

unlike other souls who were fortunate enough to have had the inestimable bounty of meeting Him, she did not share them — at least, not with me. Although she did tell me about her early pilgrimages to Akká, I do not know now if she was recounting just one of them or incidents from the several visits she made there from 1904-1906. Laura referred to her meeting with May Maxwell in Paris in 1900. It was at May's that Laura met her future husband, Hippolyte Dreyfus, but this did not come up in our conversation. Laura referred to her as May Bolles. "In those days," Laura said, "we knew her as May Bolles before she married Sutherland Maxwell."

I asked about the compiling of *Some Answered Questions* but because of her advanced age, and the great respect I held for her, I did not want to question her too often or too closely. Madame Barney did not tell me much more than what is written in the Introduction to that book, except that one of her earliest questions was about strikes. The word came to her in French — "grèves" — and since we were speaking in English, I supplied the translation.

But I do remember clearly what she told me about 'Abdu'l-Baha. There were three things and they were brief: the first was that 'Abdu'l-Bahá loved harmony and had an aversion to disunity. In the conversations that she observed between the Master and others, Laura said: "If a difference of opinion entered into the conversation, 'Abdu'l-Bahá would change the subject and put the conversation on a more harmonious track." The second thing was on a sad note. One day, she said, a Jewish couple came to visit 'Abdu'l-Bahá. I am no longer sure what they were seeking; I don't think Laura told me. But when they left 'Abdu'l-Bahá's presence, He began to weep and said: "They are spiritually dead." (Such was the Master's great perception and his concern and compassion for the spiritual life of the soul). The third thing was a comment. I'll call it the anticipation of liberation. One day as He sat in His chair, looking out onto the Mediterranean, in the dining room of the house of 'Abdu'lláh Páshá, the same room where the talks recorded in *Some Answered Questions* were given, 'Abdu'l-Bahá said: "Oh, won't it be wonderful when at last we are liberated from the body and we'll be able to fly throughout the universe."

When I entered that room on pilgrimage in March of 2007, looking through the window, I saw that the Mediterranean lies only a stone's throw from that room. Laura's words, spoken 40 years ago, came back to me; they became then all the more real. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's remark took on a special poignancy when I realised that, at that time, because of the scheming of the covenant-breakers, the Ottoman authorities had renewed their restrictions on His movements.

When the hour was up, I took my leave, thanking the maid as I left. As I descended the carpeted stairs of the apartment in the affluent 16th arrondissement, I realized that I had been graced by the presence of a great soul, one who met other great souls, one who had seen great things, and done great things in the service of the Greatest Servant of humanity.

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