



the end of His American sojourn.

The news of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to America prompted lengthy and generally accurate newspaper articles in the Baltimore newspapers. In a city noted for its quality journalism, having spawned such outstanding talent as H.L. Mencken, the Baltimore Sun made only one major error in its reporting. That was with respect to the expected date of an address by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Baltimore.

On April 6, 1912, five days before 'Abdu'l-Bahá's steamship berthed in New York harbor, the Sun papers declared,

'Abdu'l-Bahá Coming. Son of Founder of Bahá'í Movement to Lecture Here — Seeks Unity of Religions — Persian Savant Also Maintains That There Should be Equality of the Sexes.<sup>3</sup>

The article stated that 'Abdu'l-Baha would speak on Sunday, April 21, at the First Independent Christ's Church (Unitarian).

Six-month delay

In his book *239 Days*, Dr. Allan L. Ward suggests that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's itinerary was sometimes planned on a day-to-day basis and that no official schedule was given to the American friends prior to His arrival in New York on April 11, 1912. Since 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke in Washington, D.C., on April 21, it can only be assumed that the enthusiastic Bahá'ís in Baltimore had acted somewhat presumptuously in their advance planning and press releases.

From Washington, 'Abdu'l-Bahá departed for Chicago and points west, and was not destined to reach Baltimore until more than six months later. On November 12, 1912, the Baltimore American heralded the long-awaited arrival:

To Speak in Unitarian Church — Abdu'l-Bahá, the Persian peace advocate, who is making a tour of the United States after having been incarcerated in Acca, Syria, where he had been exiled by the Mullahs for antagonizing the religious beliefs of his country, will visit Baltimore tomorrow and deliver an address at noon at the Unitarian church Charles and Franklin Streets. Abdu'l is now in Washington after having completed a trip through the West and Southwest. He will leave Baltimore tomorrow night for New York.<sup>4</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá arrived by train in Baltimore's Camden Station at 11 a.m. on November 11. The entourage that accompanied Him included Dr. Ameen Fareed and Mirza Ahmad Sohrab (interpreters), Mirza Mahmud, Mirza 'Ali Akah, Mirza Valiollah Khan, Dr. Zia Bagdadi, and Saya Assadollah.<sup>5</sup>

Press interviews

They went at once to the Hotel Rennert at Saratoga, and Liberty Streets, where 'Abdu'l-Bahá granted press interviews. Mahmud recorded in his diary, "Among those who were honored with interviews was a press representative who heard a detailed discourse regarding universal peace and the capacity of the United States of America as a nation and government to enforce it, which was noted for publication."<sup>6</sup> In all probability this interview was the basis for an article

that appeared the following day in the Baltimore American.<sup>7</sup>

The chapel of the Unitarian church where 'Abdu'l-Bahá was to speak was packed with Johns Hopkins University faculty members and many local professional men. 'Abdu'l-Bahá arrived promptly at noon and began His address in Persian without any introduction. His translator was Dr. Fareed, who had studied previously at Johns Hopkins. 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke on the unity of religions and the oneness of God:

We declare the foundations of the divine religions to be one; and if we forsake these accidental imitations — by imitations we mean the teachings that have crept in, dogmas which have crept into religion, and which have nothing to do with the foundation — then we have a basis for unity amongst the religions, then we have a cause or source of illumination of all humanity.<sup>8</sup>

Undaunted in his enthusiasm, a Sun-papers artist captured the animated delivery of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talk in five unique sketches that appeared in the paper the next morning.<sup>9</sup> Among several poses, they showed 'Abdu'l-Bahá with upraised palms, stroking His beard in meditative thought, and forcefully expounding a truth with a sculpted left hand. The accompanying article observed:

In appearance the Persian teacher is a striking-looking man of about 70 years. He is of the average height, with a strong rugged face covered with a short white beard. His cheekbones are high, his eyes bright and flashing.

At the lectures he wore a robe of black with a triangular insert of light tan in front reaching from the hem to the neck. The long sleeves of the garment were turned back from the strong hands. Distinguishing him from his escort was a white turban which he wore, from beneath which gleamed locks of iron gray. Members of his escort wore black turbans.

As frequently happens, this event was accompanied by an anecdote, completely unsubstantiated, that has nevertheless been passed down through the oral tradition of long-standing Bahá'ís. According to the story, two Catholic priests arrived late and took a position behind the speaker's platform to listen to the speech through a half-opened door. 'Abdu'l-Bahá is said to have noticed them and closed the door!<sup>10</sup>

Mahmud wrote of the address:

The Beloved delivered at the Unitarian Church of Baltimore an address regarding the oneness of the world of man, the immutability of the principles of the divine religions and the changing of the social laws according to the demands of the time.<sup>11</sup>

At the conclusion of the address, women kissed His hand and others tearfully greeted Him at the door of the chapel. Pressed by a busy schedule, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and His traveling companions hurried by car to the home of Howard Struven at 1800 N. Bentalou Street for a mid-afternoon meal.

Globe-circling trip

Present among the Baltimore believers at the luncheon were Mr. and Mrs. Struven and Mrs. Maude Thompson Amendt. Mr. Struven is credited in *God Passes By* with circling, "for the first time in Bahá'í history, the globe visiting on his way the Hawaiian Islands, Japan, China, India, and Burma" with Charles Mason Remey.<sup>12</sup> In an interview given in 1966, Mr. Struven related that the trip took place in 1902 and was financed by money that had been set aside for his college education.

He did not attend college, but later became a successful businessman.<sup>13</sup>

Mrs. Amendt had spent the morning walking out to a farm east of Baltimore to get fresh chicken for 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and thus had missed His talk at the Unitarian church. Mrs. Amendt was described as a stout, corseted woman. After the meal, 'Abdu'l-Bahá motioned her out of the kitchen and invited her to sit by Him on the floor in the tiny living room. One can only surmise that there was a twinkle in His eye as He extended the loving invitation to Mrs. Amendt who declined to attempt such an improbable feat of agility.<sup>14</sup>

Ursula Shuman Moore was living at the Struven home at the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit, and it was she who provided the most extensive account of that interlude spent in the Struven home:

Yesterday, the 11th, he came over to our house in Baltimore and had dinner with us at our table! Did you ever dream that this would come to pass. He came to Baltimore about twelve o'clock and spoke at the Unitarian Church, and then they came out to our house and we had dinner for him. Many of the Washington believers came over too and many of the Baltimore believers came up. We had about 55 or 54 to feed. Had a grand chicken dinner, with rice and celery, peas, ice cream and cake, and vegetable soup. He said we had given him a good dinner, a fine dinner, and that he ate much. When I brought in the big platter of chicken and set it before Him at the table he said, "Oh, chicken!" and seemed to be much pleased with it. He said everything was cooked well. We had him and the Persians in his party sit down first, 12 at the table, and served them, and then we had four relays and every body had something. They all seemed so glad to be there and enjoyed themselves so much. I was so glad for Mother could be near him and see him. I introduced Mother to him, and he took her hand and said "Oh, your Mother!" and looked at her very kindly. I told him she had been and was sick, and that we asked that she might be well. He said "In Shalah" ["if God be willing"]. So I hope she will get well soon now. They did not stay very long, as they left on the (3 o'clock) train. It surely was a great privilege to have him in our house, and something that we will always remember.<sup>15</sup>

It was reported by another observer that after the dinner, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had a brief nap upstairs at the Struven house before the public meeting.<sup>16</sup> Mahmud penned the Master's comments during that post-prandial discussion:

"Praise be to God! I see that you may become more enlightened and spiritual. When I reach the Holy Land I shall lay My head on the Threshold of the Blessed Tomb and with tears in my eyes I shall supplicate heavenly favors, eternal honor and everlasting happiness for you."

He then left for the station. On the way to the station the Beloved embraced Mr. Struven as a kind father embraces a son and with utmost kindness He mentioned his services to the Cause of God.<sup>17</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá departed from the Camden Station on the 3 o'clock train for New York City, having spent four hours in Baltimore. During that brief interlude He gave interviews to the press, delivered a public address, and shared a luncheon with the friends in the Baltimore area. For a man of 68 years, His energies seemed endless, and His dedication to teaching the Bahá'í Cause was absolute. So much could be gained for the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh if each of us were to teach tirelessly after the example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

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