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Description of a Visit

Isabella D Brittingham

September 1901

Notes

A portion of a letter, written during March 1905 by Mrs. Isabella D. Brittingham, in response to a letter received in a letter from a far western believer whom she had never personally know, for a c

Passing over the journey to Syria, which was but the way to the accomplishment, I take up my pilgrimage from my first point of entry into that land.

In the beginning of September 1901, having taken the steamer from Beirut, Syria, sailing southward on the Mediterranean Sea and standing out a little from the land, we came opposite the Acre on the northern point of the bay of Acre. The Lebanon Hills behind the city were half veiled by a cloudlike mist, but Acre – the “City of Life” – stood out white and shining, touched here and there by the golden rays of the setting sun: “beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth” (Psalm 48:2). As we slowly passed on down, I watched it – sitting motionless and with thoughts too deep for words – one beautiful Utterance from the Sacred Lips of the One who abode therein constantly reverberating through my soul: “From that Holy Fragrance in that white Spot all sides and regions have been perfumed. Blessed are they who inhale the odor thereof!”

Passing on the southern point of the bay, we landed at Haifa, at the foot of Mt. Carmel, to the south of which and coming up to it, lies the valley of Sharon, and back of the mountains, the low lying Lebanon hills. We were in the midst of Bible prophecy. I went off on shore with Mr. Herbert Hopper of Paris, my companion pilgrim, having met him for the first time at Port Sa’id – the bond of the Faith having at once made us brother and sister – for our faces were turned toward the same Holy Spot. We were taken to a hotel, which was also situated at the foot of Mount Carmel, The Master’s returning ambassador, Hájí Hasan Khurasání of Cairo and his interpreter with both of whom I had been making the pilgrimage from NewYork – went off with an Oriental brother, and when next we met them, it was in the Presence of our Lord.

At this hotel we awaited the Word of our Lord to come to Him. Early on the following morning the Summons came for Mr. Hopper, and I was left for a few hours alone. In the interval our Lord’s wife, the Holy Mother, who was then

in Haifa with the Holy daughters – but soon to go to Acre – overwhelmed this unworthy one with a most gracious visit of an hour. The power of GOD emanated from her to such a degree that she seemed naught save the embodiment of Divine Love. She appointed an hour in the afternoon for me to come to her, and to remain to tea with the Holy Household, which in due time became a blessed consummation. Late in the afternoon, also, third pilgrim arrived at the hotel, a young ‘Englishman, Mr. Breakwell by name. Although we had never met each other, yet in one moment, through the precious Spirit of this Glorious Revelation, we were as brother and sister talking together- with tears of happiness upon our faces- of the Faith and of Its Power which had brought us together under the shadow of Mount Carmel, to await the Divine Call to the Sacred Feet of the world’s Redeemer.

Early the following morning that blessed Word came, and together we began this last stage of our pilgrimage to His Presence.

The drive from Haifa to Acre is northward, around the shore of the bay of Acre, through the Valley of Acre, with Mount Carmel and the “Land of Zebulun” behind us, the hills of Lebanon to the right, and before us the “land of Naphtali” – and the city of Acre ever looming up clearer and more defined as our carriage followed the road “by the way of the sea”, its left Wheels frequently submerged in the blue waves iridescent with their tinted seaweed. Here and there lonely palm tree appeared, a silhouette against the perfect blue of a Syrian summer sky; and the shore was occasionally enlivened by an Arab with his camel.

That ride has often been described by pilgrims, and it has never been overrated. The air was perfect that blessed September morning, and our hearts were throbbing with the sense of nearness to the Beloved, ‘but we talked but fragmentarily. We read some Hidden firds and Holy Utterances a little. “The Light of His Beauty” was upon my companion’s face, and it was in my soul. Our companionship had reached its acme in a sense of oneness of ineffable joy which could be expressed only in the language of the Spirit.

We passed within the gates of that penal City, on up through its narrow streets amid its Oriental confusion and noise, alighting at the entrance of a courtyard, and followed a guide therein. A row of beautiful Oriental brothers in the Faith awaited, there, our coming, and greeted us in the NAME of that One Who has made the world one home and then, still following our guide, we ascended an outer staircase and were ushered into a large ante-room, most simply furnished, in Oriental style, and were requested to be seated, and then were left alone. The hour was that of noon, - golden and calm. We sat there with thought in suspension. A great stillness fell upon me. Love seemed vibrating everywhere. In a few moments a messenger entered, and in low tones invited us to “partake of a material and a Spiritual feast.” We followed him silently, passing through an upper court which had for its roof the blue sky, and entered a long room, advancing a little and then involuntarily pausing. The floor was tiled in the stern fashion the walls plastered and lofty also an Eastern custom. On one side, toward the upper end of the man, was a wide window, which was I think,

lattice. At that upper end which was slightly elevated, was spread a table for the noon meal with a simple snowy cloth and pure china chairs surrounding the table. There was nothing else whatever on the floor or the walls of that simple apartment. Around the room were standing, in perfect silence, with folded arms and bowed heads, a number of the Oriental brothers who I had previously met, - awaiting the entrance of our Lord. We had not long to wait. At the far end, beyond the table, a door swung calmly open, and a Figure, all beautiful and majestic, entered, clad in white flowing robes, and advanced toward us. It was the MASTER. So different was He - so absolutely All Spirit - so much more glorious than the photograph taken of Him by a believer, many years ago (and the copies of which have encircled the world) that I did not, for one instant, recognize Him. The next instant I knew my Lord - and then I lost all earthly consciousness in that Presence. Those about me said that I called: "ID, it is my Master!" - and that I ran to Him, - but I did not know that I had done so. I only knew that I found myself There, before Him, kissing His beautiful Hands, which were extended toward me. Then they said. He left me and went to greet Mr. Breakwell, who was standing dazed and motionless. I do not remember the Master leaving me, but dimly remember seeing Him greet my fellow pilgrim. Then they said He returned to me and taking me by the hand, led me to my seat at the table, but I remember nothing of this, That Great Vibration had broken up the old conditions, and I was lost to the consciousness of this world then, and for hours thereafter, although I, doubtless, mechanically lived and moved. I had entered that Great Light, and Its Power already had begun the work of disintegration.

Great days followed; too great, too sacred, to speak much of. For with what language of the flesh can we portray them? Only those who have been vouchsafed the blessedness of attaining that Visit, and have continuously prayed during the pilgrimage thither to be emptied and cleansed that they may be filled with Him, know what that Visit means to the longing heart. I - the least of all His children - had seen the King in His beauty.

During later meals, as I sat beside my Lord, I understood the joy of "breaking bread in the Kingdom of GOD" - and I understood the mystical Glory of the Truth of the "Lord's Supper!"

The parting, as I sat at the Feet of our Lord, seemed like the rending asunder of the spirit. But His Divine Benediction, there so graciously bestowed upon this unworthy one, healed my sorrow and wiped away my raining tears, and I went forth in the Light of that Love and Mercy, made live by His WORD.

I was in our Lord's Presence five days - the number of the Báb. Twice during that time I was permitted the Blessing of Visiting the Holy Tomb of the Blessed Perfection, Bahá'u'lláh, and once the beautiful Ridván; and, praying in each, I received, through further unveilings of His Presence, the unspeakable realization of the Power and Eternal Glory of GOD.

On the last night, before sailing from Haifa nine of us - Orientals and Occidentals

– together assembled at the Tomb of Báb, upon the holy heights of beautiful Mount Carmel, and sitting in an almost unbroken silence, looked across the blue waxes to Acre, the City of Love and Peace for the whole world, watching it until the sunset gold deepened into rose and then turned into ashes, and the of City was hidden from our eyes by a mist; then by the light from a lantern carried by one of our Oriental brothers in the Faith, we descended the mountain.

Early on the following morning September 9th sailed away from Haifa and the land which held our hearts for evermore – we three pilgrims sitting in the stern of the steamer and again watching the blessed City of Acre until it glimmered out of sight.

And then with the preciousness of that Holy Visit, as a Perfume permeating our souls, we turned back to the world to serve Him whose benediction upon us had changed for us that world; Whose Love had made us its humble, unworthy, but privileged cup-bearers of Divine Knowledge concerning its latest and greatest Gift from GOD – the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.