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## Pilgrim Notes

Cora Gray

September 13, 1920

**S. S. Montenegro, September 13, 1920**

Homeward bound after a week in Haifa! A week in Heaven! Delay after delay, postponed sailings, strikes among the harbour workers and slow boats had left us, as we thought only two or three days for that wondering spot but we had pushed on, trusting that since we had had permission to come, the journey could not be in vain. When the last obstacle, the permit to enter the Palestine, was finally removed, we started off in the first train from Cairo on the evening of August 31, 1920. Three of the Cairo friends came to see us off, an Armenian, Mírzá Tofic, the Master's nephew, and dear blessed Mírzá Muḥammad Taky Işfahání. The latter tipped the "conductor" when he taught we were not looking, and just as we were about to pull out, gave us a bunch of fragrant roses and a tray of French pastry. He speaks no English but the goodbye smile he gave us needed no interpreter.

All next day our hearts were full as we journeyed up through the Holy Land by the "way of the sea". In the afternoon hills and mountains came into view and we said to each other as the little villages stood out in the clear air, "a city that is set on a hill cannot be hid" and again when the blue misty heights rose in the distance, "I will lift up my eyes unto the hills from which cometh my help". We had thought of Mount Carmel as higher and steeper, and so while we were still looking ahead for a glimpse of the "Holy Mountain", we rounded its base and began to pull into Haifa, a long cluster of houses shining white and beautiful in the rays of the setting sun.

Having learned by previous experience that passing baggage through the window is the accepted method of getting it out, I jumped off as soon as the train stopped and was just about to engage a porter when a voice at my side said, "Are there American Bahá'ís here? Miss Gray?" With joy I turned to say "yes" and "Alláho Abhá" to a fine looking man in a fez. Four men from the household had met us,

Rúhíe, the Master's grandson, 'Azíz'u'lláh Khán, Mírzá Luṭfu'lláh and Fugita. Fugita clambered in through the window while the rest sent off the posters who flocked around us. He passed our baggage out through the window and finally staggered out the door with huge basket of fruit sent by some friends in Cairo in my suitcase, stoutly denying that either was in the least heavy! Rúhíe put us and some of our baggage into an auto and went with us to the house, leaving the others to follow with the rest when the car should return.

On the way up, Rúhíe told us that the Master was on the Mountain but He would either come or send for us the following day. My heart sank for tomorrow seemed so far off! We learned too that Malcolm and Mrs. Hoagg were the only other Americans there. The latter had been there three months in preparation for going to Italy to teach. She acted as hostess and Fugita was cook. He got the breakfast of toast, tech, cheese, honey and an egg, brought us the lunch sent over from the Master's house, and served when we gathered at the Master's table for dinner. Formerly there was a woman housekeeper at the Pilgrim House, but when she left, just before Mrs. Hoagg arrived, Fugita had offered to take her place. A young girl from the Master's house came over every morning to straighten the bedrooms, and the boys brought the water, but Fugita cooked, washed the dishes, cared for the lamps, made and served the afternoon tea, and looked after the house generally.

The ride seemed long, we were so anxious to be there, but it probably took ten or fifteen minutes to reach the gate of the house made familiar to us by photographs brought by returning pilgrims. We were welcomed to the American Pilgrim House and shown our rooms by Mrs. Hoagg, to those dear plain rooms with tiled floors and big windows. Soon after we were taken to meet the sweet-faced, starry-eyed ladies of the household.

As we entered the gate of the Master's house, that too looked familiar in the moonlight and we seemed indeed to be coming to a place we had known a long time. We were shown into a reception room lined with comfortable chairs and lighted from a large chandelier. Soon the ladies came in simple, light colored house dresses, with white veils thrown over their heads, Khanoum, (the Greatest Holy Leaf), the Holy Mother, Rúḥá Khanoum and two girls of about fourteen or fifteen. They greeted us with smiles and embraces and told us that we were very welcome, that they had been expecting us for a long time, (because of some letters written by the friends in America after we had left). I remember almost nothing of that they said, but one does not soon forget the love, the kindness they shower upon the visitor, nor the sweet beauty of their faces. When dinner was announced. they laughingly excused themselves because of the men guests who were present, but I still remember the feeling of desolation with which I gave them up for the dinner hour. Mírzá Houssein, one of the sons-in-law received us and seated us at the end of the long table, and one by one the men came and took their places until the table held twenty-four. Mírzá Jalál sat at one end and Mabel at the other. Fugita and Hosro served as always and little Fu'ad trotted around "superintending" After dinner we returned to the Pilgrim House

where Rúhíe Effendi, Mírzá Luṭfu'lláh, and Mírzá 'Azíz'u'lláh Khán joined us. We sat for a time talking in the moonlight and went in for our first right in Haifa.

I woke early with the thought that that day I should see the Master, but the hours passed and He did not come. Of course I should have spent the time in preparation, but I could not. I walked around, looked out the window and walked again, restless for His coming. At lunch Rouble came saying that after tea we were to go up the mountain to meet the Master, that there would be a gathering of the friends there.

About four the carriage came to take us up the mountain. Many of the men were there when we arrived but five chairs had been placed at the west of the terrace and to these we were directed. Opposite us was an arm chair where the Master was to sit. After a little time the men suddenly rose and looking toward the other end of the terrace, we saw the Master coming slowly toward us. He was clad in long pongee-colored robes with a white turban and kerchief. I think He bowed to the friends as He came passed them, and then bowing to each one of us, He sat down and called Mírzá 'Azíz'u'lláh Khán to interpret. He looked very tired and frail as He asked after our health and happiness and our journey. I tried to tell him how good the friends had been to us on the way but He dismissed the idea saying, with an air of finality, "That is the duty of the Bahá'ís" as if such things were merely a matter of course. The Master's high standard suddenly became very real to me.

In the course of the conversation the Master asked whether we had met Janabe Faḍil before we left America. We told him yes, and He remarked that He had sent two real Bahá'ís to America and one was Jenabe Faḍil. Then He continued that the other was Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl. We spoke of Jenabe Faḍil's progress in learning English and He said 'Abdu'l Faḍil learned English when he was old. "He said he was too old, but the Master smilingly said he learned it!" adding that "he who is confirmed is confirmed in all things." Then with evident amusement He told the story of how some American ladies had insisted on seeing Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl during his study time in the mornig, and how they had knocked so persistently that at last Abu'l-Faḍl had opened the door and said, "Abu'l-Faḍl not home." And the Master laughed heartily.

When He had inquired about our health He asked whether we liked the view there, the wonderful view out over the Bay of 'Akká. When Genevieve had said yes, He went on "The truth is that this place has a spiritual atmosphere. There are many beautiful views, but they do not have spirituality, as for instance the Mountains of Lebanon, which are beautiful but are without spiritual meaning. All the prophets have been here, but none were raised up in the Lebanons. It is strange that although all the world is one piece of land, yet God has continually remembered Palestine. But Samat, Lebanon and Damascus He has not mentioned. There were there worshipping places for idols, the ruins of which still exist. There was in Balbeck a temple of the sun the remains of which still stand. As it is written in the Book (Qur'án) "God gives His bounty and favor

to whomsoever He willeth! That is the case with this land.”

At the meeting on the following Sunday Mabel said that worshipping God was easier in that place than in the churches and the Master answered, “Yes the heart is attracted here. His Holiness Elijah had a cave near here ten the children of Isreal were in opposition to the religion of God. They were engaged with their own passions, only in name were they the people of His Holiness Moses. Had Moses come he would not have recognized them. He would have said, ‘I do not consider them as my own for they have entirely forsaken the religion of God. They have not the laws of God. There is no light in them at all. They are like a new servant those name is Diamond, but who is still a charcoal servant! This was the condition of the chi iron of Isreal.

“Then His Holiness Elijah educated certain souls. He trained sincere and pure souls to reach the station of what they should be. Then they began to teach and call the children of Isreal and invite them again to the law of God. All the leaders of the people Elijah gathered together on this mountain. There were three hundred and sixty of them. But all his advice was of no avail, all his guidance went for naught. For Several years he worked for their education, but the effort produced no result. Then He realized that they were kind of people who would spoil other souls and he put them to death. After that the other people were able to return to their former spirituality and their good lives. They became alive again. The everlasting Glory again became apparent. They overcame the neighboring tribes; they rebuilt the Temple of Jerusalem; they put the laws of God into effect. Then when Elijah knew that he had finished his work, he went away. He left them and disappeared. They thought that he had ascended to heaven, but no he went away because his work was finished, and because he had no attachments. He did not return. When a person is sincere and pure, his actions show it. Elijah worked with such purity of purpose and labored so unselfishly, that when all the way became smooth and when the time of comfort and ease came, he he left that his work was finished and left it. He had no attachments, he went away to rest.

“All one’s thought and actions must be heavenly, that is related to the Kingdom of God. We must be attached to nothing in this world. This world is like the waves of the sea, it does not last. The wise person does not attach his heart to waves.”

Then Mabel, thoughtfully for the problems of the Urbana group, asked whether the friends there should attend the Unitarian church. The Master answered, “There is no harm in it.” Then she asked whether it was better to go there than somewhere else, and He answered,

“One can worship anywhere. In any place, in any church or in any mosque the purpose is to turn to God. If there is a Mashriqu’l-Adhkár, it is better to be there for in other worshipping places the hearts are not communing with God, they are turned to the world, and therefore they do not inhale the breath of the Merciful. But n the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár the hearts are turned to God for it is

the place of the breath of the Merciful. But if there is no Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, it is not bad to go to other worshipping places."

"When I was in America I used to go to the churches and speak there. When I entered while they were engaged in prayer, I also would stand up and turn to the Kingdom of God. After they had finished their prayer, I would give the divine glad tidings. I would give them the proofs, evidences of the divine. I gave the teachings of the Blessed Beauty and all would listen. There was no opposition. When they were in communion with God, it made me happy. When they were calling, 'My God! My God!' I became happy.

"When His Holiness Christ gathered His disciples together on that special night, it was not in an established worshipping place, but in a room. And that night they had the Lord's supper, and in a room. The purpose of worship is that the heart may be attracted, the spirit may be filled with the divine glad tidings, and the souls be turned unto Him. This is the object, the other things are secondary."

Then some guests came to see the Master and with a word of apology He went to receive them. When He had left, Mrs. Hoagg took us into the Tomb, a beautiful simple room, a place of peace and strength. We knelt a long time, our hearts reaching out to those great Teachers in this day of God. As we came out, we met the Master returning to enter the Tomb with the men. Because I had been the last to leave I found myself nearest the door and the Master as He swept past. He took the vase of rose water and held it out to me, but seeing that I hesitated awkwardly, not knowing quite what was expected, He smiled, and then with quick thoughtfulness poured some on his Hands and bathed hands and face in the fragrance. Then with another smile of loving encouragement, He held it out to me again. The Master was the last to enter and in a moment He spoke to Rúhíe who immediately began to chant in a wonderfully sweet voice the exquisite "Visiting Table."

### **The Visiting Tablet,**

Bahá'u'lláh.

The praise which became manifest from Thy supreme soul the glory which dawned from Thy countenance, the Most Glorious, be upon Thee! O Thou manifestation of the Almighty, the Kind of Immortality and the Possessor of all which is upon the earth and in the heavens! I testify that through Thee the sovereignty of God and His Almightyness became revealed. Through Thee the Suns of Priority shone forth in the heaven of preordination and the beauty of the Invisible appeared from the horizon of Origin. I testify that through the motion of Thy Pen the Command of "Be" and "it was" was published abroad, he hidden Mystery of God was revealed, the unknown potentialities were disclosed and the Manifestations were sent. I testify that through Thy Beauty the beauty of the Adored One was uncovered; through Thy face the face of the Desired One beamed; through one word on Thy part the creatures were separated and the

sincere ones ascended to the apex of loftiness while the polytheists descended to the lowest degree.

I testify that whosoever recognized Thee: has recognized God, and whosoever attained to Thy meeting has attained to the meeting of God. Blessed is he who has believed in The and Thy verses; become humble before Thy majesty, was honored with Thy visit, Thy good pleasure, milked about Thy court and presented himself before Thy Throne.

Woe is him who has oppressed Thee, disbelieved in Thee, repudiated Thy signs, rebelled against Thy sovereignty, fought against Thine own self, seemed haughtiness before Thy countenance, contended with Thy proof, run away from Thy government and supremacy and was written with the fingers of command as one of the polytheists in the Tablets of his Holiness.

O My God! O My Beloved! Send to me from the right hand of Thy grace and providence the holy fragrances of Thy bestowals, and release me from myself and the world and draw me toward the heaven of Thy nearness and Thy meeting. Verily Thou art surrounding all things!

Upon Thee be, O Thou Countenance of God, the praise of God and His mention – the glory of God and His light! I testify that the eye of creation has not witnessed an oppressed one like unto Thee. During all Thy days Thou wert in the dark chambers of calamities. Now thou wert under the swords of enemies and anon Thou wert under chains and irons. Notwithstanding all these Thou didst command the people as Thou wert commanded on the part of the Wise and the Knowing! May my spirit be a sacrifice to Thy afflictions and may my soul be a ransom to Thy trials! I beg of God, of Thee and of those whose faces became illumined through the rays of Thy face and followed that which they were commanded for the sake of Thy love, to rend asunder the veils which have intervened between Thyself and Thy creatures, and destined for us the good of this world and the world to come. Verily Thou art the Powerful, the exalted, the Mighty, the Forgiving and the Merciful!

O God! Glorification and salutation be upon the Tree and its Leaves, Its Branches and Its Twigs, Its Roots and Its Limbs – through the continuation of Thy Comely names of Thy most high attributes. Then protect it from the perversity of the antagonists and the hosts of the tyrants. Verily Thou art the Omnipotent and the Omnipotent.

O God! Glorification and salutation be upon Thy servants who have attained and Thy maidservants who have attained. Verily Thou art the Generous, the Possessor of the most great bestowals, and verily there is no God beside Thee, the Pardoner and the Clement.

#### **Diary of Aḥmad Schrab, August 30, 1914**

After the chanting of the Tablet, the men prostrated themselves and we followed their example as well as we could. Then bowing and kissing the fragrant

threshold, we stepped back and knelt again to pray for a few moments. When we at length came out, Mrs. Hoagg was at the door to say that the Master was waiting to tell us goodbye. Hastily we put on our shoes, and at the east end of the building found Him waiting to shake hands and say goodnight. When we passed the caretakers house on our way to the carriage, there He stood again, smiling and waving us on our way. That little glimpse of Him coming to wave as a second goodbye was to me one of the sweetest incidents of our stay and made the Master's love very real.

The morning after our first meeting with the Master while we were still straying on the mountain Genevieve and I left the house a little after five to visit the Tomb. The caretaker met us, smiled and unlocked the door. We spent a long time in that sweet, quiet place. When we came out we met Rúhíe and Mírzá Lotfulla we filled our hands with fragrant white blossoms. The latter led us to the circle of tall graceful cypress trees where used to sit, but we were barely inside when Rúhíe came to say that the Master had sent for us. Joyfully we went to a room in the caretaker's house where the Master sometimes stays. For some reason I entered first, and saw Him sitting on a divan by a little barred window, looking out over the Bay of 'Akká toward the prison city. He motioned me to come in, but I stood stupidly rooted to the threshold and unable to move. At once He smiled, as one smiles at a child caught in an awkward predicament, rose and coming toward me, motioned me again to the chair, saying welcome. My mortification at having made him rise was almost lost in admiration for his quick kindness. Genevieve came and sat next to me, and Mírzá Lotfallah and Rúhíe followed.

Almost at once an herb tea was brought Him and in a moment a tray for us, tea, bread, homey, olives and delicious ripe figs and we were invited to eat our breakfast. We drank our tea and ate some, but we were much more interested in looking at Him than in eating.

He spoke in of the wonderful view of the Bay and the distant mountains, and then told us how the body of the Báb had for years been concealed, carried from place to place, never left long in one spot but continually move about to prevent its being discovered, and finally, about twenty-five years before brought to Haifa, disguised as a bale of silk. Then we went out, we saw the carriage waiting for Him, and so we waited to see Him leave. But to our surprise we were invited to share it with Him, and so we drove down the mountain sitting quietly behind him. We saw him no more until dinner time. The secretaries told us how busy and tired He was, that many visitors came every day, that there was an overwhelming amount of correspondence, that threatened persecutions in Persia were taking time and attention. he seemed so weary that we hesitated even to present the letters we had brought and asked almost no questions, knowing that one gets all one has capacity for.

That night the Master met us at dinner and placed Mabel at the head of the table opposite Him. It is a place of honor, but the lights hide his face and one prefers less honor!! He was very tired that night and beyond a question or two

about our comfort, almost nothing was said. One evening a little later I found my napkin at the head of the table. Thinking it a mistake, since the Master had placed Mabel there, quietly took it as I passed around to the side, but the Master looked back, stopped me and put me at the head. And so he put now one now another in the place opposite Him.

On Sunday about four we were told that the carriage was waiting to take us up to the Tomb of the Báb for the regular Sunday meeting. Sweet Tuba Khanoum and little Fu'ad went with us. About thirty of the friends were already gathered there when we arrived. The Master's chair was placed where a projection of the building would shelter Him from the wind, for while the day was warm the breeze on the mountain was cool. Túbá Khanoum had left us at the caretaker's house saying that she would stay there.

We seated ourselves and soon tea was served, very sweet tea in tins class cups without handles. As we talked Mírzá Luṭfu'lláh brought the big book in which the friends were asked to sign their names. Finally a stir made us look up and then came the Master, followed by Rúhíe and little Fu'ad. I do not remember much that He told us that day, but I think it was then that He said, "Some people do not listen to my words. Some listen but do not heed, and some hear but forget." At dinner that night He said to us,

"I hope that the health of the friends is good. Today you went to visit the Tomb of the Báb. Are you happy?"

As the grapes were being served He said, "His Holiness Christ was once eating grapes." He said, "I will not eat of the fruit of the vine until I eat it new with you in the Kingdom." But the grape of the Kingdom is different from these grapes. In the Kingdom there is no grape like this. Now I also say to you all, we will eat together of the divine bounties I hope, that is, of the heavenly food. Its taste is everlasting. Its power is everlasting. God willing, we shall there all at together of the heavenly food." I almost gasped for of all the sayings of Christ this one had more than almost any other attracted and puzzled me. And here was the Master using almost the very same words.

Several times the Master came to us at breakfast motioning as to be seated and to continue our meal. He always asked after our health and whether we slept well. To tell the truth I had a most prodigious case of hives in Haifa and did not sleep much, but health seemed so trifling a thing that I cheerfully told a lie each time, or else kept still and let the others say we were very well! Somehow I could not seem to talk about a thing like lack of sleep and a little discomfort. He usually stayed only a few moments and then smiling and rising abruptly He would leave us. Sunday morning He came to ask us all to go to church. Mírzá Lotfulla always reminded me of my kodak as He left, but I could never remember to have it out and ready and besides taking pictures of Him was almost impossible. The only two I tried were not very successful but I loved them anyway.

One morning after breakfast He said, "The body of man belongs to the world



of nature, his body is similar to that of the animal. The tendencies exist in man but his divine power is great. Man's divine nature is pure and sanctified, his spirit is heavenly, but his body belongs to the lower world. If the spiritual powers overcome those of the body, then the animal tendencies will not remain, and he will become illumined, and heavenly. He will become full of activities and good works. But if the natural qualities predominate over the spirit, those of the spirit will not remain at all. All the powers of the body will become "natural". In such a state the love of self is found. Then man is filled with darkness upon darkness. He becomes negligent of God. There will remain no signs of spirituality in him. This is why His Holiness Christ said we twat be born again. Once man is born from the womb of his mother and becomes free from material darkness; in the same way he must again be freed so that he may become free from the darkness of the world of nature. This is the second birth. Man must strive always so that his spirit may overcome his body. If he strives continually the second birth will be obtained. He will become free from all his imperfections, he will become filled with virtues, he will be nearer to the divine and will follow the divine teachings. he will become like a lighted candle. This is the truth of the matter. But when his is immersed in the world of nature, he is like an animal, a fierce animal and filled with imperfections."

The most vivid experience for file was the visit to 'Akká. We left about eight in the morning with Zia Khanoum, Merhanges and Riaz, "By the of the sea we drove toward the old prison city, only now the English have built bridges ever the two rivers and laid wire, like our wire fencing as approaches to them. Our eyes continually looked ahead to that old city. At the gate we stopped for a blacksmith to replace a shoe, and we watched the camels and the tiny donkeys file through the small entrance in the massive wall. Just inside we came to the barracks and went up the long stone steps to the entrance. A very polite soldier met us and showed us through, but he insisted on showing us the whole fortress. At last when we had climbed innumerable stairs, we persuaded him to take us to the only part we cared to see. Up the long steps we went to the tiny rooms where the family lived in those early days of close confinement. Three small rooms opening into a central one with a small space of roof through an opening of which the Purest Branch fell, was their home for months. And yet Khanoum said, "Those were happy days." Across the court with its cistern from which, the water supply was derived we went to the long tunnel-like room where the many followers were herded together. At present water has been added and the window much enlarged, but it is an uninviting spot.

Later Khanoum told, us that at the time the Purest Branch died, some Persian pilgrims had come but could not gain admission to Bahá'u'lláh just then a large company of soldiers came to the barracks, and the pilgrims, mingling with the strange soldiers gained entrance. Someone else, Zia Khanoum think, told is that the addition of the new troops made the barracks so crowded that the Bahá'ís were sent to houses outside the walls. In these ways the dying wish of the Purest Brand was fulfilled and the Pilgrims saw the Blessed Perfection.

Just outside of the walls we visited one of the houses where Bahá'u'lláh had lived, a small house, overlooking the Bay, kept now by some of the friend and owned I understand by Mm. Dreyfus-Barney. There we saw his room which He was not allowed to leave and the chairs where He had sat. Zia Khanoum's eyes filled with tears as we entered, in remembrance of the Being Who is no longer present to their eight, but Whom they so love.

From the barracks we drove to the garden where Bahá'u'lláh used to sit "under the roof not made by hands," and between the two streams of water. All sorts of flowers and fruits grow there. The old gardener, Abu'l Kázim, died during the war, so that it is no longer possible to hear the story of the locusts from his lips. There they spread rug for us under the mulberry trees, and we ate our lunch and rested until tea. It seemed like eating lunch in the holy lace of some great cathedral.

From the garden we drove to the Bahjí where we passed through a beautiful garden, carefully tended, into the Tomb of Bahá'u'lláh. The center of the room is a garden with flowers and shrubs, although to tell the truth I did not look at it. About the garden the floor is covered with thick rugs and from above the sunlight streams in. All is light and warmth and life. We knelt to pray in that blessed spot. I tried to remember all the friends for a moment at least that a little of the beauty of that of might come to them too. But my chief prayer was for myself that I might have capacity to take in a little of this wealth of spiritual life. I had hoped to be admitted to the inner room but Zia Khanoum withdrew and I, feeling keenly my unworthiness, tried to accept with radiant acquiescence. But as we were just leaving she came back and to great joy opened the door into the wonderful room. The strength and majesty of the hills, the splendour of the sunlight, peace that passed understanding were there. Our share of the great ocean was limited only by our tiny cups. To each comes his own experience but to me, this was the culmination of our trip. To leave that spot seemed to tear out my heart and I sat during the drive home speechless, my eyes full of tears my heart aching as each moment increased the distance from that glorious Threshold that was my parting and nothing else, not even Master's goodbye so stirred me. It seemed easy to follow the Master's word at dinner that night, that that visit to the Tomb of Bahá'u'lláh must be graven on our hearts, that we must never forget it.

The next day, our last in Haifa, we saw the Master for a few moments. I asked Him whether He had given any instructions for teaching where race prejudice was strong. He answered to go slowly, to be kind and to be courageous and to be patient. "You must not mind if people oppose you. But give them time. Their prejudice is like a religion, it will take them a long time to become Bahá'ís, but when they are, they will be very good ones. But to the principles and be kind. People are like wood, some is easily kindled and some is wet and no matter how much fire you put under it, it only smokes, it will not cook anything." And when I laughed He joined in merrily. Then he took our rosaries and ring stones in His hands, looked at them lovingly a moment and then he touched his lips to them and

gave them back.

Genevieve and I could not bear to go away from the house, so we sat under bear His window where we could hear His voice, and talked with Mírzá ‘Azíz’u’lláh Khán until lunch time. Once He came into the garden on some errand about the building which was put up but almost all morning He was busy with visitors and letters.

That night we waited after dinner o say goodbye. He sent his love t the friends, to each and every one, and said we were to say that He never forgot them and that He always prayed for them. And then with a smile of love and a hand clasp He left us. Early next morning we left Haifa but always the memory of His eyes and His loving smile and the beauty and kindness of that household follows us to bless and hallow all the way.