



'ABD-AL-BAHĀ' I. LIFE AND WORK

i. Life and Work

'Abd-al-Bahā' was born in Tehran on 23 May 1844. He accompanied his father into exile. At the latter's death, the great majority of Baha'is recognized him, in accordance with Bahā'allāh's will (*Ketāb 'ahdī*), as the authorized interpreter of his father's writings, as Center of the Covenant (*markaz-e 'ahd* or *markaz-e mīṭāq*) and Model of Baha'i Life. This will, however, was contested by Moḥammad 'Alī, Bahā'allāh's younger son; he set up a rival group within the Baha'i organization and contrived to compromise his brother with the Ottoman authorities, who were hostile to the Baha'is. 'Abd-al-Bahā' was released from prison in 1908 under the amnesty granted by the new Young Turks government, and in 1910 he began his three great missionary journeys. The first was to Egypt (1910), the second to Europe (Paris, London, 1911), and the third to the United States and Europe (1912-13). In America he spent eight months preaching in evangelical churches, synagogues, Masonic lodges, and the like from New York to Los Angeles and San Francisco. In September, 1912, he returned to England and continued on to France, Germany, Austria, and Hungary. At the end of 1913, he returned to Palestine from Paris.

The first Baha'i group in America had already been formed in 1894; and the first Baha'i pilgrims from the United States had reached 'Akkā (Acre) on 10 December 1898. The journey of 'Abd-al-Bahā' in 1912, intended partly to



counter the propaganda of his brother's supporters in America, strengthened the community of American adherents. It also aroused great interest in various circles in Europe, where Baha'i communities were now formed. Toward the end of World War I, the Ottoman authorities, aroused by enemies of 'Abd-al-Bahā' and by his pacifist attitudes, seriously menaced his life. In 1920 he was made a knight of the Order of the British Empire. He died at Haifa on 28 November 1921 and was buried beside the Bāb (his mausoleum was completed in 1957). In his will, 'Abd-al-Bahā' appointed his eldest grandson, Šowqī Effendi Rabbānī (eldest son of his eldest daughter), as Guardian of the Cause of God (*valī-e amr Allāh*).

The works of 'Abd-al-Bahā' fall into two groups: his direct writings and speeches, lectures, and table talk as noted down by his followers. In the first group, the following are of special interest. 1. *Resāla-ye madanīya* ("Epistle on civilization"), written in Persian before 1875 and published in Bombay, 1310/1892-93, is a treatise on the philosophy of history and civilization from a Baha'i viewpoint. Two translations are available, one by Dawud, *The Mysterious Forces of Civilization*, London, 1910 (2nd ed., Chicago, 1918), and a more recent and accurate version by M. Gail, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, Wilmette, 1957. 2. *Maqāla-ye šakṣī sayyāh* is a work in Persian, probably written in 1886, that does not bear the author's name. It was translated, with notes and appendixes, by E. G. Browne in *A Traveler's Narrative Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Bāb*, and published with the Persian text in 2 vols. (Vol. 1 being a facsimile edition of the Persian text), Cambridge, 1891. 3. *Resāla-ye sāsīya* ("Epistle on politics"), written in Persian in 1893, published with n.p. and n.d. 4. *Tadkerat al-wafā'* is an account in Persian of the lives of some of the early Babi and Baha'i believers who died in the author's lifetime. It was written in 1915 and published in Haifa in 1924. M. Gail has made an English translation, *Memorials of the Faithful*, Wilmette, Illinois, 1971. 5. A large number of tablets (*alvāḥ*) or epistles are addressed to various persons in East and West. The original Arabic and Persian texts were collected as *Makātīb-e 'Abd-al-Bahā'*, 3 vols., Cairo, 1910-21; in English, *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahā'*, ed. Windust, 3 vols., Chicago, 1909, 1915, and 1916, respectively. The collection and publication of the epistles of 'Abd-al-Bahā' have continued in Tehran (IV, 1343 Š./1964; V, 1344 Š./1965; VI, 1345 Š./1966; VII, 1346 Š./1967; VIII, 1347 Š./1968-69?).

The second group includes: 6. *Al-Nūr al-abhā fī mofāwazāt ḥazrat-e 'Abd-al-Bahā'*, table talk with Mrs. Laura Barney in 'Akkā. The Persian text was



published in London in 1908 and again in 1920. Mrs. Clifford's translation, *Some Answered Questions*, was published in London in 1908 and has often been reprinted (a French translation, *Les leçons de Saint-Jean-d'Acre* by H. Dreyfus, was published in Paris the same year). The Baha'i interpretation of Christian dogmas and beliefs in this book are particularly interesting. 7. *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by 'Abd-ul-Bahā' in Paris 1911-12*, London, 1923, 9th ed., London, 1951 (various other ed., also under the title *The Wisdom of 'Abd-ul-Bahā'*). 8. *'Abd-ul-Bahā' in London* (various ed.). 9. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 2 vols., Chicago, 1922-25, contains addresses given in the United States. A Persian collection of the European and American speeches was published in Cairo in 1340/1921.

Bibliography : Other translations of 'Abd-al-Bahā's works into English, in addition to those mentioned in the text, include the following: *Tablet to the Central Organization for a Durable Peace, the Hague*, New York, 1930. *Tablet to Dr. Forel*, New York, 1930. *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, Wilmette, 1959. *Will and Testament*, New York, 1925. (Some of these are also found in collected works.)

There is a vast literature on 'Abd-al-Bahā'. Works by non-Baha'is include: M. H. Phelps, *Life and Teachings of Abbās Effendi*, London, 1912; and S. Lemaitre, *Une grande figure de l'unité: 'Abdu'l-Baha'*, Paris, 1952. Further bibliography is given in H. M. Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Baha: the Centre of the Covenant of Bahā'u'llah*, London, 1971 (reviewed by L. P. Edwell-Sutton in *JRAS* 1973, pp. 166-68).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The original texts of many talks given by 'Abd-al-Bahā' in Europe and America may be found in *Keṭābāt ḥaẓrat 'Abd-al-Bahā' fī Orobbā wa Amrikā* (Cairo, 1340/1921) and *Keṭābāt-e mobāraka-ye ḥaẓrat-e 'Abd-al-Bahā'* (as vol. 2 following the previous title; Tehran, 1971).

The most important text for 'Abd-al-Bahā's Western tours is the travel diary of his secretary Mīrzā Maḥmūd Zarqānī *Ketāb-e badāye' al-āṭār*, 2 vols. (Bombay,



1914, 1921); less valuable, but of interest is Howard Colby Ives, *Portals to Freedom* (1937; reprinted London, 1962).

Contemporary Western accounts of ‘Abd-al-Bahā’, which include reports of his lecture tours, may be found in *Star of the West. The Baha’i Magazine*, vols. 1-14 (1910-24) reprinted in 8 vols. (Oxford, 1978).

‘Abd-al-Bahā’'s table talk in Egypt is recorded by another secretary Mīrzā Aḥmad Sohrāb in *Abdul Baha’i in Egypt* (London, n.d.). Memoirs of ‘Abd-al-Bahā’ include Dr. Ḥabīb Mo’ayyad, *Kāterāt-e Ḥabīb*, 2 vols. (Tehran, 1962, 1973) and Dr. Yūnes Khan Afrūḳta, *Kāterāt-e noh sāla-ye ‘Akkā’* (Tehran).

Recent biographical works by Baha’is include Moḥammad ‘Alī Feyzī, *Ḥayāt-e ḥazrat-e ‘Abd-al-Bahā’* (Tehran, 1972) and Hūšang Maḥmūdī, *Yāddāštḥā’ī dar bāra-ye ḥazrat-e ‘Abd-al-Bahā’*, 2 vols. (Tehran, 1974, 1975[?]).

The most recent translation of letters by ‘Abd-al-Bahā’ is by Marzieh Gail, *Tablets of ‘Abd-al-Bahā’* (Haifa, 1979).

Early translations and memoirs may be found listed in the New York Public Library *List of Works in the New York Public Library Relating to Persia*, New York, 1915, pp. 103-07 (note especially the entries of ‘Abd-al-Bahā ibn Bahā Allāh, Chase, Goodall, Grundy, Johnson, Lucas, and Stevens).