

followers went gladly forth to do His bidding.

They found Him in His prison-home in 'Akká, a home reached after going through "the inner court where the fountain plays and roses bloom all the year." (Knock and It Shall Be Opened Unto You, M.J.M., p. 14) They searched Him out in Tiberias, a town where Jesus walked. During a sojourn in Alexandria, Egypt, He Himself went to the hotel of Louis Gregory and granted him interview after interview, receiving him "with great affection." (A Heavenly Vista, The Pilgrimage of Louis G. Gregory", Louis G. Gregory, p. 27.) And when He was no longer held prisoner and took up residence in Haifa, He was again found by eager pilgrims, young and old alike.

'Abdu'l-Bahá once told an early pilgrim that "each believer has a certain time when he should make the desired visit, each having a certain work to do for the progress of the Cause." (Notes Taken at Acca, Corinne True, p. 18) This believer learned that "There are two kinds of visits — one in which the person comes very thirsty and the water will taste very sweet to him; the other in which the person is not thirsty and the water will be bitter." (Ibid. p. 28) In addition there is the temporal visit, which must come to an end, and that which is spiritual and does not terminate. "The temporal visit has no effect unless it be the spiritual also." (Ibid. p. 31.)

Pilgrimage Began in the Days of Bahá'u'lláh

Centuries before the advent of Bahá'u'lláh, the Arabian Prophet uttered these words: "Blessed the man that hath visited 'Akká, and blessed he that hath visited the visitor of 'Akká." Bahá'u'lláh confirmed these words — words which could not 'be understood for centuries. Muhammad said, too, that "A month in 'Akká is better than a thousand years elsewhere." (Note Bahá'í Holy Places at the World Centre, The Universal House of Justice, p. 10.)

During Bahá'u'lláh's confinement in the Most Great Prison in 'Akká, visitors were not permitted. "Several of the Bahá'ís of Irán came all the way on foot for the purpose of seeing their beloved Leader, but were refused admittance within the city walls. They used to go to a place on the plain outside the third moat, from which they could see the windows of Bahá'u'lláh's quarters. He would show Himself to them at one of the windows and after gazing on Him from afar, they would weep and return to their homes, fired with new zeal for sacrifice and service." (Ibid, p. 6)

Conditions changed after Bahá'u'lláh was permitted to leave the barracks. While He was yet in 'Akká an Egyptian merchant, affluent and afire with God's latest message, desired to visit Him. Abdel Kerim wrote for permission to go on pilgrimage. He must have been greatly surprised when the reply arrived: he might go on pilgrimage but only after all his debts were paid.

He had been in business for many years. His caravans crossed the desert with precious cargo. He had quite naturally been interested in expanding his business, but now his consuming interest was to "owe no man anything." It followed that when he received a payment, instead of investing it for further

gain, he paid off a debt. This continued for five years when at last he was debt-free.

His business shrank. No longer did "love of wealth" consume him. When all his debts were paid, he had only enough to keep his family going in his absence and to pay for deck passage on a ship bound for Haifa.

Formerly he would have traveled first-class. Now he had neither bed nor warm stateroom. Never mind! He was going to see Bahá'u'lláh. As he crossed the gangplank, his shawl slipped into the water. The night would be chilly, but his heart was glad and he felt "alive with prayer."

Bahá'u'lláh informed His family that He was expecting an honored guest. A carriage was sent to Haifa to pick up the merchant, but the attendant received no description of this very special guest. As the passengers disembarked, he watched them very carefully — surely he would recognize someone so distinguished. But the passengers appeared quite ordinary and in due time he returned to 'Akká with word that Bahá'u'lláh's visitor had not arrived.

The merchant had expected to be met. No money remained to hire a carriage. Bitterly disappointed, he seated himself on a bench, feeling forlorn and destitute.

Bahá'u'lláh knew that His distinguished guest had arrived even though he had not been recognized. This time He sent 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who recognized in the twilight "the disappointed figure huddled upon the bench".

Quickly, the Master introduced Himself and explained what had happened. Then He asked him if he would like to go to 'Akká that very night or if he would prefer to wait until morning.

The merchant had already spent hours in prayer in preparation for his meeting with Bahá'u'lláh. But he found that bitterness had now come into his heart because he had felt so forgotten and alone upon his arrival in Haifa. He had even begun to wonder about the very station of Bahá'u'lláh. For what had he given up his fortune? He was in torment.

Now in the presence of this welcome and gentle Man doubts and suspicions ebbed out of his soul, but he felt the need of hours of prayer to feel ready spiritually to meet God's Emissary.

As the story is told, 'Abbas Effendi knew instinctively that His new friend would not wish to seek a hotel at His expense, so finding that he preferred to wait until morning for the journey to 'Akká, He unbuttoned the long cloak that enveloped Him, seated Himself beside the pilgrim, and wrapped both in its ample folds. So they passed the night praying together, lost in that ecstasy of prayer that brings realization.

The next morning they proceeded toward the prison-city of 'Akká. At long last the Egyptian appeared before Bahá'u'lláh with a glad heart, purified through five years of testing. (The Oriental Rose, Mary Hanford Ford, pp. 94-99)

Early Pilgrimages before World War I

Pilgrimages from the West to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 'Akká and Haifa began before the turn of the century. America had just begun to hear about the Bahá'í Faith.

"It was on September 23, 1893, a little over a year after Bahá'u'lláh's ascension, that, in a paper written by Reverend Henry H. Jessup, D.D., Director of Presbyterian Missionary Operations in North Syria, and read by Reverend George A. Ford of Syria, at the World Parliament of Religion, held in Chicago, in connection with the Columbian Exposition, commemorating the four-hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America, it was announced that 'a famous Persian Sage,' 'The Babi Saint,' had died recently in 'Akká, and that two years previous to His ascension 'a Cambridge scholar' had visited Him, to whom He had expressed 'sentiments so noble, so Christ-like' that the author of the paper, in his 'closing words,' wished to share them with his audience." (God Passes By, Shoghi Effendi, p. 256.)

"He is the Master"

In 1898 philanthropist Mrs. Phoebe Hearst, the wife of Senator George F. Hearst, organized a group of pilgrims who made their way to the prison-city. In a letter she later made testimony: "Those three days were the most memorable days of my life . . . The Master I will not attempt to describe: I will only state that I believe with all my heart that He is the Master, and my greatest blessing in this world is that I have been privileged to be in His presence, and look upon His sanctified face . . . Without a doubt 'Abbas Effendi is the Messiah of this day and generation, and we need not look for another.'" (Ibid. p. 258) In her enthusiasm and devotion to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, she, as so many others, mistook the Master for the Prophet Himself. This, of course, He never claimed to be.

"A Heart White as Snow"

Mr. Robert Turner, the butler of Mrs. Hearst, distinguished himself by being the first Western Negro to become a Bahá'í. May Maxwell recalled later that "on the morning of our arrival, after we had refreshed ourselves, the Master summoned us all to Him in a long room overlooking the Mediterranean. He sat in silence gazing out of the window, then looking up He asked if all were present. Seeing that one of the believers was absent, He said, 'Where is Robert?' ... In a moment Robert's radiant face appeared in the doorway and the Master rose to greet him, bidding him be seated, and said, ' . . . your Lord loves you. God gave you a black skin, but a heart white as snow.'" (An Early Pilgrimage, May Maxwell, p. 20) "Such was the tenacity of his faith that even the subsequent estrangement of his beloved mistress from the Cause she had spontaneously embraced failed to becloud its radiance, or to lessen the intensity of the emotions which the loving-kindness showered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá upon him had excited in his breast." (God Passes By, Shoghi Effendi, p. 259.)

Only the Mention of God

May Bolles (Maxwell) was one of those fortunate fifteen pilgrims welcomed in

the prison-city at that time. She recorded her experiences in *An Early Pilgrimage* — a divine love story.

In the Holy Land whose very air was "laden with the perfume of roses and orange blossoms", she found 'Abdu'l-Bahá Whose love and wisdom penetrated her very soul. In 'Akká the Holy Family had vacated their own rooms that the pilgrims might tie comfortable. Early mornings the Master would inquire about their happiness and health, and at night He wished them "beautiful dreams" and a good rest.

And there, for three precious days and nights, they heard nothing "but the mention of God." Never elsewhere had she seen such happiness nor heard so much laughter. The Master wanted no tears. At one time the tearful were asked to weep no more for His sake. Only when all were fully composed would He teach the friends.

"Then He said: 'Pray that your hearts may be cut from yourselves and from the world, that you may be confirmed by the Holy Spirit and filled with the fire of the love of God.'" (p. 39) ". . . I say unto you that anyone who will rise in the Cause of God at this time shall be filled with the spirit of God, and that He will send His hosts from heaven to help you, and that nothing shall be impossible to you if you have faith. And now I give you a commandment which shall be for a covenant between yon and Me — that ye have faith; that your faith be steadfast as a rock that no storms can move, that nothing can disturb, and that it endure through all things even to the end. . . . As ye have faith so shall your powers and blessings be. This is the balance — this is the balance — this is the balance." (p. 40)

She had the inestimable privilege of seeing the portraits of both Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb. Whereupon in poignant voice the Master said, "Another commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another even as I love you. Great mercy and blessings are promised to the people of your land, but on one condition: that their hearts are filled with the fire of love, that they live in perfect kindness and harmony like one soul in different bodies. If they fail in this condition the great blessings will be deferred. Never forget this; look at one another with the eye of perfection; look at Me, follow Me, be as I am; take no thought for yourselves or your lives, whether ye eat or whether ye sleep, whether ye are comfortable, whether ye are well or ill, whether ye are with friends or foes, whether ye receive praise Or blame; for all of these things ye must care not at all. Look at Me and be as I am; ye must die to yourselves and to the world, so shall ye be born again and enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Behold a candle how it gives its light. It weeps its life away drop by drop in order to give forth its flame of light." (pp. 41-42)

Spiritual and physical life stood in sharp contrast. The Master told an American, who felt orphaned due to unbelieving parents, that "Material relationship is nothing, it bears no eternal fruits. You are the child of God and of the Kingdom and the ties of the flesh are nothing, but the ties of the spirit are all." (p. 31)

Nourished by the Love of God

She was to hear that the food man eats was of no importance as its effect endured but a short time. But the food of the spirit was life to the soul and its effects would endure eternally. She heard Him tell the touching "story of the hermit". Bahá'u'lláh "was traveling from one place to another with His followers" and "He passed through a lonely country where, at some little distance from the highway, a hermit lived alone in a cave. He was a holy man, and having heard that Our Lord, Bahá'u'lláh, would pass that way, he watched eagerly for His approach. When the Manifestation arrived at that spot the hermit knelt down and kissed the dust before His feet, and said to Him: 'Oh, my Lord, I am a poor man living alone in a cave nearby; but henceforth I shall account myself the happiest of mortals if Thou wilt but come for a moment to my cave and bless it by Thy Presence.' Then Bahá'u'lláh told the man that He would come, not for a moment but for three days, and He bade His followers cast their tents, and await His return. The poor man was so overcome with joy and gratitude that he was speechless, and led the way in humble silence to his lowly dwelling in a rock. There the Glorious One sat with him, talking to him and teaching him, and toward evening the man bethought himself that he had nothing to offer his great Guest but some dry meat and some dark bread, and water from a spring nearby. Not knowing what to do he threw himself at the feet of his Lord and confessed his dilemma. Bahá'u'lláh comforted him and by a word bade him fetch the meat and bread and water; then the Lord of the universe partook of this frugal repast with joy and fragrance as though it had been a banquet, and during the three days of His visit they ate only of this food which seemed to the poor hermit the most delicious he had ever eaten. Bahá'u'lláh declared that He had never been more nobly entertained nor received greater hospitality and love. 'This,' explained the Master, when He had finished the story, 'shows us how little man requires when he is nourished by the sweetest of all foods — the love of God.'" (pp. 22-24.)

The Law of Love

May Maxwell came to realize that every word and every act of the Master's had meaning and purpose. The pilgrim party was invited to meet Him "under the cedar trees on Mount Carmel where He had been in the habit of sitting with Bahá'u'lláh." She recalled that "On Sunday morning we awakened with the joy and hope of the meeting on Mount Carmel. The Master arrived quite early and after looking at me, touching my head and counting my pulse, still holding my hand He said to the believers present: There will be no meeting on Mount Carmel to-day . . . we could not go and leave one of the beloved of God alone and sick. We could none of us be happy unless all the beloved were happy.' We were astonished. That anything so important as this meeting in that blessed spot should be cancelled because one person was ill and could not go seemed incredible. It was so contrary to all ordinary habits of thought and action, so different from the life of the world where daily events and material circumstances are supreme in importance that it gave us a genuine shock of surprise, and in that shock the foundations of the old order began to totter

and fall. The Master's words had opened wide the door of God's Kingdom and given us a vision of that in finite world whose only law is love. This was but one of many times that we saw 'Abdu'l-Bahá place above every other consideration the love and kindness, the sympathy and compassion due to every soul. Indeed, as we look back upon that blessed time spent in His presence we understand that the object of our pilgrimage was to learn for the first time on earth what love is, to witness its light in every face, to feel its burning heat in every heart and to become ourselves enkindled with this divine flame from the Sun of Truth, the Essence of whose being is love."

But this very love could both warm and purify. With beautiful humility and candor, she recounts the Master's silent lesson:

To Speak No Evil

"We had learned that to be with 'Abdu'l-Bahá was all life, joy and blessedness. We were to learn also that His Presence is a purifying fire. The pilgrimage to the Holy City is naught but a crucible in which the souls are tried; where the gold is purified and the dross is consumed. It did not seem possible that anything but love could ever again animate our words and actions.

"Yet that very afternoon, in my room with two of the believers, I spoke against a brother in the truth, finding fault with him, and giving vent to the evil in my own heart by my words. While we were still sitting together, our Master, who had been visiting the poor and sick, returned, and immediately sent for my spiritual mother, Lua, who was with us. He told her that during His absence one of His servants had spoken unkindly of another, and that it grieved His heart that the believers should not love one another or that they should speak against any soul. Then He charged her not to speak of it but to pray.

"A little later we all went to supper, and my hard heart was unconscious of its error, until, as my eyes sought the beloved face of my Master, I met His gaze, so full of gentleness and compassion that I was smitten to the heart. For in some marvelous way His eyes spoke to me; in the pure and perfect mirror I saw my wretched self and burst into tears. He took no notice of me for a while and everyone kindly continued with the supper while I sat in His dear Presence washing away some of my sins in tears.

"After a few moments He turned and smiled on me and spoke my name several times as though He were calling me to Him. In an instant such sweet happiness pervaded my soul, my heart was comforted with such infinite hope, that I knew He would cleanse me of all my sins." (An Early Pilgrimage, May Maxwell, pp. 25-6. — adapted)

The Role of the Manifestations

"In 1909, May and Sutherland Maxwell made a pilgrimage together to the Prison City of 'Akká, to visit 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Sutherland was not yet a convinced Bahá'í. One day at table, he said to 'Abdu'l-Bahá: 'The Christians worship God through Christ; my wife worships God through You; but I worship Him direct.'

"'Abdu'l-Bahá smiled and said: 'Where is He?'"

"'Why, God is everywhere,' replied Sutherland.

"'Everywhere is nowhere,' said 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He then went on to demonstrate that such worship was worship of a figment of the imagination and had no reality; we must worship God through something tangible and real to us, hence the role of the Manifestations. Sutherland bowed his head in acceptance. The real seed of his faith germinated from that hour. The way this faith grew in him was a beautiful thing." (Bahá'í World, Vol. XII, p. 658.)

Lua Getsinger — spiritual mother of both Mrs. Hearst and May Bolles (Maxwell) — was also in that late 1898 pilgrim party. For the following eighteen years she returned time and again to 'Akká and Haifa. 'Abdu'l-Bahá entrusted her with vital teaching missions. And constantly He taught her in the path of divine love.

Be Firm in Purpose

During one of her visits to the Orient the Master told her, "Thou must be firm and unshakable in thy purpose, and never, never let any outward circumstances worry thee, I am sending thee to India to accomplish certain definite results. Thou must enter that country with a never-failing spirituality, a radiant faith, an eternal enthusiasm, an inextinguishable fire, a solid conviction, in order that thou mayest achieve those services for which I am sending thee. Let not thy heart be troubled. If thou goest away with this unchanging condition of invariability of inner state, thou shalt see the doors of confirmation open before thy face, thy life will be a crown of heavenly roses, and thou shalt find thyself in the highest station of triumph.

"Strive day and night to attain to this exalted state. Look at me! Thou dost not know a thousandth part of the difficulties and seemingly unsurmountable passes that rise daily before my eyes. I do not heed them; I am walking in my chosen highway. . . ." (Star of the West, Vol. IV, No. 12, p. 208.)

She grew impatient to grow spiritually. Impetuous in nature, she wanted instant perfection with which to better serve 'Abdu'l-Bahá. But the Master taught her that she could not stand that — perfection is a slowly evolving process.

"Serve Thy Fellow Man"

One day when Lua was in 'Akká to see the Master, "He said to her, that He was too busy today to call upon a friend of His who was very ill and poor and He wished her to go in His place. Take him food and care for him as I have been doing, he concluded. He told her where this man was to be found and she went gladly, proud that 'Abdu'l-Bahá should trust her with this mission.

"She returned quickly. 'Master,' she exclaimed, 'Surely you cannot realize to what a terrible place you sent me. I almost fainted from the awful stench, the filthy rooms, the degrading condition of that man and his house. I fled lest I contract some terrible disease.'

"Sadly and sternly 'Abdu'l-Bahá regarded her. 'Dost thou desire to serve God,' He said, 'serve thy fellow man for in him dost thou see the image and likeness of God.' He told her to go back to this man's house. If it is filthy she should clean it; if this brother of yours is dirty, bathe him; if he is hungry, feed him. Do not return until this is done. Many times had He done this for him and cannot she serve him once?" (Portals to Freedom, Howard Colby Ives, pp. 84-85.)

Her passion for her Faith and her love for the Master knew no bounds. The physical world became less important to her as she grew in spirituality. Her very dress changed before her early death in 1916. She abandoned her old finery. Instead she always wore a conservative blue outfit. During her last years, she lived only in and for the world of the spirit.

"Endure people even when they are unendurable!"

Stanwood Cobb, teacher at Robert College, Constantinople in 1908 went to Egypt for his midyear vacation. While in Cairo, whom should he run into on the steps of the Shephard Hotel but Lua Getsinger, this devoted follower of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Cobb had arranged to go on a trip up the Nile, she was on her way to see the Prisoner in 'Akká. She urged him to join her, saying that she had standing permission to take anyone with her.

With candor and intimacy he has recorded his first pilgrimage: "My first meeting with 'Abdu'l-Bahá was bewildering. We were ushered into a long study, lighted by large French windows at the farther end. I saw a large desk there, but no person sitting at it. Only a radiance of light. As we approached the end of the room, a majestic figure in Oriental garb became evident to me. It was 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

"Lua Getsinger, with the devotion of a Mary Magdalene, fell to her knees and fervently kissed His robe. But what was I to do? I am not one who can act insincerely. Should I merely shake hands with Him? As I stood in hesitation 'Abdu'l-Bahá, fully realizing my predicament, saved me from it by taking me in His arms and embracing me.

"You are welcome!" He said.

"Every evening at dinner 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who did not eat at that time, helped to serve us. He went around from guest to guest, putting more food upon the plates. This is the height of Oriental hospitality, to serve an honored guest with one's own hands.

"When the meal was over, 'Abdu'l-Bahá would give us a brief talk on spiritual themes. I regret I have not a memory sufficient to recall all that He said. But I do recall two of these messages of spiritual wisdom.

"It is not enough to wish to do good. The wish should be followed by action. What would you think of a mother who said, 'How I love you, my babe!' — yet did not give it milk? Or of a penniless man, who said, 'I am going to found a great university!'"

"On another occasion He spoke of the need for loving patience in the face of

aggravating behavior on the part of others.

'One might say, 'Well, I will endure such-and-such a person so long as he is endurable.' But Bahá'ís must endure people even when they are unendurable!'

"Three extraordinary qualities which characterized all of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's utterances were to be found in these two brief conversations: His supreme logic; His delightful sense of humor; and the inspiring buoyancy with which He gave forth solemn pronouncements.

"For instance, when He said, 'But Bahá'ís must endure people even when they are unendurable,' He did not look at us solemnly as if appointing us to an arduous and difficult task. Rather, He beamed upon us delightfully, as if to suggest what a joy to us it would be to act in this way!

"I want to emphasize this important point — the joyousness with which 'Abdu'l-Bahá always depicted the spiritual life as He enjoined it upon us. And why not? Is man's spiritual life not in reality more joyous than any other kind of life that he can lead?

"This philosophy of joy was the keynote of all of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's teaching. 'Are you happy?' was His frequent greeting to his visitors. 'Be happy!'

"Those who were unhappy (and who of us are not at times!) would weep at this. And 'Abdu'l-Bahá would smile as if to say, 'Yes, weep on. Beyond the tears is sunshine.'

"And sometimes He would wipe away with His own hands the tears from their wet cheeks, and they would leave His presence transfigured." (Bahá'í News July 1962, p. 5)

Glimpses of Early Bahá'í Pilgrimages, part 2

Published in Bahá'í News #500, November 1972, pp. 2-6.

See image scans at bahai-news.info/viewer.erb?vol=08&page=218.

One of the early pilgrims to see the Master while He was yet a Prisoner was Corinne True, who went to the prison-city in 1907. This proved to be the first of nine pilgrimages she was privileged to make to the Bahá'í Holy Places. Only the knowledge that she and her small party were to receive shelter in the home of 'Abdu'l-Bahá could have made her enter that grim city, so aptly named, "The Greatest Prison".

The loving warmth of that holy household was felt immediately. The Master had picked three lovely roses, which were sent to them with His welcome. When He Himself appeared, He brought pink and purple hyacinths. Later He sent each a luscious tangerine. These small considerations seemed to fill the very atmosphere with a divine sweetness, tilling their hearts with joy.

"Make a Beginning"

"This was during the time of the Second Commission of Investigation by the Turks, when 'Abdu'l-Bahá had again been confined as a prisoner in 'Akká by

order of the Sultan of Turkey. On this visit Mrs. True took a petition to the Master asking permission for the American Bahá'ís to begin planning for the erection of a 'House of Worship.' This petition was in the form of a parchment containing the signatures of over a thousand American believers. She tells the story of putting the parchment behind her on the divan and first presenting the little gifts sent by the loving friends. But the Master strode across the room, reached behind her and grasped the parchment, holding it high in the air. 'This,' He exclaimed, 'this is what gives me great joy.' 'Go back,' He told her, 'go back and work for the Temple; it is a great work.' How she longed to do this work, 'but it seemed such a great task.' 'Abdu'l-Bahá, looking at her with deep intensity said, 'Devote yourself to this project — make a beginning, and all will come right.' He then proceeded to give basic instructions about its design. It was to have nine sides, nine gardens, nine fountains, nine doors, nine walks, etc. And so a vision of the first Bahá'í Temple in the Western Hemisphere was born." (Told by Honor Kempton in Bahá'í World, Vol XIII, p. 847)

The small pilgrim party was invited to join the family in early morning devotions — usually held between six and seven — at which time tea was served and the Holy Words were chanted. The Master took His breakfast of a little cheese, Syrian bread and a cup of tea. The pilgrims' breakfast was served later.

The Holy Household

Corinne True tells about this early morning experience: "The widow of one of the martyrs sits on the floor in the Persian style and makes and serves the tea every morning. Her husband was one of three brothers who were imprisoned for this Cause. For days they had no news about them. One day they heard a great noise in the street and looking out they saw three heads placed on long poles and being carried through the streets, and when in front of their home they tossed these heads into their mother's room. She wiped them off with water and then threw them back, saying, 'What I have given to God I will not take back.' This woman who makes the tea had been married only one year to one of these brothers. Having lost all of her relatives through the persecution, and Persian women having no openings for self-support, the Master took her into His household. What a wonderful household this is — over forty people living here in one home, some black, some white, Arabic, Persian, Burmanese, Italian, Russian and now English and American! Not a loud command is heard and not one word of dispute; not one word of fault-finding. Every one goes about as if on tip toes. When they enter your room, their slippers are left before the door and they come in with stocking feet and remain standing until you invite them to sit down." (Notes Taken at 'Akká, Corinne True, pp. 29-30.)

Dinner served two purposes: to eat and to teach or learn. The Master would eat a bite or two and then He taught those present. She observed that "Not one moment of the day is wasted by this Mighty Man of God." (p. 25)

Friday Mornings

Corinne True was one of many who were deeply touched by the Master's customary Friday morning acts of charity. From her window she "saw between two and three hundred men, women and children gathered. Such a motley crowd one can see only in these parts. There were blind, lame, cripples and very feeble persons, the poorest clad collection of people almost that the earth contains. One man had his clothing made of a patched quilt, an old woman had gunny sacking for a cloak; children were so ragged that their clothing would scarcely stay on them.

"Two or three of the men believers were with the Master. The people were required to arrange themselves in order about two sides of the court and the Master began near the gate giving into the hand of each some piece of money and then each was required to move out. It was a sight never to be forgotten to see the Master going from one to another, saying some word of praise or kindness to encourage each. With some He would stop to inquire into their health and He would pat them on the back, these poor, dirty-looking creatures, and once in a while we would see Him send some one away empty-handed and He would reprimand him for his laziness. How clear and musical His voice sounded as He went from one to another, giving and praising! The men accompanying Him kept order in great kindness, but firmness, and saw that each passed on as soon as he had received from the Master. Where on this globe can one duplicate such a scene as is enacted every Friday morning in the court yard of the Master of 'Akká, Who is Himself a state Prisoner to the Turkish government and has lived in prison or in exile since He was nine years of age!" (Adapted pp. 22-23.)

Later, while resting, the Master told Mrs. True about His friends. "These are My friends, MY friends. Some of them are My enemies, but they think I do not know it, because they appear friendly, and to them I am very kind, for one must love his enemies and do good to them." He explained that there was not sufficient work in 'Akká, and of only two kinds: fishing or carrying heavy loads. The sea had been too stormy lately and the loads to be carried required great strength. Those who attempted to take advantage of Him were rebuked and told where they might obtain work. (p. 24)

A Pilgrimage in 1905

Pilgrim Mary Lucas went in 1905 and wrote A Brief Account of My Visit to 'Akká. From Haifa a carriage took her to the narrow streets of 'Akká, streets so small that approaching camels with their 'burdens were obliged to back away to make room for the carriage to pass.

She was of course deeply impressed with the Master, Whom she found in 'Akká. She noted His "absolute poise", "absolute naturalness" and "absolute freedom." "There was an utter absence of any desire or effort to impress one with His greatness, which is majestic in its simplicity. When we consider that He has never been enrolled in any school, has always been an exile and a prisoner, has had no access to books, that in spite of all this, His knowledge is unbounded! Truly we must marvel!" (p. 10).

The Master's Appearance

"In personal appearance the Master is of medium height and slender build. His complexion is rather dark, from the American point of view, but he is fair for a Persian. His eyes are bluish gray, and there is a white line within the iris which sometimes seems to radiate light, making His eyes wonderfully luminous. His countenance is of the type rendered familiar to us by the old masters' paintings of Christ. His hands are small and delicate, decidedly of the spiritual and artistic sort, but with a grip of steel. Though but sixty years old His hair and beard are white, and His hair falls over His shoulders in Oriental fashion. He is very indifferent as to His appearance, though extremely neat, and in warm weather frequently tucks His flowing locks up under His fez in undisguised desire to get them out of the way. His ordinary costume is a tan colored robe of simple material, and a white fez." (p. 30)

A Life of Simplicity and Sacrifice

'Abdu'l-Bahá's simplicity and generosity were indelibly imprinted in her heart and mind. He knew how to sit with her in silence. He knew how to make a cup of tea for her. His own physical needs appeared virtually nonexistent.

How could this Prisoner give to the needy of 'Akká every Friday morning? Had not His exiled family's wealth and property been almost totally confiscated? She found that "All that the Master gives is a real sacrifice, and is saved by the cutting off of what most people would consider necessities." (p. 28)

"The Master slept on the stone floor with only a rug and a matting between His body and its cold, hard surface, and no cover except His cloak. One of the American pilgrims was grieved to see Him so deprived of comfort, and gave Him a bed and mattress. Soon afterward it was discovered to be gone, and when questioned about it, the Master replied: 'How could I sleep in luxury when so many have nothing!'" (p. 29)

She found that He gave away all the many gifts which were sent to Him. "A story is told of a beautiful silver service which was presented to Him, and He did not even look at it. One and another received portions of it until piece by piece it disappeared. A significant incident is that of a wealthy woman who offered Him a sum of money before she left 'Akká. He refused to accept it, and as the lady pleaded for the privilege of placing it in His hands, He said, at length: 'I never accept anything for Myself, but if you wish you may bestow it upon a poor man . . . for the education of his son.' So the money was used for this purpose." (p. 29)

'Abdu'l-Bahá usually ate but one simple meal a day. In Mary Lucas' eight days He was present at most meals, often coming just to add joy to the occasion, though He was not hungry. If He knew of someone who had had no meal during a day, the family supper was gladly packed up and sent to the needy.

She noted that grace was not said before meals. She mentioned this to the Master, to which He replied, "My heart is in a continual state of thanksgiving, and so often those accustomed to this form say the words with the lips merely, and their hearts are far from being in a state of thanksgiving."

(p. 31)

Even His household reflected His greatness. In addition to Himself, His wife, His sister, two married daughters with husbands and children, and His two youngest daughters, there were some orphan children and widows of martyrs. She observed that "These serve ill some capacity in the household, and the sentiment of love and equality in every member of this home is a living example for the world. Everything is done in the spirit of love." (p. 15)

"Forgive Him Now"

It was observed that on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's birthday, "He spoke only of the Báb, His mission and message. (He was born during the night of the Bab's Declaration, May 23, 1844.)" Most certainly He did not use the occasion to talk about Himself.

In 1906 over two hundred guests were to dine at the Master's table. Since dawn, He had been busy helping with the work involved. He Himself kneaded dough to be put in the ovens. "He has been in gay spirits, inspiring, uplifting, cheering all His helpers," someone observed. And later He "assisted in passing the platters . . . the rice . . . the lamb . . . the fruits of the region (of such large size, such color, and such fragrance as only the sunshine of the East produces and paints). Moving among His two hundred guests, He spoke to them as He served them, such Divine words of love and spiritual import. . . : 'If one of you has been wounded in heart by the words or deeds of another, during the past year, forgive him now; that in purity of heart and loving; pardon, you may feast in happiness, and arise, renewed in spirit.'" With words to this effect He seemed to be telling His many friends that all He wanted of them at that happy time was to know that they had forgiven any transgression which might have been committed against them. (The Sheltering Branch, Marzieh Gail, pp. 70-71)

The First American Bahá'ís on Pilgrimage

Thornton Chase, who has become known as "the 'first American believer,' and indeed the first to embrace the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh in the Western world" (God Passes By, p. 288), sailed from Jaffa in Syria with several other Bahá'ís in 1907. They landed safely in Haifa and the next day went through the German Colony, dating back to 1843. Its inhabitants expected Christ's Second Coming there on Mount Carmel soon thereafter. Inscriptions over doors of homes, church and school expressed their very real expectation. One could still read "Der Herr ist Nahe" meaning that the Lord is near.

The beauty of Carmel did not pass him by as he waited for his pilgrimage to 'Akká. "Roadsides and fields were painted with blossoms, and we delighted in their variety, colors and fragrance. There were myriads of flowers, daisies, forget-me-nots, sweet peas, lilies, roses, and the flaming red poppies everywhere." (In Galilee, Thornton Chase, pp. 13-14)

Then came that blessed April day to see 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 'Akká. They went by way of the sandy seashore in a carriage drawn by three horses pulling side by

side.

Vividly he described in his little story In Galilee, his impressions on arrival: "... they conducted us through the arched, red brick entrance to an open court, across it to a long flight of stone steps, broken and ancient, leading to the highest story and into a small walled court open to the sky, where was the upper chamber assigned to us, which adjoined the room of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The buildings are all of stone, whitewashed and plastered, and it bears the aspect of a prison.

"Our windows looked out over the garden and tent of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the sea side of the house. That garden is bounded on one side by the house of the Governor, which overlooks it, and on another by the inner wall of fortification. A few feet beyond that is the outer wall upon the sea, and between these two are the guns and soldiers constantly on guard. A sentry house stands at one corner of the wall and garden, from which the sentry can see the grounds and the tent where 'Abdu'l-Bahá meets transient visitors and the officials who often call on Him. Thus all His acts outside of the house itself are visible to the Governor from His windows and to the men on guard. Perhaps that is one reason why the officials so often become His friends. No one, with humanity, justice, or mercy in his heart, could watch 'Abdu'l-Bahá long without admiring and loving Him for the beautiful qualities constantly displayed." (pp. 23-24)

For five days he remained inside those prison walls — feeling the love and peace of the Holy Household — finding that the real prison was on the other side of those same walls. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was ever the perfect host. An instance of this is cited by Chase, who noted that at the noon meal He accepted food only after all those present had been served. And then He indicated that the meal should be eaten by saying "In the Name of God," smiling His beautiful smile.

The Master possessed spiritual charisma. "He assumed nothing; His powers were natural, His sincerity thorough; His affection pure. His smile charmed and attracted friends to Him.

"He had the stride and freedom of a king — or shepherd. My impression of Him was that of a lion, a kingly, masterful Man of the most sweet and generous disposition." (p. 29)

'Abdu'l-Bahá is a grand Man, broad, universal in thought, standing above the world and looking down upon it in its weakness and poverty with a boundless love and an intense longing to lift it up from its wretchedness, to make it conscious of the rich bounties of God, which are so freely offered in this wonderful time . . ." (p. 54) "His own personality in the eyes of others is naught to Him, nor does He care for the personality of others. It is not love for the individual one, but the love of the Spirit for humanity." (p. 55)

'Abdu'l-Bahá had such an easy way of leading into a meaningful conversation. He would begin "with some simple reference to a natural thing, the weather,

food, a stone, tree, water, the prison, a garden or a bird, our coming, or some little act of service, and this 'base would be woven into a parable and teaching of wisdom and simplicity, showing the oneness of all Spiritual Truth, and adapting it always to the life, both of the individual and of mankind. All of His words are directed toward helping men to live. Unless questions of metaphysics, dogmas and doctrines be introduced, He seldom mentions them. He speaks easily, clearly, in brief phrases, each of which is a gem." (pp. 33-34)

His every instruction was geared to help the living live. And His only wish was that the word and will of God sink deep into the heart of man and conquer it.

The miracle of 'Akká — a mighty Revelation emerging from prison walls over the face of the planet — must have astounded many a mortal. But to those who had become spiritually alive, there was less mystery — they were keyed in to the Lord of the universe and they understood. "... after a week, a day, or an hour, they return to their distant homes, all filled with love, most of their questions unasked and forgotten, curious no longer, but satisfied and overflowing with love to the human race and a great longing to bear the word of Revelation to their friends, and to serve every creature of God without regard to family, race or religion. The inexpressible happiness of the Spirit possesses each one of them, and he wants the whole world to have it." (p. 50)

Yes, Mr. Carl Scheffler, who was with Chase on pilgrimage, was right when he referred to the rugged, stone steps leading to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, saying, "Those are the steps up to heaven". (p. 48)

Love and Harmony in the Penal Fortress

A modest pilgrim to 'Akká, while 'Abdu'l-Bahá was yet a Prisoner in the penal fortress, recorded his visit in a few small pages and then signed this little gem simply "Roy".

What most impressed this early pilgrim was the spirit of sacrifice which he found among the Bahá'ís in the "Most Great Prison." He noted that "Nowhere have I witnessed such love, such perfect harmony. The desire of those in that prison is to serve one another." (Knock and It Shall Be Opened Unto You, Roy. p. 1.)

He was aware of the "bitter antagonism" which existed among the followers of different religious bodies. "For example, a Jew and a Muhammedan would refuse to sit at meat together: a Hindu to draw water from the well of either. Yet, in the house of 'Abdu'l-Bahá we found Christians, Jews, Muhammedans, Zoroastrians, Hindus, blending together as children of the one God, living in perfect love and harmony." (p. 1)

Having arrived by boat in Haifa, he traveled the ten miles by shore to 'Akká in a large-wheeled carriage. "... two streams had to be forded. The smooth, hard sand at the edge of the Mediterranean is the road, and as we drove along, the waves would frequently wash up against the horses' feet. The little horses knew that the sand was hardest at the water's edge, and they followed the waves as they washed up and receded, traveling in scallops, as it were. It is a low,

sandy coast and the outline is broken only by an occasional clump of date palms and tall cactus plants. We passed here and there an Arab on horseback, usually a long rifle pointing above his shoulder; also a number of natives with their flowing garments girded up into their belts to give greater freedom and to offer less resistance to the wind, which at times blew with considerable force. Above the water line the sand seemed to be constantly shifting into irregular mounds, some of them as much as fifteen or twenty feet in height." (p. 4)

In 'Akká the streets were narrow and winding but they soon stopped at an entrance to a house. They passed through a courtyard. Ascending a "long flight of stone steps", he arrived at an upper court and was taken to a large room facing the sea and in view of the crumbling remains of once mighty fortifications. He was the guest of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

In about an hour the Master arrived and said, "Welcome! Welcome!"

Then He spoke in Persian with an interpreter. After saying that "The Cause of God is like a tree — its fruit is love", He asked how the believers were. Happy that they were becoming more united He replied, 'This news is the cause of My happiness, for the more they are united the more they will receive God's confirmation. They must love one another. Each must devote and sacrifice himself and what he has for the other. I, Myself, sacrifice My life for all.'" (pp. 5-6.)

From the pilgrim's room could be seen a small garden with a fountain. Close by was a tent in which the Master received many people who wished to interview Him. Known not only for His wisdom but also for His justice, He was asked for explanations of religious passages, for solutions to family problems and for advice in business quarrels. He made no distinction among the peoples of differing religions. Though untaught in the schools of men, priests, learned men and government officials consulted with Him and wished the advice of this Man whom they regarded as their Friend.

"Friday mornings at seven there is another picture. Near the tent in the garden one may see an assemblage of the abject poor — the lame, the halt and the blind — seldom less than a hundred. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá passes among them He will be seen to give to each a small coin, and to add a word of sympathy or cheer; often an inquiry about those at home; frequently He sends a share to an absent one. It is a sorry procession as they file slowly away, but they all look forward to this weekly visit, and indeed it is said that this is the chief means of sustenance for some of them. Almost any morning, early, He may be seen making the rounds of the city, calling upon the feeble and the sick; many dingy abodes are brightened by His presence." (p. 7)

Roy noted that little birds loved to come also. They flew right into the rooms. As the dining-room door was usually open, they happily ate the crumbs from the table.

According to the Persian custom, dinner in the evening was at nine o'clock. It was then that the Master taught those who were gathered together.

During his last meal with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, He "broke a quantity of bread into His bowl; then asking for the plates of the pilgrims He gave to each of us a portion. When the meal was finished, He said, 'I have given you to eat from My bowl — now distribute My Bread among the people.'" (p. 9)

The Gateway to Heaven

Ten Days in the Light of Akká records the early pilgrimage of Julia Grundy. Red anemones carpeted field and mountain, heralding the coming of spring.

She came to know the prison city of 'Akká, "home of exiles and prisoners of the Turkish Government. A few merchants and bazaars comprise its present meagre commerce although in former times it was an important market for Syrian products. It is the residence of a governor and various officials. The inhabitants generally are poor and wretched; evidences of poverty and squalor everywhere. Haifa has absorbed the business vitality of 'Akká. The city looks like a catacombs with the roof lifted up; heavy walls, a labyrinth of passages, narrow streets and dark alleys leading in every direction. But the spiritual atmosphere which surrounds us here is unmistakable and uplifting. Here in this unholy yet holy place we have been taught that the peace, power and knowledge of God can only be attained by severance from the things of earth and freedom from the influences of transitory surroundings. 'Akká is to us a gateway of Heaven." (p. 70)

Mightily impressed with the "holy history" of Mount Carmel, she was told that not only had Elijah and Jesus spent part of Their lives there, but that 'Abdu'l-Bahá loved this holy mountain of God and had at times stayed overnight in its caves — to pray and commune with God. Once He attempted to bring a message to the Carmelite Monastery, but He would not be heard. Dejected, He returned to 'Akká, "walking the whole distance of nine miles." (p. 6)

Spiritual knowledge and wisdom flowed from the lips of the blessed Master. How true it was, as she was told, that "'The more you see of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the more you will realize the inexhaustible fountain of knowledge within Him. He is the "Bazaar" of God, where everything humanity needs may be found without money and without price. In Him there is always something new to learn and possess; always some new thought in His words and explanations. What you receive from Him is measured by your capacity.'" (p. 106)

Concerning the Second Coming of Christ, He said, "'In the Book of the Zend Avesta the Zoroastrians are awaiting the coming of two Manifestations. Also in the Old Testament Scriptures there is the promise of Elijah and Messiah. In the Gospel of the New Testament they are expecting the Father and the Second Coming of Christ. Likewise in the Qur'an the Muhammadans have the promise of the Imám Mahdí and Christ. In brief all the Holy Scriptures announce the coming of two Manifestations and these two Manifestations are the Báb and the Blessed Perfection.'" (p. 61)

She heard the Master tell a little-known story. "The disciples of Jesus passing along the road and seeing a dead dog, remarked how offensive and disgusting a

spectacle it was. The Christ turning to them said, "Yes, but see how white and beautiful are his teeth;" — thus teaching that there is some good in everything." (p. 109) So, too, He taught that one should always look for the good and not for the bad.

Super-psychiatrist that He was, He taught that "We should not be occupied with our failings and weakness but concern ourselves about the will of God so that it may flow through us, thereby healing these human infirmities." (p. 11)

At one time the author asked the Master, "What shall I say to those who state that they are satisfied with Christianity and do not need this present Manifestation?" His reply was clear: 'Let them alone. What would they do if a former king had reigned and a new king was now seated upon the throne? They must acknowledge the new king or they are not true subjects of the Kingdom. Last year there was a springtime. Can a man say "I do not need a new springtime this year, — the old springtime is enough for me?" No! The new spring must come to fill the earth with beauty and brightness.'" (p. 40)

She described a beautiful supper at which many friends were welcomed by the Master Himself. He passed out napkins, embraced and found places for each. All were individually anointed with attar of rose. He served pilau, a Persian rice dish, to each guest. There were also oranges and rice pudding. "Throughout the supper which was very simple in its character and appointment, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was the Servant of the believers. This was indeed a spiritual feast where love reigned. The whole atmosphere was love, joy and peace." (p. 74)

One day He sent for her. His words were brimming with love and inspiration: "I want you to carry away from 'Akká the joy and peace of the spiritual life." (p. 38) "The true pleasure and happiness depend upon the spiritual perception and enjoyment. The powers of mind are the bounties of God given to man to lead him toward spiritual happiness. The highest grace in man is to love God. Love of God, knowledge of God is the greatest, the only real happiness, because it is nearness to God. This is the Kingdom of God. To love God is to know Him. To know Him is to enter His Kingdom and be near Him. This is what I desire for you; — that you may walk in this path." (p. 39)

Glimpses of Early Bahá'í Pilgrimages, part 3

Published in Bahá'í News #501, December 1972, pp. 2-6

See image scans at bahai-news.info/viewer.erb?vol=08&page=241.

Flow of Pilgrims Halted by World War I

Year after year "a continual flow of pilgrims . . . transmitted the verbal messages and special instructions of a vigilant Master". (God Passes By, Shoghi Effendi, p. 259.) World War I brought a rude halt to these heavenly journeys.

"A remarkable instance of the foresight of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was supplied during the months immediately preceding the war. During peace times there was usually a large number of pilgrims at Haifa, from Iran and other regions of the globe. About six months before the outbreak of war one of the old Bahá'ís living at

Haifa presented a request from several believers of Iran for permission to visit the Master. 'Abdu'l-Bahá did not grant the permission, and from that time onwards gradually dismissed the pilgrims who were at Haifa, so that by the end of July, 1914 none remained. "When, in the first days of August, the sudden outbreak of the Great War startled the world, the wisdom of His precaution became apparent." (Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era, Dr. J. E. Esslemont, p. 79.)

During World War I, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had practically no communication with the Bahá'ís outside the Holy Land. Shoghi Effendi wrote, "He felt acutely the virtual stoppage of all communication with most of the Bahá'í centers throughout the world." (God Passes By p. 304)

The difficulties of those years can hardly be imagined. The Master yet felt the exhausting effects of His extensive western journeys. He suffered agony seeing the world plunged into war — Bahá'u'lláh's summons had gone unheeded. Furthermore, He "became again virtually a prisoner of the Turkish Government", plagued by real personal danger and a shortage of food. Cut off from most of the Bahá'ís, He was deprived of much joy.

But His work continued, "ministering to the material and spiritual wants of the people about Him. He personally organized extensive agricultural operations near Tiberias, thus securing a great supply of wheat, by means of which famine was averted, not only for the Bahá'ís but for hundreds of the poor of all religions in Haifa and 'Akká, whose wants He liberally supplied. He took care of all, and mitigated their sufferings as far as possible. To hundreds of poor people He would give a small sum of money daily. In addition to money He gave bread. If there was no bread He would give dates or something else. He made frequent visits to 'Akká to comfort and help the believers and poor people there. During the time of war He had daily meetings of the believers, and through His help the friends remained happy and tranquil throughout those troublous years." (Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era, J. E. Esslemont, p. 75.)

After the war, the flow of pilgrims resumed. Eager as He must have been to welcome them, He was known to grant permission when they could travel in comfort.

"Strive to Create Love"

The Randall-Vail-Latimer pilgrimage of November 1919 is beautifully recorded in *The Light of the World*. For twelve blessed days the pilgrims basked in the divine sunlight of the Master and of the Bahá'í Holy Places. Dr. Esslemont of England was among that mixed gathering attracted to the Master as bees are to honey. "Persian, Arab, Kurd, Turk, English, American, Hindu, Japanese, Muhammedan, Christian, Jew, Buddhist, gathered at one heavenly table by the power of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh"! (p. 26)

They observed 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He "sat there before us, at times silent, but when He spoke every word vibrated with power. As He talked of world conditions, His irresistible logic, the splendor of His universal mind, were a continual astonishment. As He paused, told a humorous story, laughed about Fugita, heaped

more food on Margaret Randall's plate (now Counsellor Báhiyyih Ford), His great love set all our hearts in uproar.

"It is not the Master's human personality, attractive as it may be, but the light, the truth of God shining through His selfless spirit that makes Him so wonderful and His words like the Water of Life." (p. 27)

His life-style was beautiful, selfless. This "magnetic personality" allowed no one to bow before Him. He often brought flowers to lunch. One day jasmine blossoms — brought to Him from the garden at the Báb's tomb — were sprinkled on the table cloth. One night He got out of bed at midnight and "corrected Tablets for four hours." Yet fatigue did not prevent His coming to lunch, where He joked with young Margaret and with Fugita, the young Bahá'í from Japan who served in the Holy Household.

He taught constantly — by word and act. Dr. Esslemont asked Him if His words were the same as those of Bahá'u'lláh, He answered, "Yes ... I have no opinion of my own. Whatever is His Blessed Will I carry out." (p. 37)

Dr. Esslemont also asked, "Was it not true that Bahá'u'lláh had to show forth all the attributes of God, how to be both poor and rich?"

The Master replied, "Yes. However, He lived very simply and economically regarding His own welfare. He had no return from His property at that time. His property was confined to half the village of Adasieh (near Tiberias). It was in ruins and yielded no revenues. Now it is restored and we get some revenues. Bahá'u'lláh owned vast properties in Persia which were confiscated; also in Baghdad, but they were taken from Him toward the end of our stay. All were sacked and confiscated by the Turkish Government." (p. 123)

He stressed love and unity among the servants of God. "Unity must be made very firm. Whoever has love for Bahá'u'lláh must give his life for the friends. Love for the friends is love for Bahá'u'lláh. In this Cause there is no danger save the inharmony among the friends . . .

"Whenever inharmony and disagreement arise between two persons, it will ultimately lead to their both turning away from the Cause ... Do not let any conflict arise between two friends. When there is a difference both will become grieved. There must be only love. You must never offend any soul. You must always have love. As soon as you see any dissatisfaction between souls, strive to create love between them. For the Kingdom of God does not accept differences.

"Bahá'u'lláh says: 'If two persons argue over a subject, both are wrong,' so that no disagreement should occur . . . There must be love, love, love. God is love." (pp. 140-141)

"Many times during our interviews 'Abdu'l-Bahá impressed upon us the need of love and its power to transform the heart of mankind. The real spirit of Bahá'í unity will be the mirror to reflect this love to the world. To Mrs. Randall He gave the secret of its attainment in the following matchless gem:

"Severance from the world is the first sign of the love of God. As long as man is much attached to this world he will be unaware of the Kingdom of God. As soon as he begins to be detached from this world the Spirit of the Kingdom, like unto a sun, will shine from the horizon of his heart." (pp. 141-142)

During those precious days the Master told them that each Bahá'í should "make one Bahá'í each year." (p. 103)

The day arrived when their steamer was in port. They must depart. But their separation from the Master need not be devastating. His tender words of love and encouragement came even to the end: "Turn to me always that I may be in your hearts for I love you very much and this is eternal. You are always in my heart, but I must also be in your hearts, then we are in oneness." (p. 146)

"For one moment He held each by the hand. The Master's last words would move them forward with joy: 'You are under the protection of God.'"

Pilgrimage of a Thirteen-Year-Old

This pilgrimage made an indelible impression on young Margaret Randall (Bahíyyih Randall Ford). Telling about her experiences she said "Of course every Bahá'í wants to go to Haifa. And in those days everyone longed to go to Haifa to visit 'Abdu'l-Bahá. And so father wrote and asked if he might come with his family, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote back and said. 'When you may travel in comfort, then you may come.' So in 1919, after the first World War, it was so arranged. George Latimer, Albert Vail, father, mother and I started for Haifa, Palestine. I was thirteen years old. When we arrived in the harbor of Haifa, our spirits were in such a state of excitement that we could hardly stand it. We got into the little boats which took us from the big steamer to the dock and there Lotfullah Hakim (elected a member of The Universal House of Justice in 1963) met us with the wagons of the Master. We were driven through the little quaint streets of Haifa and part way up Mount Carmel, and finally the little wagon stopped at a gate covered with bougainvillea vines, such beautiful flowers. Lotfullah (Dr. Hakim), said: 'This is where you are going to stay. It is the Persian Pilgrim House.'

"And as we were about to get out of the wagon, I felt as if a magnet was drawing my eyes, and I turned around and looked into the eyes that were so grand and so wise and so comprehending of everything in the world that they took my breath away. I said, 'Oh, there is the Master!' And of course it was He. He was sitting in the little house that was built on the wall where He used to write His Tablets, and He sat low in the room and the window was high, so that all we could see of His face was just from the top of His nose up, His eyes and His turban, and these wonderful eyes were looking at us. We will never forget those eyes, because they expressed the sympathy and love that seemed to encompass the whole world, and a wisdom that could guide the world."

In the Persian Pilgrim House, the party was greeted by Shoghi Effendi, who came bringing flowers. At that time he was one of the Master's secretaries.

Mrs. Ford further recounts some of her experiences: "One night we were sitting

at the table with 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He always placed me on His left. He smiled at me and said, 'Your name is Bahíyyih. Bahíyyih means light, but unless you have something within you, something back of it, there is no light.' And I realized the challenge He gave me just then. Another time we were told that we could have an interview with 'Abdu'l-Bahá and mother went with me when I had one. I asked Him 'What can I do to serve this Faith!' The Master paced up and down the room several times and then He turned and looked at me and said. 'Study. Study. Study.' So many times the Master would repeat things three times. That was the Message for me. Always the Master knew the thing that would bring fullest development into the individual's life. If it was requested, He guided the person to it."

Every day He came and had luncheon with the pilgrims over in the Pilgrim House, and at night pilgrims would go to His home to have dinner.

Bahíyyih Ford recalled that "There was a perfectly wonderful person who always sat on the right of 'Abdu'l-Bahá at dinner. His name was Haydar-'Alí and he had been a follower of Bahá'u'lláh and was so meek and so beautiful. His hands would shake so that he could not eat. He was such an old, old man, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá would feed him with such tenderness. One day I saw him sitting out in the garden and I asked him what he had ever done. Of course, he could not speak English and I could not speak Persian, but we somehow seemed to understand. A man came along to interpret just then, and I told him what I had asked: 'What have you done to serve the Faith?'

"Haydar-'Alí looked up with his eyes to heaven and said, 'I have not done as much as an ant could do in the path of God.' And then the interpreter told me that he had been dragged across the desert, tied in a bag to a camel, and that his whole life had been one series of martyrdoms. Yet, he had said, 'I have not done as much as an ant could do in the path of God'."

Young Bahíyyih was impressed with the question the Master was always asking: "Are you happy? Are you happy?"

(Based on Notes of Bahíyyih Ford, typed sheets sent by Mrs. Ford from South Africa.)

The Master at Seventy-five

Dr. J. E. Esslemont, author of the often-printed Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era, was 'Abdu'l-Bahá's guest in Haifa for two and a half months in the winter of 1919-1920. He described what he observed: "At that time, although nearly seventy-six years of age, He was still remarkably vigorous, and accomplished daily an almost incredible amount of work. Although often very weary He showed wonderful powers of recuperation, and His services were always at the disposal of those who needed them most. His unfailing patience, gentleness, kindness, and tact made His presence like a benediction. It was His custom to spend a large part of each night in prayer and meditation. From early morning until evening, except for a short siesta after lunch, He was busily engaged in reading and answering letters from many lands and in attending to the

multitudinous affairs of the household and of the Cause. In the afternoon He usually had a little relaxation in the form of a walk or a drive, but even then He was usually accompanied by one or two, or a party, of pilgrims with whom He would converse on spiritual matters, or He would find opportunity by the way of seeing and ministering to some of the poor. After His return He would call the friends to the usual evening meeting in His salon. Both at lunch and supper He used to entertain a number of pilgrims and friends, and charm His guests with happy and humorous stories as well as precious talks on a great variety of subjects, 'My home is the home of laughter and mirth,' He declared, and indeed it was so. He delighted in gathering together people of various races, colors, nations, and religions in unity and cordial friendship around His hospitable board. He was indeed a loving Father not only to the little community at Haifa, but to the Bahá'í community throughout the world." (Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era, April 1970 edition, J. E. Esslemont, pp. 76-77.)

"Go Out with Gladsome Heart"

Four American pilgrims, Mabel Paine and her daughter, Sylvia (Parmelee), Cora Gray and Genevieve Coy spent a week in Haifa in 1920. Genevieve recounted this visit in several issues of the Star of the West. Before meeting the Master she remembered the advice she had received from Juliet Thompson, Bahá'í artist, in New York: "'When you are in the Master's presence do not be self-conscious, if you can help it. Do not be afraid. There is nothing to fear. He is all love and kindness. Pray, pray, all the way on your journey, that your hearts may be freed from all self-consciousness. Go to him freely, gladly!'" (Star of the West, Vol. XII, No. 10, p. 167.)

Later she recalled: "It is very difficult to remember much of what He said. Indeed, it was almost difficult to listen!

"I wished only to look and look at the beauty of his face! For that was what impressed me first, — the exquisite beauty of the Master. It was like the most beautiful pictures we have of him, with life and color added. His is a face of living silver — the wonderful silver of hair and beard, and the blue of his eyes. The side face is majestic and sweet and loving. It was that which we saw most of the time. The full face is more dignified; to me it seemed more awe-inspiring. And yet, when he smiled, it was most exquisitely friendly, and human!" (Star of the West, Vol. XII, No. 11, pp. 179-180.)

Of course there was talk of teaching. One day the Master said, "'Some people are ready for education. They are like the fertile ground. Some have not capacity, they are like the barren or salty ground. His Holiness Christ has told a story of the seed that fell on stony ground and so it could not grow. Other seeds fell in the shallow earth, and they soon withered away. But some fell on the good fertile earth, and grew and produced fruit. So it is with my words. Some fall on hearts that have no capacity; they do not take effect at all. Those people do not understand. Others hear and seem to understand, but they forget my words and do not live in accordance with them. But others have great capacity; they hear my words; they understand; they live accordingly.'"

(pp. 182-3)

During their visit the Master was exceedingly busy, and He told them He was sorry He had not been able to see them more. Yet He added, ". . . it is not the length of time that one spends here that is important. Some people stay a short time, and then go and do great service. Other people are here a long time, and they learn nothing. There is some wood that is very dry: it catches fire quickly and burns well. There is other wood that is so wet that it will not burn even though you should try for a whole day. There is no result but smoke. It will not blaze, it will not keep any one warm; it will not even cook anything!" As he said the latter He smiled." (Star of the West, Vol. XII, No. 13, p. 213.)

Life was "lifted higher" in the Master's presence. His home was indeed "the home of peace". Yet at departure time it was vital to remember His blessed words, "My home is the home of joy and delight. My home is the home of laughter and exultation. Whoever enters through the portals of this home must go out with gladsome heart." (p. 214)

A Theologian's Daughter Gives Her Impressions

Easter season 1921! Professor Jakob Kunz and his wife, Anna, he a scientist and she the daughter of a Swiss theologian in Zurich, reached the Holy Land when the moon stood full and bright over Mount Carmel. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was not in Haifa. After a severe illness, He was resting, presumably, in Tiberias. But apparently visitors were received by Him even there — all day long. And they, too, were expected.

Beautifully, Anna Kunz has described that blessed pilgrimage: "It was a bright and luminous Easter morning when the Master called us into His room. Oh, that I could picture Him to all those who never saw Him, could picture Him in those simple surroundings at the shores of that same lake where Christ walked and taught. Though I feared to approach Him, after His loving words of welcome this fear vanished. Here we sat before our Master, in a little room, with only the most necessary furnishings, on top of the hotel, -with a view of that blessed lake. His look seems to go into one's very heart. Yes, He knows His children and their need. As I think of Him now, I always love to think, first, of His great simplicity, His marvelous humility which knows of no self-existence, and last, or better, first, of His boundless love. To us His outward appearance seemed similar to that of the old Hebrew Prophets; His humility. His simplicity and love were like the Christ. This boundless love conquered the hearts at once. 'Abdu'l-Bahá talked to us with a ringing, piercing voice which will forever sound in my ears. His words would come forth with that unique simplicity, then He would pause for a while, often closing His eyes. His spirit, it seemed when I dared to look at Him, had left His body; He was looking into infinitude, communing with that world for which we long. Having seen Him, we could understand well what He meant when He said to us, 'The Prophet discerns by sight.' We came before Him, my husband especially, with many, many questions in our minds, but sitting in His presence we seemed to

forget them, or better, there did not exist any unsolved problems. He said 'God has created a remedy for every disease,' and while in His presence, we tasted of this remedy." (Star of the West, Vol. XIII, No. 6, Sept. 1922, p. 141.)

Words of wisdom poured forth as interview followed interview. The scientist said that science denied immortality and he asked how the Prophet knew otherwise. The Master replied, "'Science does not know; but the Manifestation makes discoveries with the power of the Spirit.' They wondered how one should deal with people who denied religion. He answered, 'You must be tolerant and patient, because the station of sight is a station of bounty; it is not based on capacity. They must be educated.'" (p. 143)

And He spoke to them of moderation. "Everything must be done moderately. Excess is not desirable. Do not go to extremes. Even in thinking do not go to excess but be moderate." (p. 143)

Easter took on a new significance for these pilgrims. 'Abdu'l-Bahá pointed to the spot some 150 meters away where Jesus told Peter to become a fisher of men. And now 'Abdu'l-Bahá told them what they should do. "Just like a shepherd who is affectionate to all his sheep, without preference or distinction, you should be affectionate to all. You should not look at their shortcomings. Consider that they are all created by God who loves them all." (p. 144) "Say to the friends: "The Kingdom of God has been opened to you."'" (p. 144)

"You Must Never Forget Christ"

Among the last of those fortunate pilgrims to visit 'Abdu'l-Bahá were the Edwin Mattoon family. In their great longing to reach His side, they had asked if they might come from the United States "if only for a day." Permission was granted. With their two little daughters, Florence (Zmeskal) and Annamarie (Baker), the latter only three months old, they joyously set sail. They were asked to take a part of an automobile so that the Master's — sent by American friends — might be repaired. Somehow they managed that, too. Annie Mattoon remembered later that 'Abdu'l-Bahá said to them, "'You must never forget Christ.'" (We Went to Haifa, Annie Mattoon, p. 9, mimeographed copy.) With this encouragement, they included visits to the Holy Places of Christianity. Today, also, Bahá'ís are encouraged to make the "wider pilgrimage."

Conclusion

'Abdu'l-Bahá was ever the Master — master of every situation, One Who had mastered life, master Teacher, in word and deed. None could do better than to emulate His way, for in some mysterious manner, it was ever the perfect way.

The accounts of those early pilgrims still give us inspiring glimpses of the Master Teacher at work. To follow Him during even a few precious moments is to better know the life-style of the Bahá'í Exemplar.

How well He knew that people are in different stages of spiritual development. "Do not become a Bahá'í." The Master Himself once told a pilgrim the story behind His giving this advice.

He was concluding an interview by telling of the time when He travelled through Persia (Iran) with a party which included a merchant. When the caravan halted in a certain village, quite a few people gathered around to meet 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The travelers later continued their journey and when they stopped in another town, the same thing happened. And it happened yet again.

The merchant noticed this very obvious love and respect, which were showered on the Master. And he then took Him aside and told Him he wished to become a Bahá'í.

When the Master asked him why he desired this, he replied, without apparent shame, "You are a Bahá'í, and wherever you go, great crowds of people flock out to meet you, while no one comes to meet me; so I wish to become a Bahá'í."

'Abdu'l-Bahá probed deeper. He asked him if that was the real reason.

Whereupon the merchant replied with candor, 'I also think it will help my business, as I will have all these people come to meet me.'

It was then that he was told very frankly, "Do not become a Bahá'í. It is better for you to remain as you are." (Adapted from *A Modern Pilgrimage to Palestine*, L. B. Pemberton, pp. 99-100.)

One writer reported that He once said, "At the gate of the garden some stand and look within, but do not care to enter, others step inside, behold its beauty, but do not penetrate far. Still others encircle this garden inhaling the fragrance of the flowers, having enjoyed its full beauty, pass out again by the same gate. But there are always some who enter and, becoming intoxicated with the splendor of what they behold, remain for life to tend the garden." (The Garden of the Heart, p. 14)

"All the travelers have come back like pilgrims of a new hope, bubbling and overflowing with the ideas, impressions and suggestions drawn from their visit to this inspiring spiritual center, and their contact with 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Each has illustrated the reply given by the Servant of God to the questioner who asked Him: 'Why do all the guests who visit You come away with shining countenances?'

"He said with His beautiful smile, 'I cannot tell you, but in all those upon whom I look, I see only My Father's Face.'" (The Oriental Rose, Mary Hanford Ford, p. 6)

Those early pilgrims to the Holy Land during the Bahá'í Dispensation left their marks upon the earth. Their regeneration — born of divine love — gave birth to new generations. And so today, around the globe, ever increasing numbers "remain for life to tend the garden."

METADATA

Views9514 views since posted 2012-12-16; last edit 2026-02-22 22:17 UTC;
previous at archive.org.../honnold_glimpses_early_pilgrimages

Language

English

Permission

© BIC, public sharing permitted. See sources 1, 2, and 3.

History

Scanned 2012-12 by Don Calkins; Formatted 2012-12-16 by Jonah Winters.

Share

Shortlink: bahai-library.com/1748

Citation: ris/1748

select Collection:

Archives

Articles

Articles-unpublished

Audio

Bibliographies

BIC

Biographies

Books

Chronologies

Compilations

Compilations-NSA

Compilations-personal

Documents

East-asia

Encyclopedia

Essays

Etc

Excerpts

Fiction

Glossaries

Guardian

Histories

Introductory

Letters

Maps

Music

Newspapers

NSA-documents

NSA-letters

Personal

Pilgrims

Poetry

Presentations

Resources

Reviews

Scripts

Software
Statistics
Study
Talks
Theses
Transcripts
Translations
UHJ-documents
UHJ-letters
Video
Visual
Writings

[home](#)

[sitemap](#)

[series](#)

[chronology](#)

[search:](#)

[author](#)

[title](#)

[date](#)

[tags](#)

[adv. search](#)

[languages](#)

[inventory](#)

[bibliography](#)

[abbreviations](#)

[links](#)

[about](#)

[contact](#)

[RSS](#)

[new](#)

— Glimpses of Early Baha'i Pilgrimages (Used by permission of the curator)