

... description: 1908, Alma and Fanny Pilgrimage author: Alma Knobloch,
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title: Alma and Fanny Pilgrimage notes: ...

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Alma Knobloch, Fanny Knobloch

1908

Pilgrimage for a Bahá'í means making a special trip to the Holy Land, Haifa and 'Akká Israel, to the World Center of the Bahá'í Faith. Today when one goes on Pilgrimage, one spends nine days visiting all the burial sites called shrines and are considered very holy and sacred places. At present, one can visit the Tomb of Bahá'u'lláh, enshrined in the Mansion of Bahjí in 'Akká. One also visits the Prison in 'Akká, where Bahá'u'lláh spent two years living in a cell with many other members of His family. One also visits the beautifully domed Shrine of the Báb, which illumines the slopes of Mt. Carmel, the Holy Mountain of God. The administrative buildings that house the Universal House of Justice, the supreme administrative body of the Bahá'ís of the world and The International Teaching Center are also found within an Arc on the side of that Holy Mountain. Another very special part of a Bahá'í Pilgrimage is a visit to the Archives Building which houses many wonderful artifacts and belongings of the Holy Family and the original Writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as well as the Guardian of the Faith, Shoghi Effendi. It is a sacred duty of all Bahá'ís to, if at all possible, visit these sites and make a pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime.

At the turn of the century, pilgrimages were obviously quite different than they are today. Without the modern conveniences of air travel and bus rides, the trip was extremely more cumbersome. Many accounts of early pilgrimages tell of exhausting and sometimes dangerous voyages on steamships, followed by days of further travel over dusty roads. In order to go to 'Akká to meet the Master, one had to first obtain permission to go, which is not unlike today. In those days and for many years hence, the pilgrims were met by some Persian friends and escorted to the home of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, where they could stay. They would usually first meet with members of the Holy Family, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's wife or daughters, who would prepare them for their visit.

Today one must make his or her own way to Haifa and there are staff members who meet with large groups of pilgrims for an orientation after one has registered. The groups that went on such visits in those days were quite small and had a very intimate audience with 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself. They developed relationships with members of The Holy Family that often lasted a lifetime. 'Abdu'l-Bahá took great care to nurture and instruct these early believers so that they would

return to Europe and America and spread the teachings in a way that would further the aims of His Father's Cause. Today the Universal House of Justice members meet with the whole group of pilgrims at one great meeting, but make an effort to personally greet each pilgrim with a handshake. They also have speakers who give talks on pertinent topics, in hopes that they will inspire the friends to go home and spread the Word. Another big difference is that most of the buildings one now visits were not in existence at that time. Then the pilgrims mostly went to 'Akká where 'Abdu'l-Bahá was still a prisoner and was not allowed to go far from the city. Pilgrims actually stayed in the same home where the Holy Family lived and to some extent suffered the same hardships. Today we have beautiful buildings to visit and to comfort the travelers. In either case, today or in years past, the spiritual benefits of such an experience far out-weigh any sacrifices one would encounter to complete such an endeavor.

From November 7 to 13, 1908 Fanny Knobloch along with her sister, Alma Knobloch and a good friend, Ida A. Finch (who was the daughter of the Phelps family that had been a part of their Bahá'í circle of friends from the beginning) were blessed to take part in one of these early pilgrimages. Originally their tickets had been intended for Pauline and Joseph, but because of the passing of their mother Amalie in 1908, the Hannens decided to give the tickets to Fanny and Mrs. Finch and postpone their visit for another year. Alma was already living in Germany at the time, so Fanny met her in Naples along the way. They also felt that it might help Alma to ease the pain of losing her mother, if she could spend some time with her sister Fanny and of course be with her Beloved Master.

The following account which Alma wrote later in her life has wonderful expressions of her feelings of expectation about meeting 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Holy Family. It includes some of her preparations and a glimpse of the trip from Germany to 'Akká as well as many heartwarming stories of their times with 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the women of the Holy family.

While at Leipzig a letter coming from Fanny was received telling that our mother had passed out [died] & to meet her at Naples & join her and Mrs. Finch to visit the Beloved at 'Akká. I immediately started for Stuttgart, saw as many of the believers as possible, many petitions for 'Abdu'l-Bahá [were given], & in two days was on my way. Herr Eckstein & his sister accompanied me as far as Zurich & safely placed me on the train for Rome where I spent several most delightful days, reaching Naples a day before Fanny arrived. Here we stayed four days, taking several delightful trips of interest, of which Pompeii was one.

At last the time came to leave for Alexandria where we were met by believers who showed us so much affection and kindness simply because we were on our way to the Beloved Master. In two days our steamer left for Haifa, what joy and expectation, would we find all we expected? Our expectations were high – Perfections in a human body – His surroundings reflecting His Divinity, His followers super humans giving forth the Light & spreading the Fragrances of god's love. His family purified from all dust of the world, beautiful flowers in

the Garden of the Abhá Kingdom. A heavenly Home of peace in a prison town, ‘Akká inhabited by only State prisoners of a very low life, surrounded by a high wall & soldiers guarding the entrance to the city gate. All these & many more, all of which had left their deep traces.

Reaching Haifa we were met by believers who showed the same loving kindness & giving forth the same beautiful heavenly light as the believers in Alexandria. We were made comfortable at the Hotel Carmel & later called for to visit some of the Daughters of the Master & His wife, the Holy Mother who was staying in Haifa at the time. Meeting these ladies showed clearly that true refinement consisted in purity of soul & heavenly sentiments & these ladies possessed all these qualities & more too. Real nobility & refinement, cleansed & of pure gold. The Holy Mother gave us helpful instructions & truly deserves the name “Brilliant Leaf”. One of her sayings is: “Be like a leaf that is blown by the breezes.” We met two of the Daughters, Zia & Rúhá & they fully came up to our expectations.

At last we were to start for ‘Akká. – One of the members of the Family had gone to ‘Akká to tell of our arrival & the Master sent for us. The Holy Mother & an old Persian believer who makes herself useful in the capacity of nurse & Rúhá’s little girl accompanied us on this most memorable visit. The Holy Mother telling us of her trip from Persia & her first trip to ‘Akká & being accepted in the Holy Family, & the wish of Bahá’u’lláh that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá should marry her & he finally consented being the wish of His Father.

This trip was very interesting, reaching ‘Akká just at sunset. Shortly before reaching the City Gate, a caravan of camel drivers with a number of camels had settled down for the night & the men in their accustomed religious devotions a most picturesque sight. We had passed several trails of camels leaving for the desert packed with merchandise, disappearing between date palms. Reaching the city Gate of ‘Akká, which [was] guarded by soldiers, & asked something of the men who were driving our carriage. They answered in reply, “‘Abbás Effendi” – & and we drove through the gate into that ancient city. Such narrow streets – the men stood close up to the calls & crevices of the old buildings as our carriage drove through & entered into the court yard of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s house, a large two story square building, porticoes all around the second story where the ladies apartments are.

We ascended the long flight of steps & were greeted by Munavvar, the youngest daughter of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá who took us to our rooms & saw that we were comfortable. Supper was served & we were told that the Master regretted not to be present at our arrival, but had an appointment with the Governor & would see us in the morning. Everything seemed most interesting & marvelous, but the keynote of our expectations was the meeting of our Beloved; would He come up to our expectations? – We had heard such wondrous & marvelous things about Him & we had placed Him high, very high on a pedestal! We arose very early & Fanny said, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá it is said walks on the roof, perhaps we will see Him.

At last we were called to the living room where the family gather in the morning, & tea is served, & prayers chanted, a heaven of peace, birds flying in & out, children of the Holy Household permitted to come in at will & leave when they felt inclined – We suddenly heard quick decided firm steps, it gave a thrill to all present – He entered the room & it was as though a darkened place had been suddenly flooded with light & perfuming fresh air – we three pilgrims arose – Fanny was the first to rush up & the most harmonious clear voice rang through the place, “ Welcome! Welcome! How are you! Are you well? Did you have a pleasant journey?” Mrs. Finch then stepped up & extended her hand & received equally the same hearty welcome. Then my turn, advancing & ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gave the warm hearty, “Welcome! Welcome!” One felt an overwhelming power of Majesty & dignity – love & authoritiveness. There was no trace of doubt but that we had found our Lord & for Him we were ready at all times to give up life, soul & spirit – we had reached our goal – Heaven.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá took His accustomed seat in the corner having asked us to be seated. [I] well remember watching who would take the seat next to Him. Mrs. Finch sat down, then Fanny & I next to her – ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s personality seemed much too powerful, a search light beyond this world, & in whose presence one felt secure & sublimely happy, never had we thought [it could] be possible to attain to such real pure happiness, neither here or hereafter. It was all far beyond our highest expectations, it was beyond our comprehension & understanding. Our visions became clearer, our thoughts brighter, our feeling keener – our sense of happiness greater & we had but one thought – to become empty vessels as to be able to receive a large portion of this Divine Out-pouring. We lifted into another world, receiving boundless blessings, at the same time realizing our responsibility.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá inquired about our journey, & health & if we had rested well – inquired about the different believers & our assemblies. Fanny was asked about the Washington Assembly & the different believers. He was pleased to hear that they were in perfect harmony & unity & received the loving greetings with real pleasure. Then He inquired about the believers in Seattle. Mrs. Finch said not all were in unity, some were. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá replied when you return they will be in perfect unity. Then He asked me how are the believers in Stuttgart? Are they united? –My reply was that they were in perfect unity & love, they send their heartfelt love & greetings. They were very grateful for the Teachings & always had a good attendance at the weekly meetings, many group meetings were held in which the friends translate the Holy Utterances of Bahá’u’lláh & ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Also [there is] a group weekly meeting at Esslingen & Zuffenhausen.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá said He had made a program for every hour of our stay. The ladies of the Household sat along one side of the room on the divan. An old venerable Persian member of the family chanted prayers & an old believer from Persia sat on the floor & served the tea from a large samovar. Birds [were] flying in through the windows & hopping on the floor picking up the grains of sugar. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had some Tablets which He looked over & corrected.

We returned to our rooms & breakfast was served in the dining room. A Chinese served the meals. The ladies called on us & assured us of their love & delight that we had come that great distance, the Holy Mother expressed her great regret not to be able to talk in our language & told of some of their experiences during their prison life in 'Akká. Monavvar translated.

Dinner was served at noon courses. Mírzá Munír Zein translated for the Master. All showed the highest respect & veneration. Fanny sat at the head of the table & Mrs. Finch on the other side of me. The Persians that took meals with us were His secretaries & distinguished guests. In the afternoon some of the old Persian believers called, telling of their life in the service of Bahá'u'lláh. During our stay there were several groups, mostly of 9 venerable old teachers who had served Bahá'u'lláh & who gave brilliant accounts of their experiences, how they had been put in prison – tortured, their eyes sparkling with mirth & telling jokes to one another, also showing the marks on their necks- remnants of torture or from the heavy iron chains that were placed around their necks & ankles with large heavy iron balls. Oftimes three were chained, placed together. Whenever one moved the other was made uncomfortable when lying down or trying to sleep each turn of the body of one or the other discomfort the other.

In the morning when we met in the living room, 'Abdu'l-Bahá greeted us & inquired of our health. He told me that He had revealed a Tablet for me. I gave Him a photograph of Herr & Frau von K, she had asked me to beg 'Abdu'l-Bahá that she might be able to meet people who would become attracted to the Cause. 'Abdu'l-Bahá replied that in this age it will be the women that will establish the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. He told us that in some Religions it is taught that after death we enter into a place of purification called Purgatory where souls are cleansed so as to make spiritual advancements. So too our stay here is a preparatory place, & He hopes each day we will make progress, as a gardener cares for his plants, or the doctor looks after his patients & is pleased to see the progress & advancement, as a loving father who cares for his family & looks after their welfare & is happy to see their development, so He too hopes we will make daily progress & attain spiritual capacity & make wonderful progress. This is my hope. We strained every nerve so as not to be a disappointment, knowing & fully realizing now that every thought is registered we could control our words, but had to learn to control our thoughts also.

In the morning in between the group callers, Shoghi & his little sister called, later Shoghi called alone bringing his slate & pencil. Fanny & Mrs. Finch were busy with their writings & I did my best to entertain the little visitor of about 9 years old. He would hand me his slate & say Spinglish. The letters did not please him & were quickly wiped away, numbers also – still he came and would bring his slate & hand it to me. At last [I] was able to amuse him by drawing sketches. The sun – moon – that he left on his slate, then a farm house, trees, bushes & chickens & a little boy trying to catch the chicken by the tail feathers – He placed his hand over his mouth & shook with laughter. These were not erased.

One morning while kneeling on the floor beside him Shoghi seated on the chair at the table with his slate in front of him, the door opened & there stood our Beloved Master. I quickly arose, feeling a little embarrassed. He gave a sign of pleasure & withdrew. In the morning, when we were in the living room, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá correcting some Tablets, the old Persian had chanted & we were drinking our tea. Shoghi came in & walked up to the Master & showed Him his slate & pointed to me – all smiles – he was pleased, but I did not feel as though I had done my best & felt rather ashamed at the poorly designs. There was some lesson to learn in this, which became a little clear after the Ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá & Shoghi Effendi was appointed Guardian of the Cause.

One morning Shoghi & his sister came & we were just about finished with breakfast, & not using sugar. I gave them both a piece of sugar, Shoghi refused but the little girl took it, Shoghi talked to her, but the more he talked the tighter she held it. He became very earnest & finally she slowly laid the sugar and the table. Fanny asked their nurse about it & she said they had been told not to accept anything from the Pilgrims, so Shoghi was doing as instructed. Obedience.

One meal was especially enjoyed because Munavvar & her cousin, the young man who took care of the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh, who had brought us some flowers. Munavvar translated, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá showed great pleasure & enjoyment. The cousin Afnán told of the severe times they had when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was expected to be taken away at any time. He was attending the American College at Beirut & a ship was the Master away. Every morning the first thing was to see if the ship was still there & the last thing at night. The nervous strain was very great on the family during those days. Officers coming to the house at all times & inspecting everything, trying to find [something] to show up against Him. They asked the Master to sign a paper to make Him a perpetual prisoner. He told them if there was no here after they could, but ‘Abdu’l Harmud would experience that for the real life is Eternal.

When the officials returned to Constantinople, some were killed, others fled & ‘Abdu’l Harmud was banished & the Young Turks set up the new government. It was shortly after we left ‘Akká that all the state prisoners were given freedom. This recalled my first prayer vision when coming into the Cause.

The visit to the Garden of Ridván was greatly enjoyed. The Holy Mother & Munavvar & also Dr. Faríd went with us. They took refreshments along & we had tea in the garden. What a glorious spot – such brilliancy of colors & variety of flowers & trees which gave refreshing shade & fruits. The fountain in the center with its four streams paved with white marble. A plant, on the bench marked the place. Also in the garden house the chair on which Bahá’u’lláh used to sit Casmin had flowers on it – such deep reverence was shown to everything connected with Bahá’u’lláh & the Master. The old gardener Casmin took such delight in showing us about & telling of the early days, when magnificent Mulberry trees are most significant, the two trees have grown into each other that one can scarcely see where the branch extends out, or in which one it has

grown in, making “the canopy made without hands.” And the “Temple made without hands.” We were given flowers & fruits & leaves, the ladies told many interesting accounts concerning this garden during the early days.

There is a large truck garden adjoining the Riḍván garden – acres and acres of vegetables which are used by the Master & in His extensive household & much of it is sent to Damascus to market.

Driving over to the Shrine of the Bahá’u’lláh we passed Napoleon’s Hill from where Napoleon surveyed saying, “If it were not for this hill of sand (‘Akká) I would conquer the world.” ‘Akká did not surrender & he was compelled to retreat.

Our visit to this Shrine is far beyond words. We were received in the living room of some of the relations & tea was served. Then we passed through a court garden & entered the Shrine. It would have been needless to tell us where we were – & that it was customary to remove one’s shoes – We knew we had entered sacred grounds. We knelt down near the door & supplicated as never before for all our dear ones. The Holy Mother chanted a prayer which seemed as though heaven had opened & we heard the celestial Angels lifting us from this earth, up to a higher plane – overwhelmed by this wonderful, spiritual atmosphere. A magnificent Persian rug covered the Center of the floor around which stood different colored lamps & vases which are used at special celebrations, also beautiful candle holders.

Fanny asked to return & pray for her dear ones & I returned with her, this time only venturing to the door step. These penetrating spiritual forces must certainly vivify the souls & rejuvenate the spirit. On our way there we met some of the Persian pilgrims & Ibn Abhár gave us some of his flowers he had brought from the Holy Shrine & saved some for the Master.

On our return entering the gate of ‘Akká, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was in the street & some of His disciples so it looked, stood a respectful distance. This impressive picture is indelibly inscribed upon my memory, never to be forgotten, the Majestic Royal Figure. His attitude showing His respect to the Ladies that spoke far more than words can express, and we fully appreciated having had the honor of visiting the Garden of Riḍván & the Holy Shrine with the Ladies of the Holy Household. The Ladies of the Center of the Covenant.

All three of us were overwhelmed from our afternoon’s experiences. No one spoke a word. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá excused Himself for supper, had an appointment & I for my part felt relieved & grateful, could not have stood any more of spiritual food, for we received both at table. There was a large floral center piece that had been sent to the Master. We were very quiet & soon retired, each meditating over their experiences of the day, & fully realizing that we had been placed into an entirely different environment.

The following morning in the living room when the Master greeted us [He] said, “I will reveal a Tablet for your mother through which she will be remembered

throughout eternity.”

Each day was filled – different groups of Persian teachers called & gave talks on various topics, of which we took notes. Fanny & I occupied the corner room from which was a splendid view in the garden below, from where we heard ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s marvelous clear voice, speaking to the men pilgrims in His summer house. Formerly he had a tent but the inhabitants kept borrowing them & always forgot to return them, so the believers built this little arbor like house. From the other window there was a fine view on the sea. We could hear the call for prayer from the minaret, everything so harmonious & peaceful, a quietness that was restful & pureness of air, & atmosphere, no unkind thoughts ever entered the minds of the inhabitants in this home. A Heavenly Home that has been established fulfilling the prophs [sic-maybe fulfilling the proofs]. The talks ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gave us at mealtime were answers to some of our questions without asking – some thoughts we perhaps had years ago.

One morning the Master told me that he would have my Tablet translated & I was happy. He also revealed another Tablet for me & had copies made of several Tablets to German believers, this was given me in a book form. He also told us that the believers in ‘Akká / Haifa were excited over the fact that the teacher from Germany was here. During the visit of one of the group visitors of Persian teachers, one of them asked, which one is the German teacher? Hígra ‘Alí [sic] to me said, “This one – she is so quiet.”

In one of the groups there was an exceptionally fine young Jewish man from Ḥamídan, Persia, who took great delight in telling us of his home, & the progress of the Cause there, his face aglow with the light of the Abhá Kingdom.

The visits of the ladies were heavenly, telling of their life & relating experiences, especially with the missionaries in ‘Akká, how they tried to win them over to their Faith. The Greatest Holy Leaf did not talk as much as the others. Rúḥá Khánúm said several times that she wished she could go out into the world & teach as we can.

One afternoon they dressed me up in a dress from one of the pilgrims from India. Early in the morning we heard a faint noise at our door & were told it was Shoghi’s little sister, with a dust pan & brush. She too wished to do something for the guests. Everything was done with such perfect ease, no rush & hurrying or excitement. Everything was done in most perfect manner, all without modern improvements & there were always so many guests.

Fanny several times asked if she could entertain the Ladies in any way, feeling so sorry that they were housed up & had no changes. So one afternoon Dr. Faríd came to us & said the Ladies would be pleased to have us spend a time with them in their apartment – the Greatest Holy Leaf’s room – We were delighted to accept the invitation. We were shown things of great interest -& then Dr. Faríd asked Fanny to show the ladies how they danced in America. She quietly responded. This looked so utterly out of place that I laughed very heartily. Finally one of the daughters said, “It seems to amuse you more than

it does us.” Then we were asked to sing some popular (American) songs & also German songs. Fanny also sang a Danish song & we also sang some of the colored plantation songs.

The following afternoon we were shown the pictures of Bahá'u'lláh & the Báb by the Greatest Holy Leaf & we knew by this that our visit was drawing to an end. The Photo of Bahá'u'lláh, which is framed in an exquisite filigree silver frame is a most wonderful Face. It is fascinating – one looks and looks – finding oneself gazing, one that which words fail to express – a most powerful, majestic – kingly countenance - one could not mistake an authoritative expression on One Who knew all that was, is & will be, peerless without equal. Single and alone in His own Identity.

There were several pictures of the Báb – a magnificent face, perfect in shape & lines. One who had been preordained for His mission. We lingered long & felt we were in a hallowed place & felt very humble & grateful. Every moment of our stay seemed valuable & we were trying to take in as much as it was possible to do, realizing that everything had its value & importance, something that was meant for a lesson for us. Naturally the strain was great, we were being remodeled. One day Fanny said, “Alma, we will not cry when we have to leave will we?” “No” I answered- “We will not cry. It makes the master feel badly.”

Casmin brought us flowers from the Riḍván garden, wrapped in cabbage leaves to keep them fresh. They were beautiful.

[I left out a paragraph which was crossed out.] {.ed}

The Greatest Holy Leaf gave each of us 9 pieces of candles which had been used in Bahá'u'lláh's Shrine, some of the sand in a white silk bag, & the Most Brilliant Leaf gave us a string of pearl bead prayer beads & a silk handkerchief that is used to tie over the head. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá presented each of us 5 stones with the Greatest Name. We felt intoxicated, experiencing so much love & kindness. It was almost more than we could bear, our cup was filled to overflowing.

The morning of our leaving, 9 of the women believers of ‘Akká came to bid us good-bye & said they would pray for our success & protection at the Holy Shrine & asked for our prayers. Fanny & Mrs. Finch were ready to leave – but I longed to remain – remain always, had found the real home – but we had been told that, the Master was closer to those on the front. A king is more interested in those soldiers in the fire line, than those near him. That oftentimes those far away are very close to the master & some of those who are near are very far from Him, that we were very fortunate to have been chosen to serve the Cause. Future generations will wish they could have been in our places & will esteem us.

Fanny and Mr. Faríd started down the stairs & I lingered talking to the women believers & again saying good-bye to the door which we had often passed. Both of them looked prostrated, leaning against the side of the door. I was motioned to step into the room – there was only ‘Abdu’l-Bahá & an old Persian believer

– feeling that it was the proper thing to do to remove my shoes, which I could not at that time - standing by the door gazing, letting it sink deep in my soul – not a word was spoken, but the attitude of our Beloved Master implied all.

The carriage was waiting for us. We slowly drove out, looking back - & letting the transformed prison – now a paradise & heaven – its beautiful brilliant flowers and all, leave a lasting impression. The ladies on the upper balcony almost out of sight—still feeling their presence. The carriage rolled through the gate & through the narrow streets – so narrow that the men stood up close to the houses as we drove through here & there where a group of men smoking their long tube pipes in dood [?] ways, and then through the gate of the city hall. heart pained me – we were leaving the most precious place in the world. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had told us to visit Port Sa’íd, Alexandria, Cairo, Paris, London & Stuttgart – I was to return to Stuttgart & make that a strong Center. To tell the believers in Alexandria & Cairo that the light in us was His love to them. They had begged of us to ask the Master to come & visit them, & in reply He said So God Willeth.

Sayings – ‘Akká

“We were told to spread the Glad-tidings – if we knew the value of the time we would not walk, we would run.”

“Establish unity & love among the people.”

“You may visit other cities, but first establish the Cause in Stuttgart.”

Fanny asked, “Shall Alma return to Stuttgart” Answer – “Why not? She is confirmed there. A tree when planted must take root first before it can grow – A palm tree spreads its roots well underground, then it gives shade. One tree set ablaze will ignite a whole forest.”

When asked about marrying a certain man, the Master answered, “You may if you love him, but you do not have to. Bahá’u’lláh said it is well to marry. There is no compulsion.”

Oftimes He apologized saying that we did not have the comforts, everything was so different. He hoped we were happy.

“All three of you be like a lamp in an Assembly – be firm & steadfast. The victory will be yours in the end.”

“If anyone asks you where you have been say in ‘Akká.” He gave us three grape berries at Table & laid them on our plate saying, I planted them.

Haifa

We visited the Shrine of the Báb. Two of the daughters went with us. We rode in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s carriage quite some way, then we walked up the rough slope of Mt. Carmel on sharp small stones. After reaching the Shrine it well repaid

us. The view over the sea & ‘Akká is most inspiring. Also the splendid view of the German Colony, the main street running a direct line to the water edge from the Shrine & a well built cemented walk built for the Prince Fredrick who never came there. The light reflecting on the water perhaps is the cause that the city, ‘Akká looks like a white city.

Long we lingered at this Holy Spot –Supplicating, walking about, & the Persian man & his wife showed us the building and served tea. Reluctantly we returned walking slowly down to the carriage. Each one [was] occupied with their thoughts –the present & future. The past has left its traces. The German colony gives proof of that, having settled there in 1868 from Stuttgart & vicinity. Hoffman & Saunders as leaders.

These two brothers had made their calculations, one by proof in the Bible & the other by mathematically, that the Lord would descend at Mt. Carmel. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, “When they settled there the German people were pious & good, but their success in their business has made them haughty & [they] have lost their sincerity in their religion.”

The houses had inscriptions above their doors, verses from the Bible. Der Herr kommt! Bereutet euch vor für Duss Herrn, and such. This well kept portion of Haifa, with its rows of trees giving shade & the neat looking houses, with lace curtains & flowers growing at their windows, was quite a contrast to the other part of Haifa, dirty, narrow streets. No sanitary observances. Dr. Farid told us that the sun shine acts as a disinfectant. It was embarrassing to walk along the streets & the stores were small & dark.

We were invited to dinner at the home of one of the daughters, & spent an afternoon in the Persian Colony. Our visit had come to an end, far surpassed our highest expectation in every way. Our only thoughts that troubled us was would we be able to show our gratitude as we should! Will we be strong enough to carry out what is expected of us – much we received, & much will be expected.

The steamer we took for Port Sa’íd was a Turkish ship, but an English mail steamer, with many European tourists, some of them having taken the trip several times, wishing to land to visit Jerusalem, but unfavorable weather prevented them from landing, which they had expected to do at Jaffa. Passing Jaffa & watching the row boats coming to get the mail, the steamer had anchored , it recalled our experience on the steamer going to Haifa. There were several Pastors and Rabbis on deck with their note books in hand, asking a German lady just returning from Stuttgart, if it was really true that the German early settlers had come to this country with the expectation to await the return coming of the Lord? She said this was true for her parents had settled there for that purpose. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had told us that, “The German settlers thought that the Muḥammadans would not know Christ when He returns & so they would be there to take the leading positions.” It was interesting to hear this lady tell about the early settlers & how they were disappointed that their calculations were not correct.

Later Fanny spoke to her & got more information. She asked where we were going & told, replied –"Have you no pastors in America that you take such a long tiring trip! WE said, "Oh yes, but there is no Teacher so Great in the world as 'Abbás Effendi." She begged Fanny to call on her on her return & tell her all about our Master. Her husband had a drugstore in Jaffa & there were many Germans living there, having had results & great financial success with their agricultural efforts.

Mr. Saunders having separated from Hoffman settled in Jerusalem & started a German settlement there. At the time of the World War there were seven prosperous German settlements in that part of Syria, under the Turkish Government.

We reached Port Sa'íd & were greeted & welcomed by Mírzá Aḥmad Yazdí & in his store met Taqí Manshaki, a Persian with very dark skin, who told us that some of the people say it is strange how a beautiful fair lady like Lua Getsinger could have such a black child! I told him I too had some very dark skinned, large children. [I assume she means spiritual children.] Aḥmad Yazdí spoke of Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, that he was not at all good looking, but everyone loved & esteemed him. We told him that we would be very happy to have the great pleasure to see him while in Cairo. It was marvelous to see their faces, reflecting that beautiful divine light & love. Aḥmad Yazdí & some of the believers saw that we were comfortable on the train that took us to Cairo, with some directions & messages.

We were swiftly being taken through an old fruitful country with strange customs. Everywhere there were signs of past glory & greatness. Egypt with its natural resources was not the Egypt of past centuries. Reaching Cairo, word had been sent that we were coming & received a hearty welcome. A meeting was arranged for the following afternoon & joy was great to meet our beloved Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl who came when he was told of our arrival, although he was ill in bed. He asked many questions about the Cause in America & the different believers. [He] Said he would like to answer their letters but was unable to do so. We gave the believers 'Abdu'l-Bahá's message – they all long to have Him come to Cairo. "The light in us is His love to them." It was interesting to watch their faces, as one after another brightened up & their eyes shone like stars. They comprehended—but we did not.

There was much of interest to be seen in Cairo, the Pyramids, Mosques – shops & such. Museums all showed of great culture & art & science. The different types of dress were of interest, although the ladies wore narrow veils, most from below their eyes, which at times disfigured them, one could plainly observe the exquisite beauty & handsome types of oriental women, for there were many types to be seen, magnificent clothing & jewels & elegant carriage & refined movements.

Watching the building of a new addition to the museum, large blocks of red sand stones, all drawn up by human power in unison giving a muttered sound

& pulling ropes that seemed to be used in great profusion.

We stopped on the island Medina, crossing the Mediterranean Sea to Marsails. Medina has an imposing harbor & the castle on the hill gave a fine view of the surroundings. An old Catholic Church with fine mosaic & clothes from the Apostles carefully protected in glass cases, also a piece of wood from the Cross of Jesus Christ.

The women in were not of the quiet gentle type – we witnessed several quarrels where they caught each other by the hair & flashed small daggers in each other.

WE compared notes on the steamer & recalled special things of interest. Mrs. Finch said she wanted to ask in regard to healing but it was all answered clearly without [asking]. I too had wished to ask for blessing in healing if that would be of advantage in establishing the Cause, but did not need to question this subject. It was plainly made [clear] to us that teaching the Words of Bahá'u'lláh & 'Abdu'l-Bahá was the principal thing. Their Teachings are the healing of the nations. To devote all our time to teaching the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh.

Stopped a day in Zurich but failed to see the parties we were to deliver greetings, we hastened on our journey. How delightful it was to reach Stuttgart, the city that is destined to become a great center of Light for Europe, where the Bahá'í Center is to be established.

Although the trip was only of a few months in duration, there was much to be done to again reestablish the former method that had been sanctioned by the Master & again continue to promote the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh & teach His principles & discard the newly arranged group meeting by Mrs. Stanard. This brought about my first real hardships – but knowing that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's counsels were the only way to conquest, went steady onward. He had promised us victory at the end.

Fanny only stayed about a week with me in Stuttgart then they visited Paris & London as 'Abdu'l-Bahá had requested. It was not easy to stay & my sister returned home, rich with boundless blessings. For me serious hard work was ahead of me, felt strong & courageous to combat with most anything or anyone.

Meetings were again resumed as before leaving for 'Akká, study classes were again taken up with enthusiasm & translations of the Words of Bahá'u'lláh & 'Abdu'l-Bahá in groups which meet at various home of the believers were continued. Trips to many surrounding towns were made, Esslingen, Zuffenhausen, Fellbach, Heilbronn – returning for the public meetings & the special meetings for the translation of the Teachings. Great progress was made within a short time.¹

Fanny also wrote a lengthy story about her trip to 'Akká, which included stories about her stops in Naples, Messina, Port Sa'id, Alexandria and finally 'Akká. Her version is slightly different and highlights the events and impressions that were significant to her. She wrote of three American ladies and one English

architect who were the only ones on board the Italian ship who spoke English. She told of visiting an elaborately decorated church in Messina after seeing the poor and suffering beggars outside the church and comments, “Surely here was demonstrated the lesson of what happens when religion has become a mere matter of form and the Spirit of God is lost.”³ She also told of how, because of the danger that existed for Bahá’ís in that region, the Bahá’ís who came to meet them in Alexandria had to whisper the Greatest Name to them so they would recognize them as Bahá’ís without making a scene or letting on that they were Bahá’ís. At each stop they were met by some local Bahá’ís who assisted and acted as hosts along the way. Finally, when they reached the Bay of ‘Akká she told a rather funny story of how they were assisted ashore.

Below us were large flat-bottomed boats – Orientals making much noise – men in some of the boats loading bags upon the backs of others to carry up on deck, others at the same time carrying quantities of freight down to boats below. These boats, because of rough water, were swaying and crashing against each other. Looking down upon this noisy, picturesque scene, we wondered how we, ourselves, would ever reach one of those boats. But there had been no need to worry, for suddenly a huge oriental unceremoniously grabbed us like a bag of meal, with our heads facing forward and bodies hanging, carried us down the steps between the freight carriers and dropped us into the arms of waiting boatmen. There were eleven men in the boat to row three little women with hand baggage to shore! Again, when landing at shore, we were picked up and carried in the same manner over a pile of coal. We heaved a sigh of relief when we felt the cobblestone of the road beneath our feet.²

The following are extracts from the more formal account of Alma, Mrs. Finch and Fanny’s pilgrimage called “Flowers Culled from the Rose Garden of ‘Akká”, which is available on line. The full account has about 18 pages of notes on almost everything ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and others said while they were in His presence. It was published into a little booklet upon their return and shared with fellow Bahá’ís and friends, as were many of the accounts of pilgrimages at that time. The portions which are included contain accounts which are not included in Alma’s or Fanny’s more personal accounts. It is important to note that any pilgrim’s notes are filtered through the minds and understandings of the listener and may contain some inaccuracies. They are subjective and not authoritative.

Extracts from “Flowers Culled from the Rose Garden of ‘Akká”. { .ref }

[The first part of this manuscript tells the same story of the wonderful greetings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and visits with the women of the holy family.] { .ed }

Nov. 8, 1908, Morning in the Tea Room.

We were called to the tea room, about seven o’clock, to meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and his family. A venerable Persian gentleman of the family chanted some of the

words of Bahá'u'lláh. After this 'Abdu'l-Bahá said:

“The Catholics believe that when they die they go to a place between Heaven and hell, called purgatory, to become purified, where they suffer, and then they are prepared to enter Heaven.” Looking and referring to us three pilgrims, he said, “That is your condition while here in ‘Akká, you suffer some bodily discomforts, you do not have the food you are accustomed to; troublesome and long journeys, etc. Everyone who visits here should make progress. I hope you, too, will make progress day by day; each day as I see you I hope that you will have made more progress. As a father who loves his children, as a teacher who loves his pupils and desires that they make progress, so I hope that you will make progress. As I love you very much, I hope that you will advance rapidly, and when you leave here you will be changed so that you may become like refreshing water to the thirsty ones, brilliant stars in the Assemblies, and firm trees in the garden of the Kingdom of God. Each one of you, like the light of a lamp, shall be the light of an Assembly.”

Nov. 8, 3 P.M.

We were visited by the wife of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Munírih Khánum, who said she felt keenly the fact that she could not speak our language, so that she might be able to tell us how much she loved us.

Then Miss Fanny said, “Oh, if we had but a thousandth part of your knowledge and love.” Her reply was, “We are all maid-servants, and if we live according to the commands given us, we will be nearer to God. Those nearest to God are those who obey His commandments. Think! In the days of Christ, some of His relatives were far from Him, and in this day, how very far from God is Muḥammad-‘Alí [half brother of Bahá'u'lláh who was an enemy of Bahá'u'lláh]!”

We spoke of having read so many tablets in which we were told that 'Abdu'l-Bahá shall be known only by the name of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Munírih Khánum said that Bahá'u'lláh called him Master. And every Prophet, after proclaiming His mission, adopts a name. Moses spoke of Himself as the Interlocutor; Christ of Himself as the Son of God; and 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls Himself 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Servant of God.

Nov. 8th., 'Abdu'l-Bahá at Lunch.

You are not accustomed to Persian food. America and Europe are like unto the dawn of the sun of reality, just at the beginning of the morning. But before long the Sun of Reality will give its full light, then you will realize how beautiful it will be. But now it is like the beginning of spring, when the grass comes through the ground, but when the time of blossom and fruition will come, it will be very

beautiful. Just now you are living in the spring time, and you must work very hard that you become fruitful trees.

The tree, no matter how green or beautiful it may be, if it is not fruitful, it is useless. So you will see many trees which are green and fresh, but produce no fruit. In the same way you see a man in the world who is very wise, learned, refined, accomplished, and diplomatic, but he is deprived of the Bounty of the Kingdom, and will not possess a share of it. But it is possible to see a man who is not accomplished or educated but who still has a share in the Bounty of the Kingdom, and when he attains to the Bounty of the Kingdom, of course he will be a fruitful tree.

Notice the women who lived in the time of Christ, and who believed in Him in those days; though they had no share in science or learning, but as they had entered into the Kingdom of God they obtained fruit out of their existence and became fruitful trees.

If one entering the Kingdom of God possesses learning and science it is well, but the essential thing, or the thing of greatest importance, is to enter into the Kingdom of God, and to be characterized by the Divine attributes, and to have the intention of doing good to the world, and to be perfectly kind to each member of the human family, and serve in promoting Universal Peace. Science and learning are good, but they are the branches, not the root.

Nov. 8th, Afternoon., The Words of Munírih Khánum

(Wife of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.) {ed}

She is sorry that the people of the village do not appreciate the Presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, but they’re so far from God. She has often, in a gentle way, led up to the subject of religion, and on several occasions has asked them: “Why do you think we have been sent here?” But they had never thought about it.

Today a young lady called whose parents owned the house in which formerly the family of Bahá’u’lláh lived. This lady is a Christian. Munírih Khánum asked her, “Have you ever thought why we were sent here?” The reply was, “No!”

Munírih Khánum, said: “You know us, that we neither steal, nor do we kill anyone.” The lady replied: “I have heard some of the natives speak of you, saying, These Persians were exiled because they have a faith, a religion, which is contrary to the religion of Persia.” Munírih Khánum then asked, “What is religion? Is it not the expression or form of worshipping God? You are a Christian, can you prove to me the truth of Christ’s teaching?” This young lady could not. She was then asked if she was certain that Christ’s teachings are true? She replied, “I do not know!”

In regard to the name “Master,” the beloved Munírih Khánum said:

“The Great-Grandfather of Bahá’u’lláh was ‘Abbás, and when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was born he was given his great-grandfather’s name. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in his childhood and early youth showed marks of wisdom and knowledge, maturity beyond his years. “Master,” when spoken from father to son, is the same as “darling,” or “dear;” because of love he is called “Master.”

After the departure of Bahá’u’lláh, he chose the name ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and the assumption of this name is for the purpose of designating himself as the Servant of God.

Nov. 9th, Morning in Tea Room.

Munírih Khánum said: “It is hard to want to tell our love and yet not be able to speak the language. It is like being thirsty and with water at hand, and yet not able to drink.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá then came into the room, while we were drinking tea, and after the usual greetings, inquired as to our health and comfort, and whether we had slept well.

Mrs. Ida A. Finch then had an opportunity to speak of the question of Mrs. Corinne True, in regard to the ground of the Mashrak el Azkar, which was whether they should go into debt, or whether to begin building immediately.

If they can afford to buy half the ground, then begin building. It requires a large piece of ground. There must be a Hospital, a College, a School for Orphans, and a Hospice. These buildings must be on one piece of ground, but separated from each other by gardens.

Nov.9, 1908., ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at Table. Noon.

Turning to Miss Alma he said: “Are you happy? Have the people of Germany the capacity to receive? Don’t they hate you? Do they love you? If I were in their place I would put you out, for you are a rioter. The people objected to the disciples at the time of Christ, saying they had led the people astray.”

In the time of Moses, Pharaoh said, “We will kill Moses, for he wishes to change our religion, and will be the cause of great damage to our land. Therefore, let us kill him soon, in order to protect our religion.” Now the people of Germany will say the same to you, that you have gone there to change their religion. In Haifa there is a colony of Germans. When they came they were very pious and sincere, but they have departed from their mission and have become very haughty.

The Kingdom of God is like a tailor, and nations and sects are like pieces of cloth or materials; each nation or sect is a special material and now the real tailor is relating or connecting these materials to each other. We hope that before long there will be made a Divine robe out of these nations or materials. Again, the Lord of the Kingdom is like a gardener. He plants in the garden many flowers of various colors, puts them together like this bunch (referring to one on the

table). So we are waiting and expecting to finish this bunch. (After a pause.) At present the gardener is working. Omega,” because the fruit is at first the seed, and again in the fruit you find the seed. Therefore, He is the Glory of His Father.³

Thus concludes the portions of Alma and Fanny’s account of their pilgrimage in their words. The following statements are extracts from the memoriam section of *The Bahá’í World*, for Fanny Knobloch. It is a good summary of some of their most memorable impressions of the pilgrimage.

What joy to meet Shoghi Effendi (later to become Guardian of the Faith) and his little sister, and Bahíyyih Khánum, the Greatest Holy Leaf, as well as the other members of the Holy Household. Of Bahíyyih Khánum, she wrote, “A strange and unknown feeling possessed me while in the presence of Bahíyyih Khánum, the Greatest Holy Leaf. Possibly it can be described as a feeling of awe, a feeling very unfamiliar to me. However, later, I realized that I had been in the presence of the greatest, the most holy woman in the history of the world - the Greatest Holy Leaf! The daughter of the Manifestation of God, Bahá’u’lláh.”....

Only one who had visited ‘Abdu’l-Bahá could understand what it meant to be with Him. For nine days the three pilgrims experienced a happiness beyond expression because of their close contact with Him. When they were leaving, He said to them, “You are not weeping? Do not weep! Many friends weep because they wish to remain longer.” Miss Fanny replied, “No, we have received so many blessings and are eager to go out and share them with all who are ready to listen.”

Nodding His blessed head, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá replied, “The general does not love most the man in the back of the ranks. He loves most the man in front. If you knew the value of these days, you would not eat, you would not sleep, you would not walk. You would run and give to all the Glad Tidings!”

After leaving ‘Akká, the three travelers went to Cairo, Egypt, to see once more their beloved teacher, Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl, then living in that city. Upon their departure, he gave to Miss Fanny his most precious possession, his prayer beads, saying to her, “My Lord gave them to me.”

Their steamer then took them to Marseilles. From there they sped to Zurich, Switzerland, and then to Stuttgart, Germany where Miss Alma had labored for two years and continued for yet another twelve, serving the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh. The two sisters addressed a large meeting, bringing to the German friends ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s message of love.

After several days Miss Fanny then hastened to Paris, according to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s wish, then to London, to convey His greetings, and back again to America, after an absence of three months.

Upon her return to America, she shared her experiences with friends in Washington, Baltimore and New York, always working for the establishment of the Faith... 4