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Blessings Beyond Measure

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BLESSINGS
BEYOND
MEASURE

RECOLLECTIONS
OF
‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ
AND
SHOGHI EFFENDI

BY
‘ALÍ M. YAZDÍ

Bahá’í Publishing Trust
Wilmette, Illinois

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Blessings Beyond Measure

‘Alí M. Yazdí

Ages, cycles, nay, thousands of generations
must pass away before the Sun of Truth
may mount its zenith and
shine again in its full splendor.
Now that...ye have been called to life
and gathered together in this Age,...
how thankful ye must be! - ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ

FOREWORD

When, as a girl, I heard of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the son of the Founder of the Bahá’í Faith, and became a believer, I had an overwhelming longing to see Him and to attain His presence. But I was young, World War I was raging, communication with the Holy Land was cut off, and travel out of the question. I did write asking permission, but the letter was apparently lost, and there was no answer.

Later, when I entered the University of California at Berkeley in the fall of 1920, I again wrote to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and asked how I could serve the Faith, what studies to pursue, and for permission to make the pilgrimage. His loving reply was sent to me by Kathryn Frankland after her own visit to the Master in November of that year. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá answered all my questions in His Tablet and said, “I hope that you... may make the visit, but at present it is not possible.” [^] A year later ‘Abdu’l-Bahá passed away.

[^] See Marion C. Yazdí, “Youth in the Vanguard: Memoirs and Letters Collected “by the First Bahá’í Student at Berkeley and at Stanford University”,

foreword by ‘Alí M. Yazdí (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982) 34, 36, for the text of her letter to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s response.

A young Persian Bahá’í came to the University of California at Berkeley in the fall of 1921 to study civil engineering. He was remarkable in every respect, well-versed in the Bahá’í teachings, and devoted to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Who was called the Master. This exemplary and fascinating student was Shaykh-‘Alí Yazdí, or ‘Alí for short. As a boy and youth, he had often been with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and His grandson, Shoghi Effendi. It was three months after our meeting that we faced together the catastrophic loss of the beloved Master.

[^] See *ibid.*, 36, 40, for a description of ‘Alí on his arrival in Berkeley, California.

[^] See *ibid.*, 46, on the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

When I was with ‘Alí, I would beg him to tell me about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: “What was He like?” His descriptions filled me with awe and joy; I was enchanted and uplifted. Throughout our friendship and later our marriage, I loved to listen to him talk about the Master; I came to feel that I, too, had actually seen Him and been in His presence.

I often hoped ‘Alí would write down his early experiences in the Faith for our children and grandchildren and for the Bahá’ís and other friends. But he was reluctant to speak or write about his intimate experiences with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and his unique years with Shoghi Effendi. Then one day in 1975, though gravely ill and suffering, ‘Alí stood up from his desk and with a radiant smile gave me a number of pages entitled “Prophetic Days — Memories of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “ herein called “Blessings Beyond Measure”. The account that follows is essentially as my husband wrote it. I have included a few details from a talk he gave on 2 November 1975 at Haas Clubhouse on the Berkeley campus of the University of California.

‘Alí’s wish to write down his recollections of young Shoghi Effendi was not realized. However, he did speak on his memories of Shoghi Effendi at the above-mentioned occasion, and I have included the transcription of that recorded talk here. I have also added sections from a 1 July 1975 interview with ‘Alí that Beth McKenty made for the National Bahá’í Information Office, as well as excerpts from a talk he gave at the home of our daughter and son-in-law, Barbara and Jim Markert, on 23 October 1977. In addition, I have quoted passages from the diary and from the youthful letters of Shoghi Effendi to which ‘Alí alluded in his talk. The very personal letters of Shoghi Effendi to his young friend ‘Alí, written before and after matriculating at Oxford University, are published here for the first time.

A word of explanation regarding these intensely interesting memoirs is in order. The accounts of ‘Alí’s years with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and his grandson Shoghi Effendi — filled as they are with experiences that affected ‘Alí profoundly all his life — should still be considered as pilgrim’s notes, one person’s impressions sincerely given. It should also be pointed out that the spoken words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi reported here may or may not be exact quotations. The

translations of the tablets of the Master (with the exception of the one to Roy C. Wilhelm, the original of which has not been found) and the letters of Shoghi Effendi, however, are all authentic.

I acknowledge with thanks the publication in 1986 of an earlier and shorter version of my husband's recollections of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in "The Bahá'í World", volume 18. An earlier version of 'Alí's memoirs of Shoghi Effendi will appear in volume 19 of "The Bahá'í World". 'Alí's recollections of Shoghi Effendi as a youth were reviewed for accuracy by Shoghi Effendi's widow, the Hand of the Cause of God Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum.

[^] "The Bahá'í World: An International Record, Volume XVIII", 1979-1983, comp. The Universal House of Justice (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1986), 907-11.

I want to express warmest appreciation to Dr. Betty J. Fisher and Anne Atkinson for their proficient editing and no less for their insight and feeling for the subject matter.

It gives me pleasure to make available to others these blessed experiences with the Master and with Shoghi Effendi in the early life of 'Alí Yazdí.

MARION CARPENTER YAZDÍ

PART ONE — Recollections of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

'Alí M. Yazdí

We live in an age in which God is openly denied and religion is ignored and discredited as archaic and even harmful.

Yet paradoxically, we live in an age that has witnessed the appearance of a new Manifestation with a Message for this Day — with solutions to the problems that are plaguing people everywhere. A Prophet of God has actually walked the earth in our time! Such is His claim, and such is the claim of those who have rallied to His call. His life, His teachings all testify to the validity of His station. His name is Bahá'u'lláh.

[^] Bahá'u'lláh, the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith lived from 1817 to 1892. His title means "The Glory of God." — Ed.

We are fortunate to live in an age when the Manifestation has walked the earth; it is an experience that is not given to many generations. For even though those who have seen Bahá'u'lláh are all but gone, there are some now living who have known people who have known and seen Bahá'u'lláh.[^] There are some who have known and seen His son, the Center of His Covenant and His appointed Successor, 'Abdu'l-Bahá. And there are more who have known His great-grandson, Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Cause of God.[^]

[^] When ‘Alí Yazdí wrote this account in 1975, there was probably no one still living who had met Bahá’u’lláh. No one who met Bahá’u’lláh is now alive. — Ed. [^] ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was born in 1844 and died in 1921; Shoghi Effendi was born in 1897 and died in 1957. — Ed.

Now, obviously, knowledge of the Manifestation and the Center of the Covenant does not necessitate being in their physical presence. Yet being in their presence, feeling the spell of their power and love, is an experience of inimitable value and bounty. It is something that those of us who have experienced it feel over and above even the holy words. It is a blessing that imparts a tangible feeling of things spiritual. It enables us to reappraise and change our outlook and gain perspective, insight, vision. It adds zest and new hope to life.

It has been my privilege to have had a father who knew and served Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi. His name was Ḥájí Muḥammad Yazdí.

It has been my inestimable privilege to have known ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and His chosen successor — Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian. While it is still possible, I would like to share the experience with others. I hope to give as best I can a little of the living Faith.

What can I add to what is already known? I dare-say very little. There have been many books on the subject. Shoghi Effendi’s history “God Passes By” has wonderful chapters on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and there was no one in the world, after Bahá’u’lláh, who was closer to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá than Shoghi Effendi. He not only loved Him, but he understood Him. “The Chosen Highway” by Lady Blomfield is a remarkable book on the subject, and there are others. My contribution will be mainly personal, a firsthand account of the feelings and thoughts evoked in me when I was in the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. I will include incidents I learned from my father, Ḥájí Muḥammad Yazdí.

[^] See Shoghi Effendi, “God Passes By”, new ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1974), 237-320, and Lady Blomfield (Sitárih Khánum), “The Chosen Highway” (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, n.d., repr. 1975), 135-228. See also H. M. Balyuzi, “‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Centre of the “Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh” (London: George Ronald, 1971); Juliet Thompson, “The Diary of Juliet Thompson” (Los Angeles: Kalimát, 1983); Ramona Allen Brown, “Memories of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Recollections of the Early Days of the “Bahá’í Faith in California” (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1980); Howard Colby Ives, “Portals of Freedom” (New York: Dutton, 1937; repr. Oxford, England: George Ronald, 1983); and Julia M. Grundy, “Ten “Days in the Light of ‘Akká”, rev. ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1979).

But first, I would like to give some background — a few highlights about the Yazdí family and the early days of the Faith — beginning with the period just after the martyrdom of the Báb and before and after the declaration of Bahá’u’lláh.

[^] The Báb, Whose title means “the Gate, “ was the Prophet-Forerunner of the

Bahá'í Faith. In 1850 He was executed by a firing squad in a public square in Tabriz, Persia (now Írán). In 1863 Bahá'u'lláh made His public announcement that He was the Promised One Whom the Báb had foretold. — Ed.

FAMILY BACKGROUND

Around 1856 the little city of Yazd, in the very heart of Persia, was carrying on its lackluster existence, its people mostly ignorant and poverty-stricken, unaware of what was going on in the rest of the world. But there was something special stirring. There was hushed talk of the Báb, the new Prophet Who had been martyred, and of the Message He had brought. There were people secretly spreading the news at the risk of their lives.

A youth, a mere adolescent only fourteen years old, contacted these people, heard the Message, and wholeheartedly accepted it. His name was Shaykh-‘Alí. He was the oldest son of the well-to-do and highly respected Ḥájí ‘Abdu’r-Raḥím Yazdí. The family was alarmed. The boy was in grave danger. His allegiance could bring ruin to the whole family. But Shaykh-‘Alí was ablaze.

[^] Shaykh-‘Alí, who was born in 1842, was the first member of the Yazdí family to accept the religion of the Báb in 1856. He was the uncle of ‘Alí Yazdí, for whom ‘Alí was named at his birth by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. — Ed. [^] Ḥájí ‘Abdu’r-Raḥm Yazdí (also spelled ‘Abdu’l-Raḥím Yazdí, as the name is pronounced) was the grandfather of ‘Alí Yazdí. — Ed.

To distract him from the Bábí Faith, his father sent him to Kirmán with enough goods to start a business. The shop was successful, but soon rumors floated back that he was meeting with the Bábís. ‘Abdu’r-Raḥím went to Kirmán and brought him home.

In Yazd Shaykh-‘Alí again attended the secret meetings. He took aid to the beleaguered Bábís who were imprisoned there. One night he was so late returning home that his mother, terribly worried, waited for him at the door. When he came in, without saying a word, she slapped him. Without a word, he took her hand and kissed it tenderly and looked at her with deep love.

Throughout this fearsome time, despite the calumnies and persecutions by the enemies of the Bábís, Shaykh-‘Alí displayed a kindness and fearlessness unbelievable in one so young. As time passed, his character, his behavior, the change in his life, his attitude, and his sacrifice, all the things he did, gradually won over the whole family who, one by one, joined the Faith.

[^] As a young man, Shaykh-‘Alí went to ‘Akká to serve Bahá'u'lláh. He performed many missions. In Khartoum, where he went to take messages from Bahá'u'lláh to Mírzá Ḥaydar-‘Alí and other believers who had been imprisoned, he contracted a disease and died in the Sudan. — Ed.

They began having meetings in the Yazdí home, in secret of course. Teachers came from other cities, each with new tales. Some came from Baghdád, and they spoke of Bahá'u'lláh. Later others came from Adrianople, where Bahá'u'lláh was banished, and then from 'Akká, where He was exiled until the end of His life.

My father, Muḥammad Yazdí, who, like his brother Shaykh-'Alí, had joined the Faith when he was fourteen, left for the Holy Land with a friend, a donkey, lots of faith, and very little money. they set out to see Bahá'u'lláh and traveled over steep, rugged mountains and across hot, arid plains until they arrived in 'Akká around 1870. Other members of the family came later.

Ḥájí 'Abdu'r-Raḥím, my grandfather, left Yazd after he had been tortured, beaten, and bastinadoed. The story of this "precious soul, " as the Master called him, his arrival in the prison city of 'Akká, and his life there, is told with tender compassion by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in "Memorials of the Faithful".[[^]]

[[^]] See 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Memorials of the Faithful", trans. Marzieh Gail (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971), 64-66.

Each member of the Yazdí family arrived and was given an assignment by Bahá'u'lláh. He always gave each person who came to see Him a special mission, sending him out to serve the Faith in various places. Ḥájí Muḥammad (my father) and two other believers were sent to Egypt.

FIRST BAHÁ'Í SETTLERS IN EGYPT

My father and his friends worked hard in Egypt for many years and eventually built up a prosperous business. Through them, all young men, the Faith was first established in Alexandria, Cairo, and Port Sa'id. In each of these cities the believers formed a well knit society where they not only joined in Bahá'í activities but in social and business life as well. They married almost exclusively within their own community, so that many of them became related to one another. Thus they were a family in fact, as well as in practice.

They were not free to teach the Faith openly because of the suspicion and accusations of the authorities in Turkey and Palestine, which carried over into predominantly Muslim Egypt. They had a few Egyptian and Syrian believers, but the great majority were Persian. The Bahá'ís formed a Persian colony as well, maintaining Persian customs, language, and Bahá'í convictions. They were on good terms with the larger population around them and were generally liked and respected.

My family and I lived in Alexandria, or, more exactly, in a suburb of Alexandria called Ramleh, a beautiful and peaceful residential district stretched right along the sandy beaches of the blue Mediterranean. There were gardens on one side; on the south side, east of the Nile, were the Nubian plains. The best section, owned by Europeans and rich Egyptians, was next to the shore.

There was another section, a middle-class area, which had some villas, but mostly there were older, once luxurious houses. It was in two of the latter that we successively made our home. The house where I was born and grew to the age of four or five had a separate guest house and a large garden surrounded by a wall of rough-hewn stone covered with broken glass on top to secure both privacy and safety. Within the garden there were many rose bushes and many lime, sweet lemon, orange, and pomegranate trees. In the summer a tropical scent hung in the air.

Later we moved to another house. It, too, had a large garden with a huge wall and an annex where we cultivated eggplants, green peppers, dill, melons, corn, sugar cane, and the like. In the main garden we had mulberry trees, green lawns, and a bed of violets. Jasmine grew over the veranda, a large open porch adjoining the garden. Here our family often had breakfast, with Father presiding at the samovar and dispensing hot tea in hot glasses to the adults and hot water with a drop of tea floating on top to the children.

Before breakfast, however, we chanted our morning prayers and heard Father tell wonderful stories about his experiences with Bahá'u'lláh and the Master or read the latest communications from the Holy Land.

One of the stories was about Bahá'u'lláh and a money belt. Bahá'u'lláh had sent my father and his friends to Egypt as pioneer settlers. When they arrived in Egypt, they did not have much money. Money was not in abundance among the Bahá'ís. For one thing, it was taken away from them; they were persecuted. For example, my grandfather was a rich man when he became a Bábí, but all he had was seized. Not having money did not stop my father from pioneering. He and the others got notions — spools of thread, needles, thimbles, ribbons — and they went to the European homes up and down the Mediterranean coast from Alexandria to Ramleh, like peddlers. People invited them in and bought those things. My father became very popular. He looked quite different from the Egyptians; he was very fair complexioned, very white and pink. He was honest, as were all the Bahá'ís. People were not used to that. And so the pioneers became famous. People told their friends about them, and gradually they prospered. They would meet at the end of the day and pool their resources, put their money together, and work in a truly Bahá'í fashion.

Before too long they had enough capital to open a store. They called themselves the “Societe Rúháníyyih,” meaning “Spiritual Company”, and the store, the “Grand Bazar Persian.” It became bigger and bigger until it was the largest and best department store in all of Egypt. The Faith had prospered also, in spite of the restrictions, and was well established in Alexandria, Cairo, and Port Sa'íd.

My father and his friends wanted to show their gratitude to Bahá'u'lláh and also help the Faith. So they took a wide belt, a money belt, stuffed it with gold, large gold coins, and sent it to Bahá'u'lláh. A tablet was received from Bahá'u'lláh expressing His appreciation.

In the 1880s there was a rebellion. An Egyptian general by the name of Aḥmad

Arabi Páshá arose, and he wanted to destroy all the Europeans in Alexandria. There were riots. Of course, the wealth was in the hands of the Europeans, and they were robbed. All the populace wanted was an excuse to pillage, steal, and destroy.

The French and British sent their fleets to Alexandria and threatened a bombardment if the pillage did not stop. All the European people left in ships. My father and the friends took the last ship out of the harbor before the actual bombardment.

When the rebellion was over, about seven months later, they came back and went to the site of their business. There was nothing there but rubble and ashes — absolutely nothing. They were desperate. People asked when they would open a new store, and they had no answer. Their credit had been good, but now they needed some down payment, and they did not have it.

One day they were meeting together, consulting and praying, when unexpectedly the postman came with a card — a notice of a package at the post office. They went to the post office, got the package, took it home, and opened it. There was the belt they had sent to Bahá'u'lláh, untouched and full of gold. They reestablished credit and started their business again. It flourished more than ever.

MEMORIES OF ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ IN RAMLEH

Stories like the one my father told about Bahá'u'lláh and the money belt left an indelible impression on me. It was in such a setting, when I was a child, that I heard the news of the coming of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to Ramleh. I heard that suddenly, without warning, He had left Haifa on a steamer bound for Europe, that He had stopped in Port Sa’íd because of ill health and fatigue, and that He was coming to Alexandria. Then the news came that “He was coming to “Ramleh!” To Ramleh where we lived! What a miracle! There was intense joy within my family, within the Bahá’í community, within me. Of all the places in the world, He happened to choose Ramleh as His headquarters for His trips to Europe and America during the period between 1910 and 1913.

I was a schoolboy, eleven years old. Excitement swirled through my mind, and along with it curiosity and anticipation. All I knew about Him was what I had heard my father tell us. No one in the family that I knew except Father and Grandfather had seen Him. There were no pictures then, except an early one taken when He was a young man in Adrianople. He was a prisoner beyond our reach — a legendary and heroic Figure.

[^] This grandfather was Ḥájí ‘Alí Manshadi, ‘Alí’s maternal grandfather, who lived in a guest house on the family’s property in Ramleh and who was very close to ‘Alí. — Ed.

Now He was free. And He was coming to Ramleh. What would He be like? How would it feel to be in the presence of the Center of the Covenant, the son and successor of a Manifestation of God? I knew that He was not only a holy man, but a divine man, that although He was not a Manifestation, still He had a divine station. Much went on in my mind as I prepared for His arrival. But I kept it all to myself.

The Bahá'í Faith was an integral part of me, not something superimposed. In Ramleh I was surrounded by it. I lived it. I believed it. I cherished its spiritual concepts as well as its goals and its principles. I realized its fundamental importance, its necessity for the world today. Yet my studies at the French school I attended had opened other areas to my mind. The logical and systematic approach and the discoveries and applications of science fascinated me. I believed they provided us with effective tools for the implementation of the teachings of the Faith. I prayed that I might be guided to play some role in this endeavor. The feeling came over me that my contact with 'Abdu'l-Bahá would provide the inspiration and the impetus to a move in this direction.

Hence, I waited eagerly for the day, which came in October 1910.

A crowd gathered in front of the Hotel Victoria for His arrival. Suddenly there was a hush, a stillness, and I knew that He had come. I looked. There He was! Then He walked through the crowd — slowly, majestically, smiling radiantly as He greeted the bowed heads on each side. I could only get a vague impression of Him, as I could not get near Him. The sound of the wind and the surf from the nearby shore drowned out His voice so that I could hardly hear Him. Nevertheless, I went away happy.

A few days later a villa was rented for Him and His family not far from the Hotel Victoria. It was in the best residential section, next to the beautiful Mediterranean and the beaches. Like all the villas in that area, it has a garden with flowers and flowering shrubs. It was there that 'Abdu'l-Bahá chose to receive a great variety of notables, public figures, clerics, aristocrats, and writers — as well as poor despairing people.

(* photograph *)

I went there often, sometimes on the way home from school, sometimes on weekends. I spent most of my time outside of school in His garden. I would wait to get a glimpse of Him as He came out for His customary walk or conversed with pilgrims from faraway places. To hear His vibrant and melodious voice ringing in the open air and to see Him exhilarated me and gave me hope. Quite often He came to me and smiled and talked. There was a radiance about Him, an almost unlimited kindness and love that shone from Him. Seeing Him infused me with a feeling of goodness. I felt humble and at the same time exceedingly happy.

I also had many opportunities to see the Master (Sarkár-i-Áqá as we called Him) at meetings and festive occasions. I especially remember the first time He

came to our house to address a large gathering of believers. The friends were all gathered, talking happily, waiting. All of a sudden there was quiet. I could hear from the outside the voice of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá — very resonant, very beautiful — before He entered the room. Then He swept in, His robe flowing.

He was straight as an arrow. His head was thrown back. His silver-gray hair fell in waves to His shoulders. His beard was white. His eyes were keen; His forehead, broad. He wore a white turban around an ivory felt cap. He looked at everyone, smiled, and welcomed all with “Khushámádíd. Khushámádíd” (“Welcome. Welcome”).

I had been taught that in the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá I should sit or stand with my hands crossed in front of me and look down. I was so anxious to see Him that I found myself looking up furtively now and then.

He spoke often and on many subjects. For nine months it seemed like paradise. Then He left us and, after three months in Cairo, sailed for Europe. How dismal everything became. But there was school, and there were duties. Exciting news reached us from Europe, and there were memories.

[^] ‘Abdu’l-Bahá moved to Cairo early May 1911 and left for Europe on 11 August 1911. — Ed.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá came back four months later. Paradise returned. He spoke to me on several occasions. He always called me “Shaykh-‘Alí”, the name He Himself had given me, after my uncle Shaykh-‘Alí, who was the first member of the family to join the Faith. When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke to me, I would look into His eyes — blue, smiling, and full of love.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ’S DEPARTURE FOR AMERICA

Again ‘Abdu’l-Bahá left us, this time for America. I will never forget the scene of His departure, as He came out of the house and turned to wave His last farewell to His disconsolate family looking down from the veranda above. They were greatly concerned about His safety and well-being. He was sixty-eight years old. He had suffered many hardships and gone through severe trials. He had been in prison for forty years of His life. And now He was undertaking a journey to a far-off country utterly different from any to which He was accustomed.

[^] ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sailed from Alexandria for New York on the SS “Cedric” on 25 March 1912. — Ed.

But ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had made up His mind. And when He made up His mind, nothing could change Him. He strode out of the garden gate without looking back. He walked for several blocks near the shore to take the electric train to Alexandria, where He would board the ship that was to take Him to New York. He was followed by about thirty believers who walked silently behind Him. I was one of them.

What ‘Abdu’l-Bahá accomplished during His nine-month stay in America is now history. From there He went on to Europe and then back to Ramleh on 17 July 1913 to stay until the following December. After that visit He left for Haifa, never to return.

[^] See Shoghi Effendi, “God Passes By”, 281-83, 287-90; Balyuzi, “‘Abdu’l-Bahá”, 171-316; Allen L. Ward, “239 Days: ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Journey in America” (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1979); and Marion C. Yazdí, “Youth in the Vanguard: Memoirs and Letters Collected by the “First Bahá’í Student at Berkeley and at Stanford University”, foreword by ‘Alí M. Yazdí (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982), chapters. 2 and 8.

That was the first chapter of my experience with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, when I was a child between the ages of eleven and fourteen.

(* photographs *)

MEMORIES OF ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ IN HAIFA

Destiny had it, however, that in 1914 my family would move to Beirut, not far to the north of Haifa. This opened the second chapter in which I was privileged to be in the presence of the Master — but only on special occasions.

[^] When ‘Alí was fifteen years old, he had qualified for the French baccalaureate, the equivalent of a degree for two years of an American university. But when the war broke out between France and Turkey, the French Brothers’ schools were closed. He hoped the war would end soon, but it went on relentlessly. Then when Germany invaded France, he knew the French schools would not reopen soon. In the fall of 1915 his parents moved to Damascus with his younger brothers and sister, but he applied at the Syrian Protestant College (soon to be known as the American University of Beirut). Since he had never studied English, he decided to enter as a sophomore instead of a junior, although it meant losing another year. — Ed.

My first occasion to visit ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Haifa was in the summer of 1917. World War I had been raging for about three years. The Allied blockade had completely cut off Syria and the Holy Land from the outside world — no mail, no trade, no telegrams, no travelers. The Turks were ruling the area with an iron hand. The military commander, Jamál Páshá, was ruthless, cruel, unreasonable, and inefficient. He destroyed all in his way. Everybody was under suspicion. Many of the aristocratic families of Syria found their sons hanged in the public square. There was a shortage of everything. Nothing could be obtained from abroad. There were no means to produce anything. Even food such as wheat was scarce. Whatever little grain was raised was largely sequestered by the Turkish army without payment to the farmers, and what was left of the crops was decimated by swarms of locusts. Famine was rampant. Poverty was everywhere.

Such was the situation when I came to spend my summer vacation with my uncle, Mírzá Ḥusayn Yazdí, in his home on Mt. Carmel. It was a memorable summer nevertheless. For over two months I lived on God's holy mountain.

Every evening before sunset I had the bounty of being with 'Abdu'l-Bahá. I would join other believers gathered in front of the Master's house. The entrance had an iron gate, and inside the gate there was a garden. We would sit on the wall or parapet on each side of the wide gravel walk that led from the garden gate to the steps and wait for Him. He would come out with a cheerful and warm greeting, welcome all, and take His seat on the platform at the head of the wide stairs. The sun would be going down, and I remember it being very quiet in Haifa.

Sometimes he sat relaxed and did not speak at all. But usually He spoke in His commanding voice, looking straight ahead as if speaking to posterity. He talked on Bahá'u'lláh, on Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, and on significant events in the history of the Faith. He told stories sprinkled with humor. And often He spoke of the believers around the world and of their progress in spreading the Faith. Then He became wistful. For three years He had heard little or nothing from anywhere. The isolation and constraint weighed heavily on Him.

Now and then He addressed individuals in the audience, asking them about their families, their work, their problems. Then He offered advice and help. Toward the end He asked one of the believers to chant verses from the Mathnaví of Bahá'u'lláh. When the chanting ended, the meeting was over. 'Abdu'l-Bahá arose and entered the house. Dusk descended over Haifa.

There were frequent trips to the Holy Shrine of the Báb. 'Abdu'l-Bahá rode an old horse-drawn, bus-like vehicle up the mountain. The rest of us walked the rocky road, past the Persian (or Eastern) Pilgrim House to the terrace overlooking the city of Haifa and the blue bay beyond. In the distance lay the hazy outline of 'Akká. We gathered on the terrace until 'Abdu'l-Bahá appeared and entered the Shrine. He generally chanted the Tablet of Visitation, but sometimes He asked Shoghi Effendi to chant it. When it was over and the believers started to come out, He stood at the door with a vial of rose water and put a little in each one's hand.

[^] The Pilgrim House referred to is located on Mt. Carmel near the Shrine of the Báb. — Ed.

I remember following Him as he walked among the pines, past the Holy Shrine on Mt. Carmel, deeply absorbed in thought, while the setting sun came down into the Mediterranean Sea.

There were also trips, though less frequent, to 'Akká and Bahjí to visit the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh.

There were times that summer when 'Abdu'l-Bahá went in the horse-drawn carriage to Tiberias and the biblical Sea of Galilee. His purpose on these trips was to oversee the grain crops which, under His supervision, had been planted by

the believers in the Jordan Valley. It was hot, and He was tired, but nevertheless He did not hesitate to go. I could “see” how hard it was for Him. I could also see His foresight in planting these large crops, long before the need arose for them. He was looking ahead, as He always did. When famine overtook the area, there was rescue for the hungry and the poor. The Master had plenty of grain stored in the ancient pits that the Romans had prepared a long time before. He distributed it to everyone who needed it, Bahá’í, and non-Bahá’í alike.

When the British arrived later, they also did not have enough provision; an officer came and talked to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá about the situation. When asked for His advice, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá replied, “I have grain.”

“But, Master, for the British Army?”

“I have grain — for the British Army,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá responded. He was later made a Knight of the British Empire for His services in relief of distress and famine.[^] [^] See Balyuzi “‘Abdu’l-Bahá”, 443-44 for an account of the knight-ing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on 17 April 1920.

Another concern of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s that summer was Jamál Páshá, who, as I mentioned before, was ruthless. He was supposed to cross the Sinai Desert and the Suez Canal, then drive the British out of Egypt. He never got there. But what he did was destroy the whole country over which he passed.

Jamál Páshá had heard charges from the Covenant-breakers that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was against the Turkish state. He was suspicious and made plans to execute Him. The Master met with him on at least two occasions. Commissions were sent to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to investigate His activities.[^] [^] See Shoghi Effendi, “God Passes By”, 304, and Balyuzi, “‘Abdu’l-Bahá”, 412-14, for an account of Jamál Páshá.

I would sometimes go into ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s garden and talk with Ismá’il Áqá. He was the gardener, an old man whom ‘Abdu’l-Bahá loved. I would sit with him in his room there and talk. I happened to go to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s garden one day. Everyone was quiet, and I asked why.

They said, “There is a commission of inquiry up in the Master’s room.” I listened, and I could hear His clear, commanding voice through the open window right above, talking to the Turkish commission with dignity, as if He were the investigator and they the culprit. Although the Master was humble in many ways, He never really bowed to anyone; He was proud in His nobility. Through sensing His confidence, I acquired confidence and faith that He would be spared.

During these difficult and dangerous days He took time to write the momentous Tablets of the Divine Plan, sometimes in Haifa, mostly in ‘Akká, thus conferring upon the American Bahá’í community its world mission.[^]

[^] ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote the Tablets of the Divine Plan, which included fourteen letters addressed to the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada, in 1916 and 1917. These letters, or tablets, constitute ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s charter, or master

plan, for the promulgation of the Faith throughout the world. See ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “Tablets of the Divine “Plan: Revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to the North American Bahá’ís”, rev. ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1977).

I was impressed that summer by the German colony, descendants of the Germans who had come to Haifa in 1844 expecting the return of Christ. As I looked down from the Shrine of the Báb on Mt. Carmel, I could see the straight, steep path, a succession of flights of stone-and-masonry steps, that were in line with the main street of the German colony. Their main avenue looked straight up at the Shrine of the Báb on Mt. Carmel. On their houses were inscriptions from the Bible.[^]

[^] The German colony, known as the Society of the Temple, or Templers, had cordial relations with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Who utilized their doctors and called upon others to assist in business transactions pertaining to acquiring land on Mt. Carmel. About twenty-five of the homes of the Templers had religious inscriptions carved into the stone over their doorways. One house, adjacent to a spot where Bahá’u’lláh once pitched His tent, has the inscription “Der Herr ist nahe 1871” (“God is nigh 1871”). — Ed.

There were also memorable little details such as eating at the table with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He ate very simply, but He insisted on others having the proper amount of food. Quite often He would come behind the guests and talk to them. He came behind me and said, “Why aren’t you eating?” I was shy; I was hungry, but I did not dare eat. “Why aren’t you eating, Shaykh-‘Alí?” He would repeat. He would then put a large helping of rice on my plate. I had to eat it!

One day I was walking back from the business section of town. All the streets were winding there, and the roads were dirt roads, not macadam. I was going around a curved street up the hill toward the house of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. As I turned the corner, there He was. I saw ‘Abdu’l-Bahá with two of the believers behind Him, walking down the hill. As was the custom, I stepped to one side and bowed. He stopped and walked over to me, right in front of me, and He looked me straight in the eyes. That is something I will never forget — looking at ‘Abdu’l-Bahá face to face. (*photograph*)

How to describe Him? I cannot do so adequately; I can only give a few brush-strokes, hoping that together they may form a rough sketch of the Master.

Imagine a strongly built man with a bearing at once majestic and genial. Snowy white hair and flowing aba. Broad forehead, a strong intellect, unswerving will, wondrous blue eyes that could look into your soul or melt into infinite tenderness and reassurance. A face, now calm and meditative, mirroring the very essence of peace, now radiant and full of life. A man of contrasts, He was dominant, and yet He was humble. He was strong, and yet He was tender. He was very loving and affectionate, and yet He could be very stern. He was intensely human, keenly alive to the joys and sorrows of this life. There was no one who felt more acutely that He did the sufferings of humanity.

He had a great sense of humor. I will share with you a few stories from here and there, which I heard from others. One time, when He was in Paris, I believe, some British journalists came to interview Him, and He answered their questions in English. They were surprised and said, “Your English pronunciation is very good.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá smiled and paced back and forth. (Quite often He walked back and forth as He talked—even in His public speeches.) “Oh yes, “ He said, and then He recited a few words such as “hippopotamus” and “rhinoceros”. “Yes, I speak “difficult” English for you!”

Another time He was in Palo Alto. This story was told to Marion, my wife, by her favorite professor of English at Stanford, Samuel Swayze Seward. Dr. Seward said he asked ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at dinner, after he had spoken at Stanford University, “Who are the people most responsive to your teachings?” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá replied, “The Persians.” “Who are the least responsive?” “The Turks.” “What about the Americans?”

“Well — the Americans never want to stay on the same streetcar very long. They always want to transfer. But when they come to the Bahá’í Cause, they are firm and strong.”[[^]]

[[^]] See Marion Carpenter [Yazdí’s] personal interview with Seward, 14 February 1924, in Yazdí, “Youth in the Vanguard”, 118-19, 167.

Once Harlan Ober, one of the early believers, was asked by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to go to India. Harlan had traveled all over the world for the Faith, but he didn’t feel too keen about going to India at that time. Of course, he said nothing, and he was perfectly willing to obey. A few days later ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, “Harlan, you are going to America; you are going to the United States.”

Harlan said, “But Master, I thought I was going to India.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá answered, “So did Columbus!”

To return to my story: Summer vacation was almost over, and I went to see my family in Damascus before going back to Beirut to graduate from the Syrian Protestant College in May of 1918. After graduation I returned to Damascus. The Allies ruled the seas. A ship stood in the Beirut harbor; I could see it as I left. Bombardment was expected at any time.

THE END OF WORLD WAR I

The war dragged on and on. There was nothing to do in Damascus. My father had a small store, and I would help him with it. There was very little business. I got a book and learned German just by reading and talking with the soldiers who came to our store. I used to meet with the German soldiers. I was trying

to do something with my time, and I thought I could learn the language and eventually study at the Technische Hochschule in Berlin.

We lived on a terraced hillside above the city in an area called “muhájirín”, meaning “immigrants.” It was so named because there was a group of Turkish citizens who had emigrated there from European Turkey when the Greeks had occupied their land. They preserved their own habits, costumes, and language. It was a nice section, and I could look down over all of Damascus, all the plain, then up at the mountains in the background.

Every day we walked downtown because the streetcars were not running; they did not have any coal or fuel to produce power. (The trains were running on wood. I had the experience myself of climbing the Lebanese mountains in a train powered by wood, and it was not exactly rewarding.) We had to walk “up the hill at night. However, it was very pleasant, because Damascus, as my father told us, was a little like Persia. It was still like the old, old country. The walls were made of pressed mud and straw, and the wood was not finished wood but just peeled trees put up instead of lumber. There were beautiful orchards, and when I walked, I could see all those trees laden with fruits. The weather was nice. I actually enjoyed my stay there. So we went up and down, counting the days, not knowing when the war would end.

One evening after sunset we had finished dinner and were up on the little veranda when we heard a loud noise like an explosion — cannon shots. We looked out ahead and saw a big fire. Then there were more explosions and more noise. We realized that the British were bombarding the military section of Damascus. At last the British had come. We had been hoping for deliverance from the Turkish yoke.

That was the beginning of the British occupation. Instead of the Turkish army’s crossing the Suez Canal, the British had come and conquered Jerusalem. Before this time we had had no news. All we heard was fabricated by the Turkish authorities. This came as a complete surprise. What would happen to us, we did not know, but somehow we were not afraid. After awhile, the bombardment stopped; we went to bed and went to sleep.

Before dawn we awoke to strange noises. First we heard the Turkish and German soldiers filing away, right in front of our door, on a little tortuous path, and escaping up the hill to the north. Then we heard a funny, squeaky noise, which we found out later was from the “Tin Lizzies,” the little Model-T Fords, going up the hill. We had never heard sounds like that before. That morning I was bold enough to go out and walk downtown to see what was going on. There were Australian cavalymen with their big hats, riding up the street eating tomatoes. I had never seen anybody eating tomatoes as fruit before. I waved at them, and they look at me suspiciously. Then I spoke English, and they brightened up, responded, and were very friendly.

Our great concern was Haifa. What had happened there? For a time we had no word. We were very anxious. But soon the news came: General Allenby and

the British had occupied Haifa. There is a long story behind that. In short, the British Intelligence Service, headed by Major Tudor-Pole, one who was very friendly to the Bahá'ís, if not a Bahá'í himself, had uncovered a message telling that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was in danger, that Jamál Páshá had vowed to crucify Him, and destroy the Holy Tombs and all the sacred buildings of the Bahá'í Faith before the British came. Immediately, the wires were busy between London and Cairo as the British arrived in Palestine. Forces were set in motion to take the town by surprise. General Allenby was to come around the promontory, around Mt. Carmel and into Haifa, and flank the Bahá'í properties. The British at once put a cordon of soldiers around the house of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and took steps to protect Him. All the generals and officers came to pay their respects to Him. And thus He was saved. We learned this fact later; we did not know at the time how close we came to losing 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

The doors to the outside world were opened up. Now we could see ahead. We, too, were free and could make plans for the rest of our lives. There was much thinking and counting of pennies. I had been working for the Public Works Department of the new Arab government. I had studied civil engineering and was hired as a draftsman. I was able to work for several months and save a little money to help me get started, but it was not enough. News got to 'Abdu'l-Bahá through my uncle, Mírzá Ḥusayn, and the Master offered me one hundred pounds, which in those days was worth about five hundred dollars.[^] That made it possible for me to go. I did not waste any time. In the fall of 1919 I went to Haifa to say farewell to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. I was on my way to Europe (Switzerland, then Germany) for my graduate studies. I was twenty years old.

[^] This gift from 'Abdu'l-Bahá was gratefully returned to Shoghi Effendi, the new Guardian, soon after 'Alí was employed by the Southern Pacific Railroad Company on completion of his graduate studies at the University of California at Berkeley. — Ed.

This was to be my last experience with 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

FAREWELL TO THE MASTER

I was in Haifa for two or three days. Just before I left, 'Abdu'l-Bahá called me to His room. I was there alone with Him; the only other person was Shoghi Effendi, who was in and out. The Master asked me to sit down, and He directed Shoghi Effendi to bring me some tea. As He spoke to me, He gave me instructions on how to live. He told me He had hopes for me. He said, “You are a good boy, Shaykh-‘Alí.”

Then Shoghi Effendi brought the tea. They serve tea in glasses there, boiling hot. I took the tea, and I tried to drink it, but I could not. 'Abdu'l-Bahá said, “Drink. Drink your tea.” So I had to drink it. It didn't matter!

At the very end He gave me His blessing. Then He stood up and beckoned me

to Him. I went to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and He put His arms around me and kissed me on both cheeks.

I never saw Him again. but the tablets, or letters, that the beloved Master revealed on my behalf followed me to Europe and America. One of the tablets, in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s own handwriting, introduced me to the German Bahá’ís: “O ye friends of God! His honor Shaykh-‘Alí is one of the firm friends; exercise toward him love and kindness.” To the Bahá’ís in the United States ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sent two introductions. In the fall of 1920 He wrote to Roy C. Wilhelm: His honor, Shaykh-‘Alí, is going to America. He is a youth of good manners and temperament and is of an accepted family at the Threshold of God. Therefore, you will do your best to help him in managing his affairs.

On 8 October 1920 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote, in His own hand, to William H. Randall: Jináb-i-Shaykh-‘Alí, the distinguished son of Ḥájí Áqá Muḥammad, is a sensible and cultured young man of good behavior. He will be going to America to complete the courses of sciences and arts which he has been studying in Berlin. Probably he will remain about two years in America. Thou shouldst treat him with the utmost consideration and kindness.

On 9 December ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote again, this time to Mrs. Ruth W. Randall, regarding the selection of a suitable university for me to attend. Finally, in late 1920 or early 1921, I was greatly strengthened and inspired as I began my life in the United States to receive a tablet from the Master inscribed to “The spiritual son, Shaykh-‘Alí, upon him be the Glory of God, the All-Glorious:” O Shaykh-‘Alí who are dear to the spiritually minded. Render thanks unto God that in this blessed age thou hast stepped forth into the world of existence, been nursed from the breast of the love of God and hast been reared in the bosom of divine guidance, and that now with the permission of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and by His leave thou art proceeding to America to study the sciences. Thy father is here with us at the Holy Threshold, and we both pray on thy behalf and beseech for thee the assistance and favor of the Blessed Perfection. And upon thee be His glory.[^]

[^] ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to “the friends of God throughout Germany,” 17 December 1919, translated by Shoghi Effendi, translation approved by the Universal House of Justice; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to Roy C. Wilhelm, undated, translated by ‘Azíz’u’lláh S. Bahádúr, 6 September 1920 (since the original Persian has not been found, the Universal House of Justice has not been able to verify the translation); ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to William Randall, 9 December 1920, translation approved by the Universal House of Justice; and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to Shaykh ‘Alí Yazdí, undated, translation approved by the Universal House of Justice, in Marion Carpenter Yazdí Papers. A year after receiving this tablet, when I was enrolled at the University of California at Berkeley, the news of His ascension reached me.

REFLECTION

Looking back, as I have so many, many times in my life, I can see that the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá marked the end of an era. He was a man passionately devoted to a single goal: to spread the teachings of His Father, Bahá’u’lláh; to bring people together; to establish the brotherhood of man on earth in “fact as well as in principle. He had spent His whole life in the midst of severe and uninterrupted persecution and imprisonment, yet He had not flinched. With His brilliant mind, His indomitable courage, and His unbounded devotion He had directed the spread of the Faith to the peoples of Europe and America, while at the same time protecting this Faith in the country of its origin from concentrated and merciless attack. Nothing stopped Him — not His enemies, the military, disaster, dangers, the Turkish authorities, the difficulties that met His efforts — nothing ever deflected Him from His purpose. And yet it was not easy, for despite His high station, He was also intensely human, and He suffered a great deal.

He was often very happy and always asked the Bahá’ís to be happy: “Be happy! Be happy!” That was His counsel to the believers, and he set the example. But there were times when I would see Him with the burdens of the whole world upon His shoulders.

There is something we should never forget, something I learned from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: His life was not really His life alone; it was the life of every one of us, an example to every one of us. If we always keep His life in mind, I think it will help us find our way.

We have a new generation of Bahá’ís coming in from the outside and a new generation growing up from the inside. They know what they have read in the books. But do they know that this is a living Faith? Do they truly realize that the Manifestation of God has actually appeared and initiated a new era? Do they know that people have lived and worked and died for the Cause? Are they fully aware that the Bahá’í Faith is not just something extraneous, something beautiful, logical, just, and fair? Do they know that it is part and parcel of our blood, our very life?

I cannot help wondering what the world would be like if people flocked to the teachings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and followed His example, if men and women all over the world arose in ever-increasing numbers and made His way of life their own — ten thousand, ten million, a hundred million people — each pursuing His goal with zest and confidence. What would the world be like? And what would the individual’s life be like, transformed by the example of our Master?

PART TWO — Recollections of Shoghi Effendi

‘Alí M. Yazdí

It has been a blessing for me beyond measure to have personally known Shoghi

Effendi, the extraordinary grandson of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, during the years of our youth, before he became the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith, as well as after.

Shoghi Effendi was very close to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The Master always treated him a little differently from other people, even when he was a child. He was devoted to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. From his earliest childhood, from the very beginning of his life, he was dedicated to the Faith.

MEMORIES OF SHOGHI EFFENDI IN RAMLEH

I first met Shoghi Effendi in 1910 when he came to Ramleh, shortly after the Master came. He was thirteen, and I was eleven. I had heard about him but had never seen him before. Now, in Ramleh, he went to the same school I did: the French Brothers’ School. We slowly started to get acquainted; you know how children are. Then we got to know each other better. I would see him at ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s house, and gradually we became friends. Even as a child he was always dignified, but he was also friendly. He was always full of zest — always energetic and eager, always full of life.

The first thing of importance that happened during his stay in Ramleh proved to be a shattering experience. When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá planned to go to the United States, He wanted to take Shoghi Effendi with Him, along with a few other believers. Shoghi Effendi was in seventh heaven. He had heard so much about America, and he longed to be with the Master as He traveled throughout North America and gave the Message. He looked forward with great anticipation to the experience.

The day before ‘Abdu’l-Bahá left, Shoghi Effendi came to see me and asked, “Shaykh-‘Alí, “ — he almost always called me Shaykh-‘Alí — “do you want to go to the ship with me and see my cabin?”

I said, “Surely!” So, with some other believers, we took the electric train to Alexandria and then to the harbor. Before us was the Cedric, a White Star Liner.

It was a beautiful ship, one of two that plied regularly between Alexandria and New York, and stopped only at Naples. Shoghi Effendi and I went on the boat, and he took me upstairs and showed me his stateroom, the dining room, and everything on the ship. He was extremely happy, and so was I very happy for him. I made him promise to write to me when he got to America, and he said he would.

The next day, 25 March 1912, was the day of departure. Earlier I explained how ‘Abdu’l-Bahá walked silently to the train and how he went to Alexandria and took the ship.[^] Shoghi Effendi went with Him. In Naples there were physical examinations; eyes were tested, for no one could enter the United States with trachoma. The Italian doctors said that Shoghi Effendi had this infection. He

had never had trouble with his eyes. There were no signs of trachoma, yet they insisted he must leave the ship. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was very sad. He said, “They think we are Turks.” Italy was still at war with Turkey. Through this, and perhaps other machinations, Shoghi Effendi was sent back. When he returned to Ramleh, the doctors said firmly that he did not have any problem whatever. Shoghi Effendi was heartbroken. He wanted to be with his beloved Master, and he wanted to be in America and see the teachings of the Faith he loved spread all over the country. That dream was denied him. I saw how he lost weight and actually became sick because he was depressed. It took quite a while before he regained his health.[^]

[^] See pp. 20, 22. — Ed. [^] Shoghi Effendi’s wife, Rúḥíyyih Rabbání, explains in “The Priceless Pearl” ([London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1969], 19) that Dr. Amin Faríd, one of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s secretaries, was party to the machinations that prevented Shoghi Effendi from accompanying the Master to North America. — Ed.

After ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s travels in the United States and Europe, He returned to Ramleh for five months. Shoghi Effendi, who had been in Haifa part of that time, came to be with Him. On 2 December 1913 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá left Alexandria to return to the Holy Land. I did not see Shoghi Effendi again for almost three years.

MEMORIES OF SHOGHI EFFENDI IN BEIRUT

At the Syrian Protestant College, Shoghi Effendi and I were both students. There was a group of Bahá’í students who met to discuss the teachings. That was our extracurricular activity and our time for comradeship. Shoghi Effendi was one of the group, and so was I. These students were mostly Persians who were marooned there. They could not get home because of World War I and the blockade of the coast; during the summers they went to Haifa and spent their vacations on Mt. Carmel. There was an anteroom to the Shrine of the Báb that was assigned to them, and they spent very happy summers there. When I was in Haifa, I greatly enjoyed being with Shoghi Effendi and with them.

At the college Shoghi Effendi was always jolly, optimistic, and hopeful. He had a wonderful personality. All of a sudden he would burst forth with loud laughter. Or sometimes a smile would break on his face. He had a very small mouth; beautiful, expressive eyes; and very regular, handsome features. He was bouncy. He just bounced.

At college we were in the same dormitory. Shoghi Effendi’s room was right across the hall from mine. I have stated that there was a shortage of everything, including food, which led to famine. I remember being downtown and seeing women dying on the streets. No one paid any attention to them. I did not go back again; I preferred staying on campus, for it was terrible to see those

people dying when no one was able to do anything for them. Luckily, because of President Bliss of the college, even though America was in the war, rations were allowed to come to the college. The main reason for this was that the Syrian Protestant College trained doctors, engineers, and so on — professionals who were useful to the Turkish authorities. We were not actually deprived of anything, but we had not luxuries either.

From time to time Shoghi Effendi would have things sent from Haifa. He would receive good, brown, home-baked bread; honey; dried fruits; and nuts. the fruits from Haifa and Lebanon were absolutely delicious. Shoghi Effendi would invite me to his room, and the two of us would sit together, feasting, talking, and enjoying ourselves. He was always very generous.

We would converse on many subjects. Actually, our relationship was now of two young men, two personal friends, as we were beginning our life on our own, and we had much to share. We often talked to each other about the future. His vision was always of the Faith spreading all over the world and of everybody serving the Cause; these were his only ambitions. We shared a common goal of personal service to the Faith. He himself did not know he was going to be the Guardian. Even at Oxford, where I later visited him, he never gave any indication that he knew he was to be the Guardian.[^]

[^] ‘Abdu’l-Bahá appointed Shoghi Effendi the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith in His Will and Testament, but Shoghi Effendi did not learn about the appointment until his grandfather passed away in 1921. — Ed.

Though Shoghi Effendi was of holy lineage, and I was a member of an old pioneer family in the Faith, we forgot about that and were just two young men being very happy together.[^] We both had logical minds, and we both liked to discuss things analytically. We also enjoyed sharing our creativity and vision. These were aspects of our relationship then and later.

[^] A pioneer in the Bahá’í context is one who leaves his or her home to serve the Bahá’í Faith in another country. — Ed.

MEMORIES OF SHOGHI EFFENDI IN HAIFA

In 1917 I spent the summer vacation in the home of my uncle, Mírzá Ḥusayn Yazdí, on Mt. Carmel. The trip from Beirut to Haifa was something I will never forget. I had never been on a horse before, and yet I had to go from Beirut down the coast by horseback. There were other Persian students riding too, but they all knew how to ride.

Despite my inexperience, I managed fine. The horse was not exactly an Arabian steed, but we trotted along until just before Tyre. I remembered something about the land of Tyre in the Bible. At that point we had to go over steep mountains. There was only hard rock, and we were high up looking down, way

down, onto the waves of the Mediterranean beating against the rocks — I not knowing what I was doing. But I trusted the horse, and I prayed all along the way.

There were compensations. We traveled by day and by night. It was strange to pass through the fields right along the seashore as people had done in Biblical days, and to see women working through the night, gathering vegetables. The fresh summer night air made it a delightful experience. Best of all, we made it safely to ‘Akká.

There were compensations. We traveled by day and by night. It was ‘Akká is an old city paved with stones. By the sea-shore there was an old fortress made of stone, brick, and masonry blocks. It was built out over the ocean with holes in the walls through which guns could be fired. The waves would beat against the walls. There I looked down and could see the house where I was to stay that night. Later I heard about all the things that had happened in that same house in the history of the Faith.[^]

[^] It is not known to which house ‘Alí is referring. — Ed. It was exciting. I was always quite a romantic child and youth; I liked to let my imagination run away. That night I slept on the floor, exhausted.

The next day we went to Haifa and were in the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. During the summer I was frequently in the company of Shoghi Effendi. He was part of the group — not just with me; we were all together, enjoying one another’s company.

COMMUNICATIONS AFTER WORLD WAR I

Shoghi Effendi graduated from the Syrian Protestant College the same year I did.[^] He went back to Haifa; I went to Damascus. Later on, when the way was opened for communication and travel, Shoghi Effendi was exceedingly happy. His diary and his letters at that time are a truly remarkable record of what the Bahá’ís were doing, as well as of his own feelings. They show how excited he was, after the long spell of silence and isolation, to see the mail flooding in from all over the world — from the United States, from Germany, from France, India, Burma. Letters came with news of the Faith; telegrams expressed the joy of the believers that they could again communicate with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Shoghi Effendi was thrilled by all of these greetings as his letter of 26 December 1918 shows:

[^] Shoghi Effendi and ‘Alí Yazdí graduated on 15 May 1918. — Ed. Every day carries with it its fresh tidings and happy news. From the Far-Eastern land, the center of news has shifted today to Persia, in the Middle East, and thence to the extreme West in the U.S. of America. Many telegrams have arrived, and each contributed its share of consolation and solace. From the dear land of Persia, the doors of which are still practically closed, in a material sense to the face of the

Beloved, this bit of good news is wired: “Good news made all extremely happy; friends well safe and united; desiring only Thy will.” From France a similar cable is at hand expressing joy at the receipt of the Beloved’s cable and conveying love to all. From Boston and Chicago alike the news arrive[s] that the friends rejoice at ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s deliverance, supplicate Tablets, and even beg the Master to come to their shores. We shall wait to see the response of the Beloved. Early this morning I was ushered to His Holy presence, and there facing the Beloved on the sofa, enwrapped in His mantle with masses of supplications scattered around Him, I sat, pen in my hand, putting down the words that flowed from His lips. A Tablet was revealed to Miss Juliet Thompson of New York....[[^]]

[[^]] Juliet Thompson (d. 1956) was an American portrait artist who learned of the Faith from May Bolles [Maxwell] when she was studying art in Paris. Her vivid recollections of her meetings with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá are recorded in “The Diary of Juliet Thompson” (Los Angeles: Kalimát, 1983). — Ed.

Another Tablet was addressed to Aḥmad Yazdí [an uncle of ‘Alí Yazdí] of Port Sa‘íd....[[^]]

[[^]] Diary-letter, Shoghi Effendi to Aḥmad Sohrab, 26 December 1918, copy in Marion Yazdí Papers (hereafter cited as Yazdí Papers).

Now the friends were again free to teach the Faith. My father received permission to come to Haifa. Shoghi Effendi described the visit in letter of 13 February 1919: The call of the Beloved bidding the friends of God to arise...has resounded throughout all regions....The city of Damascus...has awakened to the spirit of the new age. The prominent figure among its friends [Ḥájí Muḥammad Yazdí, the father of ‘Alí Yazdí] has attained to the court of the Beloved’s presence and has brought with him...good news...This morning he was ushered to the Beloved’s presence and the first thing he did after seizing the hem of the Beloved’s garment and repeatedly kissing it, was to offer a supplication from an erudite Arab, a native of Medina, an influential and responsible personage in Damascus, an authority in the Muslim creed who had been attracted and moved to write to the Beloved....In short the news of our beloved and dear visitor, Áqá Ḥájí Muḥammad Yazdí was refreshing, numerous, and significant. With a smile and a nod of appreciation the Beloved greeted every bit of news and was glad to know that a reaction to the passiveness and inactivity of the past had set in. “Deliver the Divine message with prudence and wisdom” was the Beloved’s recommendation to the teachers who are serving in these regions. Having said this, He arose, again welcomed our guest...leaving us with our friend whose source of news and glad tidings seemed inexhaustible.[[^]]

[[^]] Diary-letter, Shoghi Effendi to Aflat, 13 February 1919, copy in Yazdí Papers.

Two days later Shoghi Effendi wrote enthusiastically that the pilgrims were arriving as before the war: Tonight, around the Master’s table for supper sat Messrs. Aḥmad Yazdí, Ḥájí Muḥammad Yazdí, Mírzá Ḥusayn Yazdí [‘Alí Yazdí’s uncle, father, and a second uncle, respectively], Áqá Muḥammad Taqí, three of the

Parsee friends of ‘Adasíyyih who have recently arrived, Badí’ Effendi, and my father. The Master was tired and did not converse long. That night the recollection of those prewar banquets wherein believers from every part would gather came to my mind, for new faces I saw, and delicious dishes were placed.... Major Tudor-Pole due to a slight indisposition has had to postpone his departure from Cairo.... When he arrives, our joy will reach its utmost....[[^]]

[[^]] Diary letter, Shoghi Effendi to Aḥmad Sohrab, 15 February 1919, copy in Yazdí Papers. We have used house style for capitalization, spelling, and the transliteration of Persian and Arabic words.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá worked all hours. One morning Shoghi Effendi was sleeping when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá called him to get to work. This tender description was written later that day: Early this morning I was awakened by a gentle knock at my door, followed by the sweet voice of the Beloved calling me to rise from my sleep, to shake off my drowsiness, and to attend to my work.[[^]]

[[^]] Diary-letter, Shoghi Effendi to Aḥmad Sohrab, 21 February 1919, copy in Yazdí Papers. We have used house style for capitalization, spelling, and the transliteration of Persian and Arabic words.

‘You could see the Faith was Shoghi Effendi’s life; his joy was service to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He kept repeating all the time, “I am in the service of my Beloved.” He was happy in those days and intent on the future of the Faith.

But Shoghi Effendi was also aware that all the Persian students of our group were leaving, some for Persia, some for Europe, some for America. He wrote of the separations in his diary on 24 August and noted that I was coming to Haifa to say good-bye to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: This week has been, viewed from one aspect, a sad and depressing one. It has witnessed the scattering of friends who during the war and prior to it have been for years held closely and affectionately together by bonds of fellowship and common interest. The student Bahá’í group at the American University — that company of young, brilliant, active, and upright men, which has all throughout the war retained, notwithstanding its vicissitudes and blows, its cohesion, is now splitting up, its numbers mostly graduates of that university departing from that common center....Mr. ‘Alí Yazdí is just starting from Damascus to Haifa where, after meeting the Beloved, he will proceed to Berlin to engage in higher studies. Sad has been the farewell..., but the idea that these young men, enlightened and active as they are, may one day each in his own sphere of action render a service to the Cause, affords sufficient consolation for the hearts that remain behind.[[^]]

[[^]] Diary, Shoghi Effendi, 24 August 1919, copy in Yazdí Papers. We have used house style for capitalization, spelling, and the transliteration of Persian and Arabic words.

STUDIES IN GERMANY

I left Haifa by train to go to Port Sa'íd where I would take the ship to Switzerland and Germany. Shoghi Effendi came to the station in Haifa to see me off. He sat in the compartment until the train was ready to leave; then he said good-bye, and he asked me to write to him. It was the end of August 1919 — the last time I was to be in Haifa until 1928, after my marriage to Marion Carpenter when we both made the pilgrimage and were in Shoghi Effendi's presence.

There were five other young Bahá'ís, one of whom was older than the rest of us, who had been students at Beirut and were now being sent by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Stuttgart to contact the believers after the war. We all had passage on a small, old Italian boat of the Lloyd Triestino Company. The route was from Port Sa'íd to Alexandria to Venice. In Alexandria I went to the offices and arranged a transfer to a new ship, which was just ready to sail. The others followed suit. We had the most beautiful trip along the Adriatic by the Dalmatian coast, with its sunny little hamlets and islands, to Trieste. In Venice we were marooned for a couple of weeks with passport difficulties; things were not easy right after the war. I stopped for a short time in Switzerland. But the university had already begun, and I went on to Germany.

I studied for a year at the Technische Hochschule in Berlin and spent a summer in Stuttgart. It was a wonderful Bahá'í summer. There I came to know Consul and Mrs. Albert Schwarz. He died in 1931, but she served the Faith actively for many years and died much later. They were both remarkable people. They took me to their house many times. The Bahá'ís there were most kind. The southern Germans were very friendly, mild, and loving.

There was also another family with whom I became close. The head of that family, the father, was Herr Hauff. He had a factory outside the city that made photographic equipment. He was quite well-to-do. He had built a large house that was a replica of an old castle. He invited me to stay there. His family were all Bahá'ís; he was the only one who was not a believer. He offered me some of the choicest wine from his cellar and was rather shocked when I turned it down. He could not understand such a thing.

Herr Hauff and his wife had two daughters and a son. The older daughter, Johanna Hauff, was a very sweet, lovely girl, and we became good friends. When I was in Berlin, she and her father came to see me, and we went to some of the interesting places together. Later I read in "Star of the West", in 1922, that she was in Haifa at the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing.[^]

[^] See "Letters telling of the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Star of the West 12 (2 March 1922): 296-99, for two letters dated 28 November 1921 and 3 December 1921 from Johanna Hauff, at Haifa, Palestine, to her parents in Stuttgart, Germany.

Germany was a marvelous experience for me, but all of Shoghi Effendi's friends had gone, and he was left behind — until 1920. But he was happy in his work.

He was busy translating all the incoming mail in French and English into Persian and translating the tablets revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in reply to these people. He was very much occupied and extremely happy. I corresponded with him now and then.

After I arrived in Germany, I received this letter from Shoghi Effendi written 9 December 1919: My dearest ‘Alí

For a long time have I awaited your letters as I was in the dark as to your whereabouts. But now that your father has come for a few days from Damascus, I secured your address and am sending you herewith some news of the Holy Land. The Beloved is in the best of health and so are the friends and pilgrims. Your dear and devoted father is as ever warmhearted, loving, rosy-cheeked, and in full bloom. Your brother is studying at the S.P.C.[^] and all runs smoothly. I was told last night that he is growing wonderfully in height and his studies above par.

[^] ‘Alí Yazdí’s brother, ‘Abdu’l-Raḥím Yazdí (named by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for their grandfather ‘Abdu’r-Raḥím), was studying at the Syrian Protestant College, now called the American University of Beirut. Later he served for many years as the chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of North East Africa. — Ed. As to myself, the same work and the same room. So please write me and forget me not as I do not and cannot forget the dear Shaykh! Yours affectionately Shoghi

Eight days later he wrote that fifty pilgrims had arrived from many parts of the world. He enclosed a tablet revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá commending me to the believers in Germany: Dearest ‘Alí! Your letter from Stuttgart dated Nov. 27 is at hand. I exposed its contents to the Master, and I secured this Tablet for you in His own handwriting addressed to the German friends. I herewith enclose it.[^]

[^] See pages 42-43 for the text and facsimile of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s 17 December 1919 tablet concerning ‘Alí Yazdí addressed to the German Bahá’ís. — Ed. Your dear father is here, and we exchange the news of your letters to me and to him. He is well and happy. I trust you have received my letter to you dated Dec. 8, which I sent to the Technische Hochschule and in which I enclosed some diary letters of mine which I thought might interest you. We are exceedingly busy here. Some fifty pilgrims, Arabs, Kurds, Persians, Americans, Europeans, and Japanese. How we miss you and the dear Trio, Bakers & Co.; I have written them letters, and I wonder whether they have been received. Áqá Mírzá Muḥammad-Báqir Khán is on his way to Haifa and is now in India.[^]

[^] With “Bakers & Co.” Shoghi Effendi is making a play on words using the name of Áqá Mírzá Muḥammad-Báqir Khán. — Ed. Give please my love to all the brothers and sisters in Stuttgart, I am ever your brother Shoghi Most admirable Tablets have been revealed for Consul and Mrs. Schwarz, Mr. and

Mrs. Herrigel, Miss Knobloch and Pastor Hydron. Inform the recipients of the bounty bestowed upon them.[^]

[^] Shoghi [Effendi] to ‘Alí [Yazdí], 17 December 1919, Yazdí Papers. We have used house style for capitalization, spelling and the transliteration of Persian and Arabic words.

SHOGHI EFFENDI IN PARIS

The time came when Shoghi Effendi, too, would leave Haifa. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wanted him to continue his studies. However, the hard work had broken his health. The Master sent him to a sanatorium just outside of Paris to rest, undergo treatment, and recuperate.[^] He was not to open a book while he was there. His postcard, written 8 May 1920, gives some idea of what he was going through at this time:

[^] Maison d’Hydrotherapie et de Convalescence du Parc de Neuilly, 6, Boulevard du Chateau. — Ed. Dearest ‘Alí! I have not forgotten you, but do you know and realize what crisis I have passed and into what state of health I have fallen! For a month I have stayed and am still staying in this “maison de convalescence” away from Paris and its clamor in bed until noon, receiving...treatment and following the Master’s instructions not to open a book during my stay in this place. Be sure, dear friend, that your place in my heart is ever reserved and warm! I wish, when recovered, I could come to see you. But I am afraid this is not possible. Your dear father had gone to Port Sa’íd for a time when I left Haifa. The Master is in splendid health. Fourteen American pilgrims have arrived. The Holy Land is astir! Shoghi [^]

[^] Postcard, Shoghi Rabbání to ‘Alí [Yazdí], 8 May 1920, Yazdí Papers.

On 28 June 1920 Shoghi Effendi wrote that he had almost recovered and was waiting for instructions from the Master: My dear unforgettable ‘Alí! Your letter and the good news of you imparted by Ghulám-‘Alí made me wish or yearn to come to you and see you for a few days now that I am better and almost fully recovered Shoghi [^] I shall wait and see the turn of events before I decide to pass a sojourn with you in Berlin. Now that I have recovered after three-months regime, hydrotherapy, and electric treatment, I am impatient to plunge again in a valuable, profitable work, to build the structure for my future and whether I shall resume my work in Haifa or go to England for two years study — it all depends upon the Master’s will, which shall be communicated to me within a fortnight.

[^] Ghulám-‘Alí was a Persian Bahá’í druggist who came to Germany to supplies. — Ed. I have deplored the hard financial situation you are in, and I really feel with you. I have just written home and exposed your situation to the Holy Mother, and I trust something will be done to remedy the situation.[^] Dr. Mírzá has lately arrived here from Baghdád....Who knows? Perhaps we may

both come and see you for some days in Berlin! It is a long time I have received no news from home, and I am growing impatient.... President Bliss has died in America.[^] A great blow indeed to the college! I do not like Paris. People are so superficial, empty, pleasure-seeking, and frivolous. Life bores me here, and I hope I will have soon a change for the better.

[^] After World War I Germany was in ruins, reparations and pensions had to be paid, money was short, inflation was out of control, jobs — especially for students — were scarce, and the cost of living was expensive. ‘Alí had left Haifa with faith, his earnings as a draftsman, and one hundred English pounds that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had given him. High university fees and saving money for going to the United States to study irrigation engineering, as the Master had directed, left ‘Alí virtually with no funds. — Ed. [^] President Bliss was the president of the Syrian Protestant College when Shoghi Effendi and ‘Alí Yazdí attended it. — Ed. Your loving brother Shoghi [^]

[^] Shoghi [Effendi] to ‘Alí [Yazdí], 28 June 1920, Yazdí Papers.

Later in his life Shoghi Effendi went to Switzerland during the summers to climb mountains and walk a lot. He loved the outdoors and the mountains, and he needed time with nature, because all his work was desk work. But in 1920 his stay in Paris was only a stop on his way to England and Oxford University.

SHOGHI EFFENDI IN ENGLAND

Shoghi Effendi was happy with the Bahá’ís in England. He saw Dr. John Esslemont, whom he had known the previous winter in Haifa, and they struck up a great friendship.[^] Dr. Esslemont had tuberculosis. Shoghi Effendi used to go to his private sanatorium in Bournemouth; they had meals together, and they enjoyed talking.

[^] Dr. John E. Esslemont (1874-1925) heard of the Faith in England in 1914 and was instantly struck by the beauty and significance of it. He rendered many services to the Faith, distinguishing himself through his literary contributions, most notably his well-known introductory text “Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era” (5th rev. ed.[Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1980]) and through his collaboration with Shoghi Effendi. After Esslemont’s death, Shoghi Effendi appointed him a Hand of the Cause of God. — Ed.

Then he went to Oxford, and there, of course, things were different because he had to study very hard. He was working for a special certificate, not for a Master of Arts or a higher degree. He was studying special subjects — English, economics, history of religion, and so on, as described in the letter below. He was not taking required courses for an advanced degree. the best way to understand his feelings at that time is through the letters he wrote: Balliol College 5.10.20 ? Dear ‘Alí: Your letter reached me at a time I was immersed heart and soul in my manifold preparations for entrance at Balliol College, Oxford.

I am fearfully anxious and occupied, but your letter absorbed my interest and diverted it from this phase for a time. I am glad and extremely sad in receiving your letter — glad at the knowledge that at last my efforts have proved partially successful and some pecuniary help has been extended to you. I wished, dear ‘Alí, to have had enough money at my disposal to share it with you! I immediately wrote to Mrs. George and exposed the case fully. I hope you will soon and easily sail. I am so grieved at the sudden turn of events and the complications and cost of travel have only marred the brightness caused by the knowledge that some financial help has been finally extended. I really wondered and got even angry at the delay and silence following my letter which I sent home concerning you. I wonder whether you have experienced brighter developments since you wrote me your last letter. I assure you, dear friend, that if some are free from pecuniary anxieties, they are nevertheless subject to another set of various physical, intellectual, and social drawbacks and preoccupations. Do you believe me when I say that I, the grandson of the Master, have been victim of painful experiences, sometimes of bitter disappointments, and always of constant anxieties — all justified — for my immediate work and future? If you have spent of late painful and trying times, my share of these troubled hours is by no means much less and my burden much lighter. My field of study is so vast, I have to acquire, master, and digest so many facts, courses, and books — all essential, all indispensable to my future career in the Cause. The very extent of this immense field is enough to discourage, excite, and overwhelm such a young and inexperienced beginner as myself. Think of the vast field of Economics; of social conditions and problems; of the various religions of the past, their histories and their principles and their force; the acquisition of a sound and literary ability in English to be served for translation purposes; the mastery of public speaking so essential to me, all these and a dozen more — all to be sought, acquired, and digested! [^]

[^] In a question-and-answer session following a talk on 2 November 1975, when ‘Alí Yazdí was asked whether Shoghi Effendi was a public speaker, Yazdí explained that Shoghi Effendi was intensely interested in the great speakers at Oxford. However, Shoghi Effendi himself did not speak publicly on any occasion as far as he knew. Shoghi Effendi felt, perhaps, that that was not his greatest contribution. — Ed.

Prayer, faith, perseverance and effort will alone do it. Praying for your success from all my heart! Shoghi Rabbání [^]

[^] Shoghi Rabbání to ‘Alí [Yazdí], 5 October 1920, Yazdí Papers. Shoghi Effendi signed this letter “Shawqi Rabbání, “ a spelling he sometimes used before settling on “Shoghi Effendi.” See Rúhíyyih Rabbání, “The Priceless Pearl” (London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1969), 20.

MEMORIES OF SHOGHI EFFENDI AT OXFORD

In the fall of 1920 I left Germany and went to London, where I wired Shoghi Effendi to tell him I was going to the United States. He immediately telegraphed, “You don’t mean to tell me you are going to America without coming to see me.” I wrote a note, and he answered by postcard on 3 November 1920: Oxford 45 Broad St.

My dear ‘Alí. When I received your telegram, I wondered to what address I should forward my answer. Now that I have been informed I hasten to tell you how glad I would be to meet you, shake hands with you, and perform the ceremony of “muṣáfiḥih”. [^] I am bound with my lectures and courses and feel sometimes depressed. I shall be your host when you come to see me. I don’t know how you have managed for your traveling expenses.

[^] The Arabic form of greeting, later adopted by the Persians, of embracing and touching the right cheeks and then the left cheeks. In his postcard Shoghi Effendi wrote “muṣáfiḥih” in Arabic. — Ed. On Thursday and Friday a brilliant debating society and an address by Bryce will be delivered. [^]

[^] James Bryce (1838-1922) was a British jurist, statesman, and historian. — Ed.

Shoghi [^] { .sig }

[^] Postcard, Shoghi [Effendi] to ‘Alí Yazdí, 3 November 1920, Yazdí Papers.

With this invitation I went to Oxford and stayed in Shoghi Effendi’s rooms and spent a couple of nights there. He took me all over the university, showing me the sights and unburdening his soul. There, again, we were two young men, one of holy lineage and the other from a family that had long been in the service of the Faith. We talked about the future of the Faith and our part in it and of the opportunities that lay ahead. He told me, as he had written me, that he wanted to go to Haifa to serve the Faith. He never discussed his career in more detail — only that he hoped to be of service to the Cause in whatever way the Master would say. It was always, “What the Master would say.” Of course, translation alone would not have been enough for him. He never gave any indication that he expected to become the Guardian.

He was intensely interested in the outstanding speakers at Oxford and especially those in Oxford Union, where their great statesmen had received their training. He wanted me to attend the debates with him and to hear the address by Bryce. He hoped we could discuss the talks together. After my visit I received a card from him dated 6 November 1920, which bore the crest of the Oxford Union Society: Dear ‘Alí: I have received your card, and I knew well that it would be difficult for you to come here again. I did miss you profoundly last night and the night before, particularly as I firmly anticipated that we would both enjoy and comment upon the procedures of the debate and lecture. I trust, however, that you will not be detained a long time and that you will have not any difficulties

to surmount. I have written to Grandmother about you reminding her of your difficult and strained situation yet your patience and will. I hope that some help might issue by the time you prepare yourself for entrance into college. My best and tenderest wishes be with you always. May we meet again under better circumstances.[^]

[^] Postcard, Shoghi Rabbání to ‘Alí Yazdí, 6 November 1920, Yazdí Papers. We have used house style for capitalization, spelling, and the transliteration of Persian and Arabic words.

A few days later, shortly before I sailed, I received this further evidence of Shoghi Effendi’s tender heart, loving kindness, and generosity, at a time when his own problems were almost overwhelming: Oxford 10.11.20

Dear ‘Alí: I really never realized how minute, intense, and urgent were your financial needs. I hasten, therefore, to send you all that I can for the present — namely, five English pounds banknote, which I enclose with this letter. I hope you are staying at Miss Herrick’s. She has some rooms to offer to friends who come to London. If you are not there, do apply. She is so kind. My studies and preoccupations are exerting an effect upon me almost as distressing as your own difficulties. Believe me it is so. I don’t know what I shall do at the end. Yours lovingly Shoghi For Heaven’s sake think not of sending me back anything. I flatly refuse and decline. Let your mind be at rest.[^]

[^] Shoghi Rabbání to ‘Alí [Yazdí], 10 November 1920, Yazdí Papers. Shoghi Effendi signed this letter “Shawqi”, a spelling he sometimes used. See Rabbání, “Priceless Pearl”, 20.

SHOGHI EFFENDI

THE GUARDIAN OF THE CAUSE OF GOD

It was two years later, when I was in Berkeley, California, that I heard the news of the ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. It is strange, but we never thought that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would die. Though He Himself alluded to His passing, our minds had not, could not, accept the possibility. Before the will of the Master was opened, I wrote to my father expressing my grief, my affection, and my concern for Shoghi Effendi. It was the beloved young Guardian himself who answered my letter.

You have read in the history books how the unexpected news of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s passing almost broke Shoghi Effendi’s spirit. Coming suddenly, without any warning, it was too much for him. He actually had to leave Haifa and put the affairs of the Faith in the hands of the Greatest Holy Leaf.[^] He had to recover from the shock and regain his strength.

[^] The Greatest Holy Leaf was Bahíyyih Khánun, the daughter of Bahá’u’lláh and the sister of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. She was in charge of the Bahá’í Faith until

Shoghi Effendi recovered from the shock of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s passing and his own appointment as Guardian of the Cause of God. — Ed.

His answer to my letter to my father, which he wrote on 23 January 1922, gives you some idea of how he felt at the time: My dearest brother: The touching letter you had written to your dear father has been such a relief and comfort to me and to those who have perused it. In the midst of our sorrows, one ray of hope gives us the solace and peace that the world cannot give — namely, His sure and repeated promise that He will send souls that shall gloriously promote His Cause after Him. My dear brother! The pure faith, the ardor and the services of your father, I am sure, as well as your own noble wish, will make of you an efficient and energetic servant in His Cause, and I assure you of my prayers at His hallowed Shrine, that whatever you do, whatever you acquire may in the near future be wholly and directly put to the service of His Cause. I am too overwhelmed to write more fully, but I assure you of my prayers for you, my attachment to you, and my fervent hope that we shall both cooperate to the very last, in our servitude at His Holy Threshold. The bereaved Holy Leaves remember you with tenderness and hope and wish you a bright future wherever you may be.[^]

[^] The Holy Leaves were the female members of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s family. — Ed. Yours in His Love and Service Shoghi

An envelope was enclosed on which he had written: “Rose petals that have been laid upon His Sacred Threshold.”[^]

[^] Shoghi [Effendi] to ‘Alí M. Yazdí, 23 January 1922, Yazdí Papers. We have used house style for capitalization, spelling, and the transliteration of Persian and Arabic words.

I did not see Shoghi Effendi again until 1928, when my wife and I went to visit him. He had been the Guardian for seven years. Our friendship continued throughout the years of the Guardianship. Shoghi Effendi encouraged me to write him. But I was reluctant to do this, for he always responded warmly, and I felt I must spare him. I did write under special circumstances, or with good news, and have his exceptional letters of those later times. But that is part of another story.

As to his Guardianship, you all know about Shoghi Effendi’s splendid achievements. How did his contributions affect the Bahá’ís at the time? Out of the whole world this one man undertook tremendous tasks in every phase of the Faith. There were translations of important books that he did almost single-handedly. Before his translations we had very few good ones. His first translation was “The Hidden Words”. Mrs. Corinne True in 1922 brought back from Haifa a copy of the manuscript. A college girl, a guest of Mrs. True’s, spent thrilling hours copying by hand the new translation to take home to California. This young woman was later to become my wife.[^]

[^] Marion Carpenter [Yazdí], on summer vacation from the University of

California, Berkeley, with her brother, Howard, was an overnight guest office Mrs. True. That night she copied the entire manuscript of “The Hidden Words” by hand. “The Hidden Words of Bahá’u’lláh” (London: Bahá’í Assembly) was first published in 1923. — Ed.

I can recall the day in Berkeley when we heard that Nabíl’s “The “Dawn-Breakers” had been translated by Shoghi Effendi.[^] We could hardly wait to receive a copy of this enormous book. We immediately established a class to study it. The beautiful English translation gives the flavor of the Persian original. Through reading “The Dawn-Breakers”, the believers in America could, for the first time, get the feeling of what the early Bábís had gone through and the experiences they had had.

[^] See Nabíl-i-A’zam [Muḥammad-i-Zarandí], “The Dawn-Breakers: “Nabíl’s Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá’í Revelation”, trans. and ed. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1932).

There was also “Bahá’í Administration”, the Guardian’s letters to the American National Spiritual Assembly and to the American Bahá’í community, from January 1922 to October 1932. Through such messages the Guardian built an administrative institution block by block. Then there appeared “The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh” in 1938, in which he established the Bahá’í Administrative Order as “the nucleus and pattern of the world civilization” emerging under Bahá’u’lláh. His own comprehensive history of the Faith, “God Passes By”, appeared in 1944. Before it was published, an eager Berkeley believer got the galley sheets from Wilmette and read all night.[^]

[^] See Shoghi Effendi, “Bahá’í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932 7th rev. ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1974); Shoghi Effendi, “The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh: Selected Letters”, 2d ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1974); and Shoghi Effendi, “God Passes By”, new ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1974). Marion Holley [Hofman] was the “eager believer” who received the galleys of “God Passes By” from the Bahá’í Publishing Committee’s office in Wilmette.

Among his other achievements the Guardian completed the outer shell of the Shrine of the Báb. He extended and beautified the gardens on Mt. Carmel and at Bahjí. He carried on a vast correspondence with believers all over the world — in Persian, in English, and in French. He had no staff for carrying out major projects. Nobody went to Haifa to work with him when he needed help so greatly — perhaps because they thought that he was indestructible. Actually, they did not really realize how much he needed assistance. In the early days of the Faith in America and elsewhere, everything was happy-go-lucky and informal. Each one did what he liked. When the Guardian came, he established the administrative order. It was not easy. Some people did not like the idea; they were not used to it. Until the friends could function properly, he could not use them. When that time came, he appointed the Hands of the Cause of God. It was through that institution and through the International

Bahá'í Council (the precursor of the Universal House of Justice) that he was able to get the help he so desperately needed.[^]

[^] The Hands of the Cause of God were stewards of the Faith appointed by Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi to assist in the Faith's unity and development. At the time of Shoghi Effendi's passing there were twenty-seven Hands of the Cause alive. These individuals guided and directed the affairs of the Cause until the Universal House of Justice was elected in 1963. The International Bahá'í Council was established in 1951 under the direction of Shoghi Effendi. The International Council was, in the words of Shoghi Effendi, "the most significant milestone in evolution of Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in course of last thirty years" ("Messages to the Bahá'í World: 1950-1957", rev. ed. [Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971],7).

Of course, his marriage to Rúhíyyih Khánum was a great blessing; that was really the greatest thing that happened to him during his Guardianship.[^] She meant so much to him and helped him tremendously.

[^] Nee Mary Maxwell, from Montreal, Canada. Shoghi Effendi appointed her a Hand of the Cause of God in 1952. — Ed.

But despite the lack of help until later in his life, Shoghi Effendi completed vast teaching plans and innumerable projects. It was incredible how much work he could turn out through his determination to serve the Cause. He actually broke his health, and that is one reason for his untimely death.

Shoghi Effendi left us a majestic legacy. When I think of that brilliant, devoted, and purposeful Guardian and his unbelievable accomplishments, I am awed by the bounties bestowed upon us.

Nevertheless, my mind keeps going back to the lively, handsome, happy, young man I knew in my youth, who looked ahead eagerly to the future. He could not have known, in those days, how unique, how momentous would be his destined role in the triumph of our beloved Cause.