



## “The Supreme Psychiatrist”

By Caitlin Shayda Jones

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THE COCKROACHES SCUTTLED AS she approached, fleeing the sugary drops that had hardened on the countertop under the soda fountain. Feny E. Paulson had traveled to Salt Lake City all the way from Missoula, Montana — an approximately twenty-four hour journey. She lodged at the Young Women’s Christian Association. Feny noted that she found a dead fly in her German fries, and the chicken wings she ate still wore most of their feathers. But she was not there to be entertained; she had come to see ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Meeting ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had its own logistical complications. A telegram had been sent to Ms. Paulson, informing her of the date of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s arrival. But it failed to mention what railroad he would be arriving on. “Hence I spent most of my second day making the streetcar circuit,” Feny wrote in her diary, “station to station, reading schedules of train arrivals.”

When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá finally arrived in Salt Lake City at 2 p.m. on September 29, 1912, on the Grand Central R.R., Feny was there to greet him. “It was an oriental picture in an occidental setting,” she wrote of the scene. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had arrived with his retinue of companions, including a young Japanese man, Saichiro Fujita.

Two days later, Ms. Paulson received the phone call she had been hoping for — an invitation for a personal meeting with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. She met him in a reception room he had rented at the Kenyon Hotel, on the corner of 200 South and Main Street. He had moved here from the more expensive Salt Lake City Hotel shortly after his arrival in the city. As she entered the room, Feny noticed the roll-top desk and chairs lined against the walls. She later wrote in her diary for any future readers to see: “Recall my mentioning the dirty hall at the Y.W.C.A. and the battle I had with food?” As their meeting began, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá announced: “Luxury and comfort are not the all-important things in this life.” He later sat her down and served her tea, saying: “This is the Lord’s Supper you are having with Me.”

Ms. Paulson’s diary doesn’t relate all the details of her meeting with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, but it seems the encounter moved her deeply. Feny had never known her own father, and this troubled her. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, she wrote, told her he was her

spiritual father. He quietly whispered a prayer for her, and gave her a locket as a gift. She wrote of the encounter: “Incidents forgotten and hidden in the recesses of one’s being, in His presence, are in a flash perceived and unobtrusively aired. . . .” Near the end of her diary entry, she adds: “Abdu’l-Bahá was the Supreme Psychiatrist.”

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### **FOOTNOTE / ENDNOTE:**

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