

affirmed is “vibrating in the innermost realities of all created things” can the origins of this portentous crisis, incomprehensible to man, and admittedly unprecedented in the annals of the human race, be attributed? In the convulsions of contemporary society, in the frenzied, world-wide ebullitions of men’s thoughts, in the fierce antagonisms inflaming races, creeds and classes, in the shipwreck of nations, in the downfall of kings, in the dismemberment of empires, in the extinction of dynasties, in the collapse of ecclesiastical hierarchies, in the deterioration of time-honored institutions, in the dissolution of ties, secular as well as religious, that had for so long held together the members of the human race—all manifesting themselves with ever-increasing gravity since the outbreak of the first World War that immediately preceded the opening years of the Formative Age of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh—in these we can readily recognize the evidences of the travail of an age that has sustained the impact of His Revelation, that has ignored His summons, and is now laboring to be delivered of its burden, as a direct consequence of the impulse communicated to it by the generative, the purifying, the transmuting influence of His Spirit.

It is my purpose, on the occasion of an anniversary of such profound significance, to attempt in the succeeding pages a survey of the outstanding events of the century that has seen this Spirit burst forth upon the world, as well as the initial stages of its subsequent incarnation in a System that must evolve into an Order designed to embrace the whole of mankind, and capable of fulfilling the high destiny that awaits man on this planet. I shall endeavor to review, in their proper perspective and despite the comparatively brief space of time which separates us from them, the events which the revolution of a hundred years, unique alike in glory and tribulation, has unrolled before our eyes. I shall seek to represent and correlate, in however cursory a manner, those momentous happenings which have insensibly, relentlessly, and under the very eyes of successive generations, perverse, indifferent or hostile, transformed a heterodox and seemingly negligible offshoot of the Shaykhí school of the Ithná-‘Ashariyyih sect of Shí‘ah Islám into a world religion whose unnumbered followers are organically and indissolubly united; whose light has overspread the earth as far as Iceland in the North and Magellanes in the South; whose ramifications have spread to no less than sixty countries of the world; whose literature has been translated and disseminated in no less than forty languages; whose endowments in the five continents of the globe, whether local, national or international, already run into several million dollars; whose incorporated elective bodies have secured the official recognition of a number of governments in East and West; whose adherents are recruited from the diversified races and chief religions of mankind; whose representatives are to be found in hundreds of cities in both Persia and the United States of America; to whose verities royalty has publicly and repeatedly testified; whose independent status its enemies, from the ranks of its parent religion and in the leading center of both the Arab and Muslim worlds, have proclaimed and demonstrated; and whose claims have been virtually recognized, entitling it to rank as the fourth religion of a Land in which its world

spiritual center has been established, and which is at once the heart of Christendom, the holiest shrine of the Jewish people, and, save Mecca alone, the most sacred spot in Islám.

It is not my purpose—nor does the occasion demand it,—to write a detailed history of the last hundred years of the Bahá'í Faith, nor do I intend to trace the origins of so tremendous a Movement, or to portray the conditions under which it was born, or to examine the character of the religion from which it has sprung, or to arrive at an estimate of the effects which its impact upon the fortunes of mankind has produced. I shall rather content myself with a review of the salient features of its birth and rise, as well as of the initial stages in the establishment of its administrative institutions—institutions which must be regarded as the nucleus and herald of that World Order that must incarnate the soul, execute the laws, and fulfill the purpose of the Faith of God in this day.

Nor will it be my intention to ignore, whilst surveying the panorama which the revolution of a hundred years spreads before our gaze, the swift interweaving of seeming reverses with evident victories, out of which the hand of an inscrutable Providence has chosen to form the pattern of the Faith from its earliest days, or to minimize those disasters that have so often proved themselves to be the prelude to fresh triumphs which have, in turn, stimulated its growth and consolidated its past achievements. Indeed, the history of the first hundred years of its evolution resolves itself into a series of internal and external crises, of varying severity, devastating in their immediate effects, but each mysteriously releasing a corresponding measure of divine power, lending thereby a fresh impulse to its unfoldment, this further unfoldment engendering in its turn a still graver calamity, followed by a still more liberal effusion of celestial grace enabling its upholders to accelerate still further its march and win in its service still more compelling victories.

In its broadest outline the first century of the Bahá'í Era may be said to comprise the Heroic, the Primitive, the Apostolic Age of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, and also the initial stages of the Formative, the Transitional, the Iron Age which is to witness the crystallization and shaping of the creative energies released by His Revelation. The first eighty years of this century may roughly be said to have covered the entire period of the first age, while the last two decades may be regarded as having witnessed the beginnings of the second. The former commences with the Declaration of the Báb, includes the mission of Bahá'u'lláh, and terminates with the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The latter is ushered in by His Will and Testament, which defines its character and establishes its foundation.

The century under our review may therefore be considered as falling into four distinct periods, of unequal duration, each of specific import and of tremendous and indeed unappraisable significance. These four periods are closely interrelated, and constitute successive acts of one, indivisible, stupendous and sublime drama, whose mystery no intellect can fathom, whose climax no eye can even dimly perceive, whose conclusion no mind can adequately

foreshadow. Each of these acts revolves around its own theme, boasts of its own heroes, registers its own tragedies, records its own triumphs, and contributes its own share to the execution of one common, immutable Purpose. To isolate any one of them from the others, to dissociate the later manifestations of one universal, all-embracing Revelation from the pristine purpose that animated it in its earliest days, would be tantamount to a mutilation of the structure on which it rests, and to a lamentable perversion of its truth and of its history.

The first period (1844–1853), centers around the gentle, the youthful and irresistible person of the Báb, matchless in His meekness, imperturbable in His serenity, magnetic in His utterance, unrivaled in the dramatic episodes of His swift and tragic ministry. It begins with the Declaration of His Mission, culminates in His martyrdom, and ends in a veritable orgy of religious massacre revolting in its hideousness. It is characterized by nine years of fierce and relentless contest, whose theatre was the whole of Persia, in which above ten thousand heroes laid down their lives, in which two sovereigns of the Qájár dynasty and their wicked ministers participated, and which was supported by the entire Shí‘ah ecclesiastical hierarchy, by the military resources of the state, and by the implacable hostility of the masses. The second period (1853–1892) derives its inspiration from the august figure of Bahá’u’lláh, preeminent in holiness, awesome in the majesty of His strength and power, unapproachable in the transcendent brightness of His glory. It opens with the first stirrings, in the soul of Bahá’u’lláh while in the Síyáh-Chál of Tihrán, of the Revelation anticipated by the Báb, attains its plenitude in the proclamation of that Revelation to the kings and ecclesiastical leaders of the earth, and terminates in the ascension of its Author in the vicinity of the prison-town of ‘Akká. It extends over thirty-nine years of continuous, of unprecedented and overpowering Revelation, is marked by the propagation of the Faith to the neighboring territories of Turkey, of Russia, of ‘Iráq, of Syria, of Egypt and of India, and is distinguished by a corresponding aggravation of hostility, represented by the united attacks launched by the Sháh of Persia and the Sultán of Turkey, the two admittedly most powerful potentates of the East, as well as by the opposition of the twin sacerdotal orders of Shí‘ah and Sunní Islám. The third period (1892–1921) revolves around the vibrant personality of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, mysterious in His essence, unique in His station, astoundingly potent in both the charm and strength of His character. It commences with the announcement of the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh, a document without parallel in the history of any earlier Dispensation, attains its climax in the emphatic assertion by the Center of that Covenant, in the City of the Covenant, of the unique character and far-reaching implications of that Document, and closes with His passing and the interment of His remains on Mt. Carmel. It will go down in history as a period of almost thirty years’ duration, in which tragedies and triumphs have been so intertwined as to eclipse at one time the Orb of the Covenant, and at another time to pour forth its light over the continent of Europe, and as far as Australasia, the Far East and the North American continent. The fourth period (1921–1944) is motivated

by the forces radiating from the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, that Charter of Bahá’u’lláh’s New World Order, the offspring resulting from the mystic intercourse between Him Who is the Source of the Law of God and the mind of the One Who is the vehicle and interpreter of that Law. The inception of this fourth, this last period of the first Bahá’í century synchronizes with the birth of the Formative Age of the Bahá’í Era, with the founding of the Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh—a system which is at once the harbinger, the nucleus and pattern of His World Order. This period, covering the first twenty-three years of this Formative Age, has already been distinguished by an outburst of further hostility, of a different character, accelerating on the one hand the diffusion of the Faith over a still wider area in each of the five continents of the globe, and resulting on the other in the emancipation and the recognition of the independent status of several communities within its pale.

These four periods are to be regarded not only as the component, the inseparable parts of one stupendous whole, but as progressive stages in a single evolutionary process, vast, steady and irresistible. For as we survey the entire range which the operation of a century-old Faith has unfolded before us, we cannot escape the conclusion that from whatever angle we view this colossal scene, the events associated with these periods present to us unmistakable evidences of a slowly maturing process, of an orderly development, of internal consolidation, of external expansion, of a gradual emancipation from the fetters of religious orthodoxy, and of a corresponding diminution of civil disabilities and restrictions.

Viewing these periods of Bahá’í history as the constituents of a single entity, we note the chain of events proclaiming successively the rise of a Forerunner, the Mission of One Whose advent that Forerunner had promised, the establishment of a Covenant generated through the direct authority of the Promised One Himself, and lastly the birth of a System which is the child sprung from both the Author of the Covenant and its appointed Center. We observe how the Báb, the Forerunner, announced the impending inception of a divinely-conceived Order, how Bahá’u’lláh, the Promised One, formulated its laws and ordinances, how ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the appointed Center, delineated its features, and how the present generation of their followers have commenced to erect the framework of its institutions. We watch, through these periods, the infant light of the Faith diffuse itself from its cradle, eastward to India and the Far East, westward to the neighboring territories of ‘Irâq, of Turkey, of Russia, and of Egypt, travel as far as the North American continent, illuminate subsequently the major countries of Europe, envelop with its radiance, at a later stage, the Antipodes, brighten the fringes of the Arctic, and finally set aglow the Central and South American horizons. We witness a corresponding increase in the diversity of the elements within its fellowship, which from being confined, in the first period of its history, to an obscure body of followers chiefly recruited from the ranks of the masses in Shí‘ah Persia, has expanded into a fraternity representative of the leading religious systems of the world, of almost every caste and color, from the

humblest worker and peasant to royalty itself. We notice a similar development in the extent of its literature—a literature which, restricted at first to the narrow range of hurriedly transcribed, often corrupted, secretly circulated, manuscripts, so furtively perused, so frequently effaced, and at times even eaten by the terrorized members of a proscribed sect, has, within the space of a century, swelled into innumerable editions, comprising tens of thousands of printed volumes, in diverse scripts, and in no less than forty languages, some elaborately reproduced, others profusely illustrated, all methodically and vigorously disseminated through the agency of world-wide, properly constituted and specially organized committees and Assemblies. We perceive a no less apparent evolution in the scope of its teachings, at first designedly rigid, complex and severe, subsequently recast, expanded, and liberalized under the succeeding Dispensation, later expounded, reaffirmed and amplified by an appointed Interpreter, and lastly systematized and universally applied to both individuals and institutions. We can discover a no less distinct gradation in the character of the opposition it has had to encounter—an opposition, at first kindled in the bosom of Shí‘ah Islám, which, at a later stage, gathered momentum with the banishment of Bahá’u’lláh to the domains of the Turkish Sultán and the consequent hostility of the more powerful Sunní hierarchy and its Caliph, the head of the vast majority of the followers of Muhammad—an opposition which, now, through the rise of a divinely appointed Order in the Christian West, and its initial impact on civil and ecclesiastical institutions, bids fair to include among its supporters established governments and systems associated with the most ancient, the most deeply entrenched sacerdotal hierarchies in Christendom. We can, at the same time, recognize, through the haze of an ever-widening hostility, the progress, painful yet persistent, of certain communities within its pale through the stages of obscurity, of proscription, of emancipation, and of recognition—stages that must needs culminate in the course of succeeding centuries, in the establishment of the Faith, and the founding, in the plenitude of its power and authority, of the world-embracing Bahá’í Commonwealth. We can likewise discern a no less appreciable advance in the rise of its institutions, whether as administrative centers or places of worship—institutions, clandestine and subterrene in their earliest beginnings, emerging imperceptibly into the broad daylight of public recognition, legally protected, enriched by pious endowments, ennobled at first by the erection of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár of ‘Ishqábád, the first Bahá’í House of Worship, and more recently immortalized, through the rise in the heart of the North American continent of the Mother Temple of the West, the forerunner of a divine, a slowly maturing civilization. And finally, we can even bear witness to the marked improvement in the conditions surrounding the pilgrimages performed by its devoted adherents to its consecrated shrines at its world center—pilgrimages originally arduous, perilous, tediously long, often made on foot, at times ending in disappointment, and confined to a handful of harassed Oriental followers, gradually attracting, under steadily improving circumstances of security and comfort, an ever swelling number of new converts converging from the four corners of the globe, and culminating in the

widely publicized yet sadly frustrated visit of a noble Queen, who, at the very threshold of the city of her heart's desire, was compelled, according to her own written testimony, to divert her steps, and forego the privilege of so priceless a benefit.

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