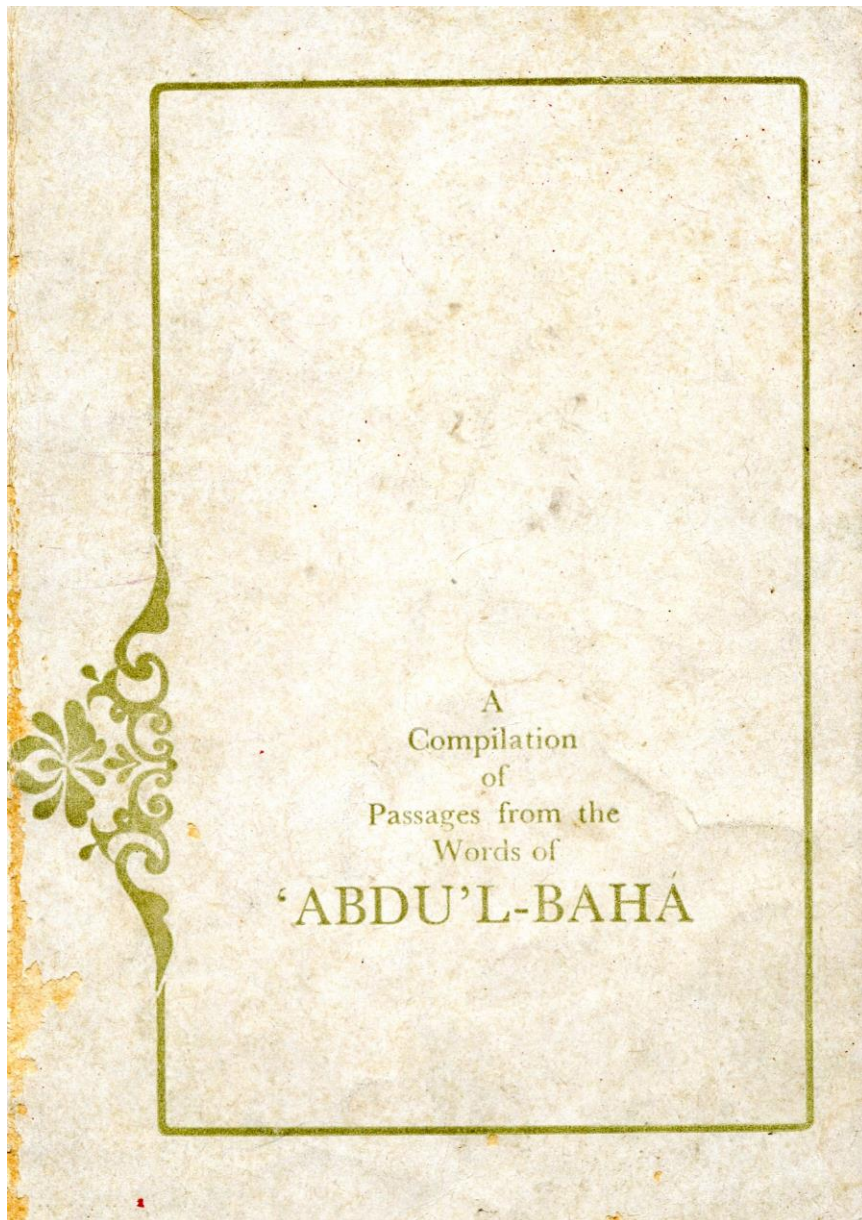


Cover



A Compilation of Passages

from

The Words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

A Compilation of Passages from The Words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Compiled by
The Universal House of Justice

Bahá'í Publishing Trust
P.O. Box 19 New Delhi 110001 India

© National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India
First Edition August 1980
Printed at Rakesh Press, New Delhi-110028

Table of Contents

Cover.....	1
A Compilation of Passages from The Words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá	2
Table of Contents.....	2
Message from The Universal House of Justice.....	3
1 Selections from The Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá	5
2 Selections from Some Answered Questions.....	29
3 Selections from The Secret of Divine Civilization.....	45

Note: this book was OCR-scanned and has not been carefully proofread yet.

The complete authoritative texts, from which these Selections were taken can be downloaded from:

1. Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá
2. Some Answered Questions
3. The Secret of Divine Civilization

Message from
The Universal House of Justice

Department of the Secretariat

24 October 1979

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The provision and dissemination of a balanced supply of Bahá'í literature is one of the aims set forth in the Seven Year Plan. The Universal House of Justice has been considering this aspect of the Plan, and has asked us to convey its comments to you.

The House of Justice hopes that every National Spiritual Assembly will provide the believers under its jurisdiction with publications of the Words of Bahá'u'lláh, the Bab, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. It is explicit in the Holy Text that the followers of the Most Great Name should recite the verses daily. How is this possible for the thousands of Bahá'ís who do not have access to these Holy Words in a language which they can understand? Furthermore, the way is open for the consolidation and maturing of the Bahá'í community when the hearts of its members can be exposed to the Divine Teachings in their pure form.

With these principles in mind, the House of Justice asked a committee at the World Center to prepare a compilation from previously published texts covering a broad range of subjects dealt with by the Central Figures of the Faith, including material which can be easily comprehended, inspire the heart, strengthen the spirit of faith, and enrich the spiritual understanding of the reader.

Such a compilation has now been prepared, and it is being sent to you by airmail under separate cover. It is not meant to supersede any material you may have already compiled. It is a sample of what can be done in this

vital area of Bahá'í activity. You should, therefore, feel free to use or translate as much or as little of this material as you wish, to add selections from the Writings which you feel are particularly applicable to the friends in your area, and to publish and distribute your own compilations as quickly and inexpensively as possible.

It is the hope of the Universal House of Justice that the workers in the Divine Vineyard in every land will always and increasingly have recourse to the Writings revealed by the Central Figures of our Faith, will appreciate the potency of the Holy Word, and will allow its ennobling and spiritualizing influence to stimulate and direct their personal lives and guide them in devoted services to the Cause of God.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
Department of the Secretariat

cc: International Teaching Centre
Counsellors
Bahá'í Publishing Trusts

A

Selections from

The Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

1

O peoples of the world! The Sun of Truth hath risen to illumine the whole earth, and to spiritualize the community of man. Laudable are the results and the fruits thereof, abundant the holy evidences deriving from this grace. This is mercy unalloyed and purest bounty; it is light for the world and all its peoples; it is harmony and fellowship, and love and solidarity; indeed it is compassion and unity, and the end of foreignness; it is the being at one, in complete dignity and freedom, with all on earth.

The Blessed Beauty saith: 'Ye are all the fruits of one tree, the leaves of one branch.' Thus hath He likened this world of being to a single tree, and all its peoples to the leaves thereof, and the blossoms and fruits. It is needful for the bough to blossom, and leaf and fruit to flourish, and upon the interconnection of all parts of the world-tree, dependeth the flourishing of leaf and blossom, and the sweetness of the fruit.

For this reason must all human beings powerfully sustain one another and seek for everlasting life; and for this reason must the lovers of God in this contingent world become the mercies and the blessings sent forth by — that clement King of the seen and unseen realms. Let them purify their sight and behold all humankind as leaves and blossoms and fruits of the tree of being. Let them at all times concern themselves with doing a kindly thing for one of their fellows, offering to someone love, consideration, thoughtful help. Let them see no one as their enemy, or as wishing them ill, but think of all humankind as their friends; regarding the alien as an intimate, the stranger as a companion, staying free of prejudice, drawing no lines.

In this day, the one favoured at the Threshold of the Lord is he who handeth round the cup of faithfulness; who bestoweth, even upon his

enemies, the jewel of bounty, and lendeth, even to his fallen oppressor, a helping hand; it is he who will, even to the fiercest of his foes, be a loving friend. These are the Teachings of the Blessed Beauty, these the counsels of the Most Great Name.

O ye dear friends! The world is at war and the human race is in travail and mortal combat. The dark night of hate hath taken over, and the light of good faith is blotted out. The peoples and kindreds of the earth have sharpened their claws, and are hurling themselves one against the other. It is the very foundation of the human race that is being destroyed. It is thousands of households that are vagrant and dispossessed, and every year seeth thousands upon thousands of human beings weltering in their life-blood on dusty battlefields. The tents of life and joy are down. The generals practise their generalship, boasting of the blood they shed, competing one with the next in inciting to violence. 'With this sword,' saith one of them, 'I beheaded a people!' And another: 'I toppled a nation to the ground!' And yet another: 'I brought a government down!' On such things do men pride themselves, in such do they glory! Love—righteousness—these are everywhere censured, while despised are harmony, and devotion to the truth.

The Faith of the Blessed Beauty is summoning mankind to safety and love, to amity and peace; it hath raised up its tabernacle on the heights of the earth, and directeth its call to all nations. Wherefore, O ye who are God's lovers, know ye the value of this precious Faith, obey its teachings, walk in this road that is drawn straight, and show ye this way to the people. Lift up your voices and sing out the song of the Kingdom. Spread far and wide the precepts and counsels of the loving Lord, so that this world will change into another world, and this darksome earth will be flooded with light, and the dead body of mankind will arise and live; so that every soul will ask for immortality, through the holy breaths of God.

Soon will your swiftly-passing days be over, and the fame and riches, the comforts, the joys provided by this rubbish-heap, the world, will be gone without a trace. Summon ye, then, the people to God, and invite humanity to follow the example of the Company on high. Be ye loving fathers to the orphan, and a refuge to the helpless, and a treasury for the

poor, and a cure for the ailing. Be ye the helpers of every victim of oppression, the patrons of the disadvantaged. Think ye at all times of rendering some service to every member of the human race. Pay ye no heed to aversion and rejection, to disdain, hostility, injustice: act ye in the opposite way. Be ye sincerely kind, not in appearance only. Let each one of God's loved ones centre his attention on this: to be the Lord's mercy to man; to be the Lord's grace. Let him do some good to every person whose path he crosseth, and be of some benefit to him. Let him improve the character of each and all, and reorient the minds of men. In this way, the light of divine guidance will shine forth, and the blessings of God will cradle all mankind: for love is light, no matter in what abode it dwelleth; and hate is darkness, no matter where it may make its nest. O friends of God! That the hidden Mystery may stand revealed, and the secret essence of all things may be disclosed, strive ye to banish that darkness for ever and ever.

Soon will your swiftly-passing days be over, and the fame and riches, the comforts, the joys provided by this rubbish-heap, the world, will be gone without a trace. Summon ye, then, the people to God, and invite humanity to follow the example of the Company on high. Be ye loving fathers to the orphan, and a refuge to the helpless, and a treasury for the poor, and a cure for the ailing. Be ye the helpers of every victim of oppression, the patrons of the disadvantaged. Think ye at all times of rendering some service to every member of the human race. Pay ye no heed to aversion and rejection, to disdain, hostility, injustice: act ye in the opposite way. Be ye sincerely kind, not in appearance only. Let each one of God's loved ones centre his attention on this: to be the Lord's mercy to man; to be the Lord's grace. Let him do some good to every person whose path he crosseth, and be of some benefit to him. Let him improve the character of each and all, and reorient the minds of men. In this way, the light of divine guidance will shine forth, and the blessings of God will cradle all mankind: for love is light, no matter in what abode it dwelleth; and hate is darkness, no matter where it may make its nest. O friends of God! That the hidden Mystery may stand revealed, and the secret essence of all things may be disclosed, strive ye to banish that darkness for ever and ever.

2

O ye peoples of the Kingdom! How many a soul expended all its span of life in worship, endured the mortification of the flesh, longed to gain an entry into the Kingdom, and yet failed, while ye, with neither toil nor pain nor self-denial, have won the prize and entered in.

It is even as in the time of the Messiah, when the Pharisees and the pious were left without a portion, while Peter, John and Andrew, given neither to pious worship nor ascetic practice, won the day. Wherefore, thank ye God for setting upon your heads the crown of glory everlasting, for granting unto you this immeasurable grace.

The time hath come when, as a thank-offering for this bestowal, ye should grow in faith and constancy as day followeth day, and should draw ever nearer to the Lord, your God, becoming magnetized to such a degree, and so aflame, that your holy melodies in praise of the Beloved will reach upward to the Company on high; and that each one of you, even as a nightingale in this rose garden of God, will glorify the Lord of Hosts, and become the teacher of all who dwell on earth.

3

Service to the friends is service to the Kingdom of God, and consideration shown to the poor is one of the greatest teachings of God.

4

O ye illumined loved ones and ye handmaids of the Merciful! At a time when the sombre night of ignorance, of neglect of the divine world, of being veiled from God, had overspread the earth, a bright morning dawned and a rising light lit up the eastern sky. Then rose the Sun of Truth and the splendours of the Kingdom were shed over east and west. Those who had eyes to see rejoiced at the glad tidings and cried out: 'O blessed, blessed are we!', and they witnessed the inner reality of all things, and uncovered the mysteries of the Kingdom. Delivered then from their fancies and their doubts they beheld the light of truth, and so

exhilarated did they become from draining the chalice of God's love, that they utterly forgot the world and their own selves. Dancing for joy they hastened to the place of their own martyrdom and there, where men die for love, they flung away their heads and hearts.

But those with unseeing eyes were astonished at this tumult, and they cried, 'Where is the light?' and again, 'We see no light! We see no rising sun! Here is no truth. This is but fantasy and nothing more.' Bat-like they fled into the underground dark, and there, to their way of thinking, they found a measure of security and peace.

This, however, is but the beginning of the dawn, and the heat of the rising Orb of Truth is not yet at the fullness of its power. Once the sun hath mounted to high noon, its fires will burn so hot as to stir even the creeping things beneath the earth; and although it is not for them to behold the light, yet will they all be set in frenzied motion by the impact of the heat.

Wherefore, O ye beloved of God, offer up thanks that ye have, in the day of the dawning, turned your faces unto the Light of the World and beheld its splendours. Ye have received a share of the light of truth, ye have enjoyed a portion of those blessings that endure forever; and therefore, as a returning of thanks for this bounty, rest ye not for a moment, sit ye not silent, carry to men's ears the glad tidings of the Kingdom, spread far and wide the Word of God.

Act in accordance with the counsels of the Lord: that is, rise up in such wise, and with such qualities, as to endow the body of this world with a living soul, and to bring this young child, humanity, to the stage of adulthood. So far as ye are able, ignite a candle of love in every meeting, and with tenderness rejoice and cheer ye every heart. Care for the stranger as for one of your own; show to alien souls the same loving kindness ye bestow upon your faithful friends. Should any come to blows with you, seek to be friends with him; should any stab you to the heart, be ye a healing salve unto his sores; should any taunt and mock at you, meet him with love. Should any heap his blame upon you, praise ye him; should he offer you a deadly poison, give him the choicest honey in

exchange; and should he threaten your life, grant him a remedy that will heal him evermore. Should he be pain itself, be ye his medicine; should he be thorns, be ye his roses and sweet herbs. Perchance such ways and words from you will make this darksome world turn bright at last; will make this dusty earth turn heavenly, this devilish prison place become a royal palace of the Lord—so that war and strife will pass and be no more, and love and trust will pitch their tents on the summits of the world. Such is the essence of God's admonitions; such in sum are the teachings for the Dispensation of Bahá.

5

¹ When Christ appeared, twenty centuries ago although the Jews were eagerly awaiting His Coming, and prayed every day, with tears, saying: 'O God, hasten the Revelation of the Messiah,' yet when the Sun of Truth dawned, they denied Him and rose against Him with the greatest enmity, and eventually crucified that divine Spirit, the Word of God, and named Him Beelzebub, the evil one, as is recorded in the Gospel. The reason for this was that they said: 'The Revelation of Christ, according to the clear text of the Torah, will be attested by certain signs, and so long as these signs have not appeared, whoso layeth claim to be a Messiah is an impostor. Among these signs is this, that the Messiah should come from an unknown place, yet we all know this man's house in Nazareth, and can any good thing come out of Nazareth? The second sign is that He shall rule with a rod of iron, that is, He must act with the sword, but this Messiah has not even a wooden staff. Another of the conditions and signs is this: He must sit upon the throne of David and establish David's sovereignty. Now, far from being enthroned, his man has not even a mat to sit on. Another of the conditions is this: the promulgation of all the laws of the Torah; yet this man has abrogated these laws, and has even broken the Sabbath day, although, it is the clear text of the Torah that whosoever layeth claim to prophethood and revealeth miracles and breaketh the Sabbath day, must be put to death. Another of the signs is this, that in His reign justice will be so advanced that righteousness and well-doing will extend from the human even to the animal world — the

¹ Written specially for Dr. Esslemont's immortal work *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*.

snake and the mouse will share one hole, and the eagle and the partridge one nest, the lion and the gazelle shall dwell in one pasture, and the wolf and the kid shall drink from one fountain. Yet now, injustice and tyranny have waxed so great in his time that they have crucified him! Another of the conditions is this, that in the days of the Messiah the Jews will prosper and triumph over all the peoples of the world, but now they are living in the utmost abasement and servitude in the empire of the Romans. Then how can this be the Messiah promised in the Torah?

In this wise did they object to that Sun of Truth, although that Spirit of God was indeed the One promised in the Torah. But as they did not understand the meaning of these signs, they crucified the Word of God. Now the Bahá'ís hold that the recorded signs did come to pass in the Manifestation of Christ, although not in the sense which the Jews understood, the description in the Torah being allegorical. For instance, among the signs is that of sovereignty. For Bahá'ís say that the sovereignty of Christ was a heavenly, divine, everlasting sovereignty, not a Napoleonic sovereignty that vanisheth in a short time. For well-nigh two thousand years this sovereignty of Christ hath been established, and until now it endureth, and to all eternity that Holy Being will be exalted upon an everlasting throne.

In like manner all the other signs have been made manifest, but the Jews did not understand. Although nearly twenty centuries have elapsed since Christ appeared with divine splendour, yet the Jews are still awaiting the coming of the Messiah and regard themselves as true and Christ as false.

6

O leaf upon the Tree of Life! The Tree of Life, of which mention is made in the Bible, is Bahá'u'lláh, and the daughters of the Kingdom are the leaves upon that blessed Tree. Then thank thou God that thou hast become related to that Tree, and that thou art flourishing, tender and fresh.

The gates of the Kingdom are opened wide, and every favoured soul is seated at the banquet table of the Lord, receiving his portion of that heavenly feast. Praised be God, thou too art present at this table, taking

thy share of the bountiful food of heaven. Thou art serving the Kingdom, and art well acquainted with the sweet savours of the Abha Paradise.

Then strive thou with all thy might to guide the people, and eat thou of the bread that hath come down from heaven. For this is the meaning of Christ's words: 'I am the living bread which came down from heaven.... he that eateth of this bread shall live forever.'¹

7

O handmaid of God, who tremblest even as a fresh and tender branch in the winds of the love of God! I have read thy letter, which telleth of thine abundant love, thine intense devotion, and of thy being occupied with the remembrance of thy Lord.

Depend thou upon God. Forsake thine own will and cling to His, set aside thine own desires and lay hold of His, that thou mayest become an example, holy, spiritual, and of the Kingdom, unto His handmaids.

Know thou, O handmaid, that in the sight of Bahá, women are accounted the same as men, and God hath created all humankind in His own image, and after His own likeness. That is, men and women alike are the revealers of His names and attributes, and from the spiritual viewpoint there is no difference between them. Whosoever draweth nearer to God, that one is the most favoured, whether man or woman. How many a handmaid, ardent and devoted, hath, within the sheltering shade of Bahá, proved superior to the men, and surpassed the famous of the earth.

The House of Justice, however, according to the explicit text of the Law of God, is confined to men; this for a wisdom of the Lord God's, which will ere long be made manifest as clearly as the sun at high noon.

As to you, O ye other handmaids who are enamoured of the heavenly fragrances, arrange ye holy gatherings, and found ye Spiritual Assemblies, for these are the basis for spreading the sweet savours of God, exalting

¹ John 6:51, 58

His Word, uplifting the lamp of His grace, promulgating His religion and promoting His Teachings, and what bounty is there greater than this? These Spiritual Assemblies are aided by the Spirit of God. Their defender is 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Over them He spreadeth His wings. What bounty is there greater than this? These Spiritual Assemblies are shining lamps and heavenly gardens, from which the fragrances of holiness are diffused over all regions, and the lights of knowledge are shed abroad over all created things. From them the spirit of life streameth in every direction. They, indeed, are the potent sources of the progress of man, at all times and under all conditions. What bounty is there greater than this?

8

The prime requisites for them that take counsel together are purity of motive, radiance of spirit, detachment from all else save God, attraction to His Divine Fragrances, humility and lowliness amongst His loved ones, patience and long-suffering in difficulties and servitude to His exalted Threshold. Should they be graciously aided to acquire these attributes, victory from the unseen Kingdom of Bahá shall be vouchsafed to them.

9

The members thereof ¹ must take counsel together in such wise that no occasion for ill-feeling or discord may arise. This can be attained when every member expresseth with absolute freedom his own opinion and setteth forth his argument. Should anyone oppose, he must on no account feel hurt for not until matters are fully discussed can the right way be revealed. The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions. If after discussion, a decision be carried unanimously well and good; but if, the Lord forbid, differences of opinion should arise, a majority of voices must prevail.

¹ Of a Spiritual Assembly

10

You have asked as to the feast in every Bahá'í month. This feast is held to foster comradeship and love, to call God to mind and supplicate Him with contrite hearts, and to encourage benevolent pursuits.

That is, the friends should there dwell upon God and glorify Him, read the prayers and holy verses, and treat one another with the utmost affection and love.

11

As to the Nineteen Day Feast, it rejoiceth mind and heart. If this feast be held in the proper fashion, the friends will, once in nineteen days, find themselves spiritually restored, and endued with a power that is not of this world.

12

O bird that singeth sweetly of the Abha Beauty! In this new and wondrous dispensation the veils of superstition have been torn asunder and the prejudices of eastern peoples stand condemned. Among certain nations of the East, music was considered reprehensible, but in this new age the Manifest Light hath, in His holy Tablets, specifically proclaimed that music, sung or played, is spiritual food for soul and heart.

The musician's art is among those arts worthy of the highest praise, and it moveth the hearts of all who grieve. Wherefore, O thou Shahnaz,¹ play and sing out the holy words of God with wondrous tones in the gatherings of the friends, that the listener may be freed from chains of care and sorrow, and his soul may leap for joy and humble itself in prayer to the realm of Glory.

¹ Shahnaz, the name given to the recipient of this Tablet, is also the name of a musical mode.

13

Strive with heart and soul in order to bring about union and harmony among the white and the black and prove thereby the unity of the Bahá'í world wherein distinction of colour findeth no place, but where hearts only are considered. Praise be to God, the hearts of the friends are united and linked together, whether they be from the east or the west, from north or from south, whether they be German, French, Japanese, American, and whether they pertain to the white, the black, the red, the yellow or the brown race. Variations of colour, of land and of race are of no importance in the Bahá'í Faith; on the contrary, Bahá'í unity overcometh them all and doeth away with all these fancies and imaginations.

14

O thou who hast an illumined heart! Thou art even as the pupil of the eye, the very wellspring of the light, for God's love hath cast its rays upon thine inmost being and thou hast turned thy face toward the Kingdom of thy Lord.

Intense is the hatred, in America, between black and white, but my hope is that the power of the Kingdom will bind these two in friendship, and serve them as a healing balm.

Let them look not upon a man's colour but upon his heart. If the heart be filled with light, that man is nigh unto the threshold of His Lord; but if not, that man is careless of His Lord, be he white or be he black.

15

O thou dear handmaid of God! Thy letter hath been received, and its contents were noted.

Marriage, among the mass of the people, is a physical bond, and this union can only be temporary, since it is foredoomed to a physical separation at the close.

Among the people of Bahá, however, marriage must be a union of the body and of the spirit as well, for here both husband and wife are aglow with the same wine, both are enamoured of the same matchless Face, both live and move through the same spirit, both are illumined by the same glory. This connection between them is a spiritual one, hence it is a bond that will abide forever. Likewise do they enjoy strong and lasting ties in the physical world as well, for if the marriage is based both on the spirit and the body, that union is a true one, hence it will endure. If, however, the bond is physical and nothing more, it is sure to be only temporary, and must inexorably end in separation.

When, therefore, the people of Bahá undertake to marry, the union must be a true relationship, a spiritual coming together as well as a physical one, so that throughout every phase of life, and in all the worlds of God, their union will endure; for this real oneness is a gleaming out of the love of God.

In the same way, when any souls grow to be true believers, they will attain a spiritual relationship with one another, and show forth a tenderness which is not of this world. They will, all of them, become elated from a draught of divine love, and that union of theirs, that connection, will also abide forever. Souls, that is. who will consign their own selves to oblivion, strip from themselves the defects of humankind, and unchain themselves from human bondage, will beyond any doubt be illumined with the heavenly splendours of oneness, and will all attain unto real union in the world that dieth not.

16

As for the question regarding marriage under the Law of God: first thou must choose one who is pleasing to thee, and then the matter is subject to the consent of father and mother. Before thou makest thy choice, they have no right to interfere.

17

Bahá'í marriage is the commitment of the two parties one to the other, and their mutual attachment of mind and heart. Each must, however, exercise the utmost care to become thoroughly acquainted with the character of the other, that the binding covenant between them may be a tie that will endure forever. Their purpose must be this: to become loving companions and comrades and at one with each other for time and eternity....

The true marriage of Bahá'ís is this, that husband and wife should be united both physically and spiritually, that they may ever improve the spiritual life of each other, and may enjoy everlasting unity throughout all the worlds of God. This is Bahá'í marriage.

18

O handmaids of the Lord! The spiritual assemblage that ye established in that illumined city is most propitious. Ye have made great strides; ye have surpassed the others, have arisen to serve the Holy Threshold, and have won heavenly bestowals. Now with all spiritual zeal must ye gather in that enlightened assemblage and recite the Holy Writings and engage in remembering the Lord. Set ye forth His arguments and proofs. Work ye for the guidance of the women in that land, teach the young girls and the children, so that the mothers may educate their little ones from their earliest days, thoroughly train them, rear them to have a goodly character and good morals, guide them to all the virtues of humankind, prevent the development of any behaviour that would be worthy of blame, and foster them in the embrace of Bahá'í education. Thus shall these tender infants be nurtured at the breast of the knowledge of God and His love. Thus shall they grow and flourish, and be taught righteousness and the dignity of humankind, resolution and the will to strive and to endure. Thus shall they learn perseverance in all things, the will to advance, high mindedness and high resolve, chastity and purity of life. Thus shall they be enabled to carry to a successful conclusion whatsoever they undertake.

Let the mothers consider that whatever concerneth the education of children is of the first importance. Let them put forth every effort in this regard, for when the bough is green and tender it will grow in whatever way ye train it. Therefore is it incumbent upon the mothers to rear their little ones even as a gardener tendeth his young plants. Let them strive by day and by night to establish within their children faith and certitude, the fear of God, the love of the Beloved of the worlds, and all good qualities and traits. Whensoever a mother seeth that her child hath done well, let her praise and applaud him and cheer his heart; and if the slightest undesirable trait should manifest itself, let her counsel the child and punish him, and use means based on reason, even a slight verbal chastisement should this be necessary. It is not, however, permissible to strike a child, or vilify him, for the child's character will be totally perverted if he be subjected to blows or verbal abuse.

19

As to the difference between that material civilization now prevailing, and the divine civilization which will be one of the benefits to derive from the House of Justice, it is this: material civilization, through the power of punitive and retaliatory laws, restraineth the people from criminal acts; and notwithstanding this, while laws to retaliate against and punish a man are continually proliferating, as ye can see, no laws exist to reward him. In all the cities of Europe and America, vast buildings have been erected to serve as jails for the criminals.

Divine civilization, however, so traineth every member of society that no one, with the exception of a negligible few, will undertake to commit a crime. There is thus a great difference between the prevention of crime through measures that are violent and retaliatory, and so training the people, and enlightening them, and spiritualizing them, that without any fear of punishment or vengeance to come, they will shun all criminal acts. They will, indeed, look upon the very commission of a crime as a great disgrace and in itself the harshest of punishments. They will become enamoured of human perfections, and will consecrate their lives to whatever will bring light to the world and will further those qualities which are acceptable at the Holy Threshold of God.

See then how wide is the difference between material civilization and divine. With force and punishments, material civilization seeketh to restrain the people from mischief, from inflicting harm on society and committing crimes. But in a divine civilization, the individual is so conditioned that with no fear of punishment, he shunneth the perpetration of crimes, seeth the crime itself as the severest of torments, and with alacrity and joy, setteth himself to acquiring the virtues of humankind, to furthering human progress, and to spreading light across the world.

20

It is incumbent upon Bahá'í children to surpass other children in the acquisition of sciences and arts, for they have been cradled in the grace of God.

Whatever other children learn in a year, let Bahá'í children learn in a month. The heart of 'Abdu'l-Bahá longeth, in its love, to find that Bahá'í young people, each and all, are known throughout the world for their intellectual attainments. There is no question but that they will exert all their efforts, their energies, their sense of pride, to acquire the sciences and arts.

21

O friends of the Pure and Omnipotent God! To be pure and holy in all things is an attribute of the consecrated soul and a necessary characteristic of the unenslaved mind. The best of perfections is immaculacy and the freeing of oneself from every defect. Once the individual is, in every respect, cleansed and purified, then will he become a focal centre reflecting the Manifest Light.

First in a human being's way of life must be purity, then freshness, cleanliness, and independence of spirit. First must the stream bed be cleansed, then may the sweet river waters be led into it. Chaste eyes enjoy the beatific vision of the Lord and know what this encounter

meaneth; a pure sense inhaletH the fragrances that blow from the rose gardens of His grace; a burnished heart will mirror forth the comely face of truth.

This is why, in Holy Scriptures, the counsels of heaven are likened to water, even as the Qur'an saith: 'And pure water send We down from Heaven,' ¹ and the Gospel: 'Except a man be baptized of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.' ² Thus it is clear that the Teachings which come from God are heavenly outpourings of grace; they are rain-showers of divine mercy, and they cleanse the human heart.

My meaning is this, that in every aspect of life, purity and holiness, cleanliness and refinement, exalt the human condition and further the development of man's inner reality. Even in the physical realm, cleanliness will conduce to spirituality, as the Holy Writings clearly state. And although bodily cleanliness is a physical thing, it hath, nevertheless, a powerful influence on the life of the spirit. It is even as a voice wondrously sweet, or a melody played: although sounds are but vibrations in the air which affect the ear's auditory nerve, and these vibrations are but chance phenomena carried along through the air, even so, see how they move the heart. A wondrous melody is wings for the spirit, and maketh the soul to tremble for joy. The purport is that physical cleanliness doth also exert its effect upon the human soul.

Observe how pleasing is cleanliness in the sight of God, and how specifically it is emphasized in the Holy Books of the Prophets; for the Scriptures forbid the eating or the use of any unclean thing. Some of these prohibitions were absolute, and binding upon all, and whoso transgressed the given law was abhorred of God and anathematized by the believers. Such, for example, were things categorically forbidden, the perpetration of which was accounted a most grievous sin, among them actions so loathsome that it is shameful even to speak their name.

¹ Qur'an 25: 50.

² cf. John 3: 5

But there are other forbidden things which do not cause immediate harm, and the injurious effects of which are only gradually produced: such acts are also repugnant to the Lord, and blameworthy in His sight, and repellent. The absolute unlawfulness of these, however, hath not been expressly set forth in the Text, but their avoidance is necessary to purity, cleanliness, the preservation of health, and freedom from addiction.

Among these latter is smoking tobacco, which is dirty, smelly, offensive—an evil habit, and one the harmfulness of which gradually becometh apparent to all. Every qualified physician hath ruled—and this hath also been proven by tests—that one of the components of tobacco is a deadly poison, and that the smoker is vulnerable to many and various diseases. This is why smoking hath been plainly set forth as repugnant from the standpoint of hygiene.

The Báb, at the outset of His mission, explicitly prohibited tobacco, and the friends one and all abandoned its use. But since those were times when dissimulation was permitted, and every individual who abstained from smoking was exposed to harassment, abuse and even death—the friends, in order not to advertise their beliefs, would smoke. Later on, the Book of Aqdas was revealed, and since smoking tobacco was not specifically forbidden there, the believers did not give it up. The Blessed Beauty, however, always expressed repugnance for it, and although, in the early days, there were reasons why He would smoke a little tobacco, in time He completely renounced it, and those sanctified souls who followed Him in all things also abandoned its use.

My meaning is that in the sight of God, smoking tobacco is deprecated, abhorrent, filthy in the extreme; and, albeit by degrees, highly injurious to health. It is also a waste of money and time, and maketh the user a prey to a noxious addiction. To those who stand firm in the Covenant, this habit is therefore censured both by reason and experience, and renouncing it will bring relief and peace of mind to all men. Furthermore, this will make it possible to have a fresh mouth and unstained fingers, and hair that is free of a foul and repellent smell. On receipt of this missive, the friends will surely, by whatever means and even over a period of time, forsake this pernicious habit. Such is my hope.

As to opium, it is foul and accursed. God protect us from the punishment He inflicteth on the user. According to the explicit Text of the Most Holy Book, it is forbidden and its use is utterly condemned. Reason showeth that smoking opium is a kind of insanity, and experience attesteth that the user is completely cut off from the human kingdom. May God protect all against the perpetration of an act so hideous as this, an act which layeth in ruins the very foundation of what it is to be human, and which causeth the user to be dispossessed for ever and ever. For opium fasteneth on the soul, so that the user's conscience dieth, his mind is blotted away, his perceptions are eroded. It turneth the living into the dead. It quencheth the natural heat. No greater harm can be conceived than that which opium inflicteth. Fortunate are they who never even speak the name of it; then think how wretched is the user.

O ye lovers of God! in this, the cycle of Almighty God, violence and force, constraint and oppression, are one and all condemned. It is, however, mandatory that the use of opium be prevented by any means whatsoever, that perchance the human race may be delivered from this most powerful of plagues. And otherwise, woe and misery to whoso falleth short of his duty to his Lord. ¹

O Divine Providence! Bestow Thou in all things purity and cleanliness upon the people of Bahá. Grant that they be freed from all defilement, and released from all addictions. Save them from committing any repugnant act, unbind them from the chains of every evil habit, that they may live pure and free, wholesome and cleanly, worthy to serve at Thy Sacred Threshold and fit to be related to their Lord. Deliver them from intoxicating drinks and tobacco, save them, rescue them, from this opium that bringeth on madness, suffer them to enjoy the sweet savours of holiness, that they may drink deep of the mystic cup of heavenly love and know the rapture of being drawn ever closer unto the Realm of the All-Glorious. For it is even as Thou hast said: 'All that thou hast in thy cellar will not appease the thirst of my love – bring me, O cup-bearer, of the wine of the spirit a cup full as the sea!'

¹ cf. Qur'an 39: 57

O ye, God's loved ones! Experience hath shown how greatly the renouncing of smoking, of intoxicating drink, and of opium, conduceth to health and vigour, to the expansion and keenness of the mind and to bodily strength. There is today a people who strictly avoid tobacco, intoxicating liquor and opium. This people is far and away superior to the others, for strength and physical courage, for health, beauty and comeliness. A single one of their men can stand up to ten men of another tribe. This hath proved true of the entire people: that is, member for member, each individual of this community is in every respect superior to the individuals of other communities.

Make ye then a mighty effort, that the purity and sanctity which, above all else, are cherished by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, shall distinguish the people of Bahá; that in every kind of excellence the people of God shall surpass all other human beings; that both outwardly and inwardly they shall prove superior to the rest; that for purity, immaculacy, refinement, and the preservation of health, they shall be leaders in the vanguard of those who know. And that by their freedom from enslavement, their knowledge, their self-control, they shall be first among the pure, the free and the wise.

22

There are two ways of healing sickness, material means and spiritual means. The first is by the treatment of physicians; the second consisteth in prayers offered by the spiritual ones to God and in turning to Him. Both means should be used and practised.

Illnesses which occur by reason of physical cause should be treated by doctors with medical remedies; those which are due to spiritual causes disappear through spiritual means. Thus an illness caused by affliction, fear, nervous impressions, will be healed more effectively by spiritual rather than by physical treatment. Hence, both kinds of treatment should be followed; they are not contradictory. Therefore thou shouldst also accept physical remedies inasmuch as these too have come from the mercy and favour of God, Who hath revealed and made manifest medical

science so that His servants may profit from this kind of treatment also. Thou shouldst give equal attention to spiritual treatments, for they produce marvellous effects.

Now, if thou wishest to know the true remedy which will heal man from all sickness and will give him the health of the divine kingdom, know that it is the precepts and teachings of God. Focus thine attention upon them.

23

O lover of humankind! Thy letter hath been received, and it telleth, God be praised, of thy health and well-being. It appeareth, from thine answer to a previous letter, that feelings, of affection were being established between thyself and the friends.

One must see in every human being only that which is worthy of praise. When this is done, one can be a friend to the whole human race. If, however, we look at people from the standpoint of their faults, then being a friend to them is a formidable task.

It happened one day in the time of Christ—may the life of the world be a sacrifice unto Him—that He passed by the dead body of a dog, a carcass reeking, hideous, the limbs rotting away. One of those present said: 'How foul its stench!' And another said: 'How sickening! How loathsome!' To be brief, each one of them had something to add to the list.

But then Christ Himself spoke, and He told them: 'Look at that dog's teeth! How gleaming white!'

The Messiah's sin-covering gaze did not for a moment dwell upon the repulsiveness of that carrion. The one element of that dead dog's carcass which was not abomination was the teeth: and Jesus looked upon their brightness.

Thus is it incumbent upon us, when we direct our gaze toward other people, to see where they excel, not where they fail.

Praise be to God, thy goal is to promote the wellbeing of humankind and to help the souls to overcome their faults. This good intention will produce laudable results.

24

As to thy question, doth every soul without exception achieve life everlasting? Know thou that immortality belongeth to those souls in whom hath been breathed the spirit of life from God. All save these are lifeless—they are the dead, even as Christ hath explained in the Gospel text. He whose eyes the Lord hath opened will see the souls of men in the stations they will occupy after their release from the body. He will find the living ones thriving within the precincts of their Lord, and the dead sunk down in the lowest abyss of perdition.

Know thou that every soul is fashioned after the nature of God, each being pure and holy at his birth. Afterwards, however, the individuals will vary according to what they acquire of virtues or vices in this world. Although all existent beings are in their very nature created in ranks or degrees, for capacities are various, nevertheless every individual is born holy and pure, and only thereafter may he become defiled.

And further, although the degrees of being are various, yet all are good. Observe the human body, its limbs, its members, the eye, the ear, the organs of smell, of taste, the hands, the fingernails. Notwithstanding the differences among all these parts, each one within the limitations of its own being participated in a coherent whole. If one of them faileth it must be healed, and should no remedy avail, that part must be removed.

25

Those souls that, in this day, enter the divine kingdom and attain everlasting life, although materially dwelling on earth, yet in reality soar in the realm of heaven. Their bodies may linger on earth but their spirits travel in the immensity of space. For as thoughts widen and become illumined, they acquire the power of flight and transport man to the kingdom of God.

26

O thou servant of God! Do not grieve at the afflictions and calamities that have befallen thee. All calamities and afflictions have been created for man so that he may spurn this mortal world—a world to which he is much attached. When he experienceth severe trials and hardships, then his nature will recoil and he will desire the eternal realm—a realm which is sanctified from all afflictions and calamities. Such is the case with the man who is wise. He shall never drink from a cup which is at the end distasteful, but, on the contrary, he will seek the cup of pure and limpid water. He will not taste of the honey that is mixed with poison.

Praise thou God, that thou hast been tried and hast experienced such a test. Be patient and grateful. Turn thy face to the divine Kingdom and strive that thou mayest acquire merciful characteristics, mayest become illumined and acquire the attributes of the Kingdom and of the Lord. Endeavour to become indifferent to the pleasures of this world and to its comfort, to remain firm and steadfast in the Covenant and to promulgate the Cause of God.

This is the cause of the exaltation of man, the cause of his glory and of his salvation.

27

Follow thou the way of thy Lord, and say not that which the ears cannot bear to hear, for such speech is like luscious food given to small children. However palatable, rare and rich the food may be, it cannot be assimilated by the digestive organs of a suckling child. Therefore unto every one who hath a right, let his settled measure be given.

'Not everything that a man knoweth can be disclosed, nor can everything that he can disclose be regarded as timely, nor can every timely utterance be considered as suited to the capacity of those who hear it.' Such is the consummate wisdom to be observed in thy pursuits. Be not oblivious thereof, if thou wishest to be a man of action under all conditions. First

diagnose the disease and identify the malady, then prescribe the remedy, for such is the perfect method of the skilful physician.

28

The teacher, when teaching, must be himself fully enkindled, so that his utterance, like unto a flame of fire, may exert influence and consume the veil of self and passion. He must also be utterly humble and lowly so that others may be edified, and be totally self-effaced and evanescent so that he may teach with the melody of the Concourse on high—otherwise his teaching will have no effect.

29

O God, my God! Illumine the brows of Thy true lovers and support them with angelic hosts of certain triumph. Set firm their feet on Thy straight path, and out of Thine ancient bounty open before them the portals of Thy blessings; for they are expending on Thy pathway what Thou hast bestowed upon them, safeguarding Thy Faith, putting their trust in their remembrance of Thee, offering up their hearts for love of Thee, and withholding not what they possess in adoration for Thy Beauty and in their search for ways to please Thee.

O my Lord! Ordain for them a plenteous share, a destined recompense and sure reward.

Verily, Thou art the Sustainer, the Helper, the Generous, the Bountiful, the Ever-Bestowing.

Whoso reciteth this prayer with lowliness and fervour will bring gladness and joy to the heart of this Servant; it will be even as meeting Him face to face.

He is the All-Glorious!

O God, my God! Lowly and tearful, I raise my suppliant hands to Thee and cover my face in the dust of that Threshold of Thine, exalted above the knowledge of the learned, and the praise of all that glorify Thee.

Graciously look upon Thy servant, humble and lowly at Thy door, with the glances of the eye of Thy mercy, and immerse him in the Ocean of Thine eternal grace.

Lord! He is a poor and lowly servant of Thine, enthralled and imploring Thee, captive in Thy hand, praying fervently to Thee, trusting in Thee, in tears before Thy face, calling to Thee and beseeching Thee, saying:

O Lord, my God! Give me Thy grace to serve Thy loved ones, strengthen me in my servitude to Thee, illumine my brow with the light of adoration in Thy court of holiness, and of prayer to Thy Kingdom of grandeur. Help me to be selfless at the heavenly entrance of Thy gate, and aid me to be detached from all things within Thy holy, precincts. Lord! Give me to drink from the chalice of selflessness; with its robe clothe me, and in its ocean immerse me. Make me as dust in the pathway of Thy loved ones, and grant that I may offer up my soul for the earth ennobled by the footsteps of Thy chosen ones in Thy path, O Lord of Glory in the Highest.

With this prayer doth Thy servant call Thee, at dawn-tide and in the night-season. Fulfil his heart's desire, O Lord! Illumine his heart, gladden his bosom, kindle his light, that he may serve Thy Cause and Thy servants.

Thou art the Bestower, the Pitiful, the Most Bountiful, the Gracious, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

B

Selections from

Some Answered Questions

31

As for the Báb, ¹ —may My soul be His sacrifice! —at a youthful age, that is to say when He had reached the twenty-fifth year of His blessed life, He stood forth to proclaim His Cause. It was universally admitted by the Shiites that He had never studied in any school, and had not acquired knowledge from any teacher; all the people of Shiraz bear witness to this. Nevertheless, He suddenly appeared before the people, endowed with the most complete erudition. Although He was but a merchant, He confounded all the 'Ulama ² of Persia. All alone, in a way which is beyond imagination, He upheld the Cause among the Persians, who are renowned for their religious fanaticism. This illustrious soul arose with such power that He shook the supports of the religion, of the morals, the conditions, the habits, and the customs of Persia, and instituted new rules, new laws, and a new religion. Though the great personages of the State, nearly all the clergy, and the public men, arose to destroy and annihilate Him, He alone withstood them, and moved the whole of Persia.

Many 'Ulama and public men, as well as other people, joyfully sacrificed their lives in His Cause, and hastened to the plain of martyrdom.

The government, the nation, the doctors of divinity, and the great personages, desired to extinguish His light, but they could not do so. At last His moon arose, His star shone forth, His foundations became firmly established, and His dawning-place became brilliant. He imparted divine education to an unenlightened multitude and produced marvellous

¹ The Báb is here designated by His title Hadrat-i-A'la, His Supreme Highness; but for the convenience of the reader we shall continue to designate Him by the name under which He is known throughout Europe, i.e. the Báb.

² Doctors of the religion of Islam.

results on the thoughts, morals, customs, and conditions of the Persians. He announced the glad tidings of the manifestation of the Sun of Bahá to His followers, and prepared them to believe.

The appearance of such wonderful signs and great results, the effects produced upon the minds of the people, and upon the prevailing ideas; the establishment of the foundations of progress, and the organisation of the principles of success and prosperity by a young merchant, constitute the greatest proof that he was a perfect educator. A just person will never hesitate to believe this.

32

Bahá'u'lláh ¹ appeared at a time when the Persian Empire was immersed in profound obscurantism and ignorance, and lost in the blindest fanaticism.

In the European histories, no doubt, you have read detailed accounts of the morals, customs, and ideas of the Persians during the last centuries. It is useless to repeat them. Briefly, we will say that Persia had fallen so low that to all foreign travellers it was a matter of regret that this country, which in former times had been so glorious and highly civilised, had now become so decayed, ruined, and upset, and that its population had lost its dignity.

It was at this time that Bahá'u'lláh appeared. His father was one of the viziers, not one of the 'Ulama. As all the people of Persia know, He had never studied in any school, nor had He associated with the 'Ulama or the men of learning. The early part of His life was passed in the greatest happiness. His companions and associates were Persians of the highest rank, but not learned men.

¹ Jamal-i-Mubarak, the Blessed Beauty, the title which is here given to Bahá'u'lláh. He is also called Jamal-i-Qidam, the Pre-existent, or Ancient Beauty. But we shall designate Him as Bahá'u'lláh, the title by which He is known in the West.

As soon as the Báb became manifested, Bahá'u'lláh said, 'This great man is the Lord of the righteous, and faith in Him is incumbent upon all.' And He arose to assist the Báb, and gave many proofs and positive evidences of His truth, in spite of the fact that the 'Ulama of the state religion had constrained the Persian Government to oppose and resist Him, and had further issued decrees ordering the massacre, pillage, persecution, and expulsion of His followers. In all the provinces they began to kill, to burn, to pillage the converts and even to assault the women and children. Regardless of this, Bahá'u'lláh arose to proclaim the word of the Báb with the greatest firmness and energy. Not for one moment was He in concealment; He mixed openly with His enemies. He was occupied in showing forth evidences and proofs, and was recognised as the herald of the word of God. In many changes and chances He endured the greatest misfortunes, and at every moment He ran the risk of being martyred.

He was put into chains, and confined in an underground prison. His vast property and inheritance were pillaged and confiscated. He was exiled four times from land to land, and found rest only in the 'Greatest Prison.'

1

In spite of all this He never ceased for one instant His proclamation of the greatness of the Cause of God. He manifested such virtue, knowledge, and perfections, that He became a wonder to all the people of Persia. So much so that in Tihrán, Baghdad, Constantinople, Roumelia, and even in Akká, every one of the learned and scientific men who entered his presence, whether friend or enemy, never failed to receive the most sufficient and convincing answer to whatever question was propounded. All frequently acknowledged that He was alone and unique in all perfections.

It often happened that in Baghdad certain Muslim 'Ulama, Jewish rabbis, and Christians, met together with some European scholars, in a blessed reunion: each one had some question to propose, and although they were possessed of varying degrees of culture, they each heard a sufficient

¹ Exiled first to Baghdad, then to Constantinople, then to Adrianople, He was imprisoned in Akká (Acre), 'the Greatest Prison', in 1869.

and convincing reply, and retired satisfied. Even the Persian 'Ulama who were at Karbila and Najaf chose a wise man whom they sent on a mission to Him; his name was Mullá Hasan 'Amu. He came into the Holy Presence, and proposed a number of questions on behalf of the 'Ulama, to which Bahá'u'lláh replied. Then Hasan 'Amu said: 'The 'Ulama recognise without hesitation and confess the knowledge and virtue of Bahá'u'lláh, and they are unanimously convinced that in all learning He has no peer or equal; and it is also evident that He has never studied or acquired this learning'; but still the 'Ulama say: "We are not contented with this, we do not acknowledge the reality of His mission by virtue of His wisdom and righteousness. Therefore we ask Him to show us a miracle in order to satisfy and tranquillise our hearts."

Bahá'u'lláh replied: 'Although you have no right to ask this, for God should test His creatures, and they should not test God, still I allow and accept this request. But the Cause of God is not a theatrical display that is presented every hour, of which some new diversion may be asked for every day. If it were thus, the Cause of God would become mere child's play.

'The 'Ulama must therefore assemble and with one accord choose one miracle, and write that after the performance of this miracle they will no longer entertain doubts about Me, and that all will acknowledge and confess the truth of My Cause. Let them seal this paper and bring it to Me. This must be the accepted criterion: If the miracle is performed, no doubt will remain for them; and if not, We shall be convicted of imposture.' The learned man, Hasan Amu, rose and replied, There is no more to be said'; he then kissed the knee of the Blessed One although he was not a believer, and went. He gathered the 'Ulama and gave them the sacred message. They consulted together and said, 'This man is an enchanter: perhaps he will perform an enchantment, and then we shall have nothing more to say.' Acting on this belief, they did not dare to push the matter further. ¹

¹ The penetrating judgment of Bahá'u'lláh upon this occasion overcame the malignity of His enemies, who, it was certain, would never agree in choosing what miracle to ask for.

This man, Hasan 'Amu, mentioned this fact at many meetings. After leaving Karbila he went to Kirmánsháh and Tihrán, and spread a detailed account of it everywhere, laying emphasis on the fear and the withdrawal of the 'Ulama.

Briefly, all His adversaries in the Orient acknowledged His greatness, grandeur, knowledge, and virtue; and though they were His enemies, they always spoke of Him as 'the renowned Bahá'u'lláh'.

At the time when this great Light suddenly arose upon the horizon of Persia, all the people, the ministers, the 'Ulama, and men of other classes rose against Him, pursuing him with the greatest animosity, and proclaiming 'that this man wishes to suppress and destroy the religion, the law, the nation, and the empire.' The same was said of Christ But Bahá'u'lláh alone and without support resisted them all, without ever showing the least weakness. At last they said: 'As long as this man is in Persia there will be no peace and tranquillity; we must banish Him, so that Persia may return to a state of quietude.'

They proceeded to use violence towards Him to oblige Him to ask for permission to leave Persia, thinking that by this means the light of His truth would be extinguished, but the result was quite the contrary. The Cause became magnified, and its flame more intense. At first, it spread throughout Persia only, but the exile of Bahá'u'lláh caused the diffusion of the Cause throughout other countries. Afterwards His enemies said, 'Iraq is not far enough from Persia; we must send Him to a more distant kingdom.' This is why the Persian Government determined to send Bahá'u'lláh from 'Iraq to Constantinople.

Again the event proved that the Cause was not in the least weakened; once more they said, 'Constantinople is a place of passage and of sojourn for various races and peoples, among them are many Persians.' For this reason the Persians had Him further exiled to Roumelia; but, when there, the flame became more powerful, and the Cause more exalted. At last the Persians said, 'Not one of these places is safe from His influence, we must send Him to some place where He will be reduced to powerlessness, and where His family and followers will have to submit to the direst

afflictions.' So they chose the prison of 'Akká which is reserved especially for murderers, thieves, and highway robbers, and in truth they classed Him with such people. But the power of God became manifested: His word was promulgated, and the greatness of Bahá'u'lláh then became evident, for it was from this prison and under such humiliating circumstances that He caused Persia to advance from one state into another state, overcame all His enemies, and proved to them that they could not resist the Cause. His holy teachings penetrated all regions, and His Cause was established.

Indeed, in all parts of Persia His enemies arose against Him with the greatest hatred, imprisoning, killing, and beating His converts; and burning and razing to the ground thousands of dwellings, striving by every means to exterminate and crush the Cause. In spite of all this, from the prison of murderers, highway robbers, and thieves, it became exalted. His teachings were spread abroad, and His exhortations affected many of those who had been the most full of hatred, and made them firm believers; even the Persian Government itself became awakened, and regretted that which had arisen through the fault of the 'Ulama.

When Bahá'u'lláh came to this prison in the Holy Land, the wise men realised that the glad tidings which God gave through the tongue of the Prophets two or three thousand years before, were again manifested, and that God was faithful to His promise; for to some of the Prophets He had revealed and given the good news that 'the Lord of Hosts should be manifested in the Holy Land.' All these promises were fulfilled; and it is difficult to understand how Bahá'u'lláh could have been obliged to leave Persia, and to pitch His tent in this Holy Land, but for the persecution of His enemies, His banishment, and exile. His enemies intended that His imprisonment should completely destroy and annihilate the blessed Cause, but this prison was in reality of the greatest assistance, and became the means of its development. The divine renown of Bahá'u'lláh reached the East and the West, and the rays of the Sun of Truth illuminated all the world. Praise be to God! though He was a prisoner, His tent was raised on Mount Carmel, and He moved abroad with the greatest majesty. Every person, friend or stranger, who came into His presence used to say, 'This is a prince, not a captive.'

As soon as He arrived at this prison He addressed an epistle to Napoleon¹, which He sent through the French ambassador. The gist of it was: 'Ask what is Our crime and why We are confined in this prison and this dungeon.' Napoleon made no reply. Then a second epistle was issued, which is contained in the *Súriy-i-Haykal*.²

The epitome of it is: 'Oh Napoleon, as thou hast not listened to My proclamation, and as thou hast not answered it, thy dominion will before long be taken away from thee and thou wilt be utterly destroyed.' This epistle was sent to Napoleon by post, through the care of Cesar Ketaphakou,³ as was known to all the companions of His exile. The text of this warning reached the whole of Persia, for it was at that time that the *Kitáb-i-Haykal* was spread in Persia, and this epistle was among the contents of this book. This happened in 1869 A.D., and as this *Súriy-i-Haykal* was circulated in Persia and India, and was in the hands of all believers, they were waiting to see what would come to pass. Not long after, in 1870 A.D., the war between Germany and France broke out; and though no one at that time expected the victory of Germany, Napoleon was defeated and dishonoured, he surrendered to his enemies, and his glory was changed into deep abasement.

Tablets⁴ were also sent to other kings, and amongst them was the letter to H.M. Nasiri'd-Din Shah. In that epistle Bahá'u'lláh said: 'Have Me summoned, gather the 'Ulama, and ask for proofs and arguments, so that the truth and falsehood may become known.' H.M. Nasiri'd-Din Shah sent the blessed epistle to the 'Ulama and proposed to them that they should undertake this mission, but they dared not do so. Then he asked seven of the most celebrated among them to write an answer to the challenge. After some time they returned the blessed letter, saying, 'This man is the opposer of religion and the enemy of the Shah.' His majesty the Shah of Persia was much vexed, and said, 'This is a question for proofs and

¹ Napoleon III.

² One of Bahá'u'lláh's works written after His Declaration.

³ Son of a French Consul in Syria with whom Bahá'u'lláh had friendly relations.

⁴ Name given to the epistles of Bahá'u'lláh.

arguments, and of truth or falsehood: what has it to do with enmity to the Government? Alas! how much we respected these 'Ulama, who cannot even reply to this epistle.'

Briefly, all that was recorded in the Tablets to the Kings is being fulfilled: if from the year 1870 A.D. we compare the events that have occurred, we will find that everything that has happened has appeared as predicted; only a few remain which will afterwards become manifested.

So also foreign peoples, and other sects who were not believers, attributed many wonderful things to Bahá'u'lláh. Some believed that He was a saint ¹, and some even wrote treatises about Him. One of them. Siyyid Davudi, a Sunnite savant of Baghdad, wrote a short treatise in which he related certain supernatural acts of Bahá'u'lláh. Even now, in all parts of the East, there are some people who though they do not believe in His manifestation, nevertheless believe Him to be a saint and relate miracles attributed to Him.

To sum up, both His antagonists and His partisans, as well as all those who were received in the sacred spot, acknowledged and bore witness to the greatness of Bahá'u'lláh, though they did not believe in Him, still they acknowledged His grandeur, and as soon as they entered the sacred spot, the presence of Bahá'u'lláh produced such an effect on most of them that they could not utter a word. How many times it happened that one of His most bitter enemies would resolve within himself: 'I will say such and such things when I reach His presence, and I will dispute and argue thus with Him,' but when he entered the Holy Presence he would become amazed and confounded and remain speechless.

Bahá'u'lláh had never studied Arabic, He had not had a tutor or teacher nor had He entered a school; nevertheless the eloquence and elegance of His blessed expositions in Arabic, as well as His Arabic writings, caused astonishment and stupefaction to the most accomplished Arabic scholars, and all recognised and declared that He was incomparable and unequalled.

¹ Valí.

If we carefully examine the text of the Bible, we see that the Divine Manifestation never said to those who denied him, 'Whatever miracle you desire, I am ready to perform, and I will submit to whatever test you propose.' But in the Epistle to the Shah, Bahá'u'lláh said clearly, 'Gather the 'Ulama and summon Me, that the evidences and proofs may be established.' ¹

For fifty years Bahá'u'lláh faced His enemies like a mountain: all wished to annihilate Him and sought His destruction. A thousand times they planned to crucify and destroy Him, and during these fifty years He was in constant danger.

In this day Persia is in such a state of decadence and ruin, that all intelligent men, whether Persians or foreigners, who realise the true state of affairs, recognise that its progress, its civilisation and its reconstruction, depend upon the promulgation of the teachings and the development of the principles of this great personage.

Christ in His blessed day in reality only educated eleven men: the greatest of them was Peter, who nevertheless, when he was tested, thrice denied Christ. In spite of this, the Cause of Christ subsequently permeated the world. At the present day Bahá'u'lláh has educated thousands of souls who, while under the menace of the sword, raised to the highest heaven the cry of '*Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá*' ² and in the fire of tests, their faces became illuminated like gold. Then reflect what will take place in the future.

Finally, we must be just, and acknowledge what an educator this Glorious Being was, what marvellous signs were manifested by Him, and what power and might have been realised in the world through Him.

¹ Cf. page 34 note 1. In giving such importance to the example of the good sense of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá means to emphasise the uselessness of miracles as a proof of the truth of the Manifestations of God.

² A cry used as a declaration of faith by the Bahá'ís, literally 'O Thou the Glory of Glories'.

The honour and exaltation of every existing being depends upon causes and circumstances.

The excellency, the adornment, and the perfection of the earth is to be verdant and fertile through the bounty of the clouds of springtime. Plants grow, flowers and fragrant herbs spring up, fruit-bearing trees become full of blossoms, and bring forth fresh and new fruit. Gardens become beautiful, and meadows adorned; mountains and plains are clad in a green robe, and gardens, fields, villages and cities are decorated. This is the prosperity of the mineral world.

The height of exaltation and the perfection of the vegetable world is that a tree should grow on the bank of a stream of fresh water, that a gentle breeze should blow on it, that the warmth of the sun should shine on it, that a gardener should attend to its cultivation, and that day by day it should develop and yield fruit. But its real prosperity is to progress into the animal and human world, and replace that which has been exhausted in the bodies of animals and men.

The exaltation of the animal world is to possess perfect members, organs, and powers, and to have all its needs supplied. This is its chief glory, its honour and exaltation. So the supreme happiness of an animal is to have possession of a green and fertile meadow, perfectly pure flowing water, and a lovely, verdant forest. If these things are provided for it, no greater prosperity can be imagined. For example, if a bird builds its nest in a green and fruitful forest, in a beautiful high place, upon a strong tree, and at the top of a lofty branch, and if it finds all its needs of seeds and water, this is its perfect prosperity.

But real prosperity for the animal consists in passing from the animal world to the human world, like the microscopic beings that, through the water and air, enter into man and are assimilated, and replace that which has been consumed in his body. This is the great honour and prosperity for the animal world; no greater honour can be conceived for it.

Therefore it is evident and clear that this wealth, this comfort, and this material abundance, form the complete prosperity of minerals, vegetables, and animals. No riches, wealth, comfort, or ease of the material world is equal to the wealth of a bird; all the areas of these plains and mountains are its dwelling, and all the seeds and harvests are its food and wealth, and all the lands, villages, meadows, pastures, forests, and wildernesses are its possessions. Now, which is the richer, this bird, or the most wealthy man? for no matter how many seeds it may take or bestow, its wealth does not decrease.

Then it is clear that the honour and exaltation of man must be something more than material riches; material comforts are only a branch, but the root of the exaltation of man is the good attributes and virtues which are the adornments of his reality. These are the divine appearances, the heavenly bounties, the sublime emotions, the love and knowledge of God; universal wisdom, intellectual perception, scientific discoveries, justice, equity, truthfulness, benevolence, natural courage, and innate fortitude; the respect for rights and the keeping of agreements and covenants; rectitude in all circumstances; serving the truth under all conditions; the sacrifice of one's life for the good of all people; kindness and esteem for all nations; obedience to the teachings of God; service in the Divine Kingdom; the guidance of the people, and the education of the nations and races. This is the prosperity of the human world! This is the exaltation of man in the world! This is eternal life and heavenly honour!

These virtues do not appear from the reality of man except through the power of God and the divine teachings, for they need supernatural power for their manifestation. It may be that in the world of nature a trace of these perfections may appear; but they are unstable and ephemeral; they are like the rays of the sun upon the wall.

As the compassionate God has placed such a wonderful crown upon the head of man, man should strive that its brilliant jewels may become visible in the world.

Having shown that the spirit of man exists, we must prove its immortality.

The immortality of the spirit is mentioned in the Holy Books; it is the fundamental basis of the divine religions. Now punishments and rewards are said to be of two kinds. Firstly, the rewards and punishments of this life; secondly, those of the other world. But the paradise and hell of existence are found in all the worlds of God, whether in this world or in the spiritual heavenly worlds. Gaining these rewards is the gaining of eternal life. That is why Christ said, 'Act in such a way that you may find eternal life, and that you may be born of water and the spirit, so that you may enter into the Kingdom.'

The rewards of this life are the virtues and perfections which adorn the reality of man. For example, he was dark and becomes luminous, he was ignorant and becomes wise, he was neglectful and becomes vigilant, he was asleep and becomes awakened, he was dead and becomes living, he was blind and becomes a seer, he was deaf and becomes a hearer, he was earthly and becomes heavenly, he was material and becomes spiritual. Through these rewards he gains spiritual birth, and becomes a new creature. He becomes the manifestation of the verse in the Gospel where it is said of the disciples that they were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God; ¹ that is to say, they were delivered from the animal characteristics and qualities which are the characteristics of human nature and they became qualified with the divine characteristics, which are the bounty of God; this is the meaning of the second birth. For such people there is no greater torture than being veiled from God, and no more severe punishment than sensual vices, dark qualities, lowness of nature, engrossment in carnal desires. When they are delivered through the light of faith from the darkness of these vices, and become illuminated with the radiance of the sun of reality, and ennobled with all the virtues, they esteem this the greatest reward, and they know it to be the true paradise. In the same way they consider that the spiritual punishment, that is to say the torture and punishment of

¹ John i. 13.

existence, is to be subjected to the world of nature, to be veiled from God, to be brutal and ignorant, to fall into carnal lusts, to be absorbed in animal frailties; to be characterised with dark qualities, such as falsehood, tyranny, cruelty, attachment to the affairs of the world, and being immersed in satanic ideas; for them, these are the greatest punishments and tortures.

Likewise the rewards of the other world are the eternal life which is clearly mentioned in all the Holy Books, the divine perfections, the eternal bounties, and everlasting felicity. The rewards of the other world are the perfections and the peace obtained in the spiritual worlds after leaving this world; whilst the rewards of this life are the real luminous perfections which are realised in this world, and which are the cause of eternal life, for they are the very progress of existence. It is like the man who passes from the embryonic world to the state of maturity, and becomes the manifestation of these words: 'Blessed be God, the best of Creators.' The rewards of the other world are peace, the spiritual graces, the various spiritual gifts in the Kingdom of God, the gaining of the desires of the heart and the soul, and the meeting of God in the world of eternity. In the same way the punishments of the other world, that is to say, the torments of the other world, consist in being deprived of the special divine blessings and the absolute bounties, and falling into the lowest degrees of existence. He who is deprived of these divine favours, although he continues after death, is considered as dead by the people of truth.

The logical proof of the immortality of the spirit is this, that no sign can come from a non-existing thing; that is to say, it is impossible that from absolute non-existence signs should appear, for the signs are the consequence of an existence, and the consequence depends upon the existence of the principle. So, from a non-existing sun no light can radiate, from a non-existing sea no waves appear, from a non-existing cloud no rain falls; a non-existing tree yields no fruit; a non-existing man neither manifests nor produces anything. Therefore as long as signs of existence appear, they are a proof that the possessor of the sign is existent.

Consider that today the Kingdom of Christ exists: from a non-existing king how could such a great kingdom be manifested? How, from a non-existing sea, can the waves mount so high? From a non-existing garden, how can such fragrant breezes be wafted? Reflect that no effect, no trace, no influence remains of any being after its members are dispersed and its elements are decomposed, whether it be a mineral, a vegetable, or an animal. There is only the human reality and the spirit of man which, after the disintegration of the members, dispersing of the particles, and the destruction of the composition, persists, and continues to act and to have power.

This question is extremely subtle; consider it attentively. This is a rational proof which we are giving, so that the wise may weigh it in the balance of reason and justice. But if the human spirit will rejoice and be attracted to the Kingdom of God, if the inner sight becomes opened, and the spiritual hearing strengthened, and the spiritual feelings predominant, he will see the immortality of the spirit as clearly as he sees the sun, and the glad tidings and signs of God will encompass him.

35

Know that the conditions of existence are limited to the conditions of servitude, of prophethood, and of Deity, but the divine and the contingent perfections are unlimited. When you reflect deeply, you discover that also outwardly the perfections of existence are also unlimited, for you cannot find a being so perfect that you cannot imagine a superior one. For example, you cannot see a ruby in the mineral kingdom, a rose in the vegetable kingdom, or a nightingale in the animal kingdom, without imagining that there might be better specimens. As the divine bounties are endless, so human perfections are endless. If it were possible to reach a limit of perfection, then one of the realities of the beings might reach the condition of being independent of God, and the contingent might attain to the condition of the absolute. But for every being there is a point which it cannot overpass; that is to say, he who is in the condition of servitude, however far he may progress in gaining limitless perfections, will never reach the condition of Deity. It is the same with the other beings: a mineral, however far it may progress in the

mineral kingdom, cannot gain the vegetable power; also in a flower, however far it may progress in the vegetable kingdom, no power of the senses will appear. So this silver mineral cannot gain hearing or sight; it can only improve in its own condition, and become a perfect mineral, but it cannot acquire the power of growth, or the power of sensation, or attain to life; it can only progress in its own condition.

For example, Peter cannot become Christ. All that he can do is, in the condition of servitude, to attain endless perfections; for every existing reality is capable of making progress. As the spirit of man after putting off this material form has an everlasting life, certainly any existing being is capable of making progress; therefore it is permitted to ask for advancement, forgiveness, mercy, beneficence, and blessings for a man after his death, because existence is capable of progression. That is why in the prayers of Bahá'u'lláh forgiveness and remission of sins are asked for those who have died. Moreover, as people in this world are in need of God, they will also need Him in the other world. The creatures are always in need, and God is absolutely independent, whether in this world or in the world to come.

The wealth of the other world is nearness to God. Consequently it is certain that those who are near the Divine Court are allowed to intercede, and this intercession is approved by God. But intercession in the other world is not like intercession in this world: it is another thing, another reality, which cannot be expressed in words.

If a wealthy man at the time of his death bequeaths a gift to the poor and miserable, and gives a part of his wealth to be spent for them, perhaps this action may be the cause of his pardon and forgiveness, and of his progress in the Divine Kingdom.

Also a father and mother endure the greatest troubles and hardships for their children; and often when the children have reached the age of maturity, the parents pass on to the other world. Rarely does it happen that a father and mother in this world see the reward of the care and trouble they have undergone for their children. Therefore children, in return for this care and trouble, must show forth charity and beneficence,

and must implore pardon and forgiveness for their parents So you ought, in return for the love and kindness shown you by your father, to give to the poor for his sake, with greatest submission and humility implore pardon and remission of sins, and ask for the supreme mercy.

It is even possible that the condition of those who have died in sin and unbelief may become changed; that is to say, they may become the object of pardon through the bounty of God, not through His justice; for bounty is giving without desert, and justice is giving what is deserved. As we have power to pray for these souls here, so likewise we shall possess the same power in the other world, which is the Kingdom of God. Are not all the people in that world the creatures of God? Therefore in that world also they can make progress. As here they can receive light by their supplications, there also they can plead for forgiveness, and receive light through entreaties and supplications. Thus as souls in this world, through the help of the supplications, the entreaties, and the prayers of the holy ones, can acquire development, so is it the same after death. Through their own prayers and supplications they can also progress; more especially when they are the object of the intercession of the Holy Manifestations.

C

Selections from

The Secret of Divine Civilization

36

How long shall we drift on the wings of passion and vain desire; how long shall we spend our days like barbarians in the depths of ignorance and abomination? God has given us eyes, that we may look about us at the world, and lay hold of whatsoever will further civilization and the arts of living. He has given us ears, that we may hear and profit by the wisdom of scholars and philosophers and arise to promote and practice it. Senses and faculties have been bestowed upon us, to be devoted to the service of the general good; so that we, distinguished above all other forms of life for perceptiveness and reason, should labour at all times and along all lines, whether the occasion be great or small, ordinary or extraordinary, until all mankind are safely gathered into the impregnable stronghold of knowledge. We should continually be establishing new bases for human happiness and creating and promoting new instrumentalities toward this end. How excellent, how honourable is man if he arises to fulfil his responsibilities; how wretched and contemptible, if he shuts his eyes to the welfare of society and wastes his precious life in pursuing his own selfish interests and personal advantages. Supreme happiness is man's, and he beholds the signs of God in the world and in the human soul, if he urges on the steed of high endeavour in the arena of civilization and justice. 'We will surely show them Our signs in the world and within themselves.' ¹

And this is man's uttermost wretchedness: that he should live inert, apathetic, dull, involved only with his own base appetites. When he is thus, he has his being in the deepest ignorance and savagery, sinking lower than the brute beasts. 'They are like the brutes: Yea, they go more

¹ Qur'an 41: 53.

astray For the vilest beasts in God's sight, are the deaf, the dumb, who understand not.' ¹

We must now highly resolve to arise and lay hold of all those instrumentalities that promote the peace and well-being and happiness, the knowledge, culture and industry, the dignity, value and station, of the entire human race. Thus, through the restoring waters of pure intention and unselfish effort, the earth of human potentialities will blossom with its own latent excellence and flower into praiseworthy qualities, and bear and flourish until it comes to rival that rose-garden of knowledge which belonged to our forefathers. Then will this holy land of Persia become in every sense the focal centre of human perfections, reflecting as if in a mirror the full panoply of world civilization.

All praise and honour be to the Dayspring of Divine wisdom, the Dawning-Point of Revelation (Muḥammad), and to the holy line of His descendants, since, by the widespread rays of His consummate wisdom, His universal knowledge, those savage denizens of Yathrib (Medina) and Batha (Mecca), miraculously, and in so brief a time, were drawn out of the depths of their ignorance, rose up to the pinnacles of learning, and became centres of arts and sciences and human perfections, and stars of felicity and true civilization, shining across the horizons of the world.

37

Remember when the holy breaths of the Spirit of God (Jesus) were shedding their sweetness over Palestine and Galilee over the shores of Jordan and the regions around Jerusalem, and the wondrous melodies of the Gospel were sounding in the ears of the spiritually illumined, all the peoples of Asia and Europe, of Africa and America, of Oceania, which comprises the island and archipelagos of the Pacific and Indian Oceans, were fire-worshippers and pagans, ignorant of the Divine Voice that spoke out on the Day of the Covenant. ² Alone the Jews believed in the

¹ Qur'an 7: 178; 8: 22.

² Qur'an 7: 171: Yawm-i-Alast. the Day when God, addressing Adam's posterity-to-be, said to them, 'Am I not your Lord?' (a-lastu bi Rabbikum) and they replied: 'Yea, we bear witness.'

divinity and oneness of God. Following the declaration of Jesus, the pure and reviving breath of His mouth conferred eternal life on the inhabitants of those regions for a period of three years, and through Divine Revelation the Law of Christ, at that time the vital remedy for the ailing body of the world, was established. In the days of Jesus only a few individuals turned their faces toward God; in fact only the twelve disciples and a few women truly became believers, and one of the disciples, Judas Iscariot apostatized from his Faith, leaving eleven. After the ascension of Jesus to the Realm of Glory, these few souls stood up with their spiritual qualities and with deeds that were pure and holy, and they arose by the power of God and the life-giving breaths of the Messiah to save all the peoples of the earth. Then all the idolatrous nations as well as the Jews rose up in their might to kill the Divine fire that had been lit in the lamp of Jerusalem. 'Fain would they put out God's light with their mouths: but God hath willed to perfect His light, albeit the infidels abhor it.' ¹ Under the fiercest tortures, they did every one of these holy souls to death; with butchers' cleavers, they chopped the pure and undefiled bodies of some of them to pieces and burned them in furnaces, and they stretched some of the followers on the rack and then buried them alive. In spite of this agonizing requital, the Christians continued to teach the Cause of God, and they never drew a sword from its scabbard or even so much as grazed a cheek. Then in the end the Faith of Christ encompassed the whole earth, so that in Europe and America no traces of other religions were left, and today in Asia and Africa and Oceania, large masses of people are living within the sanctuary of the Four Gospels.

It has now by the above irrefutable proofs been fully established that the Faith of God must be propagated through human perfections, through qualities that are excellent and pleasing, and spiritual behaviour. If a soul of his own accord advances toward God he will be accepted at the Threshold of Oneness, for such a one is free of personal considerations, of greed and selfish interests, and he has taken refuge within the sheltering protection of his Lord. He will become known among men as trustworthy and truthful, temperate and scrupulous, high-minded and loyal, incorruptible and God-fearing. In this way the primary purpose in

¹ Qur'an 9: 33.

revealing the Divine Law—which is to bring about happiness in the after-life and civilization and the refinement of character in this—will be realized. As for the sword, it will only produce a man who is outwardly a believer, and inwardly a traitor and apostate.

38

We shall here relate a story that will serve as an example to all. The Arabian chronicles tell how, at a time prior to the advent of Muhammad, Nu'mán son of Mundhir the Lakhmite—an Arab king in the Days of Ignorance, whose seat of government was the city of Hírih —had one day returned so often to his wine-cup that his mind clouded over and his reason deserted him. In this drunken and insensible condition he gave orders that his two boon companions, his close and much-loved friends, Khalid son of Mudallil and 'Amr son of Mas'úd-Kaldih, should be put to death. When he wakened after his carousal, he inquired for the two friends and was given the grievous news. He was sick at heart, and because of his intense love and longing for them, he built two splendid monuments over their two graves and he named these the Smearred-With-Blood.

Then he set apart two days out of the year, in memory of the two companions, and he called one of them the Day of Evil and one the Day of Grace. Every year on these two appointed days he would issue forth with pomp and circumstance and sit between the monuments.

If, on the Day of Evil, his eye fell on any soul, that person would be put to death; but on the Day of Grace, whoever passed would be overwhelmed with gifts and benefits. Such was his rule, sealed with a mighty oath and always rigidly observed.

One day the king mounted his horse, that was called Mahmud, and rode out into the plains to hunt. Suddenly in the distance he caught sight of a wild donkey. Nu'mán urged on his horse to overtake it, and galloped away at such speed that he was cut off from his retinue. As night approached, the king was hopelessly lost. Then he made out a tent, far off in the desert, and he turned his horse and headed toward it. When he reached

the entrance of the tent he asked, 'Will you receive a guest? The owner (who was Hanzala, son of Abi-Ghafráy-i-Ta'i) replied, 'Yea.' He came forward and helped Nu'mán to dismount. Then he went to his wife and told her, 'There are clear signs of greatness in the bearing of this person. Do your best to show him hospitality, and make ready a feast.' His wife said, 'We have a ewe. Sacrifice it. And I have saved a little flour against such a day.' Hanzala first milked the ewe and carried a bowl of milk to Nu'mán, and then he slaughtered her and prepared a meal; and what with his friendliness and loving-kindness, Nu'mán, spent that night in peace and comfort. When dawn came, Nu'mán made ready to leave, and he said to Hanzala: 'You have shown me the utmost generosity, receiving and feasting me. I am Nu'mán, son of Mundhir, and I shall eagerly await your arrival at my court'.

Time passed, and famine fell on the land of Tayy. Hanzala was in dire need and for this reason he sought out the king. By a strange coincidence he arrived on the Day of Evil. Nu'mán was greatly troubled in spirit. He began to reproach his friend, saying, 'Why did you come to your friend on this day of all days? For this is the Day of Evil, that is, the Day of Wrath and the Day of Distress. This day, should my eyes alight on Qábús, my only son, he should not escape with his life. Now ask me whatever favour you will.'

Hanzala said: 'I knew nothing of your Day of Evil. As for the gifts of this life, they are meant for the living, and since I at this hour must drink of death, what can all the world's storehouses avail me now?

Nu'mán said, 'There is no help for this.'

Hanzala told him: 'Respite me, then, that I may go back to my wife and make my testament. Next year I shall return, on the Day of Evil.'

Nu'mán then asked for a guarantor, so that, if Hanzala should break his word, this guarantor would be put to death instead. Hanzala, helpless and bewildered, looked about him. Then his gaze fell on one of Nu'mán's retainers, Sharík, son of 'Amr, son of Qays of Shaybán, and to him he recited these lines: 'O my partner, O son of 'Amr! Is there any escape

from death? O brother of every afflicted one! O brother of him who is brotherless! O brother of Nu'mán, in thee today is a surety for the Shaykh. Where is Shaybán the noble—may the All-Merciful favour him!' But Sharik only answered, 'O my brother, a man cannot gamble with his life.' At this the victim could not tell where to turn. Then a man named Qarád, son of Adja, the Kalbite, stood up and offered himself as a surety, agreeing that, should he fail on the next Day of Wrath to deliver up the victim, the king might do with him, Qarád, as he wished. Nu'mán then bestowed five hundred camels on Hanzala, and sent him home.

In the following year on the Day of Evil, as soon as the true dawn broke in the sky, Nu'mán as was his custom set out with pomp and pageantry and made for the two mausoleums called the Smearred-With-Blood. He brought Qarád along, to wreak his kingly wrath upon him. The pillars of the state then loosed their tongues and begged for mercy, imploring the king to respite Qarád until sundown, for they hoped that Hanzala might yet return; but the king's purpose was to spare the life of Hanzala, and to requite his hospitality by putting Qarád to death in his place. As the sun began to set, they stripped off the garments of Qarád, and made ready to sever his head. At that moment a rider appeared in the distance, galloping at top speed. Nu'mán said to the swordsman, 'Why delayest thou?' The ministers said, 'Perchance it is Hanzala who comes.' And when the rider drew near, they saw it was none other.

Nu'mán was sorely displeased. He said, 'Thou fool! Thou didst slip away once from the clutching fingers of death; must thou provoke him now a second time?'

And Hanzala answered, 'Sweet in my mouth and pleasant on my tongue is the poison of death, at the thought of redeeming my pledge.'

Nu'mán asked, 'What could be the reason for this trustworthiness, this regard for thine obligation and this concern for thine oath?' And Hanzala answered, 'It is my faith in the one God and in the Books that have come down from heaven.' Nu'mán asked, 'What Faith dost thou profess?' And Hanzala said, 'It was the holy breaths of Jesus that brought me to life. I

follow the straight pathway of Christ, the Spirit of God ' Nu'mán said, 'Let me inhale these sweet aromas of the Spirit.'

So it was that Hanzala drew out the white hand of guidance from the bosom of the love of God, ¹ and illumined the sight and the insight of the beholders with the Gospel light. After he had in bell-like accents recited some of the divine verses out of the Evangel, Nu'mán and all his ministers sickened of their idols and their idol-worship and were confirmed in the Faith of God. And they said, 'Alas, a thousand times alas, that up to now we were careless of this infinite mercy and veiled away therefrom, and were bereft of this rain from the clouds of the grace of God'. Then straightway the king tore down the two monuments called the Smearred-With-Blood, and he repented of his tyranny and established justice in the land.

¹ Cf. Qur'an 27:12, referring to Moses: 'Put now thy hand into thy bosom: it shall come forth white one of nine signs to Pharaoh and his people...'* Also Qur'an 7:105; 20:23; 26:32; and 28:32. Also Exodus 4:6. See too Edward Fitzgerald's *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*:

Now the New Year reviving old Desires,
The thoughtful Soul to Solitude retires,
Where the White Hand of Moses on the Bough
Puts out, and Jesus from the Ground suspires.

The metaphors here refer to white blossoms and the perfumes of spring.