

An Unforgettable Visit

Across the river from the Eiffel Tower in Paris, 'Abdu'l-Bahá stayed in a sunny apartment where he welcomed visitors with warmth and kindness. People from all walks of life and many faiths came to speak with him. During his travels throughout the West from 1911–1913, he met leaders in society and saw some of the world's most famous sights. But just as often, he spent time lifting the hearts of people in need.

One day, 'Abdu'l-Bahá invited some friends to join him in meeting Victor and Fanny Ponsonaille, just outside of Paris. When this couple became Bahá'ís, they felt drawn to help orphans. They gave up their own lunches to feed the kids, and they shared Bahá'í writings with them. In time, Victor built a small cabin where the kids could gather, using materials given by the Bahá'ís of Paris.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's guests arrived at the simple cabin before he did. It was at the end of a narrow street in a poor neighborhood. Kids of various ages waited inside, wearing clothes that didn't fit well. A desk made of rough boards stood at one end of the room, and Arabic calligraphy of Bahá'u'lláh's name hung in a frame.

Fanny led the kids in song, then Victor read them some of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writings. Everyone watched the cabin door, eagerly anticipating 'Abdu'l-Bahá's arrival. Some boys began to get rowdy and noisy.

At last, 'Abdu'l-Bahá entered the cabin. All the kids rose to their feet. The restless boys grew perfectly quiet. 'Abdu'l-Bahá walked to the front of the room, and a French Bahá'í translated as he spoke to the kids in Persian. He said, "I am very glad to see you all here. I love you very much. I have been in many beautiful houses, but this is more beautiful to me than any of the others, for the spirit of the love of Bahá'u'lláh is here."



"When I think of Paris in the future, I seem to see her bathed in the light of the Holy Spirit!" said 'Abdu'l-Bahá, during his 1911 visit to the French capital.

Then 'Abdu'l-Bahá praised Victor and Fanny. "This is a great work you are doing for the love of God," he said. "Your names will go down through all the ages. Kings and queens have never been talked of and remembered as you will be."

After his talk, 'Abdu'l-Bahá chanted a prayer and a blessing. Then he moved toward the door. The kids crowded around him. He laid his hands on some of their heads and took the hands of others. He gave everyone a loving smile.

Outside, Victor stood by the door. 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave him a generous gift of gold pieces. Then 'Abdu'l-Bahá strode down the street to his waiting carriage as neighbors watched from doorways and windows.

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá left Paris in December, he had made an unforgettable impression on many. He told his friends, "Now I say 'Good-bye.' This I say only to your outer selves; I do not say it to your souls, for our souls are always together."