

UK BAHÁ'Í

Dawn of the Light

*The bicentenary of the
Birth of the Báb and His
revolutionary mission
for spiritual renewal*

**PREPARING
FOR THE
BICENTENARY**
*Activities and plans
for commemorations
under way*

**THE WORLD
IN 1819**
*The revolutionary
changes that heralded
a new era*

**WILLIAM
CORMICK**
*The Irish doctor who
treated the Báb*

**THE STORY OF
THE BÁB – A STAGE
DRAMA**

*How a theatre production
caught Tolstoy's attention*

Welcome to UK Bahá'í

Just two years on from the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh, the Bahá'ís of the world once again have an opportunity to “attract the largest possible number of believers, their families, friends, and collaborators, as well as others from the wider society,” to commemorate a moment “when a Being peerless in creation, a Manifestation of God, was born to the world”. This second bicentenary celebration affords further opportunities to help awaken hearts to the “greatness of this Day”, whose “advent was announced by two divine Manifestations”. That “every community, every household, every heart” celebrate this occasion, and that “efforts to befittingly honour the Báb ... succeed in advancing the Cause He foretold”, is the aim of every individual, community and institution around the world. In this edition of UK Bahá'í we reflect upon the Life and Mission of the Báb, the ongoing search for truth which is apparent everywhere, and how the community is preparing for the bicentenary.

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introduction

The threshold of a new era

In this turbulent period of history, humanity is crying out for a unifying vision of its true nature and purpose. This vision unfolds in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb

IN THE MIDDLE of the nineteenth century, the Báb announced that He was the bearer of a message destined to transform the life of humanity. At a time when Iran was undergoing widespread moral breakdown, His message aroused excitement and hope among all classes, rapidly attracting thousands of followers.

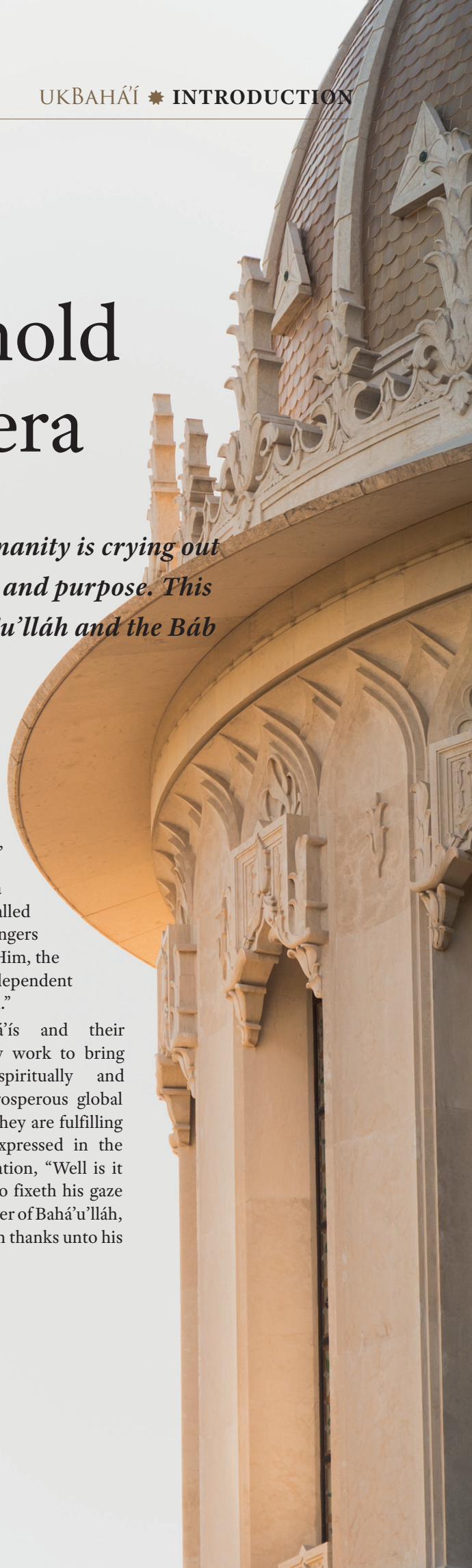
With His call for spiritual and moral reformation—and His attention to improving the position of women and the lot of the poor—the Báb's prescription for spiritual renewal was revolutionary. At the same time, He founded a distinct, independent religion of His own, inspiring His followers to transform their lives and carry out great acts of heroism.

Stories of the Báb's Cause and the inspiring acts of those who followed Him captured the imaginations of numerous Western writers in Europe and central Asia. "His life is one of the most magnificent examples of courage which it has been the privilege of mankind to behold," wrote the contemporary French historian and Orientalist, A.L.M. Nicolas.

Announcing that humanity stood at the threshold of a new era, the Báb's primary mission was to prepare the way for "Him Whom God shall make manifest," Bahá'u'lláh. Despite the brief six years of the Báb's ministry, He was not, as Shoghi Effendi makes clear in *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh*, merely an "inspired Precursor of the Bahá'í Revelation...Indeed the greatness of the Báb consists primarily, not in His being the divinely-appointed Forerunner of so transcendent a Revelation, but rather in His having been invested with the powers inherent in the

inaugurator of a separate religious Dispensation, and in His wielding, to a degree unrivalled by the Messengers gone before Him, the sceptre of independent Prophethood."

As Bahá'ís and their friends today work to bring about a spiritually and materially prosperous global civilization, they are fulfilling the hopes expressed in the Báb's exhortation, "Well is it with him who fixeth his gaze upon the Order of Bahá'u'lláh, and rendereth thanks unto his Lord." ER



Bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb

The quest of the 21st century seeker

All around the world, human beings continue to search for truth and meaning. And, while they may not think the answer lies in religion, their desire for a better world may be as strong as that of the Bábís—writes Barney Leith

WHEN MULLÁ ḤUSAYN arrived at one of the gates of the fabled Persian city of Shíráz on a spring evening in 1844, it was the culmination of an intense journey of search and an unquenchable yearning to find the Promised One. Here the youthful cleric's quest was rewarded in a way that was to change his life—and the life of humanity—forever. A young merchant, a descendent of the Prophet Muḥammad, Who would take the title of the Báb, greeted him, invited him to His home, and revealed Himself to be the one Whom Mullá Ḥusayn ardently sought.

Mullá Ḥusayn was far from being the only soul searching for the promised Qá'im—"He Who will arise"—of Shí'í Islám. The acceptance of the Báb's message by countless thousands of souls in Iran was dramatic and rapid, and the turmoil it provoked captured the attention of diplomats and writers much further afield. In the phenomenon of Islamic millennial expectation, some saw parallels with the expectation concerning the return of Christ in the West. And the search for truth and meaning in the mid-

nineteenth century has its own parallels with today. The Universal House of Justice has noted:

Though separated from our own time by two centuries, the society in which the Báb appeared resembles the present-day world for the sense of oppression and for the longing of so many to find answers to slake the soul's thirst to know.¹

This thirst to know does not, however, always find its resolution in traditional religion. Research in Europe and North America has found that growing numbers of young adults identify themselves as "spiritual but not religious", or even as atheists. A report by the Barna Group, an evangelical Christian polling organisation in the United States, reveals that the proportion of Generation Z—those born between 1999 and 2015—that identifies as atheist is double that of the rest of the US adult population.

More than any other generation before them, Gen Z does not assert a religious



LEFT: The doors to the House of the Báb in Shíráz, through which Mullá Ḥusayn entered.

identity. They might be drawn to things spiritual, but with a vastly different starting point from previous generations...²

Young people in Europe and North America may no longer identify with organised religion or formal religious organisations as much as they did in the past, but many still yearn for something that gives meaning to, or transcends, their daily lives. The search for God goes on, even if decreasingly described in formal religious terms and increasingly in terms of “spirituality”.

An article on the international Bahá'í website gives a word of caution about our understanding of spirituality:

*It is too easy to view the concept in a superficial way—to comprehend it as little more than a tool for maximising satisfaction or as a veneer of activities or rituals designed to soothe the nerves and anxieties roused by a materialistic life. True spirituality reaches to the very roots of human existence: it permeates action and channels individual and collective efforts for the betterment of society, it cultivates thirst for knowledge, it elevates work to the station of worship, it promotes empathy, it provides for the control of selfish impulses, it emphasises oneness and interconnectedness, it fosters generosity and humility, and it nurtures appreciation for diversity and attraction to beauty. '[S]pirituality', 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, 'is the greatest of God's gifts...May you, one and all, increase daily in spirituality, may you be strengthened in all goodness, may you be helped more and more by the Divine consolation, be made free by the Holy Spirit of God, and may the power of the Heavenly Kingdom live and work among you.'*³

One Common Faith, prepared in 2005 under the supervision of the Universal House of Justice, remarked upon

*a widespread revival of spiritual search. Expressed most commonly as an urge to discover a personal identity that transcends the merely physical, the development encourages a multitude of pursuits, both positive and negative in character. On the one hand, the search for justice and the promotion of the cause of international peace tend to have the effect of also arousing new perceptions of the individual's role in society. Similarly, although focused on the mobilization of support for changes in social decision-making, movements like environmentalism and feminism induce a re-examination of people's sense of themselves and of their purpose in life.*⁴

The widespread youth activism making today's news is a sign that young people are finding the resources within themselves, and in collaboration with others, to stand up against the “sense of oppression” mentioned by the Universal House of Justice. Far from being the “snowflakes” or troubled school refusers too often stereotyped by the media, many are making their voices heard on justice and peace, for action on climate change and on racism. They are seeking meaning beyond themselves.

The significance of their own quest should not be underestimated. They are driven by a passion for justice and equality, searching for something that will make the world they will live in as adults a place that fosters wellbeing, a world that will make it possible for all to develop and use their many capacities in service to their fellow human beings. **BL**

¹ Universal House of Justice, To the Bahá'ís of the World, Ridván 2018

² www.barna.com/research/atheism-doubles-among-generation-z/

³ www.bahai.org/beliefs/god-his-creation/ever-advancing-civilization/coherence-between-spiritual-material

⁴ *One Common Faith*, www.bahai.org/r/651093940



RIGHT: "More than any other generation before them, Gen Z does not assert a religious identity" – The Barna Group, an evangelical Christian polling organisation in the USA.

LEFT: The Qu'ran gate in Shiraz where the Báb welcomed Mullá Ḥusayn.



Photo by Wyron A on Unsplash

Bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb

The road to the bicentenary

As the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb rapidly approaches, friends around the United Kingdom are making a decisive effort to channel the spiritual forces released by the previous bicentenary into their personal and collective endeavours

SINCE THE LAST bicentenary, the small Bahá'í group in **Blaina/Nantyglo**, has continued the process of building friendships with local people and organisations. On 20 July, they brought together some 32 local performers who danced and sang for around 120 invited guests. These included the Deputy Mayor, the Police and Crime Commissioner of Gwent and the Chief Constable of Gwent Police, who remarked,

"It was the most uplifting afternoon." Friends of the Bahá'ís helped with the preparation and serving of refreshments; even the local Asda supermarket contributed food, drinks and flowers. The Deputy Chief Constable posted on Twitter, "Well!! What a day celebrating communities and music with the Bahá'í Community at Blaina. Exceptional local talent, dance, music and poetry. Thanks for the welcome. Great people doing great things!"



LEFT: Featuring dance, poetry and song, the Blaina/Nantyglo community came together in July to build connection and friendship. Performers included educator Rufus Mufasa, a Welsh hip-hop lyricist and rapper. She is the first poet in residence for the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales. Bahá'í Christine Abbas read a poem composed for the event by one of the local Community Police Officers.

Part of the poem read:

We are bringing a community
together to make it strong,
Friends building positive futures
through music, art and song,
We're from all different backgrounds
religions and lands,
But on the 20th of July united we stand.

In the **London Borough of Tower Hamlets**, the friends—keenly aware that this period has a special potency—have been focusing on the Five Year Plan. A new Ruhi Book 1 and three new devotional meetings, including a “choir devotional”, have started since the most recent cluster reflection meeting. Participants in Ruhi Book 4, some of whom are friends of the Faith, hosted a screening of the film *The Gate*, and there have been fireside discussions, and an especially inspiring evening dedicated to the life of the Báb. At the Nineteen Day Feasts, stories of the Life of the Báb and the heroes and heroines of the Faith have been shared. At one recent Feast, the friends took a quote from the Báb and shared various artistic expressions of it.

✨

There are just three Bahá'í adults and one child in **Magherafelt**, but their 2017 bicentenary celebrations attracted more than 100 people. This time, they are hoping to double the audience for their main bicentenary event. They have been increasing their activities in the past year, and now have a children's class, devotional meetings, meditation and yoga sessions, and a book reading club. More than 20 people attended their last devotional.

✨

In **Altrincham and Sale**, there has been a weekly Sunday morning family devotional since January 2019 including stories about the heroes and heroines of the Bábí era. A monthly gathering has been organized for all the junior youth and their friends with the purpose of familiarising them with the stories of early believers. This is accompanied by some artistic and service projects. An end of year picnic held with the children's class participants, the junior youth and their parents, further fostered the atmosphere of love and fellowship, and generated discussions about community-building activities and the significance of the bicentenary. A classical piano recital took place in May, in honour of the Báb, and included some of His Writings. A workshop on the life of the Báb was organised by the Local Spiritual Assembly in July 2019

with the purpose of equipping friends with the knowledge and language to enable them to have conversations with their friends about the life of the Báb and His Ministry.

✨

The **Glasgow** Spiritual Assembly have been putting into practice their learning from the last bicentenary in making their plans for this one. They are creating a space every fortnight for friends to come together to study materials on the life of the Báb, taken from Ruhi Book 4, as well as inspirational stories. It is hoped the friends will be inspired to make home visits to their friends and neighbours after each of these deepenings. Further deepenings will allow the friends to practise talking about the Báb so that, by October, they will feel confident in having conversations about Him.

✨

The friends in **Great Yarmouth** are creating a storytelling performance on the life of the Báb, using a poem written about Him by a friend of the Faith who has completed Ruhi Books 1 to 4. The poem will be enhanced with other source material, sound effects and music. Their other plan is to hold a Friendship Walk, done successfully for the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh, to which many of their local friends and neighbours came. The walk is an act of unity and its commemoration of the Báb's birth will be made clear both in the invitation and follow-up.

✨

Oxford is planning a “moving devotional” with a musician travelling between several homes and locations around the city. The host of each devotional programme will invite their personal friends.

✨

The **York** community are hosting a screening of *Dawn of the Light*, the film commissioned by the Universal House of Justice, at a local cinema with 200 seats. A large number of people, including local dignitaries and representatives of other organisations, are invited.

In **Shetland**, Lerwick are also hoping to attract more than 150 friends with personal invitations to a film screening. There will be a devotional opening, home-baked food and live musical performances.

✨

In **Lanarkshire and Giffnock**, a small group of isolated believers are busy inviting their friends to a film screening, buffet and dramatic presentation.

✨

In the **London Borough of Wandsworth**, primary schools have been invited to participate in a project for Key Stage 2 pupils to mark the bicentenary. Inspired by the quote, “Consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship,” classes are being asked to collaborate on producing artistic works to express their views on the quote.

✨

A new Ruhi Book 8 has started in **Swindon** where the friends are coming together to deepen on the Covenant and to support one another in developing the skills for meaningful conversations. Raising capacity for introducing the Twin Manifestations in their conversations was identified as one of the key skills required in this period leading up to the bicentenary celebration.

✨

The British Library in **London** is launching an ambitious *Discovering Sacred Texts* online learning website and exhibition. To coincide with the launch of this new website—which will have a number of pages devoted to the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths—there will be a case in the British Library's Treasures Gallery, open to the public, containing three Bahá'í manuscripts including a rare and beautiful Haykal Tablet in the handwriting of the Báb and childhood calligraphy exercises by Bahá'u'lláh. The manuscripts will be on show for six months. The actor Omid Djalili will be giving a number of performances of his play *A Strange Bit of History*, which covers the early history of the Faith, at the British Library.

Bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb

Worldwide celebrations

The 200th anniversary of the Báb's birth occurs on 29 October, and around the world people are preparing for the momentous occasion. An exhibition of archives in Germany is just one example

AFTER PRAYERS in the Bahá'í House of Worship, as sunlight passes through the dome's diamond-shaped windows, a group walks down a geranium-lined path to the National Bahá'í Centre. Inside are sacred items related to the life of the Báb. The relics are part of an exhibition created by Germany's Bahá'í community to commemorate the upcoming bicentenary of the Báb's birth.

The exhibit, open from 21 April to 2 May, displayed three original items from the German Bahá'í community's archives, each related to the life of the Báb: a lock of His hair, some fragments of His clothes, and a piece of the wall of the castle of Máh-Kú, where He was imprisoned for nine months. The exhibit also included original items related to

the life of Bahá'u'lláh, as well as a passage written by the Báb about Bahá'u'lláh and another by Bahá'u'lláh about the Báb. Many hundreds of people from around the country viewed the exhibit, and many expressed profound emotions at being able to see items so closely connected to the lives of those two Sacred Figures.

"The theme here was the Word of God and the remarkable connection between the Twin Manifestations of God," explained Saba Khabirpour, the Secretary of Germany's National Spiritual Assembly.

Germany's Bahá'ís have undertaken numerous other steps to prepare. In nearby Gauangelloch, a village of 2,300, organizers of a spiritual education programme for children and youth have been holding regular service projects, involving



about 80 people, in honour of the Twin Bicentenaries. Efforts began in 2017 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the birth of Bahá'u'lláh, and they are continuing throughout the period linking that historic anniversary with the forthcoming bicentenary.

“Both celebrations are so intricately linked to the whole development of the community,” said Katrin, a Bahá'í living in Gauangelloch. “It’s not just two big events that are separated by two years, but really they’re part of an ongoing process of community-building.”

Amid the mounting joy and excitement, the bicentenary has especially animated young people, who are finding inspiration in the lives of the heroes and heroines of the Faith from the time of the Báb—individuals who courageously faced the dark forces of blind imitation, superstition, prejudice, and corruption. Many of them were youth and young adults, like the Báb Himself.

In February, a three-day youth conference brought together some 500 young people from around the country. They shared the stories of those early heroes. Though separated by time, participants could see the profound connection between the heroism of the Báb and His followers and the selfless and courageous service of so many young people working for unity today.

“The oneness of humanity was not a utopia or a dream for me any more,” said one of the participants, reflecting on the impact of the conference. “The vision of Bahá'u'lláh became much more realistic to me to see how so many people were united.” Inspired by the gathering, participants re-dedicated themselves to serving their communities and made concrete plans for their return home.

“The idea was to have a spiritual impulse that would set the tone for this holy year,” explained Sahar, one of the organizers of the youth conference, held near Frankfurt. “The stories of these youth have inspired a lot of action and helped us to draw on spiritual concepts such as sacrifice, understanding your reality, service, teaching, and selflessness.”



Samuel, another of the conference’s organizers, found that the conference not only inspired the participants but helped them to see that they are not alone. “Many youth attending the conference said they felt much more reassured knowing that there are so many others walking this path of service,” he explained. “Really, just at this conference, there are 500 other youth learning about this.”

Other local communities around Germany are also preparing for the bicentenary, focusing on integrating the coming celebration into their community building efforts as well as visiting friends and family members to deepen connections and bonds of love. In Mannheim, for example, the community is organizing storytelling nights in different neighbourhoods and plans to produce podcasts of the narratives being shared. In Muenster, a group formed a choir and is planning an artistic performance in honour of the bicentenary in October. **BWNS**

ABOVE: People line up to view a special exhibit of historic items related to the lives of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, displayed during an exhibition in Langenhain, Germany.

BELOW: About 500 youth gathered for prayers inside the House of Worship on the first night of a youth conference held in February.



Bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb

1819

the year the Báb was born

*When the Báb came into the world, writes John Lester,
revolutionary changes were taking place in Europe,
and poets were heralding the dawn of a new era*

TWO YEARS BEFORE the birth of the Báb—and coinciding with the birth of Bahá'u'lláh—the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley penned the sonnet *Ozymandias*, describing the discovery of a broken statue in the desert. Its face, half sunk on the sand, exhibits a “frown,” a “wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command,” indicative of a powerful and arrogant ruler. The poem ends:

*And on the pedestal these words appear:
‘My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!’
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.¹*

Ozymandias is the Greek form of the powerful Pharaoh Ramesses II, who may have been the Pharaoh in the story of Moses in The Book of Exodus. If that is the case, it brings an extra dimension to the poem. For whilst the influence of Moses is manifest and His name exalted in the Bible, the Qur'án and the Kitáb-i-Iqán—as well as other writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh—the Pharaoh's power died with him and his name is not specified in the Old Testament. The demise of Ozymandias is reminiscent of Bahá'u'lláh's questions in His tablet to Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh:

*Whither are gone the learned men, the divines and
potentates of old? All have perished, and, by God's decree,
naught remaineth of them but scattered dust. Exhausted
is the wealth they gathered, dispersed the stores they*

*hoarded, dissipated the treasures they concealed. Naught
can now be seen but their deserted haunts, their roofless
dwellings, their uprooted tree-trunks, and their faded
splendour.*

*...All have perished and are gone to rest beneath a canopy
of dust. Of them one heareth neither name nor mention;
none knoweth of their affairs, and naught remaineth of
their signs.²*

There is however a monarch, also born in 1819, who continues to exert a fascination over present generations: Queen Victoria. She would come to be praised by Bahá'u'lláh and, in accordance with the prayer He revealed for her, would aid His Cause in her lands during her lifetime. Her government—in the person of General Gordon, who, the historian H.M. Balyuzi suggests, may have met Bahá'u'lláh—released the Bahá'ís in Khartoum from prison in 1884. Ascending to the throne at a time when the reputation of royalty was at a low ebb, Queen Victoria would come to reign over “the largest and most cosmopolitan empire the world has ever known”³ and her dynasty survives to this day.

Shelley's poem fits well with the transitory power of kings and the ascendancy of Twin Manifestations to their thrones in the hearts of people. Indeed, the poet was particularly attuned to the spirit of expectation that was permeating the age. In one work, Shelley wrote:

*And a voice said:--‘Thou must a listener be
This day--two mighty Spirits now return,*

*Like birds of calm, from the world's raging sea,
They pour fresh light from Hope's immortal urn;
A tale of human power--despair not--list and learn!*⁴

In 1819, while most European empires were expanding, within the individual countries, unrest was brewing. Following the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, there were no more European Wars for 40 years so, internal disturbances notwithstanding, peace reigned in Europe for the whole of the Báb's life. But the Peterloo massacre in Manchester demonstrates how insecure governments of the time could feel. That same year Lord Liverpool's Six Acts significantly restricted the right of peaceful assembly. In 1820 there was a plot, known as the Cato Street Conspiracy, to kill the Prime Minister and his cabinet. In 1840, there was an attempt to assassinate the newly crowned Queen Victoria. In Persia, the Council of Badasht in 1848, establishing the independence of the Báb's religious claims, coincided with uprisings in France, Germany, Italy and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Clearly the old world order was being challenged at the very moment that the new one was being formed.

The Báb's lifetime saw European possessions in South America becoming independent, more through revolution than policy. Brazil, under Portugal till that time, became autonomous in 1822, whilst between 1811 and 1830 the

Spanish possessions of Paraguay, Argentina, Chile, Venezuela, Peru, Uruguay, and Ecuador all attained independence, with Chile in 1818 being closest to the special year. The independence movements enjoyed British support with the Foreign Secretary George Canning commenting, "I called the New World into existence to redress the balance of the Old."⁵ Unfortunately the New World Order he had in mind was not quite the one that the Báb was destined to herald.

It was left to the writers of English hymns to anticipate the arrival of a new Day. One of them, Frederick Tennyson—brother of the more celebrated Alfred, Lord Tennyson—was clearly sensitive to the spirit of the coming age:

*The Night is ended and the Morning nears:
Awake, look up! I hear the gathering sound
Of coming cycles, like an ocean round;
I see the glory of a thousand years
Lightening from bound to bound.*⁶

JL

¹ Shelley, *Ozymandias*

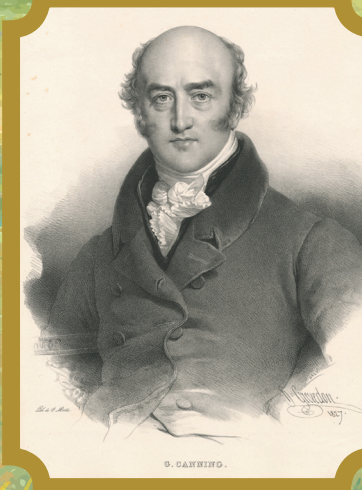
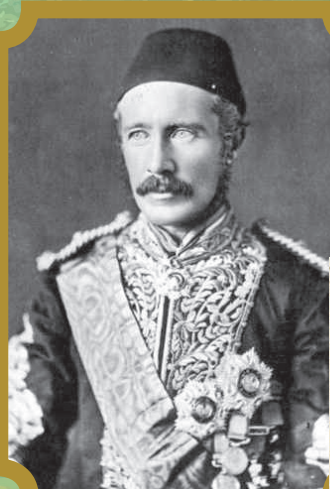
² Bahá'u'lláh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, pp.130-31

³ *Century of Light*, p.20

⁴ Shelley, *The Revolt of Islam*, Canto First, LVIII

⁵ <http://www.historyhome.co.uk/polspeech/portugal.htm>

⁶ Frederick Tennyson, *A Prophecy*



Ozymandias

*I met a traveller from an antique land,
Who said—two vast and磊磊 legs of stone
stand in the desert... near them, on the sand,
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, & sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, & the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal, these words appear:
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings,
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, & despair!
Nothing remains behind, Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless & bare
The lone & level sands stretch far away."*

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Queen Victoria, also born in 1819; General Gordon released the Bahá'ís in Khartoum from prison in 1884; Shelley's draft of the poem *Ozymandias*; Percy Bysshe Shelley; Foreign Secretary George Canning.

*Awake, look up! I hear
the gathering sound*



Bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb

“In no need of teachers”: the Báb as a Child

Even from His earliest years, it was evident to those around Him that The Báb possessed exceptional qualities and characteristics which could not be readily explained, writes Alex Murray

FROM THE MOMENT of the Báb's birth, the uniqueness of His soul was immediately apparent to his mother, Fāṭimih-Bagum. “Normally, He was serene and made no noise,” she recalled. “During the twenty-four-hour period, He would desire milk only four times. While nursing He would be most

gentle, and no movement was discerned from His mouth. Often I would become anxious and ask myself, ‘Why is this Child not like other children? Perhaps He has some illness that prevents His desiring milk.’ Then I would console myself, saying, ‘If He really had some unknown illness, He would manifest signs of agitation and restlessness.’

Unlike other children, He did not complain or behave in an unseemly manner during the weaning period. I was most thankful that now that the Exalted Lord had granted me this one Child, He was gentle and agreeable.”¹

By the age of five, the Báb's father, Mírzá Muḥammad-Ridá, describes his son as having mystical visions and

LEFT: A view of the interior of the Nasir al-Mulk mosque in Shiráz. (Photo: AyyoubSabawiki, Wikimedia Commons)

accurately foretelling things that would soon come to pass. He also described the devotional nature possessed by the Báb from a very young age:

Such peculiar characteristics are manifest in Him that the people are astonished. Now, when He is five years old, He sometimes raises His hands to the threshold of the One God, and recites prayers. He wakes in the middle of the night and stands to offer His obligatory prayers, in the midst of which He weeps. Sometimes He is sad, on other occasions He is happy, or immersed in rapture, or preoccupied with the imaginary world. My astonishment and bewilderment prevents me from describing further. Were I to recount all that I have observed from the time of His birth until the present, it would make a thick book.²

The Báb's uncle, who continued to raise Him after the passing of His father, also witnessed the Báb in such an exalted prayerful state:

It was not long after, at midnight, that I awoke and noticed that He was not in bed. Deeply perturbed, I was overtaken with anxiety that perhaps He had fallen from the mountain. Finally, after searching extensively, I heard a voice raised in the obligatory prayer and prayers of glorification to

the Lord, coming from the lower extremities [of the mountain]. When I followed the melody of that chant, I found the Child, standing alone and in private, in consummate rapture voicing prayers and supplications to the One Who transcends all mention, on the deserted mountainside and at that late hour of the night.³

Whilst a young boy, the Báb was entrusted by His uncle to a tutor called Shaykh 'Ábid, who had at one time been a disciple of both Shaykh Aḥmad and Siyyid Kázim. It was Shaykh Ábid who related this famous account:

One day...I asked the Báb to recite the opening words of the Qur'án: 'Bismi'lláhi'r-Rahmání'r-Raḥím.' He hesitated, pleading that unless He were told what these words signified, He would in no wise attempt to pronounce them. I pretended not to know their meaning. 'I know what these words signify,' observed my pupil; 'by your leave, I will explain them.' He spoke with such knowledge and fluency that I was struck with amazement. He expounded the meaning of 'Alláh,' of 'Rahmán,' and 'Raḥím,' in terms such as I had neither read nor heard. The sweetness of His utterance still lingers in my memory. I felt impelled to take Him back to His uncle and to deliver into his hands the Trust he had committed to my care. I determined to tell him how unworthy I felt to teach so remarkable a child. I found His

uncle alone in his office. 'I have brought Him back to you,' I said, 'and commit Him to your vigilant protection. He is not to be treated as a mere child, for in Him I can already discern evidences of that mysterious power which the Revelation of the Şáhibu'z-Zamán alone can reveal. It is incumbent upon you to surround Him with your most loving care. Keep Him in your house, for He, verily, stands in no need of teachers such as I.' Hájí Mírzá Siyyid 'Alí sternly rebuked the Báb. 'Have You forgotten my instructions?' he said. 'Have I not already admonished You to follow the example of Your fellow-pupils, to observe silence, and to listen attentively to every word spoken by Your teacher?' Having obtained His promise to abide faithfully by his instructions, he bade the Báb return to His school. The soul of that child could not, however, be restrained by the stern admonitions of His uncle. No discipline could repress the flow of His intuitive knowledge. Day after day He continued to manifest such remarkable evidences of superhuman wisdom as I am powerless to recount.⁴

AM

¹ Afnán, Mírzá Habíbu'lláh, trans. Ahang Rabbani The Báb in Shiráz: An Account by Afnán, https://bahai-library.com/pdf/r/rabbani_habibullah_afnan_shiraz.pdf

² *ibid.*

³ *ibid.*

⁴ Nabíl-i-A`zam, The Dawn-Breakers, p.76



LEFT: The birthplace of the Báb in Shiráz.

Bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb

The wife of the Báb: of dreams and sacrifice

The childhood dreams of the Báb's wife, writes Shirin Taherzadeh, were a premonition of the joys and sorrows of her life of devotion and unwavering faith to His Cause

KHADÍJIH-BAGUM first dreamt of her cousin, Siyyid 'Alí-Muḥammad—later known as the Báb—when she was a child. She vividly saw Him standing “in a verdant plain, with flowers in profusion,” praying towards Mecca. “He was wearing an outer coat on which Qur’anic verses were embroidered with threads of gold. His face was radiant.”¹

Some years later, she had another striking dream, anticipating their marriage. The following day, her aunt visited Khadíjih’s home to ask for her hand in marriage to her son. Many years later, recalling that dream and her marriage, Khadíjih is reported to have said, “No words can ever convey my wonderful feeling of good fortune...[Siyyid 'Alí-Muḥammad's] kindness towards me and His care for me were indescribable.”²

The early days of their life together were joyful and relatively tranquil. Not long after their marriage however, Khadíjih had a most troubling dream, one that foretold the tribulations that awaited them. In this dream, Khadíjih’s arms were wrapped around the neck of a fearsome lion. The lion dragged her two-and-a-half times around the courtyard of their home. She awoke, trembling with fright, and related her dream to Siyyid 'Alí-Muḥammad. “You awoke too soon,” He said. “Your dream portends that our life together will not last more than two-and-a-half years.”³ Khadíjih was deeply distressed. Siyyid 'Alí-Muḥammad’s affection and loving words were the only source of comfort to her sorrow-laden heart, and prepared her for the adversities that she was about to endure.

Through her intimate association with her husband, and her observation of every aspect of His life, Khadíjih began to recognize His extraordinary spiritual powers. One night, some time before Siyyid 'Alí-Muḥammad made the declaration of His station to Mullá Ḥusayn, Khadíjih witnessed something that confirmed her belief in the Báb and His mission.

That memorable evening, Khadíjih entered the upper chamber of the house, where the Báb would say his prayers. There she saw Him, immersed in light—a “divine light”—a light that she saw, not with her “outward eyes but with her inner sight.”⁴

When the next day the Báb revealed to her His station, she immediately professed her belief in Him, and her heart became calm and assured. “From that



ABOVE: An orange tree growing in the courtyard of the House of the Báb.

moment," she said, "I lived only to serve Him, evanescent and self-effacing before Him, no thought of self ever intruding".⁵ Khadíjih was the first member of the Báb's family to recognise Him.

Shortly afterwards, the rapid spread of the Báb's Message set in motion a series of events, resulting in His persecution, imprisonment and eventual martyrdom. This was a time of profound sorrow for Khadíjih. "Whenever [she] spoke of the days of her marriage and the enforced separation from her Husband, and related the sufferings of the Báb, grief would so overwhelm her as to deprive her, for a while, of the power of speech."⁶

Khadíjih survived the Báb by 32 years. Despite the deep anguish and suffering that she endured, she devoted the rest

of her life to furthering His Cause and bringing solace to those who had suffered hardships in His path.

Khadíjih-Bagum passed away in 1882. In visitation prayers revealed in her honour, Bahá'u'lláh testifies to the exalted station that she holds, and the tremendous sufferings that she endured, describing her in the *Kitáb-i-Badí'* as the "Most Virtuous of All Women." ST

¹ Balyuzi, *Khadíjih-Bagum*, p.2

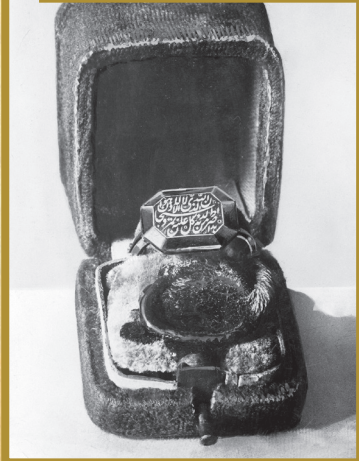
² *ibid.*, p.5-6

³ *ibid.*, p.6

⁴ Arbab, *Akhtaran-i-Taban*, Vol.1, pp.9-11, cited in Rouhani Ma'ani, *Leaves of the Twin Divine Trees*, p.34

⁵ Balyuzi, p.13

⁶ *ibid*



ABOVE: Exterior view of the House of the Báb.

ABOVE TOP TO BOTTOM: Cap worn by the Báb beneath His turban; Qur'an belonging to the Báb; the Báb's signet ring.

Bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb

William Cormick: the doctor who met the Báb

*What is known about the physician who was
the only Westerner to have met the Báb?
Brendan McNamara has been investigating*

He was a very mild and delicate-looking man, rather small in stature and very fair for a Persian, with a melodious soft voice, which struck me much...In fact his whole look and deportment went far to dispose one in his favour.¹

This unique depiction of the Báb was penned by Dr. William Cormick, a physician stationed in Tabríz in the 1840s. It is the only description of the Báb by a Westerner who actually met Him.

Despite his Irish origins—his father hailed from County Kilkenny—young William was himself born to an Armenian mother in Tabríz in 1819, where his father served as a physician to the royal court. At the age of 10, William was sent to England for his education. On his return to Persia in 1844, he was appointed as doctor to the British Mission in Tīhrán.

After two years, Dr. Cormick was seconded to the family of the Crown Prince Násiri'd-Dín Mirza and, in March 1847, he joined the royal party in Tabríz. At this very point, the Báb was prevented from proceeding to Tīhrán for a proposed meeting with the Sháh and was taken instead as a captive to Tabríz. The arrival of the Báb created a great stir, something the doctor must have been aware of, even if he could not imagine that he himself would be drawn into the centre of the drama.



After some days in Tabríz, the Báb was incarcerated in the remote castle of Máh-Kú. The following April the Prime Minister, concerned at the increasing influence that the Báb was exerting over the people of the area, transferred Him to another fortress prison, Chihríq. Despite being banished to this remote outpost, the influence of the Báb and His teachings only increased; “Siyyids of distinguished merit, eminent ‘Ulamás, and even government officials were boldly and rapidly espousing the Cause of the Prisoner”.²

The authorities in Tīhrán reacted by bringing the Báb to Tabríz so that these matters could be further investigated. His return to the provincial capital only served to fuel the enthusiasm of the people of the city who joyously welcomed Him and, despite threats and entreaties, strained to get a glimpse of the famous Prisoner. On being apprised of this tumult, the Prime Minister ordered the ecclesiastical dignitaries of Tabríz to meet immediately to consider how to “extinguish the flames of so devouring a conflagration.”³

The interrogation of the Báb by the clerical authorities which followed, in the presence of the Crown Prince, was a supremely dramatic moment. Rather than succeeding in humiliating the Báb, the authorities presented Him with an opportunity to declare His station. The Báb stated:

ABOVE: Dr. Cormick with his family, c.1867. ABOVE RIGHT: Dr. William Cormick.

“I am, I am, the promised One! I am the One whose name you have for a thousand years invoked, at whose mention you have risen, whose advent you have longed to witness, and the hour of whose Revelation you have prayed God to hasten. Verily I say, it is incumbent upon the peoples of both the East and the West to obey My word and to pledge allegiance to My person.”⁴

The Báb’s words electrified the convocation, perplexed His accusers and led to the dispersal of the meeting. The only decision the authorities could agree on was to inflict on Him the torture of the bastinado.

Dr. Cormick’s account relates that he and two Persian



doctors were sent to examine the Báb to determine whether He was of “sane mind, or merely a madman, to decide the question whether to put him to death or not.” The Báb was reluctant to answer the doctors’ questions, except when Dr. Cormick stated that he would like to know something about the Báb’s religion, as, not being a Muslim, he might “be inclined to adopt it.” “He regarded me very intently on my saying this,” Dr. Cormick wrote, “and replied that he had no doubt of all Europeans coming over to his religion.” The report of the three doctors was “of a nature to spare his life,” though Dr. Cormick goes on to mention that the Báb was put to death some time later.

But Dr. Cormick’s involvement does not end there. During the administration of the bastinado, which took place after receipt of the examining doctors’ report, the Báb was struck on the face, a blow “which produced a great wound and swelling of the face.” On being asked whether He wished a doctor to attend His wound, the Báb specifically asked for Dr.

Cormick, who “accordingly treated him for a few days.” The doctor complained that he was unable to have a “confidential chat” with the Báb on any of these occasions as Government people were always present. The doctor’s account concludes:

He was very thankful for my attentions to him... Of his doctrine I heard nothing from his own lips, although the idea was that there existed in his religion a certain approach to Christianity. He was seen by some Armenian carpenters, who were sent to make some repairs to his prison, reading the Bible, and he took no pains to conceal it, but on the contrary told them of it. Most assuredly the Mussulman fanaticism does not exist in his religion, as applied to Christians, nor is there that restraint of females that now exists.

Dr. Cormick, his Armenian wife and five surviving children returned to London in 1873 where he died in 1877, aged 58, and was buried in Kensal Green cemetery.

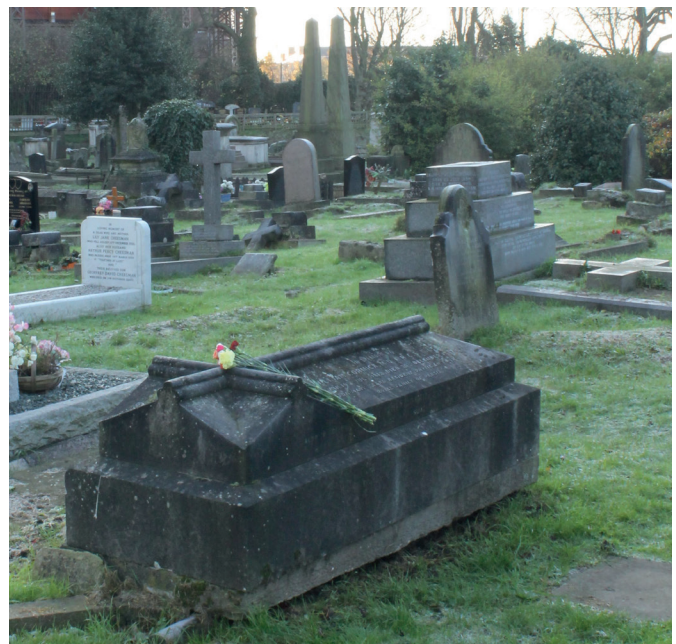
The story of William Cormick is that of an unwitting outsider thrust centre stage for the briefest of moments. Though not fully aware of what is going on, he nonetheless achieves a place in history because the Person who drew him to Himself was none other than a Manifestation of God. Dr Cormick cleaned and dressed, on more than one occasion, the wound upon the face of the Representative of God on earth. Thus the name of ‘Cormick’ will be recorded in the annals of religious history for all time. **BM**

¹ Dr. Cormick’s account is cited in Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá’í Religions – Some Contemporary Western Accounts*, p.75

² Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p.20

³ *ibid.*, p.21.

⁴ *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp.315-16



ABOVE: Dr. Cormick’s grave in Kensal Green, London.



*Haste thee, O Carmel, for
lo, the light of the countenance
of God, the Ruler of the
Kingdom of Names and
Fashioner of heavens, hath
been lifted upon thee.*

— Bahá'u'lláh —

Bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb

The Queen of Carmel

In 1891, Bahá'u'lláh visited a circle of cypress trees on Mount Carmel and indicated to 'Abdu'l-Bahá the spot where the Báb's remains should be permanently buried. Today, the Herald of the Bahá'í Faith rests in conspicuous glory, writes Sophie Gregory

MOUNT CARMEL has undergone a profound transformation in the past century. Once a bare, rocky mountainside, it now offers one of the most spectacular and beautiful sights on the planet. The illumination of this once-bare mountainside is a constant reminder that, during His imprisonment, the Báb was denied even a candle. The transformation of the mountain to become a befitting final resting place for the Báb was only achieved by tremendous sacrifice and strenuous labour.

The Báb's remains had been hidden for almost 50 years in various locations in Iran before being secretly transported to the Holy Land. For 'Abdu'l-Bahá, acquiring the land itself was an arduous task: the landowner resisted the sale; the cost of constructing a road to the site was exorbitant; objections were raised by officials at every turn; and there was constant suspicion perpetuated by those who undertook to thwart the Master's mission.

In spite of all the challenges, 'Abdu'l-Bahá succeeded in constructing a six-

room mausoleum. The Báb's remains were finally laid to rest at Naw-Rúz 1909. Believers gathered to witness the momentous and solemn occasion. The light of a single lamp guided the Master as He laid the remains of the Báb within a marble sarcophagus, a gift from the Bahá'ís of Rangoon. Such was the intense relief and emotion of the moment that 'Abdu'l-Bahá wept profusely.

This, however, was just the beginning of the process of building a befitting Shrine for the Báb. For this, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had a clear vision: it was to have nine rooms at the ground level, surrounded by an arcade and completed by a dome. However, the Master never saw the final structure completed. That fell to His Grandson, Shoghi Effendi.

Though adding the three additional rooms was no great task, finding an architect to bring 'Abdu'l-Bahá's vision into being proved more challenging. The answer to this conundrum came in a most unexpected way. Shoghi Effendi had been carrying out most of the work himself, helped by a local architect or engineer. But when his father-in-law

came to join the family in the Holy Land, a beautiful partnership began. William Sutherland Maxwell was an esteemed architect, and the person whom Shoghi Effendi entrusted with the weighty task of completing the Shrine.

The colonnaded arcade, finished and topped by a balustrade, was completed in 1950. Work then began on the central octagon, topped by a second balustrade with minaret-like pinnacles at each corner. An 11-metre-high drum-like clerestory was then built with 18 windows, symbolising the first 18 followers of the Báb—the Letters of the Living. The superstructure was covered with a dome, covered in gilded tiles, and topped with a lantern and finial. It was finally completed in 1953.

The Guardian labelled the completed structure “the Queen of Carmel”, “enthroned on God's Mountain, crowned in glowing gold, robed in shimmering white, girdled in emerald green, enchanting every eye from air, sea, plain and hill”.¹

The ornamental hanging garden terraces that surround the Shrine were also part of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's vision. It

would be a further half century before the stunning setting for the jewel that is the Shrine of the Báb was completed. In May 2001, the Terraces were inaugurated, completing the task set by Bahá'u'lláh more than a century earlier, while visiting the circle of cypress trees, which still remains behind the Shrine of the Báb.

For the thousands of visitors who today visit the Shrine and Terraces,

it is a place of outstanding beauty and tranquillity. For Bahá'ís, though, the Shrine of the Báb is one of the holiest sites on earth. It is, the Universal House of Justice has written, "a monument to the triumph of love over hate. The gardens which surround that structure, in their rich variety of colours and plants, are a reminder that the human race can live harmoniously in all its diversity. The light that shines from the

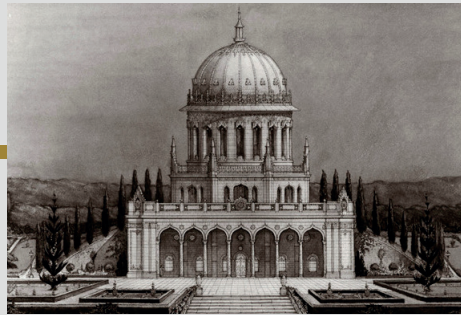
central edifice is as a beacon of hope to the countless multitudes who yearn for a life that satisfies the soul as well as the body."² SG

¹ Shoghi Effendi, Messages to the Bahá'í World, p.169

² Universal House of Justice, Statement for the Opening of the Terraces on Mount Carmel, 22 May 2001



Haifa in the nineteenth century



*Design for a superstructure
by W.S. Maxwell*



Shrine of the Báb, early 1900s



*Construction of the
Shrine of the Báb, 1950s*

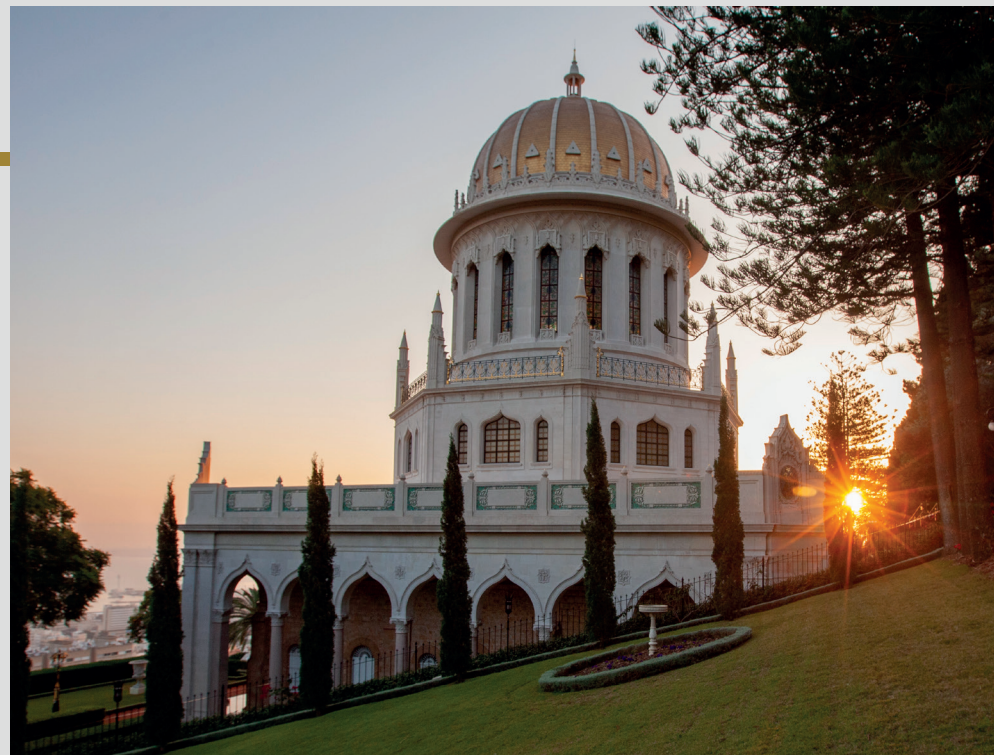


*Lights on path below the
Shrine of the Báb, 1920s*



*Shrine of the Báb as seen from Carmel
Avenue (now Ben Gurion), 1950s*

*The Shrine of the Báb
in the present day.*



Bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb

The story of the Báb – a stage drama

Writers in Europe and central Asia were moved and inspired by the spiritual drama of the Báb's life and martyrdom. Jan Jasion tells the story of one groundbreaking theatrical production

AS ACCOUNTS of the Báb became widely known in the second half of the nineteenth century, a number of significant western writers and artists were attracted to the tragic romance of His life and death. In *God Passes By*, written in 1944 to mark the centenary of the Declaration of the Báb, Shoghi Effendi records for posterity one such piece of theatre:

A Russian poetess, member of the Philosphic, Oriental and Bibliological Societies of St. Petersburg, published in 1903 a drama entitled "The Báb," which a year later was played in one of the principal theatres of that city, was subsequently given publicity in London, was translated into French in Paris, and into German by the poet Fiedler, was presented again, soon after the Russian Revolution, in the Folk Theatre in Leningrad, and succeeded in arousing the genuine sympathy and interest of the renowned Tolstoy, whose eulogy of the poem was later published in the Russian press.

The drama titled Ба́бъ [The Báb] was written by Izabella Grinevskaia. Born in 1864 in Suwałki in the so-called Kingdom of Poland—in reality a Russian governorate—she was raised in a literate family, where Polish, Russian and German classics formed a staple diet. She attended a college for young ladies in St. Petersburg at a time when universities were closed to women, and began a career as an actress, then as a translator, before she moved on to publish her own poems, plays, monologues, satires, essays and songs.

Grinevskaia probably first encountered the story of the Báb while researching oriental subjects in one of St. Petersburg's academic libraries. Russian scholars had a rich tradition of publishing studies on central Asia. Several of them—including Baron Viktor Rozen—had published in-depth articles with translations and analysis of the writings of the Báb.

Her play was published in April 1903 and immediately received very

BELOW: The Maly Theatre in St. Petersburg where the play *The Báb* was staged.





ABOVE: Izabella Grinevskaia

favourable reviews in the Russian press; some of them quoted at length from the text. One review wrote that the story could “move a Russian as well as a Persian. It is almost strange that in our literature no-one has come to write about such a wonderful, true-to-life tragedy.” Reviews also appeared outside St. Petersburg, including in Moscow, Baku, Odessa and Tbilisi. Grinevskaia received a personal letter from Leo Tolstoy praising *The Báb*, which she had sent to the great author.

The long awaited stage production happened in St. Petersburg on 4 January 1904. The director was Evtikhi Pavlovich Karpov, best known for his



ABOVE: The actor Iakov Sergeevich Tinskii.

production of Chekov’s *The Cherry Orchard*. The Báb appears as a character in the play, acted by Iakov Sergeevich Tinskii; Táhiriḥ was played by Nadezhda Nikolaevna Muzil-Borozdina. By all accounts, the audiences sat spellbound by the colourful costumes and the oriental settings and music. Applause, flowers and call-outs greeted the author. There was some criticism about the length of the performance as well as some minor problems in the rhyming schemes; the whole play was written as a poem. Outside Russia, news of the play appeared in the press in Paris and Rome, and even the United States.

For one performance on the 22 February, many well-known actors from Moscow took cameo roles. It was perhaps their way of supporting the author in the face of a looming decision to limit the production of the play for political reasons. The play so successfully portrayed its message of peace, love, tolerance and brotherhood that, after four performances, it received a five-year ban from the Tsar’s censor. It did however go on to be staged in Baku on 28 April and in the south Russian city of Astrakhan during the first week of December 1904.

A second edition of the play was published in 1916 and staged the following year. In 1922 the last recorded staging took place in ‘Ishqábád in Turkistán. This performance is described by Hand of the Cause of God ‘Alí-Akbar Furútan in *The Story of My Heart*:

On the night of the performance, a large audience...gathered in the theatre, but at the climax of the play when interest was at its highest, the theatre was suddenly enveloped in darkness. Fortunately, the interruption did not last long, and after a few minutes the electricity was restored. It was later found that a few unsympathetic individuals had cut the main power cables on the street to express their hostility in this way.

Even in dramatic form, then, the story of *The Báb* was plagued by

opposition.

Many of the play’s first reviews stated that the play must be staged, for its effect on the whole of society would be uplifting. The publicity given to the play in London, to which Shoghi Effendi refers, happened in 1907 when a conference was organised under the auspices of the Foreign Press Association. Well-known personalities from Serbia, Bohemia, France and England attended, including the traveller and Orientalist F.H. Skrine, who in 1912 wrote a book, *Baháism: The Religion of Brotherhood and its Place in the Evolution of Creeds*. A booklet later produced in French and English carried extensive quotations from the play but, contrary to widely published accounts, there is no record of the play ever being staged in any city outside Russia or in any language other than Russian. Isabella Grinevskaia went on to write other stage pieces on Bahá’í themes before her passing, shortly after the end of the siege of Leningrad in 1944. In a Tablet to her, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, “I beseech for thee the exaltation of the Kingdom, as I entreat for thee likewise heavenly illumination, nearness to the Court of Grandeur, eternal life, and spiritual effulgence.” JJ



ABOVE: Nadezhda Nikolaevna Muzil-Borozdina (1880-1952) as Táhiriḥ.

I am the Mystic Fane which the Hand of Omnipotence hath reared. I am the Lamp which the Finger of God hath lit within its niche and caused to shine with deathless splendor. I am the Flame of that supernal Light that glowed upon Sinai in the gladsome Spot, and lay concealed in the midst of the Burning Bush.

— The Báb

Further Reading

The website of the worldwide Bahá'í community, www.bahai.org, has a number of excellent articles on the Báb and His mission. These include:

The Life of the Báb: www.bahai.org/the-bab/life-the-bab

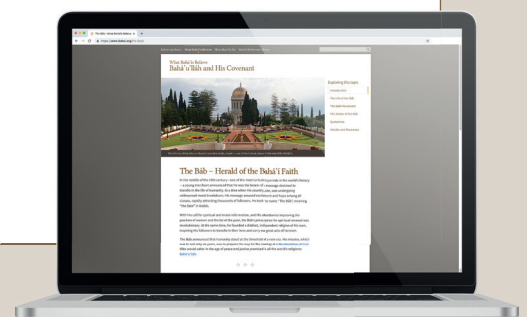
The Bábí Movement: www.bahai.org/the-bab/babi-movement

A selection of essays, articles and resource materials which further explore the life of the Báb and His mission: www.bahai.org/the-bab/articles-resources/

The new Bahá'í World Publication website, www.bahaiworld.bahai.org includes:

The Mission of the Báb – Retrospective 1844-1994: www.bahaiworld.bahai.org/articles/mission-bab

In this article, first published in the 1994–5 edition of *The Bahá'í World*, Douglas Martin considers the Revelation of the Báb in the context of its impact on the Western writers of the period and its subsequent influence.





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Published by the National Spiritual
Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the
United Kingdom.

Registered in England – Company
limited by guarantee No.355737,
Registered Charity (1967) 250851.

Registered with the Scottish Charity
Regulators (SC041673)

The Assembly also represents the
Bahá'í communities of the Isle of
Man and the Channel Islands.