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*“The Balance hath been Appointed”*<sup>1</sup>

**Some Thoughts on the Publication  
of the Kitāb-i-Aqdas**<sup>2</sup>

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1 *Gleanings* 17:1.

2 This article is the introductory chapter of a still unpublished manuscript the author has prepared for seminars on the Kitāb-i-Aqdas.

*"This Book is a heaven which We have adorned with the star of Our commandments and prohibitions... Say, O men! Take hold of it with the hand of resignation... By My life! It hath been sent down in a manner that amazeth the minds of men. Verily, it is My weightiest testimony unto all people, and the proof of the All-Merciful unto all who are in heaven and all who are on earth... Blessed the palate that savoureth its sweetness, and the perceiving eye that recognizeth that which is treasured therein and the understanding heart that comprehendeth its allusions and mysteries. By God! Such is the majesty of what hath been revealed therein, and so tremendous the revelation of its veiled allusions that the loins of utterance shake when attempting their description... This Book is none other than the ancient Lamp of God for the whole world and His undeviating Path amongst men. Say, it is verily the Dayspring of divine knowledge, did ye but know it, and the Dawning-place of the commandments of God, could ye but comprehend it... Say, this is the spirit of the Scriptures breathed into the Pen of Glory, causing all creation to be dumbfounded, except those who are stirred by the vitalizing fragrance of My tender mercy and the sweet savours of My bounty which pervade all created things."*<sup>3</sup>

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3 Bahā' u' llāh, quoted according to *Synopsis and Codification*, Introduction, p. 5, 7.

In these verses, mostly taken from the *Kitāb-i-Aqdas*, Bahā'u'llāh Himself bears witness to the outstanding rank and the unique position the *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* occupies in the body of His works. This Book, as Shoghi Effendi declared, "stands out ... unique and incomparable among the world's sacred *Scriptures*"<sup>4</sup>. It is the central Book of the Revelation, the "*Umm al-Kitāb*", the "Mother Book"<sup>5</sup>. It is alluded to in the *Kitāb-i-Iqān* as "the Book unto which all the Books of former Dispensations must needs be referred, the Book which standeth amongst them all transcendent and supreme"<sup>6</sup>. Shoghi Effendi has praised it with high epithets: "The principle repository of that Law which the Prophet Isaiah had anticipated and which the writer of the Apocalypse had described as a 'new heaven' and the 'new earth', as the 'tabernacle of God', as the 'Holy City', as the 'Bride', the 'new Jerusalem coming down from God'"<sup>7</sup>.

In contrast to the significance of this work and of its unique rank is the interest Bahā'īs have expressed in it, as evidenced by the dearth of seminars, lectures and courses dealing with it. This is not surprising at all, since up to the present we did not have an authentic translation of the complete text into a major Western language. Approximately one third of the Book has been translated and published by Shoghi Effendi, principally in the anthology "*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahā'u'llāh*"<sup>8</sup>. Among this selection can be found the passages in which Bahā'u'llāh sets out the basis of His legislation which, together with the concept of progressive revelation, propounded in the "*Kitāb-i-Iqān*", constitute the kernel of a Bahā'ī theology<sup>9</sup>.

The "*Synopsis and Codification*", published in 1973 by the Universal House of Justice contains these same passages translated by Shoghi Effendi. The guardian had adopted as of the goals of the Ten Year Crusade at the World Centre the codification of the laws and ordinances of the *Kitāb-i-Aqdas*, and he left an outline of a synopsis and codification in English, and notes in Persian by the time of his passing in 1957. Certain passages which were later translated and published under

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4 *God Passes by*, p. 213.

5 *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* 103; cf. Qur'ān 3:4; 13:40; 85:22.

6 para 220 (p. 199)

7 *God passes by*, p. 213

8 ch. 37; 56; 70-72; 98; 105; 155; 159; 165

9 The term theology is used for any methodical, analytical, systematical thought on the divine Revelation. On the concept of "Bahā'ī theology" cf. Jack McLean, "*Prolegomena to Bahā'ī theology*" (in preparation, to be published by the Association for Bahā'ī Studies in Canada).

the aegis of the Universal House of Justice and subsequently published have not been included. It was Shoghi Effendis wish that this "*Synopsis and Codification*" would serve as an "essential prelude"<sup>10</sup> to the full translation and publication of the Most Holy Book, complete with copious annotations and detailed explanations.

The Bahā'īs would do well to be prepared for this event, which the Universal House of Justice has described as a "monumental achievement which alone and of itself will usher in a new stage in the evolution of the Bahā'ī world"<sup>11</sup>. Such a world-shaking development will present a twofold challenge to the Bahā'īs. First, they themselves must "take hold of it with the hand of resignation"<sup>12</sup>, study a Book which Bahā'u'llāh has called "the Lamp of the Eternal unto the world and His straight, undeviating Path amidst the peoples of the earth"<sup>13</sup>, a Book which has caused "all creation to be dumbfounded"<sup>14</sup>. They will be encouraged to focus on the central teachings of their Faith, such as the Covenant<sup>15</sup>, the sovereignty of God<sup>16</sup>, the doctrine of the "*Most Great Infallibility*" of the Manifestation<sup>17</sup>, the absoluteness of the Divine Law<sup>18</sup> and on Bahā'u'llāh's concept of freedom<sup>19</sup>. Only if they stand fast and firm on this foundation will they be endowed "with the most perfect constancy"<sup>20</sup>. They who do not cleave to these basic truths, these "sublime and fundamental verities"<sup>21</sup> proclaimed by Bahā'u'llāh in the *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* in provocative and powerful language, will be "agitated" by "the winds of doubt"<sup>22</sup>, and the "sayings of the infidels will distract" their "souls"<sup>23</sup>.

Another challenge, once the Book is published, will be the reaction of the public. The Churches and all those who view the Faith with little regard and much suspicion will certainly not hesitate to judge the Book according to their own standards and assumptions, publicly expressing their criticism of it.

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10 *Synopsis*, p. 6.

11 Ridvān 1991 Message.

12 Bahā'u'llāh, *Synopsis*, p. 3.

13 *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* 186.

14 Bahā'u'llāh, *Synopsis*, p. 7.

15 *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* 1-4.

16 *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* 7; *Tablets* 8:16.

17 *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* 47, 161-162, 99; *Tablets* 5:14; 8:17-20.

18 *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* 2-4; *Gleanings* 88.

19 *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* 122-126.

20 *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* 162.

21 *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* 162.

22 *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* 162.

23 *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* 162.

The publication of the Book in a Western language will be a test for the Bahā'īs themselves. It was surely not by coincidence that in 1987 the Universal House of Justice published the compilation entitled "*Crisis and Victory*". The Bahā'ī community is well aware how the dialectic of crisis and victory, of triumph and tragedy, has shaped its growth and development ever since its inception, and that amongst the most common of the crisis that have assailed the Faith have been the recurrent attacks that have launched against it from outside its membership. The publication of the Aqdas in a Western language will undoubtedly accelerate this process, bringing the Cause of God into a direct, more intense encounter with the forces of unbelief and prejudice than it has previously experienced, and with the ecclesiastical powers of our age. Bahā'u'llāh has appealed to His people, to "refute the arguments of those who have attacked the Faith of God"<sup>24</sup>. In the defence of their faith the Bahā'īs, both individually and collectively, would be well advised to prepare themselves through the use of rational, rigorous and cogent arguments, based on a steadfast faith and a sound understanding and appreciation of the fundamental teachings of their faith and provisions of its Most Holy Book.

One must remember that Europeans at the end of the twentieth century are poorly prepared to understand such a work. In terms of their religious thinking, Europeans feel committed to a late form of Christianity which, even in its early history, developed doctrines far removed from its origin and which are different from the teachings of the Bahā'ī Faith. Moreover, three hundred years of European "Enlightenment" have left their mark on the Churches. They have adopted secular ideas often at variance with the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition in which the Bahā'ī Faith is itself grounded, as any discussion with theologians, even Catholic ones, soon reveals. For example, a young Catholic theologian, who had studied the Bahā'ī Faith very thoroughly with much interest and sympathy, was most disturbed when he discovered that what was demanded from the believer was absolute submission to the divine law. He said that he had not left one orthodoxy in order to hurl himself into another. He was frightened by the idea of having God's will in its pure form, dictating the believer how to act and live. He said, that, of the two, he preferred the Gospel, which left individual believer with the freedom to conduct his life and his own discretion according to the prevailing views of man, life and society.<sup>25</sup> Another

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24 *Gleanings* 154:1.

25 When I heard his arguments, a verse of the Qu'ān came to my mind: "They pervert the text of the Word of God" (4:45) and Bahā'u'llāh's exegesis according to which "by corruption of the text is meant that which all Muslim

case also bears this point out. Luise Rinser, a well-known German novelist, recently wrote in a letter to a Bahā'ī: "Of course, I know the Bahā'ī Faith for many years. However, I am disturbed by one phrase: 'True liberty consisteth in man's submission unto My commandments.'<sup>26</sup> I don't want to submit myself to anyone. I submit only to God in myself, and I find people with authoritarian claims most suspect. As a Catholic, I have freed myself from the dogmas of the church, from which I have suffered so much. That is why I cannot become a Bahā'ī."

And what kind of understanding can be expected from the contemporary critical mind with its deep-rooted scepticism towards religion or from those who consider religion to be a relic of the past, outmoded, doomed to extinction, an interesting but nonetheless pathetic anachronism, a poetical creation of the human intellect which only served to accompany mankind so long as a scientific explanation of the world, based upon reason and logic, was lacking?

Undoubtedly, the *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* is "heavy fare" for the average Westerner. However, incredulous it may then appear that God has again spoken through the mouthpiece of His Messenger in the 19th century, occurring at the same time as philosophers proclaimed "the death of God", many, including those who have long turned away from religion as a source of moral and social order, still feel sympathy for the Bahā'ī ideals of universal peace, universal brotherhood, elimination of all prejudice and inequality, and its commitment and contribution towards bettering the lot of mankind at a most critical juncture in its long and chequered history. However, such people have become unaccustomed to concrete religious law with its binding rules, prohibitions and ordinances, with its demand for absolute obedience, a law which cannot be challenged, questioned or criticized.

It will not only be the concrete norms contained within the Book, that will attract the criticism of the sceptics, but furthermore, one can anticipate that the phenomenon of divine legislation and the way it operates in the *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* will meet a serious lack of understanding and appreciation, as it is completely different from manmade systems of legislation, from our modern legal practice. Like everything else that human beings plan, decide, devise and complete, state legislation is a rational process. Reason demands that the codification of legal

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divines are engaged today that is the interpretation of God's Holy Book in accordance with their idle imaginings and vain desires" (*Kitāb-i-Iqān* 94 [p. 86]).

26 *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* 25.

norms be a systematic one. The *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* is not at all a systematic book of laws. Its contents are very varied and without a *visible* order<sup>27</sup>. Passages dealing with the most fundamental teachings of the Faith are followed by appeals, warnings, exhortations, prophecies, allusions and so on. The laws are, as Adib Taherzadeh has written, "interwoven with passages of spiritual counsel and exhortation, of weighty pronouncement and divine guidance"<sup>28</sup>: "There seems to be no visible pattern for the interweaving of the two" (the spiritual teachings and laws), "nor is there any apparent connection between them. Bahā'u'llāh, after expounding some of His choicest teachings or revealing some of His counsels and exhortations, abruptly changes the subject and gives one or more laws which outwardly seem not to have any relevance to the previous subject."<sup>29</sup> In a beautiful metaphor Taherzadeh describes the way the *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* has been revealed: "In revealing the *Kitāb-i-Aqdas*, Bahā'u'llāh may be likened to a celestial bird whose habitation is in the realm of the spirit far above the ken of men, soaring in the spiritual heights of glory. In that station, Bahā'u'llāh speaks about spiritual matters, reveals the verities of His Cause and unveils the glory of His Revelation to mankind. From such a lofty horizon this immortal Bird of the Spirit suddenly and unexpectedly descends upon the world of dust. In this station, Bahā'u'llāh announces and expounds laws. Then the Bird takes its flights back into the spiritual domains. Here the Tongue of Grandeur speaks again with majesty and authority, revealing some of the choicest passages treasured in the *Kitāb-i-Aqdas*."<sup>30</sup>

The laws themselves are not always the final word on a subject they are dealing with. Sometimes a subject occurs later again, i.e. the prohibition of opium in para 155 and 190, the obligatory prayers in para 6, 10, 18; the "*quiblah*" in para 6, 137,

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27 If we say the divine revelation has no *visible* order, one should not conclude that it has no order at all. In the Qur'ān, too, the revelation has no visible order (the sequence of the surahs is due to the Caliph Ūṭmān (cf. *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*, p. 279). However, as a research of the *Massachusetts Institute of Technology* has proven, the Qur'ān is in his architecture completely based on the number nineteen which is reflected in an astonishing number of data. The Imām of the Mosque in Tucson/Arizona, Rishād Kḥalifa, who has published a report on the results of this scientific research ("*al-ḥisābāt al-elekrūnīyyah wa mu`djjizat al-qur'ān al-karīm*" ["The electronic computation and the wonder of the Holy Qur'ān"], Beirut, *Dār al-'Ilm li'l-Malāyīn*, 1983), in order to demonstrate the divine origine of the Qur'ān, as no human being could ever have written a book in such a wise. A more comprehensive edition of this book is his "*Qur'ān: Visual presentation of the Miracle*" (Islamic Productions [ISBN 0-934894-30-2] Tucson, Arizona). Chalifa has been harshly criticized in Egypt because of this publication and been reproached to be in favour of the Bahā'īs who consider the number nineteen as a holy number. According to the Malaysian Newspaper "*New Straits Times*" (25. December 1992), Chalifa has been assassinated.

28 *Revelation of Bahā'u'llāh*, vol. III, p. 270.

29 *op. cit.*, p. 277.

30 *The Revelation*, vol. III, p. 276.

the ordinances on purity in para 46, 74, 76, 106, the prohibition of contention in para 73, 95, 148, 183; the intentional killing of a person (murder and homicide) in para 19 and 62, involuntary killing of a person in para 188; the way one should consort with followers of other religions in para 75, 144. Thus a systematic order cannot be readily identified. A Protestant theologian wrote in his thesis: "In a mixed-up muddle, prescriptions of cult, organizations, morals, and civil-law and penal law are following each other, arbitrarily interrupted by personal statements"<sup>31</sup>. Another Protestant theologian, a well-known German scholar of religious studies to whom the Bahā'īs are much indebted because he was one of the first to recognized the independent character of the Bahā'ī Faith, has called the *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* a "hotch-potch of instructions"<sup>32</sup>. However, being himself very familiar with the history of religion, he should have known how inappropriate his judgement was. The Book of God has never come down in the form of a logically devised and developed system of intellectual exposition. Its laws have never been grounded in the form of a rational, systematically structured design of general, abstract norms. The Word of God is completely different. It is an eruptive, visionary, and emphatic outpouring, and not systematically structured, an arid instruction in plain terms. The Holy, the Divine - the "*numinosum, tremendum et fascinosum*" as Rudolf Otto defined it, is in its very essence beyond the rational and its categories of thinking. Therefore, it is no surprise that the Book of God does not present itself in a systematic way. Neither the laws of the Old Testament nor those of the *Qur'ān* grounded in a systematic manner. It was rather the theologians and lawyers who later systematized them. Hourani illustrates this point well: "The *Qur'ān* also contains suggestions for answers to some more general questions of ethics, but it is not a book of philosophy or even theology."<sup>33</sup> At all times it has been up to man to order the laws of God systematically, which is an essential precondition for their later application.

Moreover, the legislation of the *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* is not final. The Book is no "*numerus clausus*", it does not contain all the laws of Bahā'u'llāh. Some Tablets, revealed after the revelation of the *Kitāb-i-Aqdas*, contain "subsidiary ordinances, designed to supplement the provisions of His Most Holy Book"<sup>34</sup>. An appendix to the *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* contains the answers given by Bahā'u'llāh to the questions of Zaynu'l Muqarrabīn, a former "*mujtahīd*" (doctor of Islamic law), regarding the

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31 Hermann Roemer, *Die Babi-Behai*, p. 109.

32 Gerhard Rosenkranz, *Die Bahā'ī*, p. 56.

33 *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics*, p. 15.

34 Shoghi Effendi, *God passes by*, p. 216; see also Taherzadeh, *The Revelation*, vol. 3, p. 278.

application of the laws. This together with the principle of the gradual implementation of the divine law<sup>35</sup> is a non-systematic procedure which we are accustomed to from our experience of manmade legislation. However, we should accept this and understand that the Word of God should not be judged by rational categories: "No one can fathom the manifold exigencies of God's consummate wisdom"<sup>36</sup> ... "The Will of God is not limited by the standards of the people, and God does not tread in their ways"<sup>37</sup> - and there is an exhortation with which we are already familiar from the Old Testament: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord."<sup>38</sup> Bahā'u'llāh himself did not want the *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* to be considered a codified book of law: "Think not We have revealed upon you a mere code of laws. Nay, rather, We have unsealed the choice wine with the fingers of might and power."<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, for Western thought, deeply rooted itself in the ideas of the philosophy of Enlightenment, the book is a provocation. Indeed, the *élan*, the vitality of the spirit of Enlightenment has been exhausted. People feel chilly in the rational coolness of modern times, they feel homeless and long for the warmth of spiritual experience and for a transcendental security. Today, many people refuse a *Weltanschauung* which is exclusively based on the immanent world. However, they would rather surrender to a new irrationalism and obscurantism than to accept new "tables of stone" bearing the commandments of God. They look for guidance and illumination in astrology, reincarnation-therapy, magical-occult practices, original myths of shamanism, and many of them consult the fortune-tellers and astrologists, tea-leaves and tarot cards. Everything which was considered by enlightened reason as "obscurantism" has popped up again: magic, sorcery, the belief in witches, the

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35 On the gradual implementation of the divine laws see *Synopsis and Codification*, Introduction p. 5 The implementation of monogamy is an example. Monogamy has not been formulated in the *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* in an unequivocal language. The explicit text forbids man to have more than two wives, emphasizing however, that he will be content with a single partner (*Kitāb-i-Aqdas* 63). The text leaves no doubt that Bahā'u'llāh prefers monogamy. After the passing of Bahā'u'llāh, 'Abdu'l-Bahā, the authorized interpreter of the Teachings, clearly stated that bigamy was conditioned upon justice, and thus it has been made dependent upon an impossible condition. The evolution of the application of monogamy was due to the fact that the community of the faithful at the time of the revelation of the *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* were for the most part of Muslim extraction, steeped in Islam tradition to marry four legal wives. Later, when these old traditions were abandoned, the basic principle of monogamy was clearly enjoined by the appointed successor of 'Abdu'l-Bahā (see *Synopsis and Codification*, p. 59 no. 17).

36 *Tablets* 5:14.

37 *Tablets* 8:19.

38 Is. 55:8.

39 *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* 5

cult of satan, animist practices, even the archaic bloody ritual sainfire of animals. However, if the same people encounter the law of God, they cavil at norms which appear strange to them, unaccustomed and not in accordance with their expectations in the name of that reason they have previously thrown overboard.<sup>40</sup> One of Pascal's sayings comes to mind: "*Incrédules les plus crédules. Ils croient les miracles du Vespasian, pour ne pas croire ceux de Moïse.*"<sup>41</sup>

What is the reason of this contradictory attitude? Obviously, it is rooted in man's desire for freedom - in his freedom to decide what is right and what is wrong according to his own promptings, his freedom to choose his own way of life. The moral autonomy of man is one of the dogmas of secular society. It is the unconditioned, binding character of the divine law, its absoluteness, which modern man shuns as the devil shuns the holy water. Instead it is the obscurantist sources of truth that man seems to find comfort, meaning, inspiration, fulfilment, enlightenment and a widening of his consciousness, but in the final analysis these sources do not demand anything of the individual. According to their message man bears the divine in his own self. This is why he can discover the truth, the standards and requisite guidance for living his life only by turning within. According to this view everyone may choose and decide what serves him best, for every path is equally valid. The categories of right and wrong, good and evil no longer exist. This atmosphere of metaphysical arbitrariness where everything goes is the reason for the success of such alternative offers of salvation, the reason why they appear to be attractive: They do not demand anything. People can keep their absolute freedom.<sup>42</sup> These ideas find adherence much more easily and quickly than a religion based on divine revelation which bears the tablets of a new law with its categoric commandment "Thou shalt!".

In order to engage in a meaningful dialogue with the world as well as an aid to our own understanding of the Cause of God it will not suffice to deepen our knowledge of the fundamentals of our faith alone, we should also know and understand the standards of contemporary secular society, and understand that they are not absolute parameters, above criticism, that they are rather the result of a historical process, that they are essentially relative. We need to understand that

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40 I refer to my recent book *Heilsgeschichte und Paradigmenwechsel. Zwei Beiträge zur Bahā'ī-Theologie* (Prague 1992), p. 28 ff. (English edition in preparation).

41 *Pensées* (B 816).

42 On the *New-Age-Movement* cf. my *Heilsgeschichte und Paradigmenwechsel*, p. 27 ff.

everything which is taken for granted and considered to be immune from criticism, although it is a result of a historical process, must be judged according to the "Infallible Balance"<sup>43</sup>, the Word of God for this age. In times of spiritual upheaval, when a new Messenger of God has spoken to mankind, it has always been hard to accept that the holy word constituting this balance is the standard and not "man's fanciful theories"<sup>44</sup>.

Bahā'u'llāh has foreseen the commotion which His Book would provoke, which is "the Spirit of the Scriptures breathed into the Pen of Glory, causing all creation to be dumbfounded"<sup>45</sup>. He speaks about "the fears and agitation which the revelation provokes in men's hearts", which should be "likened to the cries of the suckling babe weaned from his mother's milk"<sup>46</sup>. Hence then His counsel to observe tact, wisdom, prudence and caution, and His exhortations to guide mankind "in a spirit of love and tolerance" and to avoid anything that could "cause disturbance and dissension or raise clamour among the heedless"<sup>47</sup>. Bahā'u'llāh assures us: "O My servants! Sorrow not if, in these days and on this earthly plane, things contrary to your wishes have been ordained and manifested by God, for days of blissful joy, of heavenly delight, are assuredly in store for you. Worlds, holy and spiritually glorious, will be unveiled to your eyes"<sup>48</sup> ... Were men to discover the motivating purpose of God's Revelation, they would assuredly cast away their fears and, with hearts filled with gratitude, rejoice with exceeding gladness."<sup>49</sup>

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43 *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* 99, 148, 183.

44 Bahā'u'llāh, quoted according to *The World Order of Bahā'u'llāh*, p. 169.

45 *Synopsis and Codification*, p. 7.

46 *Gleanings* 88.

47 Bahā'u'llāh, quoted according to *Synopsis and Codification*, Introduction, p. 4.

48 *Gleanings* 153:9.

49 *Gleanings* 88.

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**Manner of quotation:**

As far as no page number is given, it is quoted according to the chapter and the para of the publication.