

“The Baha’i Faith and Theosophy¹: Remarkable Early Contacts and Exchanges in the First Decades of the Twentieth Century”

by Graham Nicholson*

The purpose of this paper is to explore in a positive way the early contacts that occurred between these two belief systems – the Baha’i Faith and Theosophy - in the early stages of their development as distinct entities around the beginning of the twentieth century². That these two systems have certain commonalities³ is taken for granted and is not explored in detail. These contacts could not have occurred without this⁴. The remarkable feature is the extent of these early contacts, extending to senior members of both systems, and continuing on a fairly regular basis for a long period of time. As both systems reflect in their own ways the spirit of those times, and as both systems acquired a not insignificant following and influence, it says something very important about that particular age. It is for us to reflect on what that may be after reading the paper.

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¹ No significance is to be attached to the mere fact that the Baha’i Faith is mentioned first.

² Both the Baha’i Faith and the Theosophical Society claim to have certain antecedents. The Baha’i Faith, although asserting that it is an independent religion in its own right, with its own Founder/Prophet Baha’u’llah (1819-1892), its own Holy Writ and its own laws, also claims spiritual continuity with previous divine Revelations that lead to the founding of the great religions of the world, all of them being said to be originally derived from the one supreme, transcendental God. It teaches that divine Revelation is progressive and cyclical. The Faith dates from the Declaration of the forerunner of the Faith, one called the Bab, or “gate”, in Persia in 1844, who prophesied the coming of Baha’u’llah. The Theosophical Society Teachings, although new in the sense that the Society was founded in 1875 in New York by Colonel Henry Steel Olcott and Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, also recognizes the spiritual inheritance of the great religions of the world and their Founders, particularly those of eastern origins, including Jesus. Further, the foundation of Theosophical belief is said to date back to the third century AD, beginning with Ammonius Saccas and his disciples – see *The Key to Theosophy* by H P Blavatsky (1953, Theosophical Publishing House), although the Ancient Wisdom is said to have always existed. It does not claim to be a separate religion.

³ And certain differences, not to be emphasized for the purposes of this paper. K Paul Johnson states there are many points of similarity. “Both emerged in the mid and late 19th century, stress brotherhood among all religions, aim for a future world in which prejudices of race, caste, sex and creed are overcome, have their largest number of members in India but their richest and most influential membership in the US. Both even are headquartered in America in Chicago suburbs with names starting with w”. www.theos-1.com/archives/199408/t100144.html. Johnson also states that both Baha’i and Theosophy are devoted to ending religious violence - <http://www.theos-world.com/archives/html/tw199808.html>.

⁴ One of the reasons for the contact was simply geographical. The Baha’i Faith was introduced to the USA at about the time the Theosophical Society was progressing from its birth in the USA. The Baha’i Faith was first mentioned in the new world at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, and soon had followers in the USA. After Madame Blavatsky died in 1891, the Society underwent some divisions, with Mrs Annie Besant continuing as head of the main part, soon to be based in India. It is not known to the writer when the first contact between the two systems occurred, but it may have been in London, England when Mrs. Besant spoke at the South Place Chapel on “*The Religious Systems of the World*”, and Professor E G Browne spoke on “*Babiism*” in 1891. If not then, it may well have occurred later in Chicago in the USA, possibly at the World Parliament of Religions, at which Besant spoke- see *The First Five Lives of Annie Besant*, Arthur H Nethercot, (1960, Uni Chicago Press), 392-394.

The central person behind the extended links between the two systems in the first decades of the twentieth century is undoubtedly Abdu'l-Baha⁵, the eldest son of Baha'ú'llah⁶ and His successor as leader of the Baha'i Faith after the passing of Baha'ú'llah in 1892 in the Holy Land⁷. It was Abdu'l-Baha's decision late in his life⁸ to journey to the west that led to the series of contacts and exchanges the subject of this paper. This was facilitated by his release from the status of a prisoner by the Young Turk revolution in 1908. He first of all sailed to Egypt in 1910, spent some time there, and then went on to London in August/September 1911 to talk at the Universal Races Congress. He arrived in London on 4 September 1911. This led to a series of talks at various institutions around London.

His reputation as a great spiritual leader preceded him before he even arrived in England. The Faith must have already been known to Theosophical Society members in Great Britain. The May 1911 edition of the Journal *Theosophy in Scotland*, contained an article by one "Adhem" which drew upon an earlier article by Major W Tudor Pole in the *Baha'i News* about his meeting with Abdu'l-Baha in Egypt and other publications. It was clearly not the first Theosophical Society published comment on the Baha'i Faith⁹. It read in part:

"From time to time, mention of the great Baha'i Movement has been made in this magazine, and interest has again been aroused in some quarters, by the recent visit of Mr. W Tudor Pole, to Edinburgh, when it was hoped that he would be able to visit our Headquarters at 130 George Street, and perhaps address the members of the Edinburgh Lodges on the subject of his recent meeting with Abdu'l-Baha, the present leader of the Baha'is, at Alexandria. Unfortunately, however, Tudor Pole was unable to accept the invitation, and we missed the opportunity of hearing about one of the most important of modern movements, from the lips of one who has come into such close touch with its present leader..."

The article proceeds to survey the history of the Faith in a complimentary manner, and expresses the hope that the day would come when the hopes of the Theosophist and the Baha'i would be realized, and the unity and peace of the whole world would be an accomplished fact. It asks as to the future of the Faith¹⁰.

The members of the Edinburgh Lodges of the Society were obviously disappointed at not finding out more at that time. The visit of Abdu'l-Baha to London shortly thereafter no doubt aroused considerable publicity which must have reached and appeared in the Scottish press. As a result, members of the Scottish Society, led by their Secretary and Editor of the Journal Mr. Graham Pole, took the trouble of traveling to London with the express purpose of meeting Abdu'l-Baha. Pole is recorded as having met Abdu'l-Baha four times in London. He was apparently present

⁵ Abdu'l-Baha is not regarded by Baha'is as a Prophet, but he is regarded with great respect as the centre of Baha'ú'llah's Covenant after His passing in 1892 and the perfect exemplar of the Baha'i life.

⁶ Baha'ú'llah, the Prophet/Founder of the Baha'i Faith. The name literally means "Glory of God".

⁷ On the coast of northern Palestine, now Israel, the world centre of the Baha'i Faith.

⁸ Abdu'l-Baha was born in 1844.

⁹ The writer has not been able to identify the first published comment.

¹⁰ *The Seven Candles of Unity*, A Khursheed, (1991 Baha'i Publishing Trust), 57-58.

when Abdu'l-Baha spoke at the City Temple on 10 September 1911¹¹, and again when he spoke at St John's Westminster on 17 September 1911¹². Abdu'l-Baha wrote a special message for him to take back to the members in Scotland¹³, the text of which is worth reproducing:

“To the Members of the Theosophical Society in Scotland

Give my most friendly greetings to all the Theosophists. You all in reality have risen to help humanity because you are freeing yourselves from superstition and you are casting ignorance far from your minds. You wish the welfare of mankind, and this object is a mighty one. Every man that in this day rises to save his brothers is nearing the threshold of God, for all the manifestations and prophets of God have striven to bring about unity among men, and they have worked for harmony. The foundation of the Divine teaching is this unity and harmony. Moses strove for unity among men; the Christ did all to promote this understanding, and Mahommed also proclaimed the necessity of this union. The Buddha also worked for the same great goal. The Gospel and the Koran and the Holy Writings are the basis for this unity. The foundation of the religions of God is one: the faith of God is one and that is to bring between men love and understanding; and Baha'u'llah has renewed the teachings of the prophets and of the manifestations and has again proclaimed on what foundation the religion of God is established. He is bringing together again different nations, and has been able to unite together antagonistic sects. The spirit of Baha'u'llah is bringing together all the members and all the organs of the body of humanity to a complete understanding. As you are members of this body of humanity striving to bring about the accomplishment of this great aim, I pray God to assist you.

Abbas ”.

Abdu'l-Baha obviously had some knowledge of the Teachings of Theosophy to make these comments. He left a deep impression on Pole, who returned to Scotland, and wrote in most affectionate and respectful terms of the visit in the Journal *Theosophy in Scotland*, together with the text of the message of Abdu'l-Baha¹⁴. A later edition carried a portrait of Abdu'l-Baha.

Abdu'l-Baha had by this time met Mrs. Besant, who had called on him in London. Mrs. Besant happened to be in London since she first arrived from India on 5 May 1911 with young Krishnamurti and another young man. They had attended the Coronation procession of George V on 22 June and then went to Paris for a while. On return to London, Mrs Besant gave three lectures at Queen's Hall, London in June and July on “*The Coming of the World Teacher*”. She returned to India in late September 1911¹⁵. Before she left London, she decided to call on Abdu'l-Baha, whose visit to London at the same time would have been widely known. Mrs. Besant requested that Abdu'l-Baha address the Theosophical Society at its headquarters in

¹¹ For the text see *Abdu'l-Baha in London*, (1982, Baha'i Publishing Trust), 19-20.

¹² Ibid, 21-25.

¹³ *The Seven Candles of Unity*, op.cit., 59; *The Chosen Highway*, Lady Blomfield, (1975, Baha'i Publishing Trust), 173. Baha'is regard such texts as part of their large corpus of sacred literature.

¹⁴ See *The Seven Candles of Unity*, op.cit., 58-60.

¹⁵ *Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening*, Mary Lutyens, (1975, Avon Books), 51-57.

London, to which he acceded¹⁶. It was to be his last address in London on this visit. Mr. A P Sinnett, another leading Theosophist, was in the chair¹⁷ when it took place on 30 September 1911. It is possible that Mrs. Besant was not present as she may have already left for India. The text of the address is recorded¹⁸, and provided for the first time a systematic summary of the main principles found in the Teachings of Baha'u'llah¹⁹.

The nature of the discussion between Mrs. Besant and Abdu'l-Baha on her visit to his residence is not known apart from the invitation to address the Society. But it clearly was a very significant event. Here were the leaders of the respective belief systems meeting together in the most cordial of circumstances. No doubt it was very positive. Abdu'l-Baha was obviously very impressed with Mrs. Besant and her work, as subsequent correspondence reveals²⁰. That there was a close correlation between their views on certain subjects is revealed, for example, by the frequent references to the unity or oneness of mankind in the writings and addresses of Abdu'l-Baha²¹, and by similar writings by Mrs Besant on the brotherhood of man²². Mr. Sinnett is recorded as having also visited Abdu'l-Baha several times around this time²³.

Separately, Abdu'l-Baha gave a discourse to London Theosophists in September 1911. It probably took place immediately after his address on 30 September, already mentioned. This discourse, in the form of questions and answers, is also recorded²⁴. It is of interest, in that it clarifies aspects of the Baha'i Teachings, including in relation to Theosophy and other belief systems. Thus in relation to Theosophy, Abdu'l-Baha was asked if he recognized the good which the Society had done. He answered:

¹⁶ *God Passes By*, Shoghi Effendi, (1974, Baha'i Publishing Trust), 284; *Abdu'l-Baha*, H M Balyuzi, (1987, George Ronald), 152. It seems more difficult to find references to this visit by Mrs Besant to Abdu'l-Baha in Theosophical literature. It is not mentioned in *The Last Four Lives of Annie Besant*, Arthur H Nethercot, (1963, Uni Chicago Press), even though he deals with the London visit in some detail. Nor is it mentioned in *Madame Blavatsky's Baboon*, Peter Washington, (Schocken Books, 1995). A search of the literature in the Theosophical Society Library in Brisbane by Mr Borhan Borhani at the request of the author failed to reveal any mention of the visit.

¹⁷ *Abdu'l-Baha*, Ibid.

¹⁸ *Abdu'l-Baha in London*, op.cit., 27-30. The text is on the net at www.bahai.com/writings3/AbdulBaha/london/26-30.htm.

¹⁹ Sometimes called "the twelve principles" by the Baha'is, although Abdu'l-Baha only gave nine on this occasion, including the oneness of humanity and the abolition of prejudice.

²⁰ See footnote 59 below.

²¹ See, for example, *Abdu'l-Baha in London*, op.cit., talk given the City Temple on 10 September, 1911. This principle was central to Baha'u'llah's teachings.

²² See *Annie Besant on the Brotherhood of Religions*, Surendra Narayan (Compiler), (1993, Theosophical Publishing House), Chapter 3, *The Brotherhood of Man*. Madame Blavatsky identified this as one of the objects of the Theosophical Society much earlier – see *The Key to Theosophy*, op.cit., 31, and it was later formally included in the three objects of the Society.

²³ *The Chosen Highway*, op.cit., 154.

²⁴ *Abdu'l-Baha in London*, op.cit., 58-67.

*“I know it; I think a great deal of it. I know that their desire is to serve mankind. I thank this noble Society in the name of all Baha’is and for myself. I hope that by God’s help these friends will succeed in bringing about love and unity. It is a great work and needs the effort of all the servants of God.”*²⁵

After London, Abdu’l-Baha moved on to Paris. But even here the Theosophical connection did not leave him. He gave many talks over several months, including a talk to the Theosophical Society at its Paris headquarters with Monsieur Bleck present²⁶. The talk followed the pattern of that given to the Society in London, except that this time Abdu’l-Baha listed eleven principles. He said at the opening:

“Since my arrival in Paris, I have been told of the Theosophical Society, and I know that it is composed of honoured and respected men. You are men of intellect and thought, men with spiritual ideals, and it is a great pleasure for me to be among you. Let us thank God who has drawn us together this evening. It gives me great joy, for I see that you are seekers after truth. You are not held in bondage by the chains of prejudice, and your greatest longing is to know the truth. Truth may be likened to the sun! The sun is a luminous body that disperses all shadows; in the same way does truth scatter the shadows of our imagination. As the sun gives life to the body of humanity so does truth give life to their souls. Truth is a sun that rises from different points on the horizon.”

After this Abdu’l-Baha wintered in Egypt for a while to escape the cold. The exertion of his efforts had severely taxed his strength. But the arm of the Theosophical Society and its dear members in Scotland reached out to him. In April 1912, they established a fund for the purposes of publishing his many talks in London and Paris and called for contributions to the cost. The talks were published soon afterwards in two volumes, *Talks with Abdu’l-Baha given in Paris*, and *Abdu’l-Baha in London*. Both were reviewed and recommended in *Theosophy in Scotland*²⁷. By the efforts of these dear friends of the Faith, together with the efforts of Lady Blomfield²⁸ and her assistants who took notes at the talks, the actual talks are preserved for all time, a wonderful gift by Theosophy to the Baha’is and the peoples of the world.

From Egypt, Abdu’l-Baha decided to go to America, taking the *SS Cedric* from Alexandria on 25 March 1912 in preference to the new *Titanic*, which was faster and more expensive²⁹. He arrived in New York on 11 April 1912.

News of his visit must have traveled ahead of him, for contacts were quickly made with American Theosophists and others. Then began a series of talks to many groups, among them Theosophists, in various parts of America. On 25 April 1912 he addressed a delegation from the Theosophical Society in Washington DC who called on him at Mrs Agnes Parson’s room, the

²⁵ Ibid, 61.

²⁶ *Abdu’l-Baha*, op.cit., 166. The text of the talk is in *Paris Talks*, (11th Ed. 1969, Baha’i Publishing Trust), 127-134. The exact date of the talk is not known to the writer.

²⁷ *The Seven Candles of Unity*, op.cit., 61.

²⁸ See *Star of the West*, (1913) Volume III No 19, 3.

²⁹ Which of course sank on its maiden voyage.

theme being the spirit and spiritual progress³⁰. On 4 May 1912, he gave a talk to Theosophists at the Northwestern University Hall in Evanston, Illinois on existence and non-existence³¹. On 30 May 1912, he gave a talk to the Theosophists of the New York Lodge in New York on the theme of the cause of peace through Divine power³². On 24 July 1912, he gave a talk to the Boston Theosophical Society at their hall in Boston on the spirit of man³³. On 27 July 1912, Mr W W Harmon, a leading Theosophist, came from Boston to see Abdu'l-Baha at Dublin, and had a lengthy conversation with him³⁴. Mr Harmon had written a book on Theosophy and the Buddhist teachings, and the discussions with Abdu'l-Baha continued on the following day³⁵, and the day after that³⁶. On 27 August 1912, Abdu'l-Baha gave another talk to Theosophists at the Metaphysical Club in Malden, Boston³⁷. Abdu'l-Baha spoke with the President of the Theosophical Society the following day³⁸. On 4 September 1912, Abdu'l-Baha is recorded as having made a statement in Montreal marveling at the effect of Baha'ú'llah's message in the West on members of Theosophy and other movements³⁹. On 14 September 1912, he gave a talk to Theosophists in Chicago⁴⁰ on the teachings of the Manifestation of God. There may well have been a number of other addresses to or conversations with Theosophists that are not recorded⁴¹.

³⁰ See *239 Days*, Allan L Ward, (1979, Baha'i Publishing Trust), 44, *Mahmud's Diary*, Mirza Mahmud-i-Zarqani (1998, George Ronald), 59, 464, *Agnes Parson's Diary*, Richard Hollinger (Ed.) (1996, Kalimat), 46. The text of the talk is in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, (1982, Baha'i Publishing Trust), 58-60; *Star of the West*, Vol. III No 2, 22-23.

³¹ *239 Days*, Ibid, 55; *Mahmud's Diary*, Ibid, 75; note that the date given for this talk in the latter publication is 3 May. The text of the talk is in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, Ibid, 87-91; *Star of the West*, Ibid, 15-18.

³² *239 Days*, Ibid, 75; *Mahmud's Diary*, Ibid, 117; note that the date given for this talk in the latter publication is 29 May. The text of the talk is in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, Ibid, 156-160; *Star of the West*, Vol IV No 3, 55-58.

³³ See also *239 Days*, Ibid, 117; *Mahmud's Diary*, Ibid, 180; *Abdu'l-Baha*, op.cit., 232. The text of the talk is in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, Ibid, 239-243; *Star of the West*, Vol IV No 7, 115-117.

³⁴ *Mahmud's Diary*, Ibid, 183-184.

³⁵ *Agnes Parson's Diary*, op.cit., 79-81; *Mahmud's Diary*, Ibid, 184-185.

³⁶ *Mahmud's Diary*, Ibid, 185-186.

³⁷ *239 Days*, Ibid, 131; *Mahmud's Diary*, Ibid, 224. The text of the talk is in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, Ibid, 284-289.

³⁸ *Mahmud's Diary*, Ibid, 224-225.

³⁹ Ibid, 243.

⁴⁰ For the text of this talk see http://bahai-library.com/?file=abdulbaha_address_theosophical_society.html, as reproduced from the *Theosophical Messenger*, December 1912, Vol 14, No. 3; see also *239 Days*, Ibid, 145; *Abdu'l-Baha*, Ibid, 267; *Mahmud's Diary*, Ibid, 263-264.

⁴¹ For example, it is recorded that he spoke to the Theosophical Society in the Bay area of San Francisco – *Memories of Abdu'l-Baha*, Ramona Allen Brown, (1980, Baha'i Publishing Trust), 40. This talk occurred on 11 October 1912 – see *Mahmud's Diary*, Ibid, 315.

On 4 December 1912 Abdu'l-Baha gave his final talk on the American Continent, choosing the Theosophical Society in New York⁴². He spoke on the reality of the Divinity and the Manifestations on earth of that Divinity. He left New York the next day⁴³. In the few months he had been in America he had given hundreds of addresses, met thousands of people from all walks of life, carried on a voluminous correspondence and traveled the length and breadth of the Continent, a remarkable effort for a man of his age. He had also established close ties with the Theosophical Society there.

Abdu'l-Baha arrived in Liverpool, England on 13 December 1912. One of his first talks was to the Theosophical Society there on the next day⁴⁴. The President of the Society, Mrs. Armour, was in the chair. He spoke on the search for truth. He said at the beginning:

“When I was in America, I had many opportunities of addressing the Theosophical Society there. In every city I spoke once to them, and in some cities many times. The Theosophists are very dear to me, for they have abandoned all prejudice. They do not abide in the confines of dogma, but are seeking truth in a spirit of freedom. All the religions of the world are submerged in prejudice. A Jew is a Jew because his father was before him. A Christian is such for the same reason, and it is the same with the Musselman. All follow the precepts of their fathers, refusing to go forth and seek for themselves.

We both (Theosophists and Baha'is) have abandoned all dogmas in our earnest search for truth. But look at the tribes and nations of the world – why are they seething with contention? Because they are not seeking truth. Truth is one. It admits of absolutely no divisions and accepts neither limitations nor boundaries. All dogmas differ, hence nations are opposed. The different dogmas make wars and strife. Behold the events of these days! If it were not for these differences in religions there would be no wars.”⁴⁵

One might say that these comments are just as applicable to the situation in the world today as when they were spoken so many years ago. Surely they are a self-evident truth in themselves!

More talks followed. On 3 January 1913, he gave a talk to the Theosophical Society in London⁴⁶, but no record of the text of the talk appears to exist. Then it was time to reestablish the Scottish connection with the Society, which was still active from the previous contacts.

On 6 January 1913, Abdu'l-Baha left by train for Edinburgh. He had been invited by Dr Whyte, a prominent Minister of the United Free Church of Scotland, and Mrs. Whyte, who had shown considerable interest in the Baha'i Faith⁴⁷. It was supported by the Theosophical Society of

⁴² 239 Days, Ibid, 193; Abdu'l-Baha, Ibid, 329; the text of the talk is in *Star of the West*, Vol VII No 8, 69-71; *Mahmud's Diary*, Ibid, 423-429.

⁴³ New York is now known to the Baha'is as the City of the Covenant. It is also the City where the Theosophical Society was founded.

⁴⁴ Abdu'l-Baha, op.cit., 343.

⁴⁵ The full text is in *Star of the West*, Vol III No 17, 3-4.

⁴⁶ Abdu'l-Baha, op.cit., 354.

⁴⁷ Mrs. Whyte was the recipient of Abdu'l-Baha's famous letter called the *Seven Candles of Unity*, in which he indicates the steps whereby world unity would come about.

Scotland, the efforts of which have already been described up to this time, and whose members were well informed of Baha'i principles. The joint efforts of the Whytes and that Society had resulted in several articles in Edinburgh newspapers, including the Edinburgh Evening Despatch of 3 January 1913. In addition, a booklet entitled *The Baha'i Movement, The Reform of Islam from Within*, had been published by an Edinburgh publisher, presumably with similar help. Considerable publicity accompanied Abdu'l-Baha's arrival in Edinburgh on 6 January 1913. Mrs. Whyte arranged for a number of meetings by various groups, including one by the Theosophists⁴⁸.

On 9 January 1913, Abdu'l-Baha went to the Theosophical Society in Great King Street, where he was entertained to tea by Mr. Graham Pole and various other members of the Society from Scotland, England and Ireland. Some were given private interviews. He was very tired but still addressed the members and friends with great power. Mr. Pole was in the chair. The theme of the talk dealt with blind dogma, prejudice, the immortality of the soul, the Divine springtime, the renewal of religion and the appearance of the Divine Masters⁴⁹. The text was published in full in the February 1913 edition of *Theosophy in Scotland*⁵⁰. At the close of his address, Abdu'l-Baha pronounced the benediction, as follows:

*“Oh, Thou Almighty God! Illumine our minds. May the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf be unstopped. Arouse the hearts that are dead. Quicken the souls that are fast asleep. Deliver us from every tribulation. Suffer us to attain Thine infinite Kingdom. Oh Lord, confer upon us Thy bounty so that we may attain to Thy knowledge. May we be lovers of Thy beauty, no matter in which human temple it may appear. May we become the adorers of the sun of Thy reality, no matter from which dawning- place it may shine forth. May we be the seekers of sweet fragrance, no matter from which rose it is diffused. Oh, Lord, deliver us from the material world and lead us on to Thine Eternal Kingdom, so that we may walk in Thy pathway, seek after Thy holy places, and in the consecration of the elect may we witness the transfiguration of Thy bounteous Truth. Thou art generous, Thou art compassionate, Thou art omnipotent, Thou art omniscient.”*⁵¹.

Balyuzi records that after the address :

*“That night, he was the guest of the Theosophical Society for dinner, autographed a number of his own photographs which some of the members had, prayed for a young couple about to be married who, kneeling before Him, asked for His blessing, and wrote this prayer in the Society's books: ‘He is God. O Lord! Cast a ray from the Sun of Truth upon this Society that it may be illumined’.”*⁵²

Abdu'l-Baha left for London the next day. After that, he traveled on to Paris again. Again many talks were given. On 13 February, 1913, he spoke to the Theosophical Society in Paris⁵³ on the

⁴⁸ Abdu'l-Baha, op.cit., 355, 362-3; *The Seven Candles of Unity*, op.cit., 61-71.

⁴⁹ Abdu'l-Baha, Ibid, 367-368; *The Chosen Highway*, op.cit., 172-173.

⁵⁰ *The Seven Candles of Unity*, op.cit., 104-107, and see 101-104.

⁵¹ Ibid., 100.

⁵² Abdu'l-Baha, op.cit., 368.

⁵³ Ibid, 377.

subject of the Divine creation⁵⁴. From Paris, Abdu'l-Baha wrote to Mr. Graham Pole in Edinburgh by letter dated 27 February, 1913⁵⁵, in which he stated:

“I will pray in thy behalf and beg of thee Divine Confirmation so that in Scotland thou mayest upraise the banner of oneness of the world of humanity through the assistance of Baha'u'llah and become the promoter of heavenly teachings which are the spirit of this age.”

He then traveled further into the European mainland, reaching Budapest in the Austro-Hungarian Empire at a time of rising European tensions. On 9 or 10 April 1913, he addressed the Theosophical Society in that City⁵⁶, but there appears to be no recorded text of the address. On 19 April 1913, he reached Vienna. When he returned to his hotel the next day from another visit, two Theosophists Frau Tyler and Herr Kreuz, who had been at the station to greet him on his arrival, called to convey their greetings and those of other Theosophists, and to express their desire to hear his discourse that evening. Later, Abdu'l-Baha went to the new Theosophical Hall, having to walk up the steps as no lift had yet been installed. He apparently addressed the members, but no record of the talk appears to have been kept. The next day he again addressed the members of the Society, but again no record appears to have been kept of what he said. On 23 April, some Theosophists heard him again for the third time. Again, no apparent record. Before he left Vienna, Frau Tyler called on him again⁵⁷.

In the meantime, the interest in the Faith continued in Scotland. Four meetings were held by Theosophists about the Baha'i Faith in the Outlook Tower in Edinburgh. Very little information is available about these and subsequent meetings, but they were mentioned in the October 1913 edition of *Theosophy in Scotland* with a photograph of Abdu'l-Baha, and a letter from him to Pole from Port Said in Egypt dated 5 July 1913⁵⁸. That letter praised Pole for his published articles and stressed the importance of the heavenly teachings to man. Pole continued to correspond with Abdu'l-Baha. The February 1914 edition of *Theosophy in Scotland* carried an extract of another letter from Abdu'l-Baha to Pole referring to Mrs. Besant⁵⁹, in which he said:

“The ideal of Mrs. Besant, truly, I say, is very lofty. She is working and labouring most valiantly, and her utmost hope is to render a service to the world of humanity and be the means of the establishment of good-fellowship and love between the communities of the earth. At all times I am praying in her behalf so that the confirmation of the Kingdom may surround her, and that she may sow the seeds of service in pure productive soil; that she may gather many, many harvests; that the heavenly benediction may be gained, the

⁵⁴ For the text of the talk see *Abdu'l-Baha on Divine Wisdom*, (1918, Tudor Press), Chapter VII, reproduced in http://bahai-library.com/?file=abdulbaha_divine_philosophy.html, but note this is not regarded as an authentic text of the talk; This may be the same talk published in *Theosophy in Scotland*, in May 1913, but as the writer does not have access to this journal it has not been possible to check – see *The Seven Candles of Unity*, op.cit., 117.

⁵⁵ *The Seven Candles of Unity*, op.cit., 117.

⁵⁶ *Abdu'l-Baha*, op. cit., 385; *Star of the West*, Vol 4, No 5, 86; *God Passes By*, op.cit., 287.

⁵⁷ *Abdu'l-Baha*, Ibid, 388-389; *God Passes By*, op.cit., 287.

⁵⁸ *The Seven Candles of Unity*, op.cit., 117, 120-122.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 117-118.

outpouring of the Holy Spirit will be realized, and her services, troubles, and hardships be crowned with eternal results. I desire this station for her.”

After this journey, Abdu'l-Baha returned to the Holy Land to spend the duration of the Great War there. He was active in relief work for the citizens of Palestine, and after the War was knighted by the British for his efforts. The exigencies of the War prevented most communications with the outside world during the War so the correspondence with Theosophists and others came to a stop. By the end of the war he was an old man, but he began correspondence again as conditions improved. The writer is unaware of further communications with Theosophists, but it is clear that the enormous impression he had left on them in earlier years had not been forgotten. Abdu'l-Baha passed away on 28 November 1921, and had a large funeral in Haifa with representatives of many religions and beliefs attending. Many messages from around the world were received. These included one from the Holy Family Theosophical Society in London, which sent “*affectionate thoughts*”⁶⁰. It was said that a short Memoir of the “*Master’s*”⁶¹ life was being prepared for the January *Theosophist* at the request of the General Secretary of the Theosophical Society in London⁶².

So ended a short but intense period of contact and exchange between the two belief systems. The intensity was no doubt due to the dynamic nature of Abdu'l-Baha and his ability to articulate in the most sincere and compelling ways the Baha'i message. But it was assisted by the close correlation between fundamental aspects of the teachings of both belief systems. It may have also been helped by the fact that the contact occurred at a time when events in Europe were on the path to war, and that there was much concern about this among thinking peoples. The two belief systems were both of a mind that solutions could not be found to these enormous dangers to human society which ignored the great religious truths. And foremost amongst these were the need for the abandonment of prejudices and the promotion of the quest for human “brotherhood” at a spiritual level, leading to a vision of future global peace and unity that finds its roots in ancient religious teachings and prophecies. These commonalities are still with us, they continue to be truths, and are as relevant today as in earlier times, if not more so.

Thank you.

My appreciation to the Theosophical Society in Brisbane for inviting me to participate in this series of talks.

⁶⁰ *Abdu'l-Baha*, op.cit., 456; *The Passing of Abdu'l-Baha*, (1991, Kalimat Press), 35.

⁶¹ Abdu'l-Baha is known to the Baha'is as the “Master”.

⁶² *Abdu'l-Baha*, op.cit., 478-479. It is not known to the writer if this was in fact published.