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Our Visit to Haifa during Riḍván

1921

Left Pasadena March 3rd, 12 Noon.

Left Chicago March 8th

Left New York "Critic" March 15th, Cancelled at Boston and Sailed from there March 17th

Azores and Gibraltar. Naples March 29th Bestolini. Sailed April 8th, Alexandria Apr. 11th Cairo, Luxor – till April 24th.

Haifa April 25th 1921

We left Cairo at 6:15 P.M. on Tuesday evening and travelled in 1st class day coach to Rautora on Buez Caval reaching K at 16 P.M. After difficult transfer of baggage and customs exuviations crossed pontoon bridge on foot and walked through deep sand to train with Sleeping car to Haifa. Praeic pulled out all 1 A.M. and trip Eong but not dusty though we race all night and part of the morning through the Sivai dessert. The wilderness of the children of Brigl. We took lunch on the train before reaching Haifa where eve arrive at 12:30.

No one met us at train and we secured a carriage and with some difficulty made the driver understand that we wished to go to the home of 'Abbás Effendi. We drove through the town and I was at a loss to record what to do but the carriage pulled up before a house and on the gate past a bright brass wave plate bore the magic house "'Abdu'l-Bahá 'Abbás" in English and Arabic I got out of the carriage to ring at the gate when from the house just below which we had driven past. I heard my name called and Luṭfu'lláh and Fugeta followed by Arthur Redeen ran to meet us. They took our cargo and parcel and eve

were there. Shown into the Pilgrim house and made welcome. After ____ to one comfort the “bags” left us to “wash up”.

While they went down to the sea for a service. The beach is some quite distance from the house. On their return we had some Persian tea and later Luṭfu’lláh asked us if we would like to see the Master’s garden. We all walked up a few steps and entered the gate and were at once in a mavelous tower of roses aced all kinds of flowers. Met the Master’s Gardener. Master in ‘Akká for Riḍván.

Returned and get canes and walked into Mt. Carmel to tomb of the Báḅ. There were many Persian Pilgrims outing there. One chanted at our request. We were then asked if we wished to visit the Tomb proper. I removed my shoes and went in. Luṭfu’lláh following. I remain perhaps ten minutes. I get to the Tomb we walked up a little path, quite steep but through flowery grass, almond fig and other fruit trees. On the level of the Tom building there is a lovely garden and the view of Haifa the Bay and ‘Akká are superb. We came down the road which is broad and steep and at the top ends in an avenue of Cypress trees. We returned to house at seven. Supper at 8:18. Persian dishes very good but very rich. Hat cake of black or dark bread made in the Master’s house from whole wheat. After supper a little visit with the boys and before supper at visit by Rúḥá Khánum ____ of the daughters of the Master.

Comfortable sleep. Breakfast – Fugeta, Arthur, Luṭfu’lláh, ourselves.

After breakfast and dishwashing. Arthur took us in town to the Bazaars and we bought jams, candy, preserves and a bathing suit for Stuart, a friar of dark glasses for myself and though we stopped at a German Bakery and got some cakes for our tea.

On return the ladies sent for me and I went for a visit in the Master’s house. Entered Vestibule through large central dining room bare except for large table (where all friends gather with faculty at supper when the Master is in Haifa). Entered smaller room at corner. Ladies seated in divans around ____ “Khánum” as the Greatest Holy Leaf is called sitting alone one side, and the others o the other side. All froze and shook hands. The Greatest Holy Leaf kissed me o both cheeks. I delivered little gifts. Conversation for about half hour. Two other Persian ladies present.

Returned home , read and wrote till lunch. Lunch at 12. Very good four courses while American or French food in every particular. No butter eve on table, but butter for cooking. Persian Noble and wife guests with us in house having returned from ‘Akká.

Persian Pilgrim house up on Mountain near Tomb of Báḅ. Many pilgrims now for Riḍván. It took them 103 days to come direct as possible from Persia. After lunch Tuesday 27th. Stuart and bays went to swim. I went up on Moun-tain Tomb alone found some Persian Pilgrims there among the brother of Zia Baghdádí keeper of Tomb served me Persian tea. Conversed in French with Baghdádí, wrote ____ in Pilgrim Book. The Evas permitted to enter sanctuary

alone. Remained III time Tablet of Visitation. Persian ladies entered other side and chanted. I then put on my shoes and returned to Pilgrim House via road. Weather fresh and cool breeze blowing. Some bright and hot.

Tea at four – ‘Azíz’u’lláh (returned from ‘Akká), Luṭfu’lláh, Fugeta, Persian lady and gentleman Arthur Stuart. After tea rest and bath then I was summoned to house of Rúḥá Khánum for little visit before supper. Visit with Rúḥá alone.

One return visit from Mírzá Jalál.

Supper – same company at 8 o’clock.

Bed at 10.

Wednesday – Breakfast – boiled egg – tea, Persian bread toasted, olives, cheese, delicious preserves – apple and cardamom seeds. German coffee cake which we bought. 9:30 Stuart gone for a walk. ____ with dishes. Parrot - **canary birds – two cats. Emogene and Georgia** _ the household here. Grace and hospitality reign.

Put in the morning writing and at eleven I was sent for to come to the Master’s house to visit with the ladies of the household. I was accompanied by the little Persian lady who is the new to the Cause and speaks no English. She is well-known and very wealthy, the only wife of her husband who speaks English well and the two make very delightful table and house companion. On arrival at the house (only a step away). We were ushered into the room of the Holy Mother where all the ladies were assembled. The Holy Master is not well and He lay or sat propped up with pillows. I never saw a more beautifully sweet expression. Beside her sat “Khánum” and the daughter were all near. We visited for an hour, that conversation being devoted to ways of argument and approach in teaching certain individuals. I left at twelve and came down to lunch. Lunch and dinner at the house are very similar, much starchy food, no grew vegetables thus far. Another returned from ‘Akká where he was called to see about setting up light plant for Bahjí. After lunch, he and Stuart and Fugeta went for bath, I ____ and visited with Luṭfu’lláh. Arranged about heads.

At four went to meeting of ladies at Master’s house. About thirty ladies and many children. Tea made in ____ and served in small glasses very hot and sweet and very good. Interesting conversation with many. Rúḥá Khánum chanting tablets of Bahá’u’lláh. Ate Persian cookies. similar to ours. Very good. Great spirit of service everywhere. Returned at 5:30. Visited in porch with Fugeta, Stuart afterward Luṭfu’lláh. Another took Persian guests for a ride in car. Writing at 7:30. Supper at eight. Stuart reading Dr. Esselmont’s book proof.

No summons yet from the Master. Persian Pilgrims still in ‘Akká with him and Azziz returns there tonight.

Thursday. April 28th.

Rose at 7:30 and went to German Bakery for rolls for the bays. Breakfast at 8. Helped washed dishes. Little girl of one of the friends comes to make up

some room, but I have done most four room _____. Went for a walk with Stuart on mountain. Had interesting conversation. Driven at twelve. After dinner bays went to tea back. I remained, took bath, dressed. Had tea at four then went to Master's house and visited a few moments with Zia Khánun and Holy Mother. After, went to Persian friends house for tea with Rúhâ Khamun. Most interesting time, four ladies and myself. Tea and cakes and Damascus Lupkish Delight, afterward lemonade. Discussed many customs. Asked permission to have enlarged pictures of ladies, also asked permission to contribute book case to Pilgrim House. Many sick people at Master's House and many commotion among ladies because they do not know how to care for new patients. Luṭfu'lláh sent to 'Akká to confirm with Master. Wrote Mother first letter from here.

Stuart drew design for book case and I am to order it made here for 15 pounds. No furniture can be bought here and _____ very expensive English drugs and groceries can be made, but no green vegetables even at this liason and no fish as people do not know how to catch fish here. We have little meat, it being very high priced. After supper, sat and visited till bed time.

Friday noon. April 29th.

Rose at 7 and had breakfast at 7:30. After that Luṭfu'lláh returned from 'Akká (hip raise 1 hour) and bought our summons to come to come there this afternoon on 5:45 train. We are warned of viher company on train. Old Persian believer called and eve has most interesting visit. I mended double cloth and prepared for visit to the Master. Stuart gone out for a walk. Fugeta suffering from bad cold but no complaint. He is on duty as usual with his intelligent fine face and moving loving service. Arthur also busy. Master dismissed Persian Pilgrims who had come so far at so great suffering their being in 'Akká left no roon for us that is why eve have been waiting to be at Bahjí with the Master at Riḍván.

Friday evening. April 29th.

Luṭfu'lláh accompanied us to train from Haifa to Bahjí and stayed with us until train pulled out as Mírzá Jalál (Grandson of Şubḥ-i-Azal) from Cyprus was . *This young men has come and thrown himself in the Master's charity incurring expenses and being generally unworthy and unpopular. He is educated and speaks English well. My effort was to keep him away from Stuart and I occupied during train trip of one home. R-Road of his along sea and the air was fresh and lovely. We took third class in order to see the people. No glass in car windows. Many laborers returning to 'Akká from Haifa after dark. Arrived 'Akká station 6:15 P.M. No carriage. No one to meet us. I was obliged to ask direction of Mírzá Jalál. He said he was going and would accompany us!!! Nothing else to do in few minutes. We saw Hafil coming with Master's white donkey. He had but cushion on saddle for me. I declined not thinking I could sit a ride with my tight skirt. Haleel said, "It was Master's wish" of course so I climbed on by getting up on a stone wall first. Haleel guided donkey with bridle and I sat passive*

very thankful to have means of transportation in growing darkness and country road. Air fresh and lovely, hills green and rolling and here and there ruins of walls and fortress of uncertain antiquity. Off to the left the white walls of the Fortress, the "Most Great Prison". Home little distance away (1/2 mile). My riding left Stuart to walk with Jalál but I kept close match. We met some Arabs – first and then small groups of Persian Pilgrims. I shall never forget the reverence with which they stopped and with showed leads and hands crossed on breast they greeted us, "In the Name of God." I was wonderful!!!

When the night was almost entirely closed in, we saw lights Jalál and knew we were near the end of our journey. The end indeed! A large house showed up first and I thought it the Master abode but was unsecured. It is the home of the half brother Muḥammad-‘Alí. The Master’s house adjoins it but is only a series of one story norms. At one corner of the quadrangle this forneced is the Tomb of Bahá’u’lláh.

We drew up beside a low doorway and I got down. ‘Azíz came out to meet us and said the Master would receive us directly. After a few flurried moments, ‘Azíz said we were to enter the first door on the left. We were then standing in the hallway of the house which is used for pilgrims. There was a dim lamp on a table, dirt floor, table with lamp – divans of very poor quality on three sides of room. As I entered I saw beloved figure not ten feet away dieting in the very corner of the room on divan on which was a cushion and rug. He rose and I saw the picture which I have always known come is life before me. The white turban, the brownish Abba and the being they enclosed. My presence of mind came to me most wonderfully and instead of falling at his feet as I felt I must I went forward to receive his greeting. He said "Oh Mrs. French, welcome, you are very welcome, and Mr. French, come, you are very welcome."

He then sat down and Stuart sat beside him while I sat directly in front in a chair which ‘Azíz placed. The Master began to speak at once and though no record was taken of any conversation during our entire visit he left such impressions that we shall always remember in meaning if not verbatim. At that time he spoke immediately of war and how not one newspaper had upheld the banner of Peace at the beginning of the 1914 struggle. He pointed out all the terrors and dangers of the world condition. ‘Azíz interpreted, Mírzá Jalál then came in. He received no special greeting. Haleel brought Persian tea in small glasses and cans to go with it. Three glasses were in the tray. Took one, Stuart one, and the boy Haleel looked at the Master to know for when the 3rd was intended. The Master raised hand and in a very positive manoeuvre indicated Jalál. We all took one tea. While the Master said a few words more then he arose and accompanied us to a room further down the hall. There he stopped and apologized for the simplicity and lack of comfort of the room. He said I might remain there or if I preferred I might got o the other house and share the room with Monevar Khánúm (the youngest daughter). I said at once I would prefer the latter so I left with Stuart and wash and went with ‘Azíz to meet

Monevar Khánum and prepare for supper. The second house was where the Master slept, where Monevar Khánum stay and where the food is prepared. It is as simple as the first but larger. A large high hall (dirt floor) which served as dining room, the Master's had room on one side Monevar on the other. A very small inner court where there growing a small orange trees and some flowers and from the court the little primitive kitchen. Servants room and oriental toilet which is quite the most primitive variety I have ever seen. I greeted Monevar and then went to her room which I found we were to share together. This room was perhaps 25 x 25 feet, rough floor divan or stone ledge along one side by two windows which were in front of house. One divan a cushioned seat covered with small rug. A bed with close mosquito covering in one corner of room, a table in middle – noting else. A shallow brass basin was brought for me to wash in and a tin kerosene car served as pitcher. I changed my dress putting on a light grey one which was fresh and simple and seemed adapted.

This account was never finished. I found myself so engulfed in the mystery of the experience taht I could write no more.

Nellie S. French