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PREFACE

Shortly before her passing on the last day of the year 1939, Lady Blomfield asked me to write this preface. To my infinite regret, it was not prepared in time to obtain her approval. And now I feel that I cannot let this opportunity go without paying my share of humble tribute to the shining memory of a gracious lady who served the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh with never-failing vigour and devotion. It is indeed hard to believe that Sitarieh Khanum is no longer with us in her earthly temple. The contagion of her enthusiasm and the brilliance of her talk and description, her close association with the Master and His family, her unique privileges in the service of the Cause, the intense light of her faith and the captivating charm of her presence, to enumerate some of her qualities and qualifications, made her loved and revered by all. It is a great joy that she was permitted to bring this book to its conclusion before her departure to realms beyond.

The Chosen Highway will forever remain the greatest monument to the achievements of its author. Those who have met Sitarieh Khanum in person will cherish this book in the tenderness of her remembrance. To others who know of her work, it will convey a vivid portrait of her gifts of the spirit. And to generations unborn it will hand a message rich in enlightenment.

The avowed adherent of Bahá'u'lláh cannot be alone in feeling incalculable gratitude to Sitarieh Khanum. Every earnest student of the Bahá'í Faith will find in The Chosen Highway a wealth of material essential to the study of history. In my possession are two letters written by Professor Edward Granville Browne, of Pembroke College, Cambridge, to my father, in which he makes enquiries regarding the life and the origins of the Bab. Urging his correspondent to help him in his research, he states: "I am very anxious to get as accurate an account of all the details connected with the Babi movement as possible, for in my eyes the whole seems one of the most +p

interesting and important events that has occurred since the rise of Christianity and Muhammadanism, and I feel it my duty, as well as pleasure, to try as far as in me lies to bring the matter to the notice of my countrymen, that they may consider it ... for suppose anyone could tell us more about the childhood and early life and appearance of Christ, for instance, how glad we should be to know it. Now it is impossible to find out much ... but in the case of the Bab it is possible.... So let us earn the thanks of posterity, and provide against that day now."

Sitarieh Khanum's work provides the intimate detail, which Edward Browne meant to seek and record, within the limits set by the author herself. The Chosen Highway offers every seeker a real feast of knowledge. It cannot but eternally merit the esteem of the historian.

But the true greatness of this work does not lie in its compendium of narrative and chronicle. It is the spiritual purport of *The Chosen Highway*, the pattern of love, justice, charity, and sacrifice that it weaves and depicts, the chord of harmony that it strikes, which place it in prominent relief. To a world shaken to its depths, it brings the assurance that evil can never achieve the final, the abiding victory.

H. M. Balyuzi

London, March 1940.

EDITOR'S NOTE

It was my privilege, not only to know Lady Blomfield, but to discuss with her, in company with Mr. Balyuzi, the publication of *The Chosen Highway*, and I was present when she asked him to write a preface. As a representative of the Bahá'í Publishing Trust, she authorized me to publish the book and to attend to the final arrangement of the manuscript.

An examination of her notes shows that at one time she had visualized the book as an historical outline of the Bahá'í Faith. This is disclosed in the rough draft of a letter to Lord Lamington, dated 14th March, 1939. "The book I am writing begins in Persia, before the proclamation of the Bab." The notes outline a continuous narrative down to the time when 'Abdu'l-Bahá returned to the shelter of heaven. "To this story is added some narrative of the progress of the Faith down to the present day, including the immense work of the Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, in administering the affairs of the Cause in forty countries, embracing eight hundred Assemblies, the members of which are quietly proceeding to awaken mankind to the necessity of a spiritual outlook on the problems of this great day."

Her desire to write the story of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in later times was not fulfilled. But we may be exceedingly thankful that the early history received the full measure of her attention and ardent devotion. During her two visits to the Holy Land she listened to the stories of Bahá'u'lláh's daughter, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's wife, His four daughters, and of several people who played a part in the Heroic Age of the Faith. In addition to this she received 'Abdu'l-Bahá when He came to London. Her qualifications for writing of the early days were thus unique.

The editing and preparing for press was greatly simplified by the amount of work which Sitarh Khanum herself had done, and by the many discussions I had had with her. I wish to express sincere thanks to Mrs. Basil Hall, her daughter, who +p

gave the manuscript into my hands, for all the help which she has given. I am also deeply grateful to Mr. Balyuzi, both for his knowledge and his work. The uniform accuracy of the transliteration of Oriental words is due entirely to him, and his knowledge of the events described and the persons and places mentioned has been invaluable.

The system of transliteration used throughout is one adopted by a conference of

Orientalists at Oxford, and recommended by Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith.

In that part of the book which contains the "Spoken Chronicles" (mainly Part II) it has been necessary to indicate where the actual narrative has been amplified and explained by Lady Blomfield. The simplest way to do this seemed to be by the use of stars to separate the spoken word from Lady Blomfield's own writing. Thus the reader will find, during the "Spoken Chronicles," that the story often ends thus * * * . The following passage is Lady Blomfield's own, and is ended in the same way, after which the spoken narrative begins again.

In the original manuscript, the "Spoken Chronicles" are written down in a series of single sentences. This is understood when we realize that, as the speaker related the story, it was translated sentence by sentence, and written in that way. These sentences have been connected into paragraphs, thereby making a more flowing story, but no other alterations have been made.

Except in a few instances the old name of Persia has been used for Iran, since at the time the events recorded took place it was called Persia, and the chief characters always used the older name.

The pleasure and profit which I derived from many visits to Lady Blomfield "to talk about the book" remain with me. She asked for the cover to be in Irish blue, and this in itself will bring her to mind, but, in addition, now that she has returned to the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, she will not object to the inclusion of a photograph of her beautiful and saintly face.

David Hofman. London, May 1940.

INTRODUCTION

One day at a reception in Paris, at the house of Madame Lucien Monod, my daughter Mary and I heard these words from Miss Bertha Herbert:

"If I "look happy, it is because I "am happy. I have found the desire of my heart!"

The speaker, a tall, graceful girl with shining dark eyes, came across the room and seated herself between us.

"I should like to tell you why I am so happy. May I?"

"Yes," we answered.

"It is true! True!"

We fixed questioning eyes upon her glowing face.

"We have been taught to believe that a great Messenger would again be sent to the world: He would set forth to gather together all the peoples of good will in every race, nation, and religion on the earth. Now is the appointed time! He has come! He has come!"

These amazing words struck a chord to which my inner consciousness instantly responded, and I felt convinced that the portentous announcement they conveyed

was indeed the truth. Great awe and intense exaltation possessed me with an overpowering force as I listened.

Miss Herbert continued:

"The Bearer of the Message suffered much persecution, and left an uncomprehending world in 1892. But His Son is still a captive in the fortress prison of `Akka in Palestine."

"For the Cause of God I am a prisoner," said 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

"You are interested?" she asked.

"Indeed, yes, how could we fail to be interested?"

The news of the momentous event, long prayed for, steadfastly awaited in the "Faith, which is the substance of things hoped for," had come.

How should we not be interested?

"There is a lady in Paris," continued Miss Herbert, "Who has +A just returned from a visit to `Akka (St. Jean d'Acre). She had the privilege of speaking with `Abbas Effendi, the name by which He is known in Palestine.

"Would you care to meet this lady? Shall I make an appointment?"

"Please, if you will be so kind."

Miss Herbert rose to go - but before she reached the door she came back.

"I do not know where you live, or even your name!"

The were outer, but necessary details!

The appointment was made. We were introduced to Ethel Rosenberg and Monsieur Hippolyte Dreyfus. These two friends of `Abbas Effendi told me much concerning the sacred task of the Great One, Bahá'u'lláh.

On our return to London we attended some meetings held at the Higher Thought Centre. There we learned that Mrs. Thornburgh-Cropper had been the first to bring the marvellous news to England. She and Miss Rosenberg welcomed all who were eager to investigate everything connected with the Event. Under the guidance of these two devoted ladies we met to make plans for spreading the glad tidings.

At this time we had the pleasure of hearing Mr. Wellesley Tudor-Pole, who explained to us the deeper significance of what afterwards became known as the Great Event of the Bahá'í Cause. The term "Bahá'í" may be rendered "Dweller in the City of God," "Follower of the Light," "Believer in Bahá'u'lláh."

I have given the title of "The Chosen Highway" to this work. It is not intended to be a connected history of the momentous events which took place as the New Cycle of Human Consciousness dawned upon the world. It is an attempt to indicate some phases of a great historic moment in the life of Spiritual Civilization, which have not been elsewhere recorded, but are supplementary to

existing literature on the subject.

My desire is that this series of Spoken Narratives may serve to show the steps which marked the way towards the recognition of the "Glorious Day of God," and how some of the "Waiting Servants" arose to take the place destined for them; of how they became so preoccupied with things of the Spirit that +p

material things lost their value in those early days of the New Dispensation.

Bahá'u'lláh's command restores the purity of religion to the religions of the world.

This Chronicle also seeks to show how the celestial power, when held fast by Faith and Works, is able to accomplish what we have been accustomed to regard as the miraculous.

Having been privileged to enjoy opportunities of intimate association with the family of Bahá'u'lláh and of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, during my visits to Their home in Haifa, I made notes at those times, and am now prompted to use them in the belief that they will be of wide interest. Many of these opportunities occurred whilst our roof in London had the honour of sheltering 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who had brought the very words of His Father to us in Britain.

Bahá'u'lláh spoke with the power of the Great Ether; its operation [footnote: See page 134.] becomes manifest in the "Awakening." His Words of Power were heard, not only by the scribes, who wrote them down, but the sound of them went forth into all the world, and reached the inner hearing of the Waiting Servants. These devoted ones, born in every religion, every race, and every nation, were standing well-prepared on every hand to arise and set about their Father's business, when they should hear the Awakening Call.

The divine powers are focussed in the Spirit of the Messenger, Who ushers in the New Dispensation. This Messenger was described as "a glorious Sun, which burst upon a dark and dreary world; that world which is sick unto death. None but the Divine Physician has the power to heal.

Hearers, who were attuned, received the Word; to others it was as foolishness, to be "despised and rejected."

Ever since these days, when this call to awakening was heard in Britain, it gradually became the foremost desire of my heart to spread the message which I had myself received; so it was that this volume took shape, and it is at this present moment of world crisis that the reassuring words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá are uppermost in my mind. "This is a radiant century." In spite +p

of the encircling gloom, that radiance is to be found abundantly in Bahá'u'lláh's teaching.

There are many notable signs of the awakening now in progress. Men and women everywhere, and the youth of both sexes in particular, are devoting their energies to the service of great ideals.

National service in itself is a training for the reconstruction which must take

place in the world before the Will of God can be done upon Earth as it is in Heaven. National service is great, but world service is greater.

"Let not a man glory in this that he loves his country," said Bahá'u'lláh.

"Let him rather glory in this that he loves his kind."

It is borne in on our minds that we may gather not only hope but certainty that the reconstruction we look for has begun; men and women in all parts of the world are working for it either consciously or unconsciously. The scheme of the Great Century enfolds us. It is for us to realize this truth, and make the fullest response that is in our power to meet the demands which Destiny makes upon us to bring the Divine purpose to fruition.

The keynote of the Bahá'í message is Unity. "Be united, be united," said 'Abdu'l-Bahá, addressing representatives of many humanitarian and religious bodies.

"Those of you who are working separately are as ants, but working together you will be as eagles; when working separately you will be as drops or little rivulets of water, but when working in union you will be as mighty river carrying the Water of Life into the barren desert places of the world; and," He added, "it is rather dangerous to be an isolated drop; you might be spilt or blown away."

In presenting, however inadequately, this Chronicle to the world, I am deeply conscious of the vital import of the message it conveys to humanity, and of the reality of the truth it expresses. These are the latter days that herald the glorious day of God, in fulfilment of the prophecies which have come to us down the ages, through prophets, poets, and seers. In the great Indian classic, the Bhagavad Gita, we are reminded of the coming of this glorious day: +p

"When there is decay of righteousness and there is exaltation of unrighteousness then I myself come forth for the protection of the good, for the destruction of the evildoer. I am born from age to age. The foolish regard me not when clad in human semblance, being ignorant of my true nature, the Great Lord of Being" With that coming forth we listen with uplifted hearts today to the clarion voice of Bahá'u'lláh: "These ruinous wars shall cease !and the Most Great Peace shall come. "

LONDON, 1939.

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chapter 1

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