement the statements made by this Assembly in the written petition addressed to your Majesty under date of January 12, 1932.

“More effectively than in our written communication, this personal representative can make clear to your Majesty how widely spread throughout America, and especially among the Bahá'ís, is the appreciation of the notable reforms which have been made in Persia as the result of your Majesty's administration of affairs in that land. Mrs. Ransom-Kehler can likewise affirm for your Majesty the importance of the spiritual ties binding Persia and America through the reverence of the believers in both countries for the enlightened religious teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, the extraordinary effect of these teachings in paying high tribute to the prophetic character of the mission of Muhammad, overcoming the prejudice and misunderstanding prevalent among Christians in opposition to Islam for more than one thousand years, and the high moral value Bahá'í religious teachings have had for Persia by inculcating loyalty to Government, forbidding sedition and upholding true ideals of education and humanitarian service.

“The appointment of a representative to journey to Tihiran for the purpose of presenting in person the petition of this Assembly will make it evident to your Majesty how profoundly the American Bahá'ís are moved by their inability to communicate fully with their fellow-religionists in Persia by reason of the Postal regulations still prohibiting the entry of Bahá'í books and magazines published in the United States and Canada.”

It will be recalled that in Bahá'í News dated October, 1932, was published this reference to Mrs. Ransom-Kehler from a Letter written to the National Spiritual Assembly by the Guardian's secretary: “Mrs. Keith Ransom-Kehler is now with us in Haifa and in a few days will start for Persia. She rendered wonderful services in both Australia and India, and Shoghi Effendi trusts that she will do the same in Persia.”

On August 20, 1932, the following cablegram was received: “Mission successful. (Signed) Keith.”

On September 14 the National Spiritual Assembly, rejoiced by this swift consummation, despatched a cablegram to the Court Minister at Tihiran as

follows:

“On behalf American Bahá’ís we express abiding gratitude for removal ban on entry Bahá’í literature into Persia. This noble action of His Imperial Majesty’s Government has profoundly impressed Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada who have already felt strong attachment to Bahá’u’lláh’s native land. We wish to assure your Highness of our sympathy for his Imperial Majesty, our great interest in the progress and welfare of his Empire and our desire to assist in enhancing its prestige throughout the world.”

This message was brought to the attention of the Persian Minister at Washington in a letter dated October 21, 1932. A statement to the American press was also issued reporting that Mrs. Ransom-Kehler had received firm assurance from the Court Minister that the postal regulations under which Bahá’í literature had been confiscated would be immediately annulled.

Before taking up the events which destroyed this hope, it is interesting to learn of the impressive reception given Mrs. Ransom-Kehler by the Persian Bahá’ís on her arrival in that land. In November, 1932, the Spiritual Assembly of Haifa, Palestine, issued a general letter throughout the Bahá’í world, from which the following excerpts are taken: “Mrs Keith Ransom-Kehler, the energetic and faithful Bahá’í teacher, has been the object of great enthusiasm and loving devotion on the part of the Persian believers.

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... In Tabriz several meetings were held in the Hazirut-ul-Quds where large numbers of Bahá’ís, both men and women, had the pleasure of greeting the international Bahá’í teacher. From Tabriz she proceeded to Milan, accompanied by a group of believers. But before leaving Tabriz, the police authorities, apparently disturbed by the scenes of Bahá’í rejoicing, sent warning and forbade the believers to hold any meetings in honor of Mrs. Ransom-Kehler at Tabriz, and requested her to abandon her visit to Milan. But the Spiritual Assembly immediately sent a delegation to the authorities and upon assuring them that no demonstrations held by the Bahá’ís would disturb the public peace, permission was granted for her journey to Milan.

“A most thrilling meeting was held in Milan, where old and young believers witnessed in Mrs. Ransom-Kehler’s visit the dawn of the fulfillment of the prophecy found more than once in the Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahí to the Persian Bahá’ís, that the day will come when brothers and sisters from the ‘West will arrive and help you in promoting the Cause.’

“After proceeding to Sisan, Mianej, Azarbayejan and Qazwin, Mrs. Ransom-Kehler proceeded to Tihran. A reception committee, followed by a group of more than a hundred believers, met the guest at a garden about four miles from the city. Her entrance in Tihran was like the visit of a queen, amid the

acclamations of thousands of rejoicing Bahá'ís. Never had Tihran so welcomed any guest from the West.”

Mrs. Ransom-Keller's own report of her successful interview with the Court Minister was written to the American National Spiritual Assembly on August 20, 1932, the brevity of the communication revealing the pressure of that physical weakness against which she struggled so gallantly to the end. “On August 15 I saw His Highness Taymur Tash and received from him the direct, unqualified assurance that Bahá'í literature would be admitted freely into Persia and permitted to circulate.”

From other sources the American Assembly learned further details of this interview. “His Highness received the Bahá'í delegate kindly and listened with attention to her appeal. He stated that the matter did not require her to seek audience with the Shah nor to send him the written petition. The former letter of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States has been received and given due attention. ‘I hereby promise that the restrictions on the import of Bahá'í books will be removed.’ Mrs. Ransom-Kehier thereupon asked whether she could cable America and inform the American Bahá'ís of this assurance. The Court Minister replied that she most assuredly could do so and that she must consider the matter as finally settled. Mrs. Ransom-Kehier then asked whether she might arrange to have her own Bahá'í books sent to her for use while in Persia, and the Minister said there was no reason why she might not do so.”

It was not until the receipt of a letter from Mrs. Ransom-Kehier dated January 20, 1933, that the American Bahá'ís learned that the assurance given their representative by the Court Minister had not become fruitful in action. In that letter she stated that the Bahá'í books shipped to her from Beirut had been confiscated, and that she had written the Court Minister to acquaint him with this fact and renew her petition on behalf of the American Bahá'ís. This letter also conveyed the disturbing information that, during a visit to Azarbayejan, the Governor General had refused to receive her and moreover that police orders had been issued forcing the abandonment of meetings arranged in her honor by the local Bahá'ís.

Later, press dispatches from Persia reported that changes had been made in the office of Court Minister, making it clear that all of Mrs. Ransom-Keller's work would have to be done over again.

Undiscouraged, Mrs. Ransom-Kehier immediately arranged an interview with the Secretary charged with American affairs at the Foreign Office. In a report of this conversation sent to the American Assembly, the following significant statement is quoted: “He informed me that at the present time our Bahá'í literature could not circulate in Persia for three reasons. First, that it is contrary to the constitution of Persia to recognize any religion founded after Islam, and, since the Bahá'í religion cannot legally receive recognition, it follows that our literature

must remain unrecognized.

Second, that it is contrary to the constitution of Persia to permit the circulation of any literature opposed to Islam. Third, that the circulation of Bahá'í literature at this time might cause grave internal disorders that would bring much suffering to the Bahá'ís themselves."

This interview was in fact also reported to the Shah himself, in a letter which the valiant American Bahá'í addressed to him on February 25, 1933, in a supreme effort to fulfil her delicate and difficult mission. "In my report to America," she informed his Majesty, "I shall be constrained to admit that I must have misunderstood completely the purpose and intent of the interpreter, for exhaustive investigation reveals no reference in the Constitution of Persia to the status of religions founded later than Islam.

"Since every Bahá'í before he can so designate himself must accept the validity of the Prophet Muhammad and display toward the Qur'án the same reverence as that shown by the most orthodox Muslim, and since this attitude is inculcated through Bahá'í literature, the point of excluding it because it is opposed to Islam will, I fear, be incomprehensible. ... I shall await your Majesty's authority to submit the result of my conversation with the Foreign Office, herein set forth, to the proper Bahá'í centers throughout the world; for I have no desire, a second time, to find myself mistaken as to your Majesty's intention."

This appeal to the Shah receiving no reply, the National Spiritual Assembly in America, realizing that its report to the press stating that the ban on entry of Bahá'í literature into Persia had been removed was proved untrue, dispatched to its representative in Persia another communication to be presented to the Shah. This communication was dated March 27, 1933. A portion is quoted, as follows:

"Information has been received which leads us to believe that the permission granted in your Majesty's name by your Majesty's Minister of Court some months ago removing the ban on the entrance of Bahá'í literature into Persia has now been withdrawn.

"We trust that events will prove our present understanding of your Majesty's intention to be incorrect. The recent gracious action of your Majesty in asserting the power of religious freedom and opening the door to the amenities of international communication customary in modern lands was by us immediately communicated to all leading newspapers in the United States and Canada together with an expression of our grateful recognition of your Majesty's response to our petition.

"This announcement to the press was considered by us of extreme importance in view of the fact that it is among American Bahá'ís that the love and admiration for Persia and its people is most pronounced. The effect of the Bahá'í teachings upon believers in all countries outside of Persia has for many years been to establish not only an attitude of spiritual respect for the

historic greatness of Persia but also a firm and unyielding confidence in the future greatness and worldwide influence of the Persian people.

“The responsibility seems now resting upon us to inform the press that our previous communication, made in perfect good faith, must now be withdrawn.

“The press in America exercises such far-reaching influence that we have ever been most scrupulous and careful in authorizing only the most conservative and accurate statements. The American press has become aware that on account of the existence of Bahá’í communities in many lands the American National Spiritual Assembly is well informed and enjoys unusual sources of information. Our devotion to the spiritual character of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh makes it incumbent upon us to maintain our reputation with newspaper editors of unflinching sincerity and reliable accuracy.

“Our petition we entrust to our accredited representative, Mrs. Keith Ransom-Kehler, who, at our request, traveled to Persia many months ago in order to represent the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada in our appeal to your Majesty and your Majesty’s Government for a favorable and final decision in the matter of the entrance and circulation of Bahá’í literature.”

Mrs. Ransom-Kehler presented the foregoing communication to the Shah in a letter dated Tihran, April 23, 1933. Meanwhile, on April 3, she addressed his Majesty once

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again in a letter which pointed out her obligation to report the results of her mission in Persia, and with that letter enclosed a detailed summary of her interview with the Foreign Office.

Before the opening of the Annual Convention of American Bahá’ís on June 1, 1933, it had become clear to the National Spiritual Assembly that the matter had come to no favorable decision, and reports were received which indicated even a recurrence of the physical maltreatment of Persian Bahá’ís. On advice of Shoghi Effendi the problem was accordingly laid before the assembled Convention delegates, with the result that the delegates unanimously pledged their support in the National Assembly’s effort to alleviate these dire conditions.

In order to carry out the spirit of this action, the Assembly on July 10, 1933, sent personal representatives with a communication to present to the Persian Minister at Washington, thus opening a new phase in the progress of the matter.

Meanwhile, though her physical illness had increased, Mrs. Keith Ransom-Kehler, as afterward learned, had been continuing her efforts in Tihran. Thus, in a letter dated June 8, 1933, she once more addressed the Persian Shah, in a letter which stands as an expression of deep concern at the unfavorable conditions existing for the Persian Bahá’ís, with a most passionate and devoted resolve to leave no stone unturned in effort to change the official

attitude. Some excerpts follow:

“A year ago this month I reached Persia as representative of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada, having traveled halfway around the world to present a petition on their behalf to your gracious Majesty requesting the removal of the ban on entry and circulation of Bahá’í literature in Persia.

“This petition was framed because of the incalculable blessings which your Majesty’s reign has bestowed upon Persia; because of the advancement, the liberation and the protection which, under the firm and spectacular power exhibited by your Majesty, have elevated this sacred land of ours to the forefront of progress and revival.

“Certainly it would have been folly to have sent such a communication in any period preceding your Majesty’s accession, for at that time ears were deaf to every plea of justice, and Persia had become the tragic plaything of wilful, corrupt and ruthless lords.

“But mindful of the great blessings which have flowed from your Majesty’s enlightened rule, the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada felt that the time was now ripe, that the amazing accomplishments of your Majesty now favored the idea of consummating the complete emancipation of the Bahá’ís of Persia from the trammels and deprivations inherited from the dark past. ....

“We must look not to Shah Abbas nor to Nadir Shah but to the distant past — to the days of Cyrus, Darius and Jamsheed — for anything comparable to the accomplishments which in twelve brief years have characterized your Majesty’s achievements. ...

“These were the ideas we had in mind when petitioning your Majesty to remove this last barrier from the pathway of Bahá’í freedom and progress in Persia by according us the privilege of the press, an ordinary civil right in all but the most backward of countries.

“In fact, in the Minutes of the Twenty-Second Session of the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations we find the statement (pages 41-42) “Was it said that the Bahá’ís were such a small minority in Iraq that there was no need to bother about them? It was the very fact that the minority was a small one that made it necessary for the authorities to safeguard its rights. It showed the weakness of the Iraqi Government; the power which an intolerant majority had over it — and this record has gone out not only to the fifty-six nations that comprise the League but to the whole world, carrying this reproach to the Iraqi Government for its treatment of the Bahá’ís.

“The Bahá’ís of Persia are not a weak and helpless minority; we stand in numbers next to the State religion; but as the League report further says, ‘The Bahá’ís are by their religion, tenets and character of an extremely conciliatory disposition.’

“For that reason they patiently endure whatever hardships are imposed upon them

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by their governments, and for that same reason they are worthy of the utmost trust and confidence from those in authority. ...

“The numerous communications which I have had the honor of addressing to the Crown since my interview at the Foreign Office have had but one purpose: that of ascertaining in definite and dependable form whether or not the amazing and feeble statements given me there were really in accord with your Majesty’s intent and desire.”

To every Cabinet Minister and to the President of Parliament, Mrs. Ransom-Kehler sent on July 3, 1933, a letter containing the following statements: “It would give me great pleasure to place in your hands portions of our Bahá’í literature in order to prove the great contribution that it has made to the advancement of Islam in countries unfriendly to its reception; but although Jewish,

Christian and Zoroastrian literature, all opposed to Islam, is permitted to circulate, our Bahá’í literature that upholds and converts to Islam is denied this privilege.

Therefore I have nothing available to present to you.

“In the Post Offices and Customs of Persia, however, are thousands of volumes that have been confiscated. Even a brief survey of any one of these will prove that Bahá’u’lláh lays down as fundamental, loyalty to one’s government, and the sanctity and verity of Islam.”

On that same day, moreover, the representative of the American Bahá’ís felt compelled to appeal once more to the Shah. “To my horror and grief I have just heard of the burning, on the part of your Majesty’s officials in Kirmanshah, of the sacred photographs of Abdu’l-Baha. I am fully convinced that such a sacrilege has been committed without the knowledge of your Majesty, for it is fundamentally contrary to the policy of expansion, protection and tolerance that have characterized your Majesty’s evident intent with regard to the advancement of Persia.

“It is because I am certain that such an infamy was perpetrated without the knowledge or consent of your Majesty that I am presenting this memorandum to acquaint your Majesty with these highhanded and abominable outrages committed by your Majesty’s irresponsible servants....

“Assuredly the most precious and sacred

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thing in life to any man is his religious conviction. Without hesitation thousands of Bahá’ís have given their lives for their faith. That flame that once burned in Persia alone has now enkindled the world. The Bahá’ís

as a body stand ready if necessary to die for the protection of their belief. We are willing to endure any degree of injustice and persecution ourselves but, when it comes to regarding with other than outraged sentiment a gratuitous indignity offered to that illustrious example of human perfection, Abdu'l-Baha, the Bahá'ís of the world arise in the full strength of their solidarity to utter a vehement protest.

“In His Will and Testament, Abdu'l-Baha gives us this last instruction: ‘Consort with all the peoples, kindreds and religions of the world with the utmost truthfulness, uprightness, faithfulness, kindness, good will and friendliness; that all the world of being may be filled with the holy ecstasy of the grace of Baha; that ignorance, enmity, hate and rancor may vanish from the world and the darkness of estrangement amidst the peoples and kindreds of the world may give way to the light of unity.’

“Is the one who uttered such words of peace and reconciliation worthy of suppression and desecration?”

“I now with the most intense fervor supplicate and implore your Majesty to put a final stop to these fanatical persecutions that disgrace in the eyes of men the annals of Persia's former rulers, by removing this ban against Bahá'í literature, that bids fair if it continues to involve the world in contempt for this sacred land.”

The Minister of Education, replying in a letter dated “bitarikh 28 — 4 — 13 12. No. 9880/4320” to the communication which Mrs. Ransom-Keller sent to all members of the Cabinet, made this significant statement: “I would inform you that today all individuals and inhabitants of the country, whether Mubammadans or people of other nations, are resting in the cradle of tranquillity and security under the shadow of the power and grandeur of His Majesty Shahanshah Pahlavi, may our souls be sacrificed for him, and they benefit equally from the privilege of existing laws. But in the meantime new publications which are considered contrary to the official religion of the country or its political aspect can not be agreed to.”

Meanwhile, as it became apparent that communications addressed to the ruler did not penetrate the official entourage and reach the Shah himself, the American Assembly, as already mentioned, applied to the Persian Minister at Washington. The letter dated July 10, 1933, was presented to the Minister by three representatives. It read, in part, as follows:

“Your Excellency: On October 21, 1932, the members of this American Bahá'í Assembly sent to the Persian Legation at Washington a copy of a cablegram which on September 14, 1932, had been dispatched to the Minister of the Court in Teheran.

“This communication was acknowledged by Mr. Y. Azodi, Charge d'Affaires, under date of October 22, 1932.

“In substance, the cablegram sent to the Court Minister on behalf of the American Bahá'ís expressed abiding gratitude for the decision to remove the

ban on entry and circulation of Bahá'í literature in Persia.

“On March 27, 1933, as the result of unexpected information indicating that this decision had either been reversed or never made effective, we addressed a respectful petition to His Imperial Majesty Reza Shah Pahlavi, expressing our profound hope that our understanding of the matter was incorrect and referring to the fact that the American Bahá'ís had informed the press that the ban had been removed, and in the event that this statement proved to be unfounded the Bahá'í would be reluctantly obliged to make it clear to the press that Bahá'í literature is still prohibited from entry and circulation in Persia.

“This petition we forwarded to our personal representative in Teheran, Mrs. Keith Ransom-Kehler, a Bahá'í and American citizen, with the request that it be communicated to his Majesty on our behalf.

“To our astonishment and regret, during May, 1933, we learned that not only is the ban on literature still rigorously applied, but that Bahá'ís in Persia are even incurring physical maltreatment at the present time.

“These circumstances were considered by the delegates representing sixty American

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cities who met in Annual Convention in the Foundation Hall of the Bahá'í House of Worship at Wilmette, Illinois, from June 1 to 4, 1933.

“It seems desirable to inform your Excellency that the Twenty-Fifth Annual Convention of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada adopted unanimously the following resolution:

‘Resolved, that the delegates of the Twenty-Fifth Annual Convention representing sixty communities of the United States and Canada, realizing the burdens of oppression still laid upon their brethren of Persia, recommend and urge the National Spiritual Assembly to take immediate action to bring about the cessation of the reported maltreatment of our Bahá'í brethren, to secure the entry of Bahá'í literature and to restore the Constitutional provision for the printing and circulation of Bahá'í literature within Persia;

‘And be it further resolved, that the delegates pledge the support of the local Bahá'í communities to the National Spiritual Assembly in its effort to carry out the terms of this appeal.’

“In view of this action on the part of the Annual Convention, expressing the deep concern and heartfelt anxiety of all American Bahá'ís to assist in bringing about a final alleviation of all civil disabilities still suffered by our beloved brothers and coworkers in Persia, the National Spiritual Assembly has requested its chairman and secretary to call upon your Excellency and respectfully request your good offices in bringing our petition to the notice of the Persian Government.

“In discharging this grave responsibility, we respectfully point out to your Excellency the unique ties of sympathetic fellowship which have long united the Bahá’ís of America and Persia. For many years the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada have courageously upheld the Prophethood of Muhammad as one of the divine Messengers, in the face of the traditional antipathy and indifference of a predominantly Christian population. In publishing and distributing the literature of our Faith we are actively promoting the reality of Mubammad as well as the reality of Jesus.

By accepting Muhammad as a Prophet inspired with the same Holy Spirit as Jesus, we have entered into a spiritual unity with the Persian Bahá’ís without parallel in the history of the East or of the West. We state with all emphasis that apart from this spiritual bond of faith in the one God of all mankind, the relations of the various peoples and nations of the world are uncertain and replete with peril of war and economic chaos.

“After entertaining the hope that the ancient land of Persia had been granted the high privilege of a regime based upon fearless justice, the very foundation of civilization, we cannot but deplore the survival from the past of indications that free intercourse on the part of American citizens with loyal citizens of Persia on matters of purely spiritual interest is prevented by Regulations imposed by Persian authorities.

“The Bahá’ís of America assert very frankly to your Excellency their unhappiness because of the fact that unfounded prejudice against the Bahá’ís of Persia, whether emanating from atheistic or from ecclesiastical sources, can in this day and age find sanction from authorities of the State. Without this sanction, active or passive, it would be impossible to forbid the entry and circulation of a sacred literature which one day will be recognized as the glory of Persia, while at the same time permitting the entry and circulation of other religious literature the essential purpose of which is to defame the founder of Islam and overthrow the very foundation of Persian culture and ideals.

“The outcome of this representation will, we trust, enable the National Spiritual Assembly to inform the local Bahá’í communities that their determined desire to assist in removing the disabilities and maltreatment of their Persian brothers has been completely realized.”

On July 26, 1933, the Assembly reported to Mrs. Ransom-Keller a summary of actions taken by American Bahá’ís in the matter of conditions affecting the Persian believers, with the request that she communicate these facts and the attitude of the American Bahá’ís, to the officials of the Persian Government, and report the results, that the Assembly might inform the local American Bahá’í

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communities whether their Convention resolution had borne fruit. The answer came in this message, cabled by Mrs. Ransom-Keller on September 10: “Petition

unanswered.”

The grief and disappointment caused by this outcome of her mission, magnified by exhaustion resulting from self-sacrificing effort to meet every opportunity to visit and address Bahá'í gatherings in Persia, reduced Mrs. Ransom-Kehier's strength to such a degree that on October 23, 1933, while at Isfahan, this consecrated follower of Bahá'u'lláh fell victim to small pox and succumbed within a few brief hours.

This grievous event was announced in Bahá'í News of November, 1933, as follows:

“On October 27, 1933, the Spiritual Assembly of Tihran, Persia, cabled the startling news that Mrs. Keith Ransom-Kehler had passed into the spiritual Kingdom. With burning hearts the Persian Bahá'ís conveyed their grief at this mysterious culmination of our sister's special mission in the land of the birth of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. “The beloved Guardian on October 30 dispatched this message: ‘Keith's precious life offered up in sacrifice to beloved Cause in Bahá'u'lláh's native land. On Persian soil, for Persia's sake, she encountered, challenged and fought the forces of darkness with high distinction, indomitable will, unswerving, exemplary loyalty. The mass of her helpless Persian brethren mourns the sudden loss of their valiant emancipator. American believers grateful and proud of the memory of their first and distinguished martyr. Sorrow stricken, I lament my earthly separation from an invaluable collaborator, an unfailing counsellor, an esteemed and faithful friend. I urge the Local Assemblies befittingly to organize memorial gatherings in memory of one whose international services entitled her to an eminent rank among the Hands of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh.’ (Signed) Shoghi.

“A message from the American Consul at Tihran, communicated through the Secretary of State, brought the information that Keith had passed on at Isfahan on October 23.

“With the approval of Mrs. Keith Ransom-Kehler's nearest relative, a message was cabled to the Tihran Assembly asking that burial be arranged at Isfahan under Bahá'í auspices, and stating that the American Assembly will construct a permanent memorial.

“Shoghi Effendi, on November 3, sent this message: ‘Instructed Isfahan Assembly to inter Keith in the vicinity of the grave of Sultanushushuada, surnamed by Bahá'u'lláh ‘King of Martyrs.’”

“The detailed reports which our beloved sister has during the past year sent from Tihran, to convey information on the result of her mission, as the representative of the American believers chosen by the Guardian, to secure from the Persian Government the lifting of the ban on entry of Bahá'í literature and also removal of the difficulties and hardships placed upon the Persian Bahá'ís, form one of the precious and important historical records of the Cause. A summary of these reports will be published in Bahá'í News next month.

“Local Spiritual Assemblies and groups are requested to arrange memorial meetings in accordance with the Guardian’s wish.”

The papers of New York and other cities reported in detail the news of the death of this American citizen in Persia. The following statement was published in the “New York American” on October 28, 1933:

“Mrs. Keith Ransom-Kehler, who spent the last year in Teheran, Persia, as representative of the American National Bahá’í Assembly, died in that city on October 25, it was reported in a cable received yesterday by the Assembly from the secretary of the Teheran Bahá’í community.

“In August, 1932, Mrs. Ransom-Kehler, after two years’ travel in China, Japan and India as a Bahá’í teacher, went to Persia on a special mission to represent the American Bahá’ís in appealing to the Shah’s government for removal of the ban on entry of Bahá’í literature into the country of the origin of the world religion established by Bahá’u’lláh nearly seventy years ago.

“From the Court Minister, Mrs. Keith Ransom-Kehler received assurance that the prohibition, passed under the former regime while the Muhammedan clergy were at the height of their power, would be rescinded.

“This promise was, however, unfulfilled, and Mrs. Keith Ransom-Kehler devoted the remaining months of her life to the task of penetrating the imperial entourage and

[p. 399 contains photographs of the grave of Keith Ransom-Kehler]

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presenting to the Shah in person a formal petition prepared by the American Bahá’í Assembly on behalf of the sixty Bahá’í communities of the United States and Canada.

“The American Bahá’ís will erect in Teheran (correctly Isfahan) a memorial to commemorate the work of Mrs. Ransom-Kehler, the second American Bahá’í to die in Persia while serving the cause of unity and international peace.”

That memorial, we may be assured, will in future be visited by innumerable Bahá’ís of West and East as a shrine marking the physical interment of a pure and valiant Bahá’í spirit who, not in vain, sacrificed its earthly existence for the sake of the believers in that land.

The above statement has been prepared in reverent acknowledgment of Mrs. Ransom-Kehler’s mighty services to the Bahá’í Faith, that the worldwide community of believers may know what has been done to this date in effort to assist in bringing about freedom and security for the Bahá’ís of Persia.

[Pages 400- continue with the texts of letters written by Ransom-Kehler to the Shah, reports of her activities and other materials]

### 3. Agnes Parsons (pages 410-414)

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“Greatly deplore loss distinguished handmaid of Bahá’u’lláh. Through her manifold pioneer services she has proved herself worthy of implicit confidence reposed in her by Abdu’l-Baha. Advise American believers hold befitting memorial gatherings. Assure relatives heartfelt sympathy, prayers.”

(Signed) Shoghi.

(Cable to National Spiritual Assembly)

“The dress was destroyed, but the one who wore the dress is living.” These words are part of a wonderful teaching on immortality which Abdu’l-Baha gave to Mrs. Parsons when she supplicated for a word from Him for a friend who was inconsolable because of the passing of a dear one. It seems appropriate now in connection with the going away of our dear sister herself, for in this world she proved herself worthy of the implicit confidence reposed in her by Abdu’l-Baha, as stated in the cable about her from our Guardian.

On Friday, January 19, 1934, at about six p.m., Mrs. Parsons was crossing a street alone and was knocked down by a passing automobile. A serious illness followed, and finally on Tuesday night, January 23rd, about midnight, she ascended to the world of eternal, radiant light and life. “The human spirit comes from God and to Him it returns.”

Mrs. Parsons, we are informed, had reached the age of seventy-three years, a long and eventful life which, as far as all earthly measurements are concerned, seemed full of promise for many more years of service.

The only child of General and Mrs. Royal, Mrs. Parsons was born into and lived in what at that time was considered a beautifully sheltered world. Until middle age when she first became a Bahá’í she had never known nor associated with any one outside of her own immediate circle.

The absolutely miraculous creative effect of the Revealed Word of Bahá’u’lláh was never more pronounced than in the unfoldment of this great soul into a devoted and loyal follower of the Risen Sun of Righteousness and Truth.

Mrs. Parsons first heard of the Bahá’í Teachings around 1908, and became a confirmed follower of the Bahá’í Revelation when she made her pilgrimage to see Abdu’l-Baha in Haifa in 1910.

Our recorded Bahá’í history gives abundant proof of her outstanding service to the Cause in 1912 when Abdu’l-Baha was in Washington. There is no statement which any one could make which would sufficiently glorify her for the magnificent services which it was her privilege to render at that time. It was Pure Bounty from God the Almighty to her that she was able to offer to Abdu’l-Baha the hospitality of her new home during the greater part of His first visit to Washington in the spring of 1912. Every one who witnessed her indefatigable work can wholeheartedly testify that she left no stone unturned

to make her service perfect at the feet of the Lord. Abdu'l-Baha Himself testified to this fact.

Some of the marvelous talks which 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave in her home are recorded in the "Promulgation of Universal Peace," but there were many private interviews with individuals and groups from the official and social circles of Washington which have never been printed. Many of the details of the Master's visit have been written by Mrs. Parsons herself, and no doubt this important

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document will be included in the history of the Cause in America.

In August, 1912, Abdu'l-Baha visited Dublin, N. H., where Mr. and Mrs. Parsons maintained their summer residence. Here Mrs. Parsons turned over to Abdu'l-Baha for the exclusive use of Himself and His entourage, one of her places there known as "Day-spring."

Thus two of her homes — one in Washington and one in Dublin — will forever be mentioned in the Bahá'í history of this country. During His stay in Dublin Abdu'l-Baha talked again to many individuals and groups of great importance.

Abdu'l-Baha often referred, during these times, to Mrs. Parsons' spirituality and to her significant services to the Cause of God. That she was "called" to render this service and that she so wholeheartedly and graciously and happily arose and translated into the world of action all those instructions both subjectively and objectively received, shows that she was confirmed.

From that time on Mrs. Parsons gradually began to serve very definitely in the Cause, for the most part giving the Message to groups in her own immediate circle. Traveling teachers who came to Washington always received an invitation to speak to these groups in her home.

Her second visit to the Presence of the Master in Haifa, Palestine, was made during the winter and early spring of 1920. During this second visit she received from Abdu'l-Baha a remarkable instruction — a command — which, carried into execution, placed her in the ranks of those who rendered pioneer services to the Cause. "The blessings that come to one are greater than those one seeks," said Abdu'l-Baha. This instruction was not sought by Mrs. Parsons; it came to her from the heaven of the Master's Divine

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Will, and was in truth and in fact a great and overwhelming surprise to Mrs. Parsons herself.

The Master's instruction was as follows:

"I want you to arrange a Convention for unity of the colored and white races. You must have people to help you."

After Mrs. Parsons returned to America she often spoke of this command. In those days "to arrange a Convention" seemed a tremendous undertaking, but she always said: "I will be able to do it. I must for it is the Will of Abdu'l-Baha." And in accordance with the explicit command of the Master she succeeded in gathering around her a helpful, active and earnest Committee.

During the period of preparation for this Convention (and the preliminary work consumed weeks and even months), Mr. Mountfort Mills was in Haifa. He returned to this country in time to serve as Chairman of one of the Convention sessions. At this meeting he read the following message from Abdu'l-Baha sent through him to be read at the Convention:

"Say to this Convention that never since the beginning of time has one more important been held. This Convention stands for the Oneness of Humanity; it will become the cause of the removal of hostility between races; it will be the cause of the enlightenment of America. It will — if wisely managed and continued — check the deadly struggle between these races which otherwise will inevitably break out."

Immediately after the close of the Convention Mrs. Parsons sent the following cable to Abdu'l-Baha: "Convention successful. Meetings crowded. Hearts comforted."

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And Abdu'l-Baha replied at once by cable: "The white-colored Convention produced happiness. Hoping will establish same in all America."

The Tablets of the Master which followed, not only to Mrs. Parsons but to others, indicated that this first Amity Convention was termed by the Master "the mother convention" from which many Amity Conventions would be born, and in one Tablet He called it a perfect convention.

Since that time Amity Conventions arranged by the Bahá'í Interracial Committees — both national and local — have been held in nearly all the large cities of America: three additional Conventions have been held in Washington, and in Green Acre every summer a Bahá'í Amity Convention is held as part of the regular program.

It is difficult to convey to any one the full import of the work accomplished by Mrs. Parsons. One sees at a glance, even from this brief statement, that she was confirmed. The Master said to her:

"God has elected you and led you to the Kingdom of Abha, therefore you must be very grateful to God, the Bestower of these bounties upon you."

Any outline of Mrs. Parsons' services — brief or otherwise — would not be complete without a word about her wonderful cooperation with the National and Local Bahá'í Funds to the fullest extent of her ability; without mention of her many charitable and kindly deeds. Pages could be written doubtless about her contributions and helpful donations along many lines.

At the time of her passing she was a member of the Washington Spiritual Assembly, Chairman of the National Interracial Committee, and a member of the Interracial Committee of the Bahá'ís of Washington, D.C.

Mrs. Parsons had a unique station. Absolutely no one can fill her place. She had a capacity all her own, and her station was a particular one not conferred upon any one else. She was very dear to the Master and He showed her great and extraordinary favor. Her place is empty; there is no one to fill it. Down through the ages her unique position in the Cause will be spoken of and written about, for a conferred position, conferred by the Master, can never die.

Mariam Haney

4. Yusuf Khan-i-Vujdani (page 413)

coming soon

5. Dr. Arastu Khan Hakim (1877-1934) (pages 414-416)

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Dr. Arastu Khan was the grandson of Hakim Masih, court physician to Muhammad Shah and the first Jewish Bahá'í. Hakim Masih had learned something of the new faith through Tahirih herself, during the early days of the Bib's manifestation, when he was in Baghdad, and from that time on he had searched for the source of her power. Later in Tihran he offered to visit the prison and treat a Bahá'í child, when the Moslem doctors had refused; the child's father was the famous Ismu'llahu'l-Asdaq, and in the course of these visits Hakim Masih became a Bahá'í. He later achieved fame in the Cause, and among other Tablets, Bahá'u'lláh revealed the following for him: "In the name of God, the Wise, the All-knowing:

O Hakim, be staunch in the faith of thy Lord, that the blasts of oppressors may not cause thee to shake; be enduring in the Cause of thy Lord, by thy trust in the Lord and His might; and say, O men, how long will ye sin and stray, how long will ye place passion over salvation? Do ye not see that those who left your midst have not returned, that those who were scattered have not again been gathered?

Ere long shall your days to come pass by as your days that are gone. Fear your merciful Lord: by the one true God He hath desired only that which will draw you close unto Him and cause you to enter the realms of eternity, and He is the Giver, the Kind. Eat ye of the fruit of the eternal tree which is ever at hand, for those bereft of it are back of heavy veils ... Then know We are imprisoned where eyes can never penetrate, where ears cannot distinguish the words that God the Wise, the Able, and the Knowing doth reveal. By such means have they sought to withhold God's slaves from hearing the words of their Lord, that His light might go out in the midst of His creatures; but God in His might hath revealed what He willed unto those who were turning toward Him with radiant

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faces. Then guard what We have entrusted to thee: thou hast in the sight of God a high station; praise Him, be of those who acclaim Him. Grieve not over that which hath come upon Us, be content with what God hath desired for Us, for We are in radiant gladness, and all praise is meet for the Lord of the heavens and earth.”

Dr. Arastu’s father Hakim Sulayman was likewise a Bahá’í and Dr. Arastu himself gradually increased his services in the Cause as he grew to manhood. Meanwhile he was carrying on the family tradition, as are his Sons today, of practicing medicine. About 1897 he had graduated from the American School in Tihiran and was working in the American Hospital, where he already showed signs of that healing personality which later made him one of the foremost doctors in the capital. At this period he spent many hours in out of the way houses in the back streets of Tihiran, studying this faith, in those days when knowledge of Bahá’u’lláh’s cause often ended in death. Soon he began to teach on his own account; his brother Aflatun was also an ardent Bahá’í, much loved by the Master, who wrote him many tablets. In 1900 Aflatun died.

Shortly after his brother’s death Arastu Khan went to Akka, where it was his privilege to stay in the Master’s presence one year. During the first days of his Visit the Master continually addressed him as “Aflatun,” which puzzled him considerably; until one night when he and Dr. Yunis Khan Afrikhtih were following the Master through the narrow crooked streets of the prison city, the Master again addressed him as Aflatun and said, “Do you know why I call you Aflatun? It is because I desire his truth and spirituality to reappear in you.” Arastu developed rapidly in Akka studying the Master’s way, and he worked with Dr. Yunis Khan translating letters from the Western Bahá’í. The Master had hoped to send him to America, but family concerns necessitated his return home. Here he worked devotedly for the Cause, founding a weekly teaching meeting which continued to his death, and which according to his will is to be perpetuated. He received his medical diploma, became known throughout the capital for his generosity to the poor and for his gentleness. In 1911 he was in London

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with a patient and ably defended the Cause from Azali activities, and he was with the Master in Switzerland. In 1925 he again went abroad, this time visiting the Guardian in Haifa.

During his last years his health failed, but although he was ill himself he continued to visit the sick. His frequent meetings with Keith Ransom-Keller were an important event of his last year; it was she who arranged a match between his son, Dr. Qulam-Husayn Khan and the sister-in-law of Rahmat Ala’i, officiating herself at the wedding which will long be remembered in Tihiran.

Dr. Arastu’s death made a deep impression on Bahá’ís and non-Baha’is alike. Several hundred persons attended his funeral, following his coffin up one of the main thoroughfares of the capital. In commemoration of his passing, The Guardian sent to his family the following cablegram: “Beloved Arastu

joined Immortals (of) Supreme Concourse. Fully share your grief earthly separation. Praying fervently. Awaiting account life with photograph for Bahá'í World.” -(Signed) Shoghi.

The Qur'anic verse chosen for Dr. Arastu Khan's gravestone symbolizes what his life was: “O well-assured spirit, willing and blessed go thou back to thy Lord.”

6. George Adam Benke (pages 416-418)

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George Adam Benke was born on a flourishing and prosperous farm in Fredericksfelt, Southern Russia [sic: they were Crimean Germans], of Godfearing parents in the year 1878.

When but a small boy of nine he had an attack of smallpox. Taking a severe cold after this, he lay at death's door for four years. The doctors had little hope of a recovery. When his mother heard this, she fell on her knees at his little cot, beseeching God to restore her boy to health, promising that if he recovered, his life should be dedicated to God's service as a missionary.

Very shortly after this a peasant woman was found who declared she could effect a cure. She proceeded to administer doses of sarsaparilla brewed from an herb, and fed the boy only on unleavened bread. At the end of two weeks there was a marked improvement, so the child was allowed to have his regular food for a time, and then to go back again to her treatment. In a very short time Adam was up and about.

When the time drew near for his higher education, a great famine and pestilence fell on the land. The crops failed. Barely enough grain was saved for the families' nourishment, while twenty-six of the best horses and cattle died. All thought of educating Adam as a missionary had to be abandoned, and instead he became a schoolmaster.

Nevertheless his mother's great desire for him filled his thoughts, and while unable to go forth to foreign fields, or become a university student, still he could and did live a life of love for God. And when, in 1901, he married Miss Lina Wolf from Karlsruhe, Baden, they together searched long and lovingly for truth.

Then came the world's war, after which German soldiers came to the Crimea. Life soon became very hazardous, and it seemed better to escape with the soldiers. They then settled in Leipzig, and having had to leave all their worldly possessions behind them, they had to begin all over again.

Some twelve or more months later, while they were still investigating reality through the Theosophical Society, they had the joy of meeting with Mr. and Mrs. Ober and Miss Alma Knoblock, who gave to them the glorious message of Bahá'u'lláh. They then knew that they had found what they had long sought, The Pearl of Great Price, and thereafter they gave all attention to the study of the Sacred utterances.

To Mr. Benke's delight, he found in the University Library of Leipzig the Russian writings by Thomansky and Rosenberg translations from Bahá'u'lláh. These he proceeded to put into German and, in order to enable himself to further enrich the German Bahá'í Library, he set himself the task of studying English, since a good number of these precious words had already been translated into English.

In June, 1931, Mr. Benke was called to help Mrs. Jack in Sofia, where his knowledge of Russian was of great benefit, since that language is now taught in the high schools. He worked arduously in this city nearly three months, leaving no stone unturned in his

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efforts to find the ready soul. He was sent during the month of August to the Esperanto Congress at Starazagora, and meeting the Bulgarian President on the train, who became much attracted to him, he was elected honorary vice-president of the Congress.

He was again called to Sofia the following year, and remained until his passing in November. During those months Mr. Benke worked night and day. Nothing could divert his attention from the work in hand. When nothing else offered he studied Bulgarian, English, and Esperanto. His ambition to become an efficient teacher of the Cause and a servant of whom his beloved Guardian would be proud was very great. His devotion to the Great Head of the Baha'i Administration was very touching. He wanted to obey not only to the letter, but to the spirit, and studied earnestly every letter from the Great Guardian, and every word of the Administration in order that he might become absolutely efficient in this important matter, and such an obedient servant that he would be above reproach. His longing was that all believers should be firmly centered in the One chosen for us by our Heavenly Beloved Abdu'l-Baha to guard and guide us after His ascension.

The second year in Sofia he was again elected as vice-president of the Esperanto Congress, this time held in that city. Later he was invited to Varna on the Black Sea. Here he spoke twice under the auspices of the Esperanto Society to groups of enquirers. On his return journey he stopped over in Starazagora to renew his acquaintance with the Esperanto friends and refresh their knowledge of the teachings. Likewise he looked up his friend Dr. Tchervenkof in Plovdiv to meet those interested by him in that city.

Up to the very hour of his death Mr.

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Benke was in harness and in the evening he taught a Russian lady, and later, until after midnight, he was giving counsel and advice to a young Bulgarian brother. He had no illness at the last, only a short half-hour of discomfort during which time he turned in prayer to Bahá'u'lláh for relief, and sweetly passed with the "Remover of difficulties" on his lips, into the great beyond, to join the noble army of martyrs in the Supreme Concourse, and

at last to see face to face the Adored One whom he had never met in life except frequently in the happy hours of dreams.

His body was laid to rest in the Sofia cemetery.

All who knew him in Sofia and elsewhere testified to the beauty of his life and character. Many and many a one felt that when he went they had lost a dear friend and brother and one whose interest in them was of immense spiritual help, for he longed for their heavenly welfare as well as for the peace, unity and concord of all humanity. His example in living the life spoke even more loudly than his eloquent words.

#### 7. Edwin Scott (pages 418)

The passing of Mr. Edwin Scott, for many years a loyal and active member of the Bahá'í Cause, was deeply felt by the friends with whom he had spent long years in loving, active service in Paris. In 1911 when Abdu'l-Baha visited Paris He spoke several times in the studio of Mr. and Mrs. Scott and to this day that studio continues to be the Bahá'í center where Mrs. Scott welcomes the Bahá'í friends, whether tourists or residents of Paris, with the same beautiful courtesy, finding thus her greatest source of joy and consolation since the loss of her husband.

Because of his recognized ability as an artist Mr. Scott was made Chevalier of the Legion d'Honneur and he was a distinguished member of la Societe National des Beaux Arts. Five of his paintings were purchased by the French government and after his demise one of his works was hung in the Salle du Jeu de Paume, in the Museum of State in Paris, a distinction much sought after by painters. The Bahá'í Cause has suffered a grievous loss through the passing of Mr. Edwin Scott.

#### 8. Alice Barney (pages 419-420)

Mrs. Alice Barney, gifted poetess, painter, dramatist, musician, architect and craftswoman who passed away in Los Angeles in 1931, lived as her friends and contemporaries attest, in a world of beauty. She became interested in the Bahá'í Cause shortly after her daughter Laura (now Mme. Dreyfus-Barney of Paris) visited Haifa in 1900. The Washington home of Mr. and Mrs. Barney was open for Bahá'í meetings on many occasions.

Mrs. Barney visited Acca in the spring of 1905 with her daughter Laura, remaining there near Abdu'l-Baha a month, during which time she painted the portrait of the son of the Governor.

Mrs. Barney's paintings are to be found in most of the important museums of the United States, the National Museum of Washington alone having as many as five of her works, while a painting which she exhibited in the Paris Salon was purchased by the French Government. She was always a generous patron of the arts and offered her encouragement especially to members of the colored race, assisting them to develop their talents with sympathetic understanding.

The well-known settlement "Neighborhood-House" was her gift to the city of

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Washington, and this splendid institution interested Abdu'l-Baha very much when He visited Washington in 1912.

Mrs. Barney was particularly attracted to the Bahá'í Cause because of its broad teachings of tolerance, its humanitarianism, its love of the beautiful and fruitful action.

Elsewhere in this volume appears a remarkable portrait of Mirza Abu'l-Fadl which was made during the visit of this great teacher to Washington in 1903.

9. Extracts from "Bahá'í News" (pages 420-422)

[to be added]

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