



One Spark Will Set Aflame the Whole World

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“ON THE THIRTEENTH OF May,” Juliet Thompson writes, “a meeting of the Peace Conference took place at the Hotel Astor. It was an enormous meeting with thousands present. The Master was the Guest of Honour and the first speaker.” “The Master sat at the centre on the high stage, Dr Grant on his right, Rabbi Wise on His left.”

Rabbi Stephen Samuel Wise was one of the most important Jewish intellectuals in America. He had co-founded the NAACP, was a major supporter of Zionism, and championed a Jewish brand of the Social Gospel. You already know Dr. Percy Stickney Grant. What you might not know is that Juliet was in love with him. Today was his birthday.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá began his talk by describing how Moses, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, and Bahá’u’lláh had all founded religions that welded together previously antagonistic groups. Religious teachings seem to disagree, he said, only because their followers cling to superstitions and imitate the past without understanding it. “Religion and reality are one and not multiple.”

He then took aim at the moral inconsistencies of public opinion when it came to the subject of war: “If a man kills another,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá pointedly remarked, “no matter what the cause may be, he is pronounced a murderer, imprisoned or executed; but the brutal oppressor who has slain one thousand is idolized as a hero, conqueror, or military genius.”

The issue of peace wasn’t just important: it was urgent. “Just now Europe is a battlefield of ammunition ready to spark,” he declared, “and one spark will set aflame the whole world.” He asked Americans to “take the step to prevent it,” then continued, “If other nations should attempt to do this, the motive would be misunderstood. . . . Your government has, strictly speaking, no colonies to protect.”

“Mere knowledge of principles is not sufficient,” he emphasized, “We all know and admit that justice is good, but there is need of volition and action to carry out and manifest it.”

Afterwards, Juliet wrote in her diary, “the Master shook hands with the whole audience, with every one of those thousands of people!”

“The Master was really too ill to have gone to this Conference,” she continued. “He had been in bed all morning, suffering from complete exhaustion, and had a high temperature. I was with Him all morning. While I was sitting beside Him I asked: “Must You go to the Hotel Astor when You are so ill?”

“I do not work by hygienic laws,” he replied. And then he laughed: “If I did I would get nothing done.”

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FOOTNOTE / ENDNOTE:

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