

World Order

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'Abdu'l-Bahá: Portrayals from East and West

MATERIALS FROM THE PAPERS OF ALI-KULI KHAN AND THE CONVERSATIONS OF JOHN AND LOUISE BOSCH EXCERPTED, AMPLIFIED, AND ARRANGED BY MARZIEH GAIL

ALI-KULI KHAN (Nabílu'd-Dawlih) was born in Káshán, Persia, about 1879. His father was Mírzá 'Abdu'r-Raḥím Khán Darrábí. About the year 1898, Ali-Kuli Khan became a Bahá'í and from that time on served the Faith for almost seventy years, till his death in Washington, D.C. April 7, 1966. In 1901 he was sent by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the United States as a Bahá'í translator and teacher. Later, marrying an American lady, he headed the Persian Legation at Washington. It was he who selected and dispatched W. Morgan Shuster to Persia to reorganize, as Treasurer-General, the country's fiscal structure; and who persuaded President Woodrow Wilson to make it possible for Persia to send a mission to the Peace Conference at Versailles. A member of that mission, Ali-Kuli Khan later served his country in various other capacities and became Head of the Court of the then Crown Prince Regent (Qájár). His life goal, the linking of Persia and America, can be summed up in these words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, from *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*:

*"For the Persians there is no government better fitted to contribute to the development of their natural resources and the helping of their national needs . . . than the United States of America; and for the Americans there could be no better industrial outlet and market It is my hope that the great American democracy may be instrumental in developing these hidden resources May the material civilization of America find complete efficacy and establishment in Persia, and the spiritual civilization of Persia find acceptance in America. . . . Surely there will be great harvests of results . . ."*¹

WHEN I WAS SEVEN we lived in Tíhrán, where my father was Mírzá 'Abdu'r-Raḥím Khán the Kalántar (Mayor). A mullá taught us children in school. We sat in a row on the floor, each with his book before him on a bookstand. We read the Qur'án without knowing what it meant, and Sa'dí, and Háfiz. The mullá had a long, slim, flexible pole (*falak*); whenever he thought best, a child's feet would be strung to it by a rope; each end of the pole was held by boys who twisted it so the feet were held fast, soles up; the mullá himself did the whipping, beating the soles of the victim with his club (*chúb*) till, sometimes, the blood came. This was the bastinado. The children were terrified of it; panic made me study extra hard.

Like most boys everywhere, the boys were cruel enough. They used to carry black Japanese reeds that had a string-like fibre inside; with this fibre, they would, when the mullá's attention wandered, thread a live fly, and watch it fly off, trailing its thread. Sometimes they were punished for that. Another favorite thing was, using the two forefingers, to shoot white beans at the mullá or another boy. Nobody would ever give anybody away; the source of the bean was impossible to trace. Since we always read our lessons aloud in a kind of murmuring chant, the boys, whatever else they might be up to, would keep on with their murmuring, to convince the mullá that all was well. There was a public bath nearby and outside it were piles of manure for fuel. When one of the boys needed the privy he would say, "I want to go out back," or "I want to go over to the bath."

I was born with a tooth, which in Persia is supposed to mean precocity. I was always the youngest. This was bad enough, but later on when we were sent to the Sháh's college my studious habits, coupled with the fact that I

1. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahai Publishing Committee, 1943), pp. 32-33.

always told the truth, got me into real trouble: the others would beat me for studying. A teacher would ask a question, and each boy would say in turn, *man balad nístam*—"I don't know." The teacher would get to me and I would come out with, "I don't know, . . ." and then I would weep and say, "I know but I'm scared of *them* . . ." One time this led to twenty of them being bastinadoed—all my older brother's—Ḥusayn-Qulí Khán's—best friends. That night I didn't dare sleep at our house. When it seemed wisest I would sleep over at my uncle's; he and his wife, a granddaughter of Faḥ-'Alí Sháh, treated me as their son. In any case I kept on memorizing most of the pocket edition of Samuel Johnson's dictionary and after a while the others realized that my industry could be put to practical use: in our English class they would force me to write compositions for the whole class; thirty compositions, each one different. However, on their outings, they wouldn't take me along, saying I was too little.

By then, our father was dead. He had become a Bahá'í, but our mother continued to be a strict Muslim throughout her life. Father used to say, "I know my boys will become Bahá'ís." And we did, but our two sisters remained Muslim. My brother was, to begin with, a strict Muslim himself, and he was an athlete and very strong. Then another athlete, Ustád Qulám Ḥusayn-i-Banná, taught him the Bahá'í Faith. My case was different. Because of all that schooling I had no interest in religion at all. What engrossed my mind—crushed me, in fact—was the way foreigners were exploiting my country. I could see how they were setting up their puppets, making use of the mullás, and preventing the Sháh from sending students abroad. By now, what with speaking English and French and being known as a serious scholar I had become a kind of student leader, with my own little group. At the time I was one of five Persians who were fluent in English, and received an appointment as chief translator to the Prime Minister. But

my brother began to draw my friends away.

In those days I would drink my fill of *'araq*—ardent spirit. It looks like water but there the resemblance ends. By night my friends and I would visit an old graveyard strewn with rocks and planted with clover. We used to sit there in the bright moonlight, breathe the crystal air, recite poems, and drink, and play the *tár*—a kind of guitar with six strings, played by plectrum—and beat the *dumbak* or one-headed drum, played with the fingers and palm. Our poems were our own, or from the classics—Rúmí, perhaps ("I drunk and you crazed, who will carry us home?"). There were no girls; the girls were all veiled, all shut away in the *andarín* (the "within"; that is, the gynaeceum or women's apartments, often, in Persia, a separate house).

Nāṣiri'd-Dín Sháh had a handsome son-in-law, Prince Zahíru'd-Dawlih. This prince had inherited the mantle of the great murshid or spiritual guide, Ṣafí-'Alí Sháh; he was a dervish, and belonged to the order of the Sháh Ni'matu'lláhí. His dervish headquarters, that is his seminary or *takyib*, had become a fashionable retreat; and learning the mystical dervish terminology was now the style. When frequenting them I would use all their terms but with my own—and I am afraid often ribald—meanings. For example to their term "*Gazer*," (one who contemplates mystic beauty, *abl-i-didár*) I would append my secret definition: voyeur. The dervishes who conversed with me noted that my terms were always perfectly correct; the code meanings were only for me and my fellows. I also invented meaningless but impressive terms which gained respect; words, say, like *khusváziyár*. If anything, I was a kind of diabolist in those days; it was my *défi* to the world. My fellows and I used to say that all those Muslim believers sitting around killing fleas in Paradise were good-for-nothings, and that the progressives were all in Hell.

Meanwhile the Dervish Prince and his intimates would foregather and repeat their

Dhikr (remembrance or mentioning; the plural is *adhbakár*; Shoghi Effendi translates *dhákírín*, from the same root, as rememberers). "Alláb-hú," they would recite, "Alláb-hú:" God—He! God—He! And they would smoke their hashish, either in hubble-bubble pipes or ordinary pipes or cigarettes. The drug was made essentially of *chárs*, Indian hemp-juice, and the users were called *chársí*.

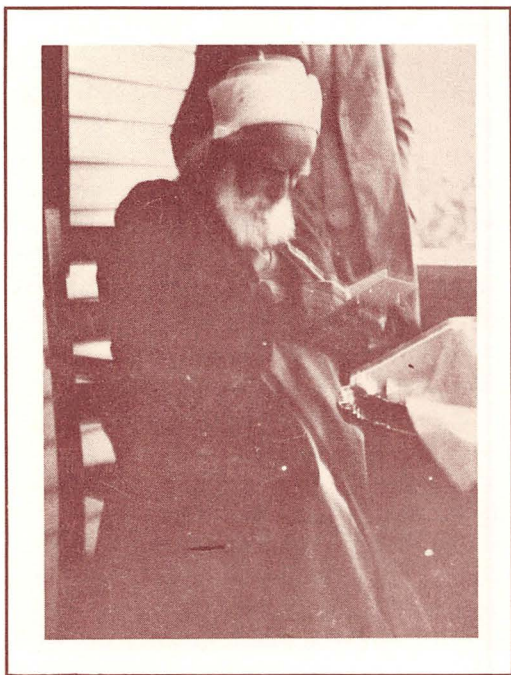
I KNEW where my brother was leading my friends astray. At night, after the curfew, they were crowding in with him to secret meetings in remote houses along the back lanes of Tíhrán. Obviously, if we were to keep on with our excursions and parties, I would have to act. I decided to attend their meetings, expose the foolishness of the teachers who addressed them and win back my friends. We had had good sport with the mullás and the dervishes; now I would show up the Bahá'ís. And so, hurrying along with the others, in almost total darkness, single file, I felt my way through the walled, uneven, pot-holed lanes of the city. If the youth at the front chanced to stumble into a hole, it was a point of honor with him to say nothing about it; the rest should also have their chance to stumble in.

For something like six months I attended these clandestine meetings. My servant waited at the door with my bottle of *'araq*, and once in a while I would stroll over to the door. Following hours of talk, the hosts would bring in pulaw. I would grumble: "Must I listen all night, for one dish of pulaw?" But the truth was, after a while the Bahá'í teachers began to make sense; and I fell in love with 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

I made a secret vow, not ever to sleep in a bed till I should see the Master. This vow I kept for over a year, always sleeping on the ground, or the floor. With two friends I wandered off, all three disguised as dervishes, hoping to reach the Holy Land. We avoided the main caravan routes, and sometimes our lives were in peril. Then I was forced back to Tíhrán because the way was barred by what

seemed to be "political plague"—plague, often non-existent, but conjured up by the colonial powers to close this or that frontier. Then in the dead of winter I simply walked off without saying good-bye to anyone. Somehow I got across the Caspian to Baku and lived there in the cellar of the not-yet-built Bahá'í Travelers' Hospice. Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí (the Angel of Carmel) was there, aged prematurely because of his terrible imprisonment in the Sudan. He used to let me address the meetings there, and I spoke in Turkish. At last permission came for me from the Master. I went steerage, and disembarked from the ship by a rowboat, off Haifa. The believers met us there and took us to a coffee house where we were served tea, bread and cheese. I asked them, "Where is the Master? Do we go to 'Akká now?" "No," they told us. "The Master is in Haifa. He is now laying the foundation of the Holy Tomb on Mt. Carmel, and He spends a week in 'Akká and a week in Haifa." They told me He had recently rented a house on an avenue roughly parallel to the sea, near a sort of embarcadero where the German Emperor, visiting Haifa, had landed the year before, in 1898. This avenue led to the street of the German Colony. (By 1906 when I was again on pilgrimage, the house was gone, or changed into an apartment house.)

I began to shake. "The Master is here in Haifa? Am I going to see Him? Am I about to look upon His face?" "Yes," they told me. "But how can I gaze upon the Master?" "You will be happy to see Him," they said. "But when I look at myself, I know I do not deserve to enter His presence." "He invited you to come," they said. "And the Master is forgiving; and once you are in His presence your worries will be over." We started out for the Master's house, I weeping all along the way. We got there and went up the steps. Then came His voice, calling for the travelers. I never heard a sweeter voice; and yet it had authority; there was a ring to it; it was the kind of voice that would grow and reach out and still it was so melodious. At every



moment, even now, that voice is in my ears. And I remember it together with the faint scent of attar of rose that He used; He had the attar, and the essence of rose too—they would send it to Him from places like Káshán and Iṣfáhán and Shíráz.

He had come over early from the small house in the German Colony, where He would spend the night, looked after by one or another of His daughters in turn, or by His sister, the Most Exalted Leaf. Very early, He had come over to receive the pilgrims. It was about sunrise, and not yet fully light. Following the others, I entered His room. I saw Him standing there. And suddenly, in my own mind, I was seeing Bahá'u'lláh, Who had passed away seven years before. I did not expect this age, this beard and hair (though there was still much black in it, mixed with the steel gray). The only picture we had ever seen of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was the one taken in His youth. Still, this was not an aged man who stood before us, but lithe and powerful. He wore a white turban, like a fez, only white, with a crisp white cloth wound about the base of it; usually He had on light gray

robes, or beige or light brown. I think that day He wore a mantle called *jubbib* (not an 'abá; an 'abá, has no sleeves), and it was gray. Only half-conscious, I fell to my knees and kissed His feet. He lifted me up and embraced me, kissing me on both cheeks. And seeing that I could not bear the intense power of His presence, He told His servant, Ustád Muḥammad-'Alí, to lead me to the travelers' room and give me refreshments. There I had some tea, and hardly ten minutes afterward, I felt strong again. At that moment Ustád Muḥammad-'Alí came in and said, "The Master wants you." This time when I entered His room the scene had changed. I was strong now; I heard Him say, "*Khubsh ámadid. Marḥabá, marḥabá. . .*" A blessed arrival—welcome, welcome. Then He addressed me, speaking words such as these:

"The Blessed Beauty, Bahá'u'lláh, may my soul be offered up for Him, promised this Servant that He would succor me from His All-Highest Realm; that He would raise up souls who would assist me to spread far and wide this Covenant and Cause. You are one of these souls, raised up to this end. The Cause of God has reached America. Thus far, however, only a few pages of the sacred Writings have been translated into English, and not in the best way. Now that you have arrived, your knowledge of the English language and your eagerness to serve the Faith—expressed in so many letters—will enable you to accomplish this important work. I therefore wish you to remain in the Holy Land with this Servant, to translate the sacred Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh and to serve as my amanuensis and interpreter. There are many letters which come in from America, and a number from American and other Bahá'ís in France and other parts of Europe. I wish you to translate these so that I may dictate the answers."

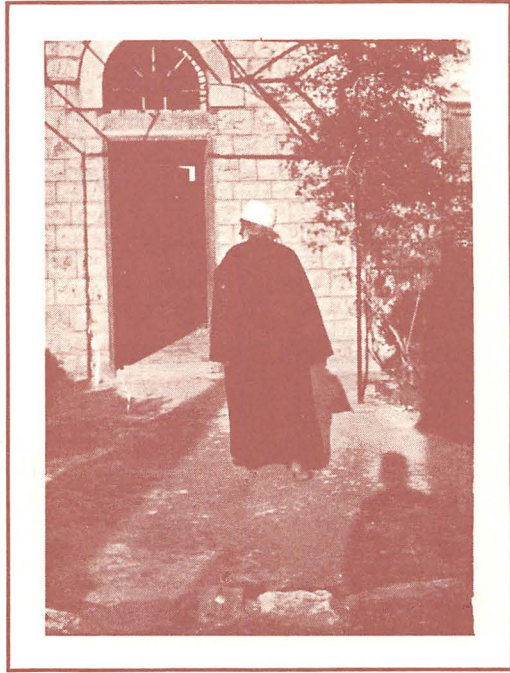
"How wonderful that He desires me to stay on," I thought to myself. For I had believed that like other pilgrims I would, after the long journey, be permitted to re-

main for a time and afterward I would return to my own country or leave for some other place which He might indicate. Then from the table He gathered up a sheaf of Tablets—written in glossy, black ink on cream-colored paper, folded in three—placed them in my hands, and directed me to retire to the travelers' room and translate them. I looked at them. They were addressed to American believers and as was customary in those days, when the Master had had only occasional Syrian translators to serve Him, they were written in Arabic.

I found there were times when I could speak to the Master; there were other times when one did not dare. I never saw Him in the same condition: on occasion He was most approachable; again He was majestic, inaccessible, and one hardly dared breathe in His presence. But always He showed a great dignity, combined with courtesy and humility. For example when He desired to impress a person with the necessity of obeying the Teachings and rectifying his life, He never said: *You* must do thus and so, be self-sacrificing, see no fault in others, and so on—He always said: *We* must . . .

Now I could speak and I said to Him: "But these are in Arabic!" He smiled in a divine way; His face beamed with light. He reached over to His table (throughout this interview He remained standing)—on which He had flowers, papers, rock candy, rose water—and with both hands full of candy He told me to hold out my hands. I laid the Tablets on the table edge, stretched out my cupped hands and He filled them with candy; and still smiling, He took my face in His two hands and said: "Go and eat this candy, and by the grace and power of the Blessed Beauty thou shalt be enabled to translate from Arabic into English. Indeed, thou shalt in time find it easier to translate from the Arabic than from the Persian."

I cannot describe what strength was bestowed on me by that action of His, and those words. All I know is, I withdrew to the next room and then and there began to



translate the Tablets. And yet—although the script is the same—Arabic is a foreign language to Persians, and my training had been in other tongues. In time I procured Arabic-English dictionaries but I found them so limited that they were of little help. Then I drew on translations made by Professor E. G. Browne and other Occidentals, and I discovered that their work touched only the surface; and I came to the conclusion that the first essential for a translator of Bahá'í sacred Writings is that he be a believer, a follower of this Faith.

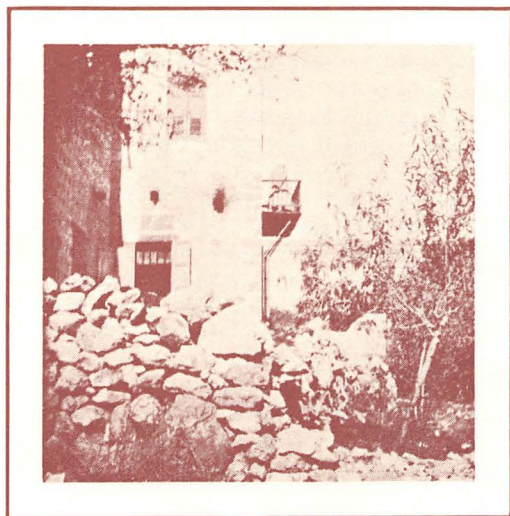
After that, the Master said: "This is your bed. Sleep in it." And I remembered my vow. He meant the bed in His corner room, facing the street, at the front of the rented house, the room where He received guests and would occasionally rest. But for four or five nights I still slept on the floor. I was afraid to sleep in the bed of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Then Ustád Muḥammad-'Alí, the Master's servant who had been a builder, came to me and said: "Do you know, Jináb-i-Khán, that you are disobeying the Master?" "What do you mean?" I cried. "Here I am, working night

and day translating the Tablets.” “That is not what I mean,” he said. “You haven’t slept in the bed.” So, for some time, I did. And often, in later years, I thought over a Muslim *ḥadīth* which says that a day would come when God would appear in His Divinity and all men would be struck with awe and flee away. Then He would disappear, and reappear in the garment of Servitude; for it is written: “Servitude is an essence the substance of which is Divinity.”

Back of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s reception room, at the rear of the building, was the travelers’ room, a kind of hospice. Next to it in back, with a barred window giving on another street, was the room of Siyyid Taqí *Manshádí*, to whom the Master entrusted all the mail. *Manshádí*’s handwriting was well known everywhere; and with the Tablets he sent out, he would enclose a brief, bare account of all the Bahá’í news. Between ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s reception room and the travelers’ room at the rear, was a kind of storeroom, about fourteen by sixteen feet. All kinds of things were stored in there: brooms, odds and ends, and especially the beautiful marble sarcophagus sent from Rangoon, Burma, to contain the remains of the Báb (destined at last, fifty lunar years after His execution in *Tabríz*, to be entombed “in spite of the incessant machinations of enemies both within and without,” on the Holy Mountain of Carmel in 1909.² Close to the one barred window, which gave onto the courtyard, there stood against the wall an unpainted wooden table and beside it a backless bench. This storeroom was my room in Haifa. On the wall were a few pegs for my few spare clothes. Here I slept, on the wooden bench. Years later I learned that the casket containing the sacred remains of the Báb and His companion, who was shot while trying to shield Him, was hidden in that very room of mine, at that very time.

I remember several occasions when the Master dictated five different Tablets—often

2. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1965), p. 276.



in different languages: Turkish, Arabic, Persian, Old Persian—answering five different letters from as many parts of the world: Persia, India, the United States, Europe. He would dictate one paragraph to me, one to the first son-in-law, one to the second son-in-law, one to *Mírzá Ḥabíb*, then back to me. To each, without the slightest hesitation, He would follow up the sentence last dictated, as if He were reading it all from a book. One afternoon in Haifa he was receiving the great Muslim Judge of *Akká*. An urgent letter had to be answered, in Arabic. Courteously explaining to the Judge that He had to finish the letter, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá kept on dictating. I was a very rapid writer; the Judge was surprised to see how rapid. He asked the Master if I could read what I had written. “Certainly,” replied the Master. He then asked the Master to bid me read it back; and so I did, at top speed. Often, as He was on His way to Mt. Carmel He would stop and dictate, and I had to be ready. I learned to write with the paper on my lap or the palm of my hand.

Once when I dropped from weariness, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá referred me to the story of the cruel blacksmith and his apprentice. It was the child’s task to blow the bellows, hour after hour. The exhausted boy would cry out, “I die! I die!” and the blacksmith would answer: “Die and blow! Die and blow!”

JOHN DAVID BOSCH was a Swiss from Canton St. Gall who emigrated to the United States in 1879. Later he returned to Europe and studied wine-making in Germany, France, and Spain. He became a Bahá'í in 1905; with his wife Louise he pioneered in Tahiti (see *The Bahá'í World*, New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1930, III, 368-71), and they were present in Haifa at the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing. In 1927 he and Louise dedicated their northern California property to the formation of the Geyserville Bahá'í Summer School. The material we give here consists of conversations with John at Geyserville, written down as he spoke, and of documented information supplied by him and Louise, often copied in their presence, in preparation for a (as yet unpublished) biographical account which they desired me to write and which is currently on file in the archives of the National Spiritual Assembly of Switzerland. We begin these excerpts with the days shortly before he became a follower of this Faith.

JOHN investigated everything, looking for truth, but could not seem to find what he wanted. Every two or three weeks he traveled from Geyserville to San Francisco, in connection with his work for the Northern Sonoma County Wineries. One day in 1903, coming home on the Cloverdale train, John saw an acquaintance—a Mrs. Beckwith of Chicago, a woman of about his age (forty-seven), who used to go up to a sanatorium near Santa Rosa, and whom he had also met at Theosophical meetings in San Francisco. She called to him. He saw that she had a book.

"I said, 'If I sit alongside of you, I'm not going to let you read—we're going to talk.' She laid the book down. I picked it up and started to read. I forgot to talk to her. I said to myself: 'This is just what I wanted. The connecting link I was missing.'"

The book was Myron H. Phelps' *Life and Teachings of Abbás Effendi* (New York:

Putnam's, 1903), just published. Mrs. Beckwith told him, "To hear of this is the greatest of privileges, but will be followed by the greatest obligations. You had better not know of it if you cannot follow it up." She referred John to Mrs. Goodall of Oakland for further investigation.

It was his busy season, the time for picking grapes. For three months he couldn't go. Then, one November afternoon, he went to Mrs. Goodall's; he had no introduction, but mentioned Mrs. Beckwith and Phelps' book, and that was enough. Kathryn Frankland was there. The two women talked to him. He bought all the available pamphlets, mostly by Thornton Chase (the first American Bahá'í), and the book *The Hidden Words*.

From that day on, he attended meetings. He told me that sometimes he had to choose between his Masonic club (he was a thirty-second degree Scottish Rite Mason), the saloons in San Francisco, and the Oakland meetings.

"I would have one foot on the ferry and one on the wharf, but something inside would say, 'I'd better go over to Oakland.' Sometimes they had from twenty-five to forty-five women there and I was the only man and never said a word. I let them all talk by themselves. I kept going; I stuck with it."

In those days Thornton Chase had an important insurance position in Chicago, with a salary of \$750 a month which diminished every year because the Faith meant more to him than his business. Whenever he was coming to San Francisco he wired John; they would stop at different hotels, but dined together. "He was very tall—about six feet two. He always ate two or three ice creams after supper; he always dug a big bite right out of the middle of it to start with. Around eleven o'clock, he used to say, 'Now, John, I guess it's about time to take you home.'" Arm in arm, they would go to John's hotel, talking steadily about the Cause. They would sit in the parlor. "About one o'clock I used to say, 'Now, Mr. Chase, I guess it's about time to take you home.' We used to wonder what

the policeman on the beat thought about us. One night we brought each other home till four in the morning."

And John became a Bahá'í. On May 29, 1905, he went down to the winery office very early and wrote 'Abdu'l-Bahá: "... may my name be entered in the Great Book of this Universal Life . . . My watchword will be 'Justice.' Humbly Thy servant . . ." Afterward it turned out that the Master sent John a message on June 11, in care of Mrs. Goodall: "O thou John D. Bosch: Raise the call of the Kingdom and give the glad tidings to the people, guide them to the Tree of Life, so that they may gather the fruits from that Tree and attain the great bounty."

Luther Burbank was one of those to whom John gave the Bahá'í Message. In 1907 John asked him for an appointment to tell him something new; he said to John and Mrs. Brittingham, "I can only give you five minutes." "We were there an hour and a half," John told me. Burbank read the books, and was addressed jointly with John in at least one Tablet (June 24, 1912). Another visit to Burbank which John remembered took place March 30, 1913, when he called on the scientist with the Howard MacNutt and Julia Grundy. The Governor of Colorado and his wife were there, sitting in the parlor; Mr. Burbank took the Bahá'ís through folding doors into an adjoining room, and an hour later he was still carrying on an animated conversation with them. John glanced into the other room and saw the Governor and his wife fast asleep in their chairs.

There were many Tablets and messages for John Bosch, through all the years. On August 17, 1909, the Master wrote to Mrs. Goodall: "Exercise on my behalf the utmost kindness and love to John D. Bosch. With the utmost humility I pray . . . that that soul may become holy, find capacity to receive the outpouring of eternity and become a luminous star in the West." Early in 1910 (the date on the envelope is May), the Master wrote to John: "According to the texts of the Book of Aqdas both light and strong drinks

are prohibited. The reason for this prohibition is that it [drink] leads the mind astray and is the cause of weakening the body . . . I hope thou mayest become exhilarated with the wine of the love of God . . . The after-effect of drinking is depression, but the wine of the love of God bestoweth exaltation of the spirit." John had forty men in four wineries under him. In one year, he crushed up fifteen thousand tons of grapes, which makes over two and a quarter million gallons of wine. "I thought it over," he said. It was not long before he decided to retire.

From a Tablet jointly addressed to John Bosch and Luther Burbank, and dated June 24, 1912, at Montclair, New Jersey, an extract reads: "As to my coming to California it is a little doubtful, for the trip is far and the weather hot and from the labors of the journey the body of 'Abdu'l-Bahá hath not much endurance. Nevertheless we shall see what God hath decreed." On August 1, the Master wrote John from Dublin, New Hampshire: "O thou who art longing for the visit of 'Abdu'l-Bahá! Thy yearning letter was wonderfully eloquent and its effect on 'Abdu'l-Bahá was inexpressible. I greatly long to fulfil the request of the friends, but am as yet in these parts, until later the requirement of wisdom will be revealed. If the western cities demonstrate their infinite firmness in the Covenant, this will act as a magnet to draw 'Abdu'l-Bahá . . ." On August 10 John wired: "I made special trip to San Francisco today. A great spirit of prayer, thankfulness, joy and hope filled the Assembly. Tonight anticipating the coming of the Center of the Covenant unity and firmness are manifest. This supplication begs earnestly for Thy personal presence, from D'Evelyn, Lua [Getsinger], [Bijou] Straun, Bozark and [Thornton] Chase, John D. Bosch." 'Abdu'l-Bahá answered John by wire August 13, from Dublin: "Your telegram was the cause of much happiness. God willing I will depart for the western part. Give these glad tidings to each and all." John told me this was the first telegram announcing

the Master's journey West. Mrs. Goodall received the second. John's was sent him in care of Mrs. Goodall's daughter, Mrs. Ella G. Cooper (wife of the noted San Francisco physician, Charles Miner Cooper), who forwarded it to him with this note: "Awful temptation to open this! Do let us know if it is very encouraging—Greetings, E.G.C."

But it was not the same with Thornton Chase. That great man, who had been a captain in the Civil War, a student at Brown University, and later Superintendent of Agencies for the Union Mutual Life Company, and was "the first to embrace the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh in the Western world"³—felt that the Bahá'ís, himself included, were not worthy of the Master's visit.

"John, don't you think it's too soon? The Bahá'ís aren't ready."

"Well, I'm ready for Him," said John.

As the Master reached San Francisco, down in Los Angeles Thornton Chase died. "It was too much for him," John told me.

All Thornton Chase's Bahá'í papers and books, and five or six calligraphies by *Mishkín-Qalam*, were willed to John. Mr. Chase had sent on most of his Tablets to the Chicago archives, but John received about ten of them in a tin box. Mrs. Chase burned some fifteen hundred of her husband's letters (not Tablets) before John could get to Los Angeles.

John remembered the minutest details of the things that were important to him, and generally in the same words. Papers were in carefully marked envelopes, Louise would be called in for more memories and documentation; they had long since worked out between them how their life had been.

Before urging the Master to come West, John, unable to wait, had been East to see 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and this journey was always present in his mind. When he heard that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was on the high seas, he went to San Francisco to get permission from the president of the California Wine Association,

Percy T. Morgan, to go East. Morgan said, "Why do you want to go, in this bad April weather?" John said: "Because I feel like it." "Very well," said the president, "if the wineries are in shape."

John took the first train East, fretting because it didn't go fast enough. In Washington he phoned one of the believers and learned that the Master was still in New York. John left on the night train. At five-thirty the next morning he was at the Hotel Ansonia, and he went upstairs to see the door of the Master's room. Dr. Getsinger (Lua's husband) was there and recognized John from a photograph. John asked for an appointment and 'Abdu'l-Bahá sent word, "In a few minutes." Then Dr. Getsinger called John in.

"I went as a business man. I had some questions to ask. When I saw Him I forgot everything. I was empty." Then, in the conversation that followed, 'Abdu'l-Bahá told John all the things he had wanted to know.

"Foolishly I said, 'Oh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, I came three thousand miles to see you.' He gave a good hearty laugh—you know what a wonderful laugh He had (here John laughed as the Master had, that faraway morning, and I caught the sound of that world-shaking laughter: Olympian—knowledgeable—the laughter of omniscience—I don't know how to say it. This was not the only time John seemed to me like a reflection of the Master. There was something about his presence; something spotless or fragrant, but not as we know the words. I had noted this in *Hájí-Amín*, too, in Persia). And He said, 'I came eight thousand miles to see *you*.'

"I told Him I was in the wine business and grossed fifteen thousand tons of grapes in one season, which makes over two million gallons of wine. 'Oh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, I said, 'I am a foreigner, born in Switzerland, and have not the command of the English language. I would love to be a speaker. All I am doing is to give away pamphlets and as many books as are printed.'

"He looked serious. He said, 'You are

3. *Ibid.*, p. 288.



'ABDU'L-BAHÁ ON MOUNT SALVAT, GREEN ACRE

doing well. I am satisfied with you. With you it is not the movements of the lips, nor the tongue. With you it is the heart that speaks. With you it is silence that speaks and radiates.'

"We had tea together. I was there about half an hour. He said, 'You are one of the family; you come in and out anytime you want to.'"

It was a cold, snowy day. In the forenoon John was in and out of the room, watched people coming by the dozens to see 'Abdu'l-Bahá, listened to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words to them. Around noon, he circled the block to look at the Hotel Ansonia. Back at the front door, he saw many people rising in the lobby:

"When His majesty came—how straight He walked!—they all rose.

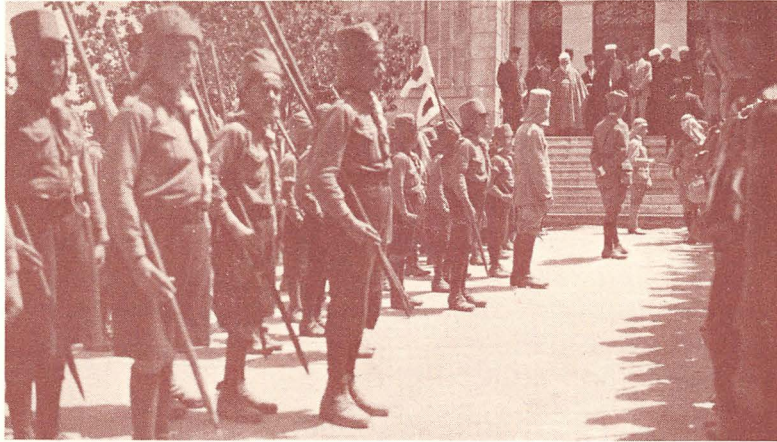
"'Abdu'l-Bahá walked to the first of three waiting automobiles. The other two were already filled with Bahá'ís and their friends. All at once I saw the Persian in the first machine pushing the air at me so I backed up, thinking he wanted me to go away [this Persian gesture for "come here" looks much like the American one for "go away"; it often confused the early American Bahá'ís]. Then I saw Mountfort Mills standing there making a pulling gesture at me so I went forward.

'Abdu'l-Bahá grabbed my hand and pulled me into the rear seat; Mountfort closed the door and I was alone with 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

"The believers had planned to show the city to the Master; the stores, hotels, banks; to give Him a good time seeing New York. Just as I stepped into the machine and was seated, 'Abdu'l-Bahá looked at me. He just looked at me, and all at once with an *immense* sigh—or what you call it better than a sigh—like the whole world would be lifted from Him so He could have a rest, He put His head on my left shoulder, clear down as close as He could, like a child, and went to sleep.

"I was still as a mouse; I didn't want to move—I didn't want to wake Him up. The trip was nearly a half hour and often I wondered what the others thought—that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was looking out of the window all the time. He woke up just as we stopped at the Kinneys' home."

John had not been invited, he told me, but he went in, met the Edward B. Kinneys for the first time, and remained for lunch. At three the Master addressed about one hundred and fifty people in the large studio, speaking perhaps a quarter of an hour. Edward Get-singer placed an armchair in the middle of the room for Him but the Master did not sit



'ABDU'L-BAHÁ REVIEWS BOY SCOUTS VISITING HIM IN HAIFA

in it. People were standing along the walls and 'Abdu'l-Bahá walked from one to the other, and took their hands to say good-bye. A young girl was on John's right. 'Abdu'l-Bahá smiled at her and walked past John to another young woman on his left. "He just turned His head and He didn't look at me; just passed me and took the girl's hand. If I ever had cold feet and weak knees it was then. It took me a few seconds till I remembered the words He had said in the morning: 'You are one of the family now.' That was why He didn't say good-bye to me. It was one of the worst punishments I ever had in my life, till I remembered."

I asked John to describe the Master. He told me that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's eyes had a luminous white ring around the iris; that He had a wonderful smile and also a very serious look. John looked in the glass, trying to explain the Master's complexion: "His skin was the color of my forehead." John's fair skin was lightly tanned by the California sun; I would have described his skin with a Persian term—"wheat-colored."

"I never paid any attention to how He looked. I only know every time I was with Him I was way down below Him—way down in the bottom. Like nothing. His hair was gray and white and shining; a little

curly. You always felt a nearness to Him even when He was far across the room."

John said a person's atmosphere or presence affected him strongly; he called it their aura.

John went to most of the meetings for about five days in New York and then someone put him in the same pullman car on which the Master traveled to Washington. The Master would leave His compartment and come out into the main "palace" car. Going through Pennsylvania an interpreter called John. All at once the interpreter called out and addressed John as Núrání, and John requested the Master to write his new name down. John would linger on the vowels when he said the word, and I could hear the Master's echo; vigorous, positive, in the Persian way. It means filled with light.

Again, John was on the same pullman when the Master left Washington for Chicago. For three days John attended meetings. He was present when 'Abdu'l-Bahá laid the cornerstone of the Bahá'í House of Worship at Wilmette, but with his usual diffidence he let "an elderly woman" represent Switzerland on that occasion, neither of the two, however, taking an active part. Many Californians had come to Chicago to see 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He called them all to Him and they were with

Him about an hour.

Just before leaving for the West Coast—John did not give me the date; I assume it was May 2, a day when the Master had delivered five public addresses—he was paying his hotel bill at the Plaza when 'Abdu'l-Bahá came in. "One of the Persians in His party called to me. The man at the desk said, 'Those people want you.' I stepped over to the elevator, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá seized my hand and wouldn't let go, and pulled me into the elevator and up to His room on the fifth floor." Nobody was there except Dr. Baghdádí. 'Abdu'l-Bahá did not speak until they were in the room. Then he went to His bed, lay down, and began talking with Baghdádí; He told how He had addressed four hundred women, and described how the ladies looked. The Master had found them terribly funny; with keen enjoyment, He described them to John and the Doctor. Anyone who remembers the ladies of 1912, not as Hollywood films them but as they were, mostly plain and dumpy, with stiff skirts, jutting bosoms, "rats," (these were hair pads with tapering ends) and to crown all, hats that were wedding cakes and nesting birds, knows. Then He said, "Now it's time for you to go." Somebody had given Him a big cake. He put that in John's arms, with apples and bananas, so many that John had to get somebody else to push the elevator button, and John left.

JOHN BOSCH was one of those whom 'Abdu'l-Bahá chose as a companion for the time when He should leave the world. Afterward, the friends saw that the Master knew the moment of His passing and had prepared for it. Some who had asked permission to visit Him at that time, He had gently turned away. But to John He had written, "I am longing to see you," and when John and Louise, responding, asked to come, His cable

replied: "Permitted." They reached Haifa about November 13, 1921.

John was present on November 19 at the Master's last public talk; 'Abdu'l-Bahá pointed to John on this occasion and addressed the talk to him: He spoke of divine love, and how different it is from human love, which fails in the testing and in which there is no element of self-sacrifice. He told John that the Persian believers loved him, although they could not speak their love, and that if John went to Persia they would if necessary give up their own lives to protect his. He said: "When lovers meet it may be that they cannot exchange a single word, yet with their hearts they speak to one another. Thus do the clouds speak to the earth and the rain comes down; the breeze whispers to the trees; the sun speaks to the eyes of men. Although this is not actual speech yet this is the way in which the hearts of the friends communicate . . . For instance, you were in America and I was in the Holy Land. Although our lips were still yet with our hearts we were conversing together."⁴

Surely besides the universal meaning, there was a special message here for John, something for him to remember over the long future before he could again be in the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. "You were in America and I was in the Holy Land . . . yet with our hearts we were conversing together."

Three days before the last, John was in the garden and all at once he saw the Master. "He walked as straight as if He had been a young man. He looked well and strong. He walked like a general. When we had made one short round, about fifty steps, He left me. He went up to the garden, and came down and brought me a tangerine. In English He said: 'Eat . . . Good.' I didn't do like the Americans and put it away for a keepsake. I peeled it and ate it and put the peelings in my pocket."

4. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "The Universal Language of the Spirit," *Star of the West*, 13, No. 7 (Oct. 1922), 163.

IT WAS in the early hours of Monday, November 28, that John and Louise were

awakened to the agonizing news that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was suddenly gone from their midst. Curtis Kelsey with another believer was sent to 'Akká with the terrible word. John saw people weeping as he went to the Master's bedroom. He kneeled down beside the bed. Then the Most Exalted Leaf, the daughter of Bahá'u'lláh, took his hand and placed him beside her on the built-in divan along the window. With her he kept a vigil there from two until four o'clock. Once, he rose, walked the two steps to the bed, took the Master's hand and said, "Oh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá!" It was about three o'clock then. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's hand was still warm. He seemed alive. "I still hoped He lived," John told me.

The Most Exalted Leaf wept far less than the others, at all times maintaining her great dignity and composure. But many times she sighed, through the night, and many times uttered the words, *Yá Iláhi*—"O God, my God!" Two years younger than her beloved Brother, Bahíyyih Khánúm was the "most precious great Adorning" of Bahá'u'lláh's house.⁵ ". . . all her days she was denied a moment of tranquillity," 'Abdu'l-Bahá had written; "Moth-like she circled in adoration round the undying flame . . ."⁶ Her life had spanned the Conference at Badash, the martyrdom of the Báb, the birth of the Bahá'í Faith as her Father lay chained in the Black Pit of Tíhrán, the peril, destitution and humiliation of years of captivity and exile, the death of Bahá'u'lláh in 1892, the Great War—when the enemy had determined to crucify 'Abdu'l-Bahá and all His family on the heights of Carmel. She had stood by her Brother when their Father left the world, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, because He was named the Successor, was deserted by His people, "For-

saken, betrayed, assaulted by almost the entire body of His relatives . . ."⁷ Now, for a brief period, Khánúm at seventy-five was the *de facto* head of the Bahá'í world; she was the custodian of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament, and her loving, sorrowing messages rallied the grief-obliterated Bahá'ís of East and West. Now she was destined to stand beside and support yet another crucial Figure in Bahá'í history, destined to be, Shoghi Effendi wrote, the "sole earthly sustainer, the joy and solace of my life."⁸ Small wonder that her Father had revealed for her lines such as these: "Let these exalted words be thy love-song . . . O thou most holy and resplendent Leaf: 'God, besides Whom is none other God, the Lord of this world and the next!' . . . How sweet thy presence . . . how sweet to gaze upon thy face. . ."⁹

Three days later John was up on Mt. Carmel at the Shrine when he saw a veiled lady walking slowly, painfully from the Shrine to the gardener's house. She seemed inexpressibly weary. He wondered if it would be permissible to help her. He went forward, took her left arm and helped raise her a little up the steep hill. Suddenly she swung her veil back and looked deep into John's eyes. "I looked back into the most beautiful blue eyes. Like an angel's. It's very hard to express or define the looks of an angel. I really thought she was a young woman." Later Riḍváníyyih Khánúm came over to the Pilgrim House. "I am going to tell you something," she said. John thought it might be something very serious, since he, a western man, had taken the arm of a veiled lady. Instead, Riḍváníyyih conveyed to John the thanks of the Most Exalted Leaf.

THEY HAD WRAPPED the Master in five separate folds of white silk and on His head they had placed a black mitre given to Him by Bahá'u'lláh. His coffin had been placed on two chairs beside the bed. John was present when His sheeted form was lifted into the coffin; while others held the Master's head

(continued on page 44)

5. "The Passing of Bahíyyih Khánúm, the Most Exalted Leaf," *The Bahá'í World* (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1936), V, 169.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 172.

7. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 247.

8. "The Passing of Bahíyyih Khánúm," p. 169.

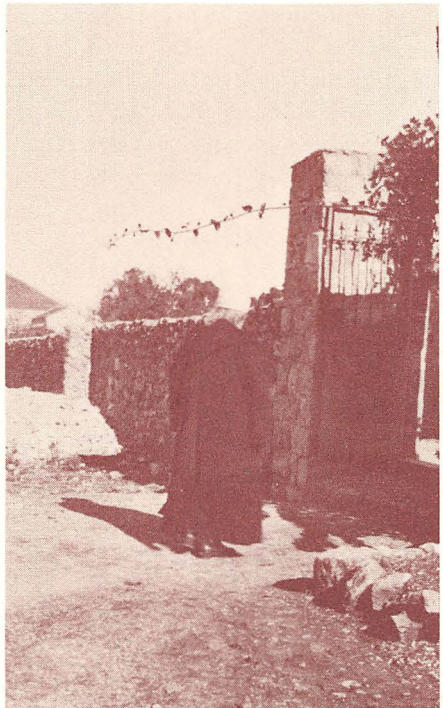
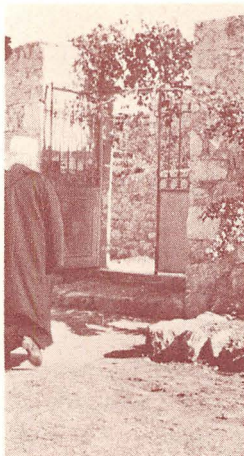
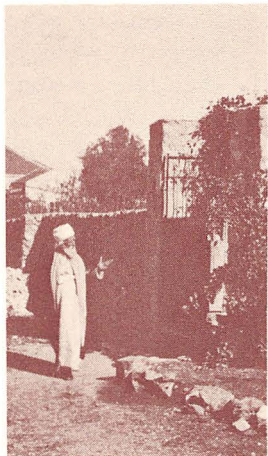
9. *Ibid.*, p. 171.

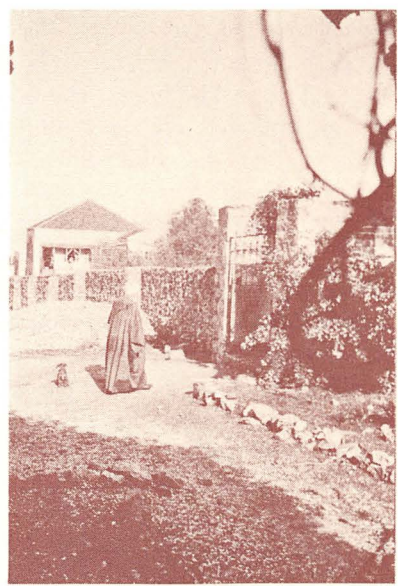
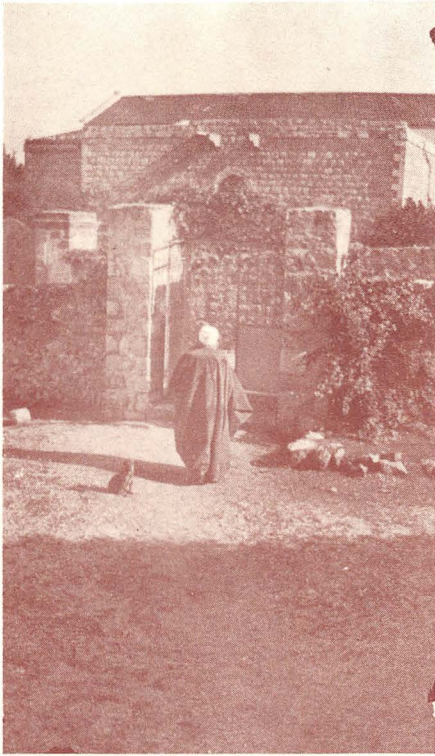
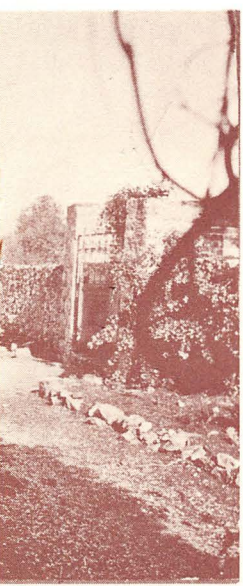
OH, HOW I LONG THAT IT COULD BE MADE POSSIBLE FOR ME TO TRAVEL THROUGH THESE PARTS, EVEN IF NECESSARY ON FOOT AND WITH THE UTMOST POVERTY, AND WHILE PASSING THROUGH THE CITIES, VILLAGES, MOUNTAINS, DESERTS, AND OCEANS, CRY AT THE TOP OF MY VOICE "YÁ BAHÁ'U'L-ABHÁ!" AND PROMOTE THE DIVINE TEACHINGS.

—'ABDU'L-BAHÁ

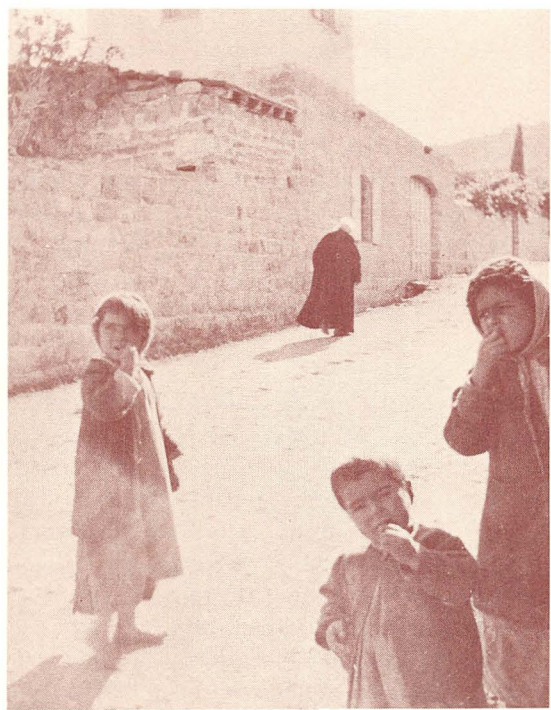


'Abdu'l





-Bahá: Picture of Motion



(continued from page 41)

and shoulders and arms, Mírzá Jalál held His feet, and John His knees. His body seemed natural, John said, not rigid. John helped the others to close the coffin down. He said he knew the living Master was there. "I felt He was there. Not in the body—even now I feel that again—His presence. I am sure He was there." When others started to raise the casket up, John didn't understand at first, but did as they did, and lifted it to his right shoulder. Then all at once he remembered that time in New York, long past, when 'Abdu'l-Bahá had leaned down on his left shoulder and gone to sleep.

ON THE LONG WAY UP Mt. Carmel, Sir Herbert Samuel, the British High Commissioner, walked directly ahead of John. Once John looked back, and saw all the carriages, empty and left behind: the ten thousand mourners were all coming on foot, although the cortège took an hour and five minutes to reach the Shrine. Once when the tall Sir Herbert stopped suddenly, John stubbed against his heel; afterward he recalled the gentleness with which Sir Herbert asked his pardon.

John told me that already by seven that Tuesday morning soldiers were lined up on both sides of the street and some were in the Master's compound. As John entered, on the left going up the steps, he saw an Arab soldier standing guard; the man was leaning on his gun and the tears streamed down his face.

SOME TIME AFTER THAT, Louise Bosch was in the "Tea Room" at the Master's house, alone. The ladies had disappeared. Preparations had been completed for the arrival of Shoghi Effendi, expected home from Oxford University that day. "Then I heard what must have been his footsteps coming up to the front door and coming in; when he gave—I don't know how to describe that cry—an outcry of greatest grief—pain—*ache*. It was *loud*. And then I remained in the

room. Although I did not see Shoghi Effendi I knew for certain it was he. So I remained quiet in the Tea Room. Then I heard some further footsteps of his, and the closing of a door."

On Wednesday, the day after the funeral, the mother of Shoghi Effendi told Louise that the Most Exalted Leaf and the Consort of 'Abdu'l-Bahá had opened a sealed letter left by the Master. This letter bore Shoghi Effendi's name; in his absence they were obliged to open it, not knowing where to bury the Master or what, for a waiting, despairing Bahá'í world, His instructions might be. Thus they found out that Shoghi Effendi was the Guardian even before he did. Shoghi Effendi's mother confided this to Louise, not under a seal of secrecy but just as one believer to another, sharing the provisions of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Both the institution and the term—Guardian—were new to the Bahá'ís of that day.

"They didn't show him the Will at first. He was all right. He came to lunch at the Pilgrim House. But from the third day on, I didn't see him. Then on the fifth day past sunset I went over, and what I saw I shall never forget. He was coming out of a room and walking through the door of the Most Exalted Leaf. He was like an old man, bent over and he could barely speak, but he shook hands with me, and looked at me for a moment. He spoke like a person who cannot hear anything now or doesn't want to see any one now. He was wholly changed and aged and walking bent and he had a little light or candle in his hand. I think he said to me, 'It is all right.'

"But I saw something terrible had happened. He had reacted just the way the Family had known he would. That's why he didn't come back to the Pilgrim House. He got ill. He couldn't eat; he couldn't drink or sleep.

"After the first three days had passed and he had seen the Will he couldn't at all accept it. He seemed to make such remonstrances that his mother felt called upon to recite to



'ABDU'L-BAHÁ DESCENDING MOUNT CARMEL WITH A GROUP OF PILGRIMS

him a history of a similar time after Muhammad when one of the Holy Imáms would not serve. [Louise was not sure which Imám; we assume it was Ḥasan.] So Shoghi Effendi's mother said: 'Are you going to repeat the history of that Imám, who also felt that he was not qualified?' I felt extremely privileged that the mother of Shoghi Effendi told me of this."

Shoghi Effendi was then twenty-four years old. He had gone to Oxford to better prepare

himself as a translator to serve 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Already reeling from the blow of his Grandfather's passing, he was dealt this "second blow . . . in many ways more cruel than the first . . ." ¹⁰ A vital office, described by him in later years as carrying a staggering weight of responsibility, was suddenly loaded onto his young shoulders. ¹¹ In the opening pages of his book *Bahá'í Administration* there are brief references to his prolonged illness, during the early days of what became a ministry lasting thirty-six years.

Although the Guardianship-to-be was a well-kept secret, it was, strangely enough, not a total one. A Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's to Miss F. Drayton of New York City contains a strong clue; it states: ". . . Verily that

10. Rúhíyyih Khánum, *Twenty-Five Years of the Guardianship* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1948), p. 6.

11. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'llah* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1955), p. 150.

Infant is born and exists and there will appear from His Cause a wonder which thou wilt hear in future . . . there are signs for it in the passing centuries and ages." When the National Bahá'í Assembly of the United States referred this Tablet to the Guardian, he verified that he was the infant mentioned here. These lines close the second volume of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's published English Tablets.

But more explicit was the Master's confiding, to an individual who was not a Bahá'í, the fact that Shoghi Effendi was to be His successor. On August 6, 1910, when a little serving girl in the Household had to have her finger lanced, 'Abdu'l-Bahá sent for the Family's German physician, Frau Doktor Fallscheer. Afterward the Doctor sat with Bahá'u'lláh's daughter, the Most Exalted Leaf, drinking coffee and conversing in Turkish; then, summoned by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Doctor repaired with Bahíyyih Khánum to the Reception Room, which soon crowded up with pilgrims and others, coming and going. The two ladies, continuing their conversation, sat down apart from the rest. At that point a son-in-law of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's entered the room, and the Doctor noticed that his eldest son, Shoghi Effendi, whom she knew by sight, followed him. The child, who seemed about twelve or thirteen, greeted and took his leave of the Master and his great aunt Bahíyyih Khánum with wonderful courtesy, in the Persian way; and the Most Exalted Leaf confided to the Doctor that this child was to be the Master's successor and "Vizier." The Doctor was much impressed with his grown-up, solemn courtesy in entering and leaving the room, and with "his dark, candid, trusting eyes, not swerving for even a moment from the magical blue glance of his Grandfather." 'Abdu'l-Bahá came over to the ladies and as they rose, He told them to be seated, settled Himself informally on a Persian stool and said: "Now, my daughter, how do you like Shoghi Effendi, my future Elisha?" (The reference was to 2 Kings,

chapter 2.) "Master," she answered, "if I may say it, in his young face I see the dark eyes of a sufferer, of one who will have much to bear." That day the Master also informed her that He would send Shoghi Effendi to study in England. In later years the Doctor returned to Germany and, not long before she died, became a Bahá'í. Her memoir was published in the German Bahá'í magazine, *Sonne der Wahrheit* (1930-31).

When Hand of the Cause Dr. Hermann Grossmann and Mrs. Grossmann consulted the Guardian about the Fallscheer notes, Shoghi Effendi "expressed the opinion that 'Abdu'l-Bahá must have had great confidence in Frau Doktor Fallscheer inasmuch as He, at the time before the beloved Guardian went to England, that is, when the Master may have first considered the idea of sending him there, talked to her about it and on that occasion mentioned that Shoghi Effendi was to be His 'Vizier,' as she expressed it."¹²

Before leaving Haifa, Louise wanted an Eastern street costume and veil such as the ladies of the Household then wore, in deference to the time and place. Riḍváníyyih Khánum helped to make it and they dressed her in it. Few sights were funnier to Easterners than a Western woman trying to wear the veil. They led Louise, striding along in her wrappings, to a room where she found the ladies at prayer. An aunt of the Guardian's said: "You must go and see Shoghi Effendi." Then she opened a door to the next room and announced through the crack: "A Turkish lady wishes to see you." Feeling like a child in fancy dress, Louise went in. "I stood maybe four or five feet from his bed. He sat up in bed and when I could not contain my laughter he said, 'Oh, it's Mrs. Bosch,' and he pointed to my shoes. Then he laughed a little and I and his aunt laughed. She told me this was the first time Shoghi Effendi had even smiled since his return."

The last words that Shoghi Effendi spoke to Louise when she and John took leave of him were: "Tell the friends, time will prove that there has been no mistake."

12. Personal letter.