



*Visits with
'Abdu'l-Bahá*

—His Footsteps in Canada

For those who aspire
to lasting change,
His example guides
the way...

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Learn more about 'Abdu'l-Bahá:



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Français

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Abdu'l-Bahá in Their Midst, by Earl Redman. © George Ronald,
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Introduction

A unique figure in human and religious history, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was the perfect example in word and deed of all His Father, Bahá’u’lláh, taught.

After a lifetime of persecution and imprisonment for His religious beliefs, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá embarked in 1911 from the Holy Land on an extended trip to share His Father’s message in Egypt, Europe and North America, including nine days in Canada.

“The accounts of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s travels and of the effect He had on those who met Him are legion. Some went to extraordinary lengths to enter His presence—going by boat, by foot, or even under railway trains—and, by the urgency of their desire to see Him, imprinted themselves on the consciousness of future generations of adults

and children. The testimonies of those who were transformed by even a brief, sometimes near wordless encounter with their beloved Master remain deeply stirring. In the wide array of visitors He received—rich and poor, black and white, indigenous and émigré—the universal embrace of His Father’s Faith was unmistakably in evidence.”¹

November 28, 2021, marks the one hundredth anniversary of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s passing. In His memory, friends the world over are sharing stories of His inspiring life as a gift with their families, neighbours and co-workers, with the conviction they will contribute to a spirit of hope in these turbulent times. As He assured us: “that which is confirmed is the oneness of the world of humanity. Every soul who serveth this oneness will undoubtedly be assisted and confirmed.”

¹ *5 December 2013 message of the Universal House of Justice*



For long had the Bahá'ís of North America hoped and prayed for 'Abdu'l-Bahá to come to the West. When He finally arrived on April 11, 1912, He told them: "After arriving today, although weary with travel, I had the utmost longing and yearning to see you and could not resist this meeting. Now that I have met you, all my weariness has vanished, for your meeting is the cause of spiritual happiness.

"I was in Egypt and was not feeling well; but I wished to come to you in America. My friends said, 'This is a long journey; the sea is wide; you should remain here.' But the more they advised and insisted, the greater became my longing to take this trip and now I have come to America to meet the friends of God. This long voyage will prove how great is my love for you. There were many troubles and vicissitudes but in the thought of meeting you, all these things

vanished and were forgotten...

“I am very happy to meet you all here today. Praise be to God! that your faces are shining with the love of Bahá’u’lláh. To behold them is the cause of great spiritual happiness. We have arranged to meet you every day at the homes of the friends.

“In the East, people were asking me ‘Why do you undertake this long voyage; your body cannot endure such hardships of travel?’ When it is necessary, my body can endure everything. It has withstood forty years of imprisonment and can still undergo the utmost trials.

“I will see you again. Now I will greet each one of you personally. It is my hope that you will all be happy and that we may meet again and again.”

—*‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Centre of the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh*,
by H. M. Balyuzi, pp.172-173



May Bolles Maxwell, renowned teacher and administrator of the Bahá'í Faith, was one of the first Westerners to travel to the Holy Land in 1898-99 to meet 'Abdu'l-Bahá. She later married William Sutherland Maxwell, a famous Canadian architect, and they made their home in Montreal.

May Maxwell had dreamed of having 'Abdu'l-Bahá stay in their home during His visit to the West. However, she knew that her husband's conservative nature might make him reluctant, at first, to extend such an invitation to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, so she did not insist. Sutherland must have sensed her disappointment. Two days before 'Abdu'l-Bahá's arrival in Montreal, he had a change of heart. According to their daughter, Rúhíyyih Khánum:

“When 'Abdu'l-Bahá consented to come to Montreal and arrangements were being

made, my father explained to Mother that though He would of course be their guest, he did not want to have the Master in his home but would engage a suite for him at the Windsor Hotel. All his sensitive Scots reticence shrank from the publicity and limelight that would be thrown on him as the host of such an attention-attracting guest... Mother was heartbroken, but she did not remonstrate, realizing perhaps that such things cannot be debated but must arise from the heart. The day before the scheduled arrival of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, my father rushed into Mother’s room, the largest bedroom, facing the garden and possessing three bay windows, and looking critically at her furniture declared: ‘This is not good enough for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, I’m going right down to Morgans to buy a new set’, and rushed off and immediately purchased and had delivered a bed, dressing

table and chairs... One can only imagine how great was her joy that her husband of his own accord should have felt the longing to have the Master under his own roof. He himself met the Master at the train and begged Him to accept the hospitality of his home...”

“In the fullness and splendour of a summer moon ‘Abdu’l-Bahá arrived on the night of August 30th. As He entered the home of [the Maxwells] on Pine Ave., many watched from their windows to catch a glimpse of the white-robed majestic figure whose advent had been so eloquently heralded thro’ all the press.”

On Monday, 9 September 1912, the Master’s wonderful nine-day visit to Montreal drew to a close. His departure marked the beginning of a new spiritual epoch in the history of Canada.

The visit was a great honour conferred upon Canada and the city of Montreal—the city that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá hoped would “become so stirred, that the melody of the Kingdom may travel to all parts of the world from that Dominion and the breaths of the Holy Spirit may spread from that centre to the East and the West of America.”

—*The Maxwells of Montreal: Early Years 1870-1922*, by Violette Nakhjavani, pp. 279-280 and 284; *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, Tablet to the Bahá’ís of Canada and Greenland, 21 February 1917, by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, as cited on <https://www.bahai.ca/bahai-shrine-in-montreal/>



One afternoon, the Master went for a ride through Montreal. Upon reaching the Roman Catholic Cathedral of Notre Dame (Marie-Reine-du-Monde) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said He would like to see it. Everything was quiet and no one was in sight. The Master alighted and went inside the huge building. After wandering through the church, He noted that the church was present in Canada, so far away from where Christianity had started, because of the sacrifice of the early Christians who had traveled the world to spread their faith.

When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá left Montreal, He said, “The time of the sojourn was limited to a number of days, but the results in the future are inexhaustible.”

Later, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said: “Many souls warned Me not to travel to Montreal... But these stories did not have any effect... [‘Abdu’l-Bahá] trusting in God, turned His face toward Montreal. When He entered that city, He observed all the doors open, He found the hearts in the utmost receptivity and the ideal power of the Kingdom of God removing every obstacle.”

And He further said, “Again I repeat that the future of Canada, whether from a material or a spiritual standpoint, is very great.”

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá in *Their Midst*, by Earl Redman, pp. 180-183; *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, Tablet to the Bahá’ís of Canada and Greenland, 21 February 1917, by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá



Alfred James Loft (1908-1973) was the first Canadian Bahá'í of the Mohawk Nation. His earliest childhood recollection was of sitting on a fence near his home (in Oshawa, Ontario) watching a train crossing the landscape. A figure clothed in flowing white robes was on the train, smiling and waving at him. In confusion and delight Jim toppled backwards. When he found the Bahá'í Faith in 1948, he recognized the figure on the train as 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who had left Montreal on 9 September 1912 on a train bound for Toronto where He changed trains for Buffalo, New York. In 1949, in obedience to the Guardian's wishes, Jim returned with his family to the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte (Tyendinaga) to establish the Faith among his people, remaining there until his death.

—*Witness of Pebbles*, by Roger White, p. 24



A Prayer by 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Revealed to the Bahá'ís of Canada

O God, my God! Thou beholdest this weak one begging for celestial strength, this poor one craving Thy heavenly treasures, this thirsty one longing for the fountain of eternal life, this afflicted one yearning for Thy promised healing through Thy boundless mercy which Thou hast destined for Thy chosen servants in Thy kingdom on high.

O Lord! I have no helper save Thee, no shelter besides Thee, and no sustainer except Thee. Assist me with Thine angels to diffuse Thy holy fragrances and to spread abroad Thy teachings amongst the choicest of Thy people.

O my Lord! Suffer me to be detached from aught else save Thee, to hold fast to the hem of Thy bounty, to be wholly devoted to Thy Faith, to remain fast and firm in Thy love and to observe what Thou hast prescribed in Thy Book.

Verily, Thou art the Powerful, the Mighty, the Omnipotent.

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