

other Americans were prepared at the time to consider any other world faith with even a modicum of sympathy. Yet the fact remains that in Islám some students and theologians felt that Islamic prophecies indicated an end of the laws of the Qur'án and a beginning of a new spiritual age. The thinking of these theologians was that the "Lord of the Age", to use the Islamic phrase, would appear.

In 1844 a young merchant of Shíráz named Siyyid 'Alí Muhammad suddenly began to teach a new faith in Persia. He assumed the title of the Báb, which literally means "the Gate." The force of the Báb's character and utterance was like a bombshell in that backward, priest-ridden land. Pleasant academic discussions as to the meaning of the traditions of Islám were at an end. A flame of interest in the Báb and devoted acceptance of Him swept the country. The astonished priests reacted with orthodox fury. They arrested and imprisoned the Báb and instigated systematic massacres of His followers.

The Báb taught that a new spiritual era was at hand. He criticized vehemently the hypocrisy and intellectual dishonesty of the Muslim clergy. He urged the highest standard of character. And He promised that within nineteen years "Him Whom God would make manifest" would begin to teach and bring to men the basic laws and principles for a new age. The degenerate clergy, long corrupted by their powerful position in the church-state of Persia, feared and hated the movement initiated by the Báb. It was as if a strong, clean wind had suddenly swept through the dank atmosphere of a room long closed. The massacres of the Bábís find their parallel in the bloody holidays of ancient Rome. Hypocrisy and tyranny tried to destroy faith by the sword. The Báb was soon arrested and imprisoned in a remote mountain village. On July 9, 1850 hatred found its climax when the Báb was publicly martyred in the barracks square of the city of Tabríz. An attempt was made to completely exterminate the new faith in Persia. Bloody scenes multiplied throughout the country, and the surviving faithful went underground.

2

The consternation of the priesthood during these years had been deepened by the fact that many of their own outstanding members had accepted the teachings of the Báb. Also outstanding men in other walks of life had accepted Him. Among these was Mírzá Husayn 'Alí, a young man of eminent and wealthy family. Ignoring the jibes of family and class, Mírzá Husayn 'Alí, Who is known to history as Bahá'u'lláh ("the Glory of God"), publicly championed the Báb. In the nation-wide campaign to exterminate the faith, Bahá'u'lláh's position had caused Him to be spared. But in 1852 when two crazed young Bábís made an attempt to kill the Sháh, Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned for four months in the Siyáh Chál, a dreadful underground prison in Tihrán. Bahá'u'lláh's innocence was clearly proven in the courts. But this incident is of great historic significance because during the imprisonment Bahá'u'lláh became aware that He was the Promised One foretold by the Báb.

Immediately after being released from prison, He was exiled to Baghdád by the

Persian government, in an effort to remove from the country the last effective leader of the detested new faith. Bahá'u'lláh was an exile in 'Iráq for about ten years. During this time He transformed the outlook and character of the followers of the Báb. His own fame spread to such an extent that scholars and men of renown visited Him in increasing numbers.

To this first exile period belong two of Bahá'u'lláh's most famous books. One is a very small book of penetrating meditations entitled Hidden Words. In epigrammatic sentences, each prefaced by a salutation, Bahá'u'lláh restated the essential spiritual truths which have been taught by the Founders of all the world religions. No complicated theology mars the directness of the passages. It is the voice of God speaking directly to the heart of man.

"O Son of Spirit!

"The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behoveth thee to be. Verily justice is my gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes."

The other outstanding work of this period was the Kitáb-i-Íqán, the English subtitle of which is the "Book of Certitude." This book is one of the major keys to understanding the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. The great theme is this: in every age God reveals His will and purpose for human destiny through a chosen individual or Manifestation. Religion thus progressively evolves. The spiritual aspects of man's relation to God are not changed from age to age but restated and clarified. The social part of religion undergoes changes in every age because the conditions of life change. Thus Moses made certain laws which Jesus later changed or ignored, to the horror of the priests and the orthodox. The evolutionary principle in world religion is Bahá'u'lláh's first challenging contribution to the spiritual unity of mankind. A generous selection from the Íqán concerning the "City of Certitude" is found on pages 264-270. Other selections from the Íqán in this volume are on pages 17-27, 46-49, 50-56, 177, and 179.

The Muslim priests and the Turkish and Persian governments as Islamic church-states could not tolerate the rebirth of the new faith under Bahá'u'lláh. So it was decreed that Bahá'u'lláh be exiled from Baghdád to Constantinople, on the theory that distance would dissipate His influence < a theory repeatedly tried and repeatedly bringing opposite results. In 1863 the exile was ordered. And in the few days while a caravan was being prepared for the long journey, Bahá'u'lláh announced to His followers that He was the One Whose coming the Báb foretold.

After being four months in Constantinople, Bahá'u'lláh was banished to Adrianople. He here publicly proclaimed His message, addressing collectively the temporal and spiritual rulers of the earth. He wrote some of the first of a

series of letters known collectively as the "Tablets to the Kings." He addressed the Sultan of Turkey, the Sháh of Persia, and Napoleon III, Emperor of the French. Among the themes in these letters was a call to the rulers "to be just and vigilant, to compose their differences and reduce their armaments." Later He addressed such letters to Queen Victoria, Alexander II of Russia, Pope Pius IX, William I, the Emperor of Germany, and Francis-Joseph, the Emperor of Austria. In His book of laws the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh addressed a passage to "the Rulers of America and the Presidents of the Republics therein," asking them to "adorn the temple of dominion with the ornament of justice" and bidding them "bind with the hands of justice the broken." A few selections from this series of Tablets are in this volume, on pages 122-125, 210-212, 219-232, 232-240, and 246-249. (For the full scope of these letters, see Bahá'í World Faith, Chapter One, and The Promised Day Is Come, by Shoghi Effendi.)

A fourth and final exile was ordered, this time (1868) sending Bahá'u'lláh to the prison-city of 'Akká on the Bay of Haifa in the Holy Land, Bahá'u'lláh was an exile in 'Akká and the surrounding countryside until the end of His life in 1892.

Here He revealed the major portion of His teachings, and despite restrictions His influence increased. Two of His major books in this period were the Kitáb-i-Aqdas in which He stated the laws and ordinances of a new dispensation and the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, a summary and defense of His teachings addressed to the son of a fanatic Muslim clergyman whom the Bahá'ís called "the Wolf."

3

In the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh we find that He "abolishes the institution of priesthood; prohibits slavery, asceticism, mendicancy, monasticism, penance, the use of pulpits and the kissing of hands; prescribes monogamy; condemns cruelty to animals, idleness and sloth, backbiting and calumny; censures divorce; interdicts gambling, the use of opium, wine and other intoxicating drinks ... stresses the importance of marriage and lays down its essential conditions; imposes the obligation of engaging in some trade or profession, exalting such occupation to the rank of worship; emphasizes the necessity of providing the means for the education of children . . ."

The chief principle of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings is "the oneness and wholeness of the human race." This is the pivotal point of all that He taught. The purpose of the Bahá'í Faith is to unite the entire world in one common faith and one common social order. We may perhaps state that Bahá'u'lláh's second challenging contribution to the unity of the human race is a set of principles and a social structure designed to produce justice. He called justice "the best beloved of all things" in the sight of God. He urged moderation and warned against fanaticism and excesses of all kinds. The acquiring of education is essential to everyone. True religion and science are in agreement. Consultation is the key method for the settling of disputes and for developing plans and policies for the common good.

To achieve the unity of the human race was Bahá'u'lláh's compelling life purpose.

The aim of religion is to produce the strong, intangible bonds of unity. Bahá'u'lláh clarifies the historic development of religion as the evolution of one faith, serving different needs in each age. Abraham, Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster, Krishna, Jesus, Muhammad, the Bab, and Bahá'u'lláh have been successive Manifestations, through Whom God has progressively revealed the purpose of religion. Because of ignorance, the followers of these Manifestations may quarrel, but the open-minded individual can see the pattern of agreement and evolution in what these supreme Educators taught. Stripped of the many layers of theology and custom, the different faiths of the world assume an integrated relationship, each leading to the other in historic development, as links in a chain. And none of the great Founders of the world's religions has ever taught that He was the only or the last Revealer of divine teachings. Instead, Each of them has praised the Prophet Who lived and taught before Him, and also has pointed to the future when another such Educator, or "Spirit of Truth" as Jesus taught, would live.

Bahá'u'lláh claimed to speak with the same divine authority as Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. He taught that the time was now ripe for the coming of age of the human race and the beginning of its conscious unity.

To achieve this, He urged the abolition of racial, religious, political, and economic prejudices, the adoption of an international auxiliary language, equal opportunities and privileges for men and women, a universal system of education, the independent investigation of truth, the adoption of a world code of human rights and responsibilities, and the creation of a world federal government. He taught that in each community there should be a House of Justice, this finally culminating in a Universal House of Justice.

4

And Bahá'u'lláh took decided steps to prevent the corruption of His Faith into sects. He wrote His teachings, and as a result oral tradition was struck a blow. He abolished the authority of a priesthood. He forbade the creation of sacraments. And He appointed 'Abdu'l-Bahá, His eldest Son, as the Center of His Covenant, the point of unity to Whom all should turn on questions of interpretation of the teachings.

'Abdu'l-Bahá had been born in 1844 and shared the series of exiles with His Father. He himself continued a prisoner until in 1908 the revolution of the Young Turks released all religious prisoners. In 1910 'Abdu'l-Bahá began a series of missionary journeys which extended over a period of three years. He visited Egypt, Europe, the United States and Canada. Everywhere He was greeted with respect, scholars and noted men visiting Him. In pulpit, synagogue, and college hall, He freely proclaimed His Father's Faith. The result was a great strengthening of the little group of Bahá'ís in the West.

At the death of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1921, the Faith entered a new period of

development. 'Abdu'l-Bahá left a Will and Testament in which He appointed Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, His eldest grandson, as Guardian of the Faith. This remarkable document not only made Shoghi Effendi the interpreter of the teachings but it also called upon the believers to arise and teach the Faith and build the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

Under the direction of Shoghi Effendi, the Bahá'ís have organized Local Spiritual Assemblies which are prototypes of the future Houses of Justice. Here group effort and consultation are learned and applied to the problems of a fast-evolving world faith. A beautiful House of Worship has been built in Wilmette, Illinois, as a first step in proclaiming Bahá'u'lláh's concept of worship and the unity of religion. Eleven National Spiritual Assemblies, some of them regional in nature, have been elected and they form a band around the earth < Canada; the United States; Central America; South America; the British Isles; Germany and Austria; Egypt and the Sudan; Iraq; Persia; India, Pakistan, and Burma; and Australia and New Zealand. The work of teaching the Faith goes on in dozens of countries where there are not yet enough Bahá'ís to form a National Assembly.

The houses and gardens associated with Bahá'u'lláh's imprisonment and exile in 'Akká and near-by Haifa are now centers of pilgrimage. On Mount Carmel a beautiful Shrine is being erected to fittingly shelter the remains of the Báb, which were hidden secretly by His followers and, after many decades of concealment, brought to the Holy Land. The Guardian of the Faith lives in Haifa, its World Center, and assisting him is the International Bahá'í Council.

Since 1921 the translation and publication of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings have increased with great rapidity. This book is an example of Shoghi Effendi's masterful translations into English. At this writing the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh have been rendered in over eighty languages.

5

This very briefly summarizes the story which is so intimately associated with the spirit of Gleanings. The reader may be further assisted by the fact that the contents of Gleanings may be divided into five parts. Part one, pages 1-46, proclaims this age as the "Day of God." "The advent of such a Revelation hath been heralded in all the sacred Scriptures." This is the culminating age when the past dispensations will bear fruit as men and women the world over unite in a common faith. Part two, pages 46-136, concerns the Manifestation of God and the significance of the Manifestation in representing the attributes of God. Part three, pages 136-200, deals with basic questions concerning the soul and its immortality. Part four, pages 200-259, concerns spiritual aspects of World Order and the Most Great Peace. Part five, pages 259-346, deals with the duties of the individual and the spiritual meaning of life. Bahá'u'lláh's teachings may be further studied in Bahá'í World Faith and in other translations of His writings. The most detailed history of the Faith is *God Passes By* written by Shoghi Effendi.

Gleanings is a book for meditative study. It is not a book of history and facts, but of love and spiritual power. No one can understand the faith of the thousands of martyred followers of the Báb, unless he catches the spirit of this book. No one can appreciate why thousands of Bahá'ís give up the comfort of settled homes and move into strange countries to tell the people about Bahá'u'lláh, unless he clearly glimpses the spirit of this book.

Bahá'u'lláh has called into being a constantly-growing body of followers in the five continents of the globe. These people come from differing racial and religious backgrounds. In the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh they become united in belief and action. While wars are waged and the moral fabric of modern civilization becomes more and more tattered, Bahá'ís continue to tell the story of Bahá'u'lláh's life, of the reawakening of men to the call of God in our time. For, to Bahá'ís, quite literally, "This is the changeless faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future." While the rot of modern materialism does its deadly work, Bahá'ís continue to patiently sacrifice and work to build the group consciousness and the social institutions which Bahá'u'lláh promised them would, in time, flower into a world civilization. To a Bahá'í, religion encompasses all of life < it is civilization itself. "All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization."

"The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens."

W. KENNETH CHRISTIAN

1952

Editorial Note: Before his passing in 1957, Shoghi Effendi appointed twenty-seven Hands of the Cause of God charged with the propagation and protection of the Faith. Through their efforts the election of the first Universal House of Justice was called in April 1963. At that time this supreme governing and legislative body of the Bahá'í Faith was elected by the fifty-six existing national administrative bodies (National Spiritual Assemblies), in accordance with provisions in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. Through a series of global teaching plans, begun in 1953, the Faith has spread to 190 independent countries and 45 dependent territories and overseas departments, with some 179 National Spiritual Assemblies. [1999]

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