

## THE BAHÁ'Í TEMPLE OF UNIVERSAL PEACE

BY ALBERT VAIL

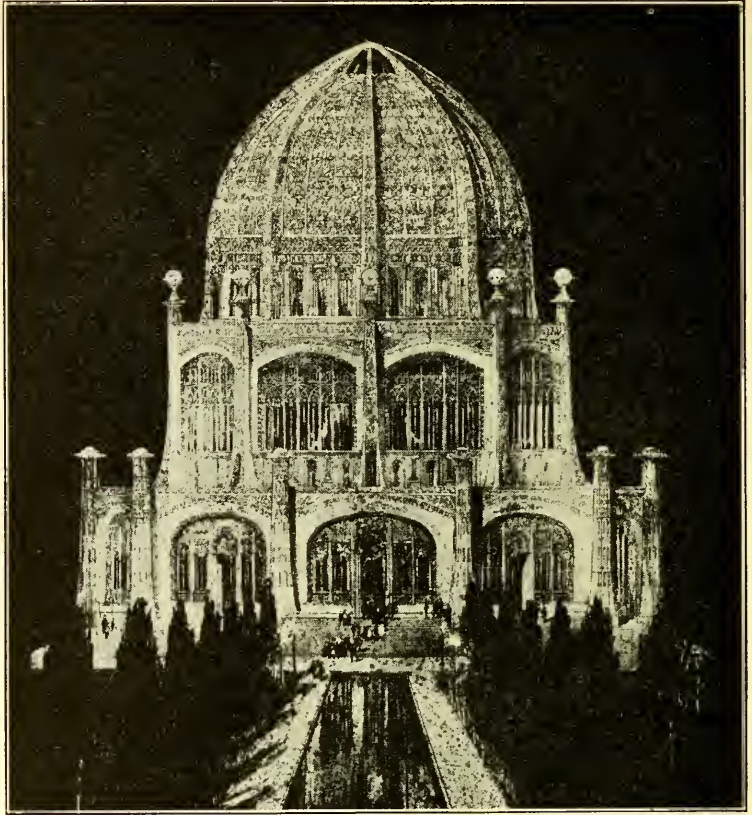
ON Sheridan Road in Wilmette, Illinois, just north of Evanston, there is rising a magnificent structure, the Bahá'í Temple. This building is unique in its architectural design, unique in its endowment, for it is being built by contributions from peoples of many lands and nations, and unique in the ideals to which it will be dedicated. In Persia, for instance, there is a village so poor its people have only one rug in the community, yet they send contributions to the Temple fund in America. Parsees, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus and Jews, of Persia and India, Russia and Japan, have with great devotion sent contributions for the building of this temple in America, often selling their precious possessions to provide the money. Such is the self-sacrifice and love which will be incorporated in this great and beautiful Temple.

What, we ask, has inspired people to sacrifice for and serve a community which they have never seen, and what will this Temple mean to them?

First, the Temple means peace—peace among nations, religions, individuals, a world living in peace, in mutual harmony, in sympathetic understanding and tolerance, a peace which will be all-encompassing, taking under its protection every weak and every great nation, every group of people who live upon this planet.

But how can we have peace among the great world religions, we ask, for the Christians, Jews, Muhammadans, Buddhists, Parsees, Confucianists have looked askance at each other and have fought one another for centuries. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the great educator and exponent of world peace, gives the answer which is perhaps the fundamental Bahá'í principle. Investigate other people's beliefs, investigate every phase of thought and every new and old idea with

a perfectly just, open mind, willing to acknowledge and accept truth, wherever we may find it. Be as open minded as is the scientist in his laboratory when he is carrying on his experiments for the sake of truth only. Studied thus, we will discover that people most fre-



THE TEMPLE AT WILMETTE

quently have followed their religion through imitation: the Buddhist has been a Buddhist because he was born into a Buddhist family; the Christian has been a Christian oftentimes by blind imitation; if a man's parents were Muhammadan he also was a Muslim. Furthermore each religion has insisted that it had the only true way of salvation and that its prophet was unique, and none other like

unto him ever had appeared or ever would appear on earth. But of course, when we investigate with perfect justice, we see that the great prophets themselves never taught anything so narrow as this. In fact, they loved each other, praised each other, approved one another. They taught the same essential truths about ethics and the constitution of the divine universe, their difference being, that each adapted his teaching to the peculiar temperament and needs of the race and time to which he came.

'Abdu'l-Bahá presents the discovery of the fundamental oneness of religions and of a progressive unfoldment of divine teaching through a succession of prophets. "Be free from prejudice," he cries. "A rose is beautiful in whatever garden it may bloom. A star has the same radiance whether it shines from the east or from the west."<sup>1</sup> If we could lay aside the prejudices of race, creed, nationality and class which are destroying the foundations of our civilization we might enter into a completely new social order.

Next 'Abdu'l-Bahá teaches the oneness of mankind, the essential oneness of all races. The difference between human beings does not lie, he says, in color of the skin, in details of feature, but in mental and spiritual development. Therefore every human being should be offered an education that he may take as much as his capacity will allow. That individual who reflects most perfectly the characteristics of God is nearer to God and is a superior being, whatever the color of his skin or his external appearance.

The new social order, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, must be organized on a universal plan. An International Court, chosen by a universal congress representing all the nations of the world would settle all international problems, limiting armaments simultaneously and guarding the world's peace. The united nations should uphold the decisions of this court by an economic boycott of any nation which should go against its decisions, by refusing to lend money or ship ammunitions to a rebellious nation, by the public opinion of the world and, if necessary, by the use of the combined armies and navies of the nations. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was asked to present his plan for a world peace to the Central Organization for a Durable Peace, at The Hague and in reply to this request he wrote in December, 1919:

"This recent war has proved to the world that war is destruction

<sup>1</sup>"The Wisdom of 'Abdu'l-Bahá," "Bahá'í" Publishing Committee, New York, 1924, p. 127.

while universal peace is construction; war is death while peace is life; war is rapacity and blood-thirstiness while peace is beneficence and humaneness; war is of the world of nature while peace is of the foundation of the religion of God; war is darkness upon darkness while peace is Heavenly Light; war is the destroyer of the edifice of mankind while peace is the everlasting life of the world of humanity; war is like a devouring wolf while peace is like the angels of Heaven; war is the struggle for existence while peace is mutual aid and co-operation among the peoples of the world and the cause of the good-pleasure of the True One in the Heavenly Realm.

“There is not one soul whose conscience does not testify that in this day there is no more important matter in the world than that of Universal Peace.

“The Supreme Tribunal which Baha’u’llah has described will fulfill this sacred task of establishing universal peace with the utmost might and power. And his plan is this: that the national assemblies of each country and nation—that is to say parliaments—should elect two or three persons who are the choicest men of that nation, and are well informed concerning international laws and the relations between governments and aware of the essential needs of the world of humanity in this day. The number of these representatives should be in proportion to the number of inhabitants of that country. The election of these souls who are chosen by the national assembly, that is, the parliament, must be confirmed by the upper house, the congress and the cabinet and also by the president or monarch so these persons may be the elected ones of all the nation and the government. From among these people the members of the Supreme Tribunal will be elected, and all mankind will thus have a share therein, for every one of these delegates is fully representative of his nation. When the Supreme Tribunal gives a ruling on any international question, either unanimously or by majority rule, there will no longer be any pretext for the plaintiff or ground of objection for the defendant. In case any of the governments or nations, in the execution of the irrefutable decision of the Supreme Tribunal be negligent or dilatory, the rest of the nations will rise up against it, be-



cause all the governments and nations of the world are the supporters of this Supreme Tribunal. Consider what a firm foundation this is. But by a limited and restricted *League* the purpose will not be realized as it ought and should."

When Professor Edward Granville Browne visited Bahá'u'lláh in Palestine in 1890 Bahá'u'lláh spoke to him the following ringing words on universal peace:

"We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations; yet they deem us stirrers up of strife and sedition worthy of bondage and banishment. . . .that all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled. . . .What harm is there in this?"

Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away and the 'Most Great Peace' shall come. . . .Is not this that which Christ foretold? . . .Yet do we see your kings and rulers lavishing their treasures more freely on means for the destruction of the human race than on that which would conduce to the happiness of mankind. These strifes and this bloodshed and discord must cease, and all men be as one kindred and one family. Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind."<sup>2</sup>

Other principles which the Bahá'í Movement declares should be universally applied throughout the world are the equality of men and women, the betterment of morals, justice to all, a universal auxiliary language to be taught in the schools of all nations in addition to the mother tongue. To bring about this new world order a universal campaign of education must be carried on. Only a new international conscience and a new international ethics can make peace permanent. Bahá'u'lláh suggests that the educators of the world come together and select from the bibles of all religions those incidents, anecdotes and ethical and spiritual teachings which will guide the children of different nations into a universal consciousness and will

<sup>2</sup>"A Traveller's Narrative", by Edward G. Browne of Cambridge University, England. Cambridge Press, 1891; Bahá'í Publishing Committee, P. O. Box 348, Grand Central Station, New York City, 1931, p. XI.

show how all the great prophets have taught the same moral precepts, the same moral attitudes, the One God.

The Temple in Wilmette when finished will incorporate in symbolic form these teachings of universal brotherhood. It will stand in a circular garden—the circle being all-inclusive. Nine paths leading from the outer edge of the gardens to the central building will symbolize the different civilizations of the world which, starting far apart, approach religious unity at the center. Though Christians and Jews, Confucianists, Taoists, Buddhists, Hindus, Parsees and Muslims may start far apart, as they approach the center of the circle they draw closer together in mutual understanding. There will be nine doors to the Temple—nine, the largest single number, is taken as a symbol of inclusiveness. As the different races and religions enter the building they will meet under the dome at the center; and the dome is very high, to symbolize the mercy of God, and His wisdom. There under the dome of unity the members of the different races and religions will be invited to worship the One God. Some may think of Him in impersonal terms, others in personal symbols; some may worship Him as the laws of nature, some as the loving Father. Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá combine these different conceptions of God into a wondrous unity.

Around the Bahá'í Temple there will be built, as time goes on, a home for orphans and for the aged, a hospice where travelers may sojourn for a time and receive physical and spiritual refreshment, hospitals and schools and ultimately colleges where science and religion can be perfectly united. Receiving the baptism of God's mercy under the dome of unity, the seeker after God will immediately long to express his thanksgiving in loving service to all mankind.

This temple, the first in America, is but one of many which will be built in all lands, by all nations, an expression of their joy that the time has come when, as the prophet of old foretold, men shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks and all shall be as brothers.

About the disinterestedness and the selfless devotion of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the great Bahá'í teachers, there is no question. They gave their fortunes and their lives for the spread of these principles and the spirit which would hasten the coming of a universal peace. 'Abdu'l-Bahá for his faith spent forty years in Turkish prisons which have no likeness, and twenty thousand of Bahá'u-

'lláh's followers were put to a tortuous death while the reactionaries of Persia tried to check the spread of the teachings of universal brotherhood, the equality of men and women, and the need of universal education. Of the Bahá'í martyrdoms, Lord Curzon, in his book "Persia", wrote, "Tales of magnificent heroism illumine the blood stained pages of Bábí (Bahá'í) history—Of no small account then must be the tenets and creed that can awaken in its followers so rare and beautiful a spirit of self-sacrifice."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>"Persia" by the Earl Curzon of Kedleston, Vol. 1, pp. 496-504, 1892.