**The Generosity of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (aka 'Abdu'l-Bah"a and the Sheep)**

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From the diary of Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, written in Palestine during the Great War (WWI)

Because this is Christmas eve I cannot entertain you better than to relate to you some of the charming stories which fell from the lips of the Master this evening:

"When I was in Mazandaran I was a wee bit of a child and enjoyed all the fun and play belonging to that age. In our town we had a man by the name of Aga Raheem who was the overseer of our shepherds. One day he came to our house and asked my mother to let him take me to a country barbecue to be given by the shepherds. After some urging on his part permission was granted, and I was glad of the chance to take part in an outdoor entertainment.

"Aga Raheem took me with him and soon we were out in the country. He led me through green valleys and beautiful pastures till we reached the foot of a lofty mountain. Here we had to walk through a narrow defile and then by a zig-zag road and with much difficulty slowly to ascend to the summit. When we arrived at the top I was surprised to find myself on a vast, verdant, table-land which was no other than the pasture-land of our cattle. I still feel the exhilarating breeze which greeted my cheeks on that clear day!

"Exclusive of horses and cows there were about four thousand head of sheep and goats belonging to us, while a few thousand more were the property of other owners. But all were grazing peacefully on this broad plateau. It was a most charming, ideal, pastoral scene and, from afar, I could see many shepherds and shepherdesses. We rode on a few minutes longer and then, under a spacious bower I was welcomed by some eighty or more shepherds who were clamoring to salute me. They were all dressed in their best clothes for this was a gala day. To me it was a noble and attractive sight.

"On that morning about fifteen sheep had been killed and prepared in the cool-flowing spring nearby; then the shepherds had stuck them on long iron rods to be roasted. Huge, spectacular campfires were burning and while the sheep were roasting the shepherds sang folk songs and danced their charming peasant dances. When noon came they all sat on the green grass and feasted, with extraordinary appetites, upon the well-season, toothsome meat ....

"When evening drew night and the hour of our leave-taking approached all the shepherds gathered around us and in their farewell speeches hinted that they expected me to give them some gifts as is customary with the landlords in these parts. I asked Aga Raheem what it was all about and told him that I was such a little child they should not expect me to make gifts and, moreover, I had brought nothing with me. Aga Raheem replied: 'This will not do. You are the master of all these shepherds and I do not like to think what they will say if you leave this place without giving them something.'

"I was indeed in a dilemma but after thinking a moment the idea came to me to give each shepherd a few sheep from our own flocks. I communicated the idea to the overseer who was rather pleased with it; and it was announced in a solemn tone, and immediately acted upon. When at last we reached home, and my act of generosity was related to the Blessed Perfection, he laughed very much over it and said: 'We must appoint a guardian to protect Aga -- Master -- from his own liberality; else, some day, he may give himself away'. "