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Letter from Emogene Hoagg

Haifa, Palestine

Emogene Hoagg

2nd January 1922

Letter from Haifa in the Time of Mourning

1922:from Emogene Hoagg to Nelly French
by Emogene Hoagg
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Introduction

THE ASCENSION OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, on November 28, 1921, marked for Bahá'ís the end of the Heroic, the Apostolic Age of their Faith. From 1892, when He was appointed by Bahá'u'lláh as the Center of His Covenant, the sole Interpreter of His Writings, and the Perfect Exemplar of His Cause, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had guided the growing Bahá'í community with his loving counsels and letters and examples. His sudden removal did, to many, make the world seem as if it had "lost its axis." But it also galvanized the dedicated souls who had learned well the firmness in the Covenant which 'Abdu'l-Bahá had striven so earnestly to instill in the Bahá'ís. 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself had departed this world, but His Writings remained and His Will and Testament provided continuing divine guidance in the Guardian of the Faith, Shoghi Effendi, whom He appointed as His successor. The editors of WORLD ORDER are happy to present herewith excerpts from a letter from an early Bahá'í who made her way from Italy to Haifa soon after she received a cabled

announcement of the ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.[1] Henrietta Emogene Martin Hoagg - known to the Bahá'ís as Emogene - learned of the Bahá'í Faith in California in 1898 from Mrs. Phoebe Hearst, and after studying with Lua Getsinger became "the first confirmed believer in California." [2] In 1899, in Milan, she received her first Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in acknowledgment of her acceptance of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. In 1900, she visited 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Haifa, and afterwards, at His suggestion, studied for a month with the outstanding Bahá'í scholar Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Faḍl in Port Sá'id. In 1903, in California, Mrs. Hoagg aided Helen S. Goodall and her daughter Ella in establishing weekly meetings in Oakland. In November 1907, Mrs. Goodall being absent, she represented California at a consultation called in Chicago for the purpose of initiating the building of the first Bahá'í House of Worship in the Western world. Her dedication prompted Mrs. Corinne True to write, "Emogene's flaming spirit of devotion was one of the pioneer pillars to accomplish that great step in the progress of the Faith in this country." [3] Throughout her Bahá'í life, until her health began to fail in 1944, Mrs. Hoagg was a devoted teacher of the Cause. She made a six-thousand-mile trip through Canada and Alaska with Marion Jack in 1919-1920, traveled throughout the United States, learned Spanish and taught in Havana, and, in accordance with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's instructions, returned to Rome and Florence to visit those to whom she, had introduced the Faith earlier. In 1928, with Shoghi Effendi's approval, she joined Julia Culver in Geneva, Switzerland, to serve the International Bahá'í Bureau, subsequently becoming its co-treasurer. In 1931, Shoghi Effendi summoned Mrs. Hoagg to Haifa to type the lengthy manuscript of Nabil's The Dawn-Breakers which he was translating from Persian into English. When she died in 1945 at the age of seventy-seven, Shoghi Effendi cabled; "Deeply grieved passing staunch, exemplary pioneer Faith, Emogene Hoagg. Record national international services unforgettable..." [4] Those who knew Emogene have written of her character, her abilities as a teacher, her spiritual vitality, her sense of humor. But most frequently they mention her firmness in the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh - a quality which illumines the following excerpts from a letter written in 1922 to Nellie French while she was helping with the translation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament.

My dearest Nelly:

Your letter of December 14th has just reached me here in this blessed spot. Needless to say why I am here, for you will have realized that no other thought could have possessed me after getting the cable of the ascension of our beloved Master.

As you said you felt, I also felt. The world seemed to have lost its axis, and I seemed to be living without a support. I had planned to go to Genoa, but had no heart nor strength to continue the work at that time. I left Torino, from where I wrote you, returned to Milano and took the first steamer from Trieste which was on December 16th. The trip was a calm one and I arrived here on

the 21st.

You may imagine the grief of the Holy Family. All was so sudden, so unexpected, that the shock to them as well as to all the friends was extreme. For the first week after getting here I had no head to use for anything, but since then have been very busy helping in the translation of some important Tablets. This has left no time for letter writing, which accounts for your not hearing from me before, as well as other friends whom I am sure are anxious for details. There is so much to tell it would take days to write it all, but later a full account is to be sent to all. Lady Bloomfield is here and is now compiling an accurate account of the few days prior to the Beloved's departure, of the cortege up the mountain to the Tomb of the Báb, and the fifth, ninth and fortieth days after the ascension.

When they expected the remains of the body of the Báb a resting place was made in the center of what is now the middle front room; but for some reason the Master had another place prepared in the room where the remains now rest. When it was necessary to find a place for the blessed body of the Master they thought of the place already prepared in the front room, and as the Master loved so much that position on the mountain, his remains were placed in that room, You will remember the front room of the Tomb where the believers always gathered and where the Master would speak to them when he went to the Tomb? It is in this middle front room that the Beloved body rests. It is hardly yet possible to believe that we shall not see him walking in and saying "Marḥabá, Marḥabá!"

The Visitation Prayer that we have in the little prayer book on page 70 is chanted at His Threshold. I have always loved this and said it much.

There is a belief among some of the oriental peoples that the soul is not entirely free from the body until the fortieth day after its ascension, so on that day a feast is always given. To carry out the custom the Holy Family gave a Feast on the Fortieth Day after the ascension of the blessed Master. They invited over two hundred guests and they were feasted in RúḥáKhánum's house. The tables were placed in every room and the food was prepared at the Big House. It was indeed a feat to do this, but it was beautifully carried out to the great astonishment of all the guests.

After the feast, as is the custom, all the guests gathered to give speeches in memory of the Master. The large central room of the Master's House had been prepared with beautiful rugs and with draperies, even the two end rooms of glass were thrown open and chairs and couches placed there, while at the windows were persian draperies. Chairs were brought from the town so that all were seated. A small raised place was made for the speakers. About twelve speeches were given, and some were most remarkable. Muḥammadan, Jew and Christian seemed to vie with each other in proclaiming the virtues and in expressions of admiration and love for the Master. Some of these speeches, if not all are to be translated and later to be sent in this account. The Bahá'ís had no chance

to enlarge upon the speeches made by the others, for they expressed all there was to be said. One man proved by reference to the Qur'án, all the Twelve Principles as given in America. Often these men gathered would weep when one would give praises of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, or express his love and admiration. It was most touching to be present, even if one did not understand all that was said.

The day after the Feast, the Will of the Master was read, to a large number of the Bahá'ís who assembled in the same room where they gathered the day before, Again was the scene impressive. There are three parts to the Will of the Master, each written at a different time. This makes the Will very long. You will have before this reaches you, received the word sent by cable, that Shoghi Effendi, the eldest grandson of the Master, is appointed by the Master as the guardian of the Cause and the head of the House of Justice — Universal House of justice. I have just been helping with the translation into English. It is very strong, There is no doubt left as to the position of Shoghi Effendi. The Master says: "The one who opposes him (Shoghi Effendi) and opposes them (Universal House of justice) verily, he opposes God, The one who rebels against them, verily, he rebels against God. The one who antagonizes him, antagonizes God, The one who disputes with them, disputes with God. The one who resists him, resists God. The one who denies him, denies God. The one who turns aside and withdraws, from him, turns aside and withdraws and separates himself from God. Upon him be the wrath of God! Upon him be the anger of God! Upon him be the vengeance of God!"

The Master was not ill, we may say. He did not feel well on Saturday, November 26th, but that night at midnight all fever left him and he was normal. Toward one o'clock of Monday morning he remarked to one of his daughters who was near him, that he felt difficulty in breathing. Those were his last words and after a few moments his soul ascended, The parting was so calm, so without any evidence of struggle, that they could not believe he had departed. Dr. Krug confirmed the fact.

From various remarks made to the family at different times and which they now remember, but did not understand at the time, they realize that the Beloved knew he was going, A few weeks before his ascension he told them to send for Shoghi Effendi saying, that if he did not come quickly he would not arrive "for the funeral". Yet they did not understand!

I cannot feel that his work was really finished, but that for some divine mystery he departed now. He told the ladies of a dream he had in which he was entering the Mosque. He thought he would give the "call" which he did. He found that the people were entering and crowding around him. Then he thought he would commence the prayer that follows the "call". This he did and found that the people were following him, and continuing to gather around him. Then he went out of the Mosque, Outside he remembered that he had not finished the prayer, he considered for a moment then decided he would not return to finish it. This seems very significant.. .

In His Name,

Affectionately

[signed] EMOGENE

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