

STORIES OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ


Laughter

I remember a luncheon party in Dublin, to which came a number of these Summer residents to meet 'Abdu'l-Bahá. There were present a famous scientist, two well known artists, a physician of note, and all of the fifteen or twenty people present had a background of more than one generation of wealth or culture. Could it be possible to imagine a more glaring contrast with the life 'Abdu'l-Bahá had lived?

The hostess, who had visited the Master in 'Akká while he was still a prisoner there, and whose life had become transformed through her spiritual contact with Him, has spoken to me of this gathering several times. Naturally, she was somewhat concerned that her friends whom she had known for years in the social life of Washington, Baltimore and New York, should know the Master, to a degree at least, as she had known Him, but there was trepidation in her soul. For these men and women were not of a religious trend of thought. In fact several of them were frankly agnostic, and all were uninterested in that phase of life.

She wanted her party to be a success, of course, but more she wished these friends to get a glimpse, if only a glimpse, of that World of Reality into which 'Abdu'l-Bahá had ushered her. She wondered, ... how 'Abdu'l-Bahá would handle the situation, for she knew that she would not have the responsibility for its handling. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was always the Host, His the dominating voice. Truly a miracle of miracles it is that earth-blinded eyes ever open to the World of Reality.

Most of those present at this luncheon party knew a little of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's life history, and, presumably, were expecting a dissertation from Him on the Bahá'í Cause.



The hostess had suggested to the Master that He speak to them on the subject of Immortality. However, as the meal progressed, and no more than the usual commonplaces of polite society were mentioned, the hostess made an opening, as she thought, for 'Abdu'l-Bahá to speak on spiritual things. His response to this was to ask if He might tell them a story, and he related one of the Oriental tales, of which He had a great store and at its conclusion all laughed heartily.

The ice was broken. Others added stories of which the Master's anecdote had reminded them. Then 'Abdu'l-Bahá, His face beaming with happiness, told another story, and another. His laughter rang through the room. He said that the Orientals, had many such stories illustrating different phases of life. Many of them are extremely humorous. It is good to laugh. Laughter is a spiritual relaxation. When they were in prison, He said, and under the utmost deprivation and difficulties, each of them at the close of the day would relate the most ludicrous event which had happened. Sometimes it was a little difficult to find one but always they would laugh until the tears would roll down their cheeks. Happiness, He said, is never dependent upon material surroundings, otherwise how sad those years would have been. As it was they were always in the utmost state of joy and happiness.

That was the nearest approach He came to any reference to Himself or to the Divine Teachings. But over that group before the gathering dispersed, hovered a hush and reverence which no learned dissertation would have caused in them. After the guests had gone, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá was leaving for His hotel, He came close to His hostess and asked her, with a little wistful smile, almost, she was used to say, like a child seeking approbation, if she were pleased with Him. She was never able to speak of this conclusion to the event without deep emotion.

- Howard Colby Ives, *"Portals to Freedom"*

