

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S KINDNESS IN NEW YORK

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá visited North America in 1912, he spent more time in New York City than any other place. There he gave dozens of talks about the Bahá'í teachings of peace and unity.

About a week after arriving in the spring, he went to the Bowery Mission to speak to poor, homeless men. He and his large group of friends were an unusual sight. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who was 67, wore long, flowing robes and a white turban. His long hair and beard were white, too. When neighborhood boys saw him, some began calling him names and tossing sticks.

A Bahá'í named Carrie Kinney stopped to talk with the boys. She patiently explained that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was a holy man who had been unfairly imprisoned and exiled for many years. The boys became interested, and Carrie invited them to her home to meet him.

The next Sunday, a noisy group of about 25 kids trooped into the stately Kinney home. 'Abdu'l-Bahá greeted each one with playful smiles and laughter, clapping their hands or putting an arm around their shoulders.

The kids were Caucasian, except for one African American boy of about 13. He came in last and paused at the doorway, looking a little unsure about whether he was welcome. In many places, due to racism, black and white kids couldn't go to the same schools, parks, or restaurants. But 'Abdu'l-Bahá showered everyone with kindness.

Howard Colby Ives, a minister who later became a Bahá'í, said that when 'Abdu'l-Bahá saw the boy, "His face lighted up with a heavenly smile. He raised His hand with a gesture of princely welcome and exclaimed in a loud voice so that none could fail to hear; that here was a black rose. The room fell into instant silence."



'Abdu'l-Bahá (seated) with Carrie Kinney (back row, left), her husband Edward, and their three sons. 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave Carrie the name Vafá (Certitude) and called Edward Saffa (Serenity).

'Abdu'l-Bahá had sent out for candy, and a large, five-pound box of chocolates arrived. He took the box around the room, putting a large handful of candy into every boy's hands with a smile.

Then, from the nearly empty box, he chose a very dark chocolate. He looked at it with a smile, then went over to the African American boy and put his arm around him. The boy gazed at 'Abdu'l-Bahá with adoration.

Howard knew these simple acts of kindness could have a powerful impact. He wrote, "The freedom from just this one prejudice in the minds and hearts of this score or more of souls would unquestionably bring happiness and freedom from rancor to thousands of hearts."