



Following the Example of America

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“THE PEOPLE OF THIS land enjoy many blessings,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told a reporter from the *Independent*, a popular national weekly newspaper. In 1908 the *Independent*, published from Boston, had printed William English Walling’s account of the Springfield Race Riot. On July 19, 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sat for his interview: it appeared in print on Chicago’s newsstands during the week of September 12, 1912.

“In spite of the lofty position ascribed to him by his followers,” the editor wrote, “his interest in ordinary human affairs is keen. He was dressed in flowing robes and turban, which accorded well with his square cut grey beard. His blue eyes are frank, lively and humorous, his figure of medium height [sic] and slight, but erect and graceful in spite of his sixty-eight years.”

“I am very pleased with America and its people,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá began. “I find religion, high ideals, broad sympathy with humanity, benevolence and kindness widespread here, and my hope is that America will lead in the movement for universal peace.”

THE INDEPENDENT: *“Is peace always desirable?”*

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ: Undoubtedly it is. What is best in a family — peace or strife? Every good man will answer that family peace is best. So it is also with a nation, and so it is also with the whole world. In the United States of America forty-eight countries or States are gathered, living in peace with each other, and their enlightenment, happiness, progress and civilization serve as a model and inspiration to all men. It was not always so. . . . The States support, love and are proud of one another, and what America has done, the rest of the world can do, following the example of America.

THE INDEPENDENT: *But would it be practical for a country to lay down its arms and submit itself to the will of its neighbors — would not such a country be robbed and abused?*

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ: Assuredly it is not practical for a single country to disarm and trust the other nations to do justice for the sake of justice. Universal peace must

be brought about by means of agreement among the great powers. They must assemble in convention, represented by their best and wisest men, and they must bind themselves by the strongest pledges and promises not to make war. Each should maintain an army and navy, but very small, merely enough to enforce order in its own territory.

THE INDEPENDENT: *Do not nations degenerate in peace?*

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ: No. Again I refer to the example of America, which has prospered, grown strong and enlightened in peace and because of peace. I was in Africa and found warring tribes and much degradation. From there I went to Switzerland, and found peace with high enlightenment, intelligence, justice and respect for the rights of fellow men. There can be no question as to the blessings of peace.

But nature is full of war. Beasts, birds, reptiles, insects, rob and destroy each other. Surely; there is much in nature that seems not good. But man has mind and soul. He has knowledge of good and evil, and his relation to God and duty to his fellows. . . . There are many things in nature that seem evil, as the venomous serpent and the scorpion, but we who are men must choose the good.

THE INDEPENDENT: *What is good?*

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ: That which bestows or preserves life and happiness is good. That which destroys life and happiness is evil.

“The people of this land enjoy many blessings,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said. “Day by day they are advancing and progressing, their fortunes are in their own hands, their patriotism is strong, they enjoy freedom in a superlative degree. . . . In a hemisphere they are supreme, and as kindness is their natural disposition, the world will expect them to bear the banner of the peace movement.”

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FOOTNOTE / ENDNOTE:

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