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March 20th, 1925

My dear Amy and Lillas,

I have now been a week in Haifa, but I will start as from the 11th the day I last posted to you, 11th. We arrived at Port Suez quite early and anchored outside to enable our boat to get oil and water. About 18 passengers went ashore to visit the Pyramids, but I do not think it was worthwhile as they would be so hurried as they have to join the Largs Bay at Port Sa'id. 12th, we all expected to meet Martha at Haifa but to our great surprise about 6 A. M. at Port Sa'id she appeared at our cabin door. There was great excitement and hurry to dress and get on dealt where she said three Bahá'ís, men were waiting to greet us. One of them, Muḥammad Mustapha, who is in the telegraph department at Port Sa'id could talk English quite well, so that heaped us. They gave us such a nice welcome. They went ashore and after we had breakfast we went on deck to say good bye to the friends we had made on our journey. By this time there were herds of natives on board selling things and Oh, how they did jabber. We then went off in a little boat and getting through the customs was something to be remembered. Fortunately Martha had a letter from someone which enabled us to get through without anything being opened, but it was the confusion and jabber that made it terrible.

We at last got to the Hotel where Martha had a room and she told us that Monever, one of the Holy Leaves, the youngest daughter of 'Abdu'l Baba, was in Port Sa'id and that she was to see us at eleven o'clock. She came and she was just delightful. She greeted us with such love and said 'hello' they were all looking forward to meeting us. All the daughters are very sweet and can talk English fairly well, - but this is going ahead, I must go on with my narrative.

She had with her a sister of her husband's, this sister's husband and their daughter. Monever was the only one who could talk English, but she translated for them and us. We had a lovely time, talking and they chanted for us. After a

picnic lunch in Martha's room Monever came again, as I was to take a snap of her (do hope it will come out well). When she came, the others of our party had gone out or were busy, so I had the good, fortune to have about – Írán hour's talk with her, and I did so enjoy it.

At 2.30 Muḥammad Mustapha (who had met us at the boat) came again and brought with him two other Bahá'ís. They are all so eager to meet the travellers from such a distance and one and all make you feel at home and as if the pleasure was all on their side.

After getting some tea at the Hotel (cold ham and eggs) we went off to the train for Haifa. Muḥammad Mustapha met us there and came as far as Kantara with us, for which we were very thankful as we had to change trains here — not only that but we had to cross the canal in a punt and as we were then entering another country (had been in Egypt) we had to get our luggage through the customs again, but Martha's letter again came in useful. Muḥammad was able to do all the talking for us and so we managed all right. We crossed the canal about 7.30 p.m. and our train did not leave till midnight, M. M. waited with us till about nine when he had to go for his train, but he would willingly have waited longer if we would have allowed him and stay all night in Kantara. Such is the devotion of the Bahá'ís here, nothing is too much trouble for them. Our train came to the station at 9.30 so we all got in and had a rest before other passengers came. We did not sleep much, but the train was quite comfortable. As soon as it got light we were able to see something of the country and the nearer we got to Haifa the more cultivated and interesting it became. The camels and donkeys, the Arab villages (mud huts and tents) orange graves, and even the sandy desert were all very interesting,

13th, Haifa. Yes, we have got to our destination, reached here about 10 a.m. Fugeta, the little Japanese Bahá, who served 'Abdu'l-Bahá for two years before His passing was at the station waiting for us with three carriages, (Fugeta is pronounced Fu gee ta.) and took us straight to the Pilgrim House, where we are the guests of the Greatest Holy Leaf, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's sister. We were there met by Mrs Corrine True from Chicago, U.S.A. and several of the Bahá's. Mrs True is the financial Sec. of the Mashrokalaska and is very nice, we all love her. After a rest and lunch we were taken by Mrs True over to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's House to visit Shoghi Effendi. He gave us a very warm welcome in the room where 'Abdu'l-Bahá used to welcome the friends, and after talking to us for a while, he went out of the room and sent the ladies in the Holy Mother ('Abdu'l-Bahá's wife) and one of her daughters. They too gave us a very warm welcome and said how they had been looking forward to our coming. It seems they were so afraid that after the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that the friends would not come to see them, and so they are so delighted, to welcome them. They gave us tea before we left, in beautiful little glass tumblers on a glass saucer and little Persian cakes. After dinner we went to bed as we were all very tired.

14th. Had a good night's rest — lire Blundell and Ethel in one room, Martha, Effie and I in another big one (three 'beds) and Hugh in another. Everything

is plain but very comfortable, and the food beautifully cooked. Everything is cooked in ‘Abdu’l Belies house and sent over. They cook for about 80 people, I was afraid I might not like the Eastern dishes but they are very nice, just a bit too rich, but nice to eat. The trouble they go to is wonderful, sometimes 4 or 5 courses for dinner. Fugeta waits beautifully. He is a wonderful man, so obliging and always so harpy — he is just giving up his life to service, to loving service. He is so jolly too and many a joke we all have. He is a great gardener and was just delighted with all the seeds. Martha brought some from S. Africa, Effie from Australia and Ethel and I from N.Z. Fugeta is very small — you will see his photo later. Well, after breakfast Mrs True took us up Mt. Carmel to visit ‘Abdu’l Baba’s and the Báb’s Shrines and a wonderful walk it was, walking up the hill that the Prophets of old, Christ and His disciples, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá walked on. They all take off their shoes before entering the Shrines, so of course we adhered to their custom. It was so peaceful and quiet and beautiful. In the afternoon, we again visited the Ladies, where we met the Greatest Holy Leaf and three daughters, when we again got a loving welcome. The Greatest Holy Leaf, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s sister is very frail, but Oh, such a sweet lovely woman. Indeed the whole family are just beautiful, so sweet, so loving and they are all so spiritual and we have many beautiful, helpful talks with them. They tell us about the early days which are most instructive and I hope when we get back to 3.Z, we will be able to tell you many things. Shoghi Effendi is not very well so we did not see him. Mr. Mountfort Mills from New York arrived today. He is a lawyer and a very fine earnest Bahá’í. Dr. Esslemont (the writer of The New Era) is also in Haifa, but he is in Hospital getting over asthma. We went to see him, he seems to be a very fine man.

15th Sunday. We went to visit Rosha Khánun, one of the daughters this morning. She lives next door to the Household, which is about 3 minutes walk from this place. She told us a lot about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s early life, so very interesting. Oh, how they all love Him and they are so devoted to each other. It is beautiful to see them together. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s sister and wife cannot talk English except to say a word or two and “I love you” and they say they are so sorry as they would like to talk directly to us. The feeling in the house is very wonderful, so peaceful. This aft we went up Mt. Carmel and first we went to the men’s meeting (the women are not allowed to be with them). We were allowed in and it was very interesting. (I am writing with an indelible pencil). They chanted and even though we did not understand, it was lovely. We were all asked to speak to them and one who spoke English, interpreted. Several of the men spoke to us, saying how pleased they were to meet us and giving us a message — this of course through the interpreter. I must tell you that there was to be a Bahá’í wedding this aft, and having met the bridegroom the day before he invited us to the wedding and we were delighted to accept. A custom here, amongst the Persians, is that the bride and bridegroom do not meet before marriage. To us this is terrible, but they say it generally turns out all right. However, the Bahá’ís are not so particular and sometimes see each other a good deal. In this particular case, the par lived in Alexandretta and had not seen the girl since

she was a child and unveiled. He came here and the girl's mother invited him to dinner the day before the marriage and introduced them.

Well to go on with our aft up Mt. Carmel – After we left the men's meeting we went over to the woman's meeting house where all the women and children were and we all met the bride. She looked very nice, but Oh so shy. She was very pale and her hands were so cold - she had a beautiful dress on - white satin, embroidered with gold coloured sequins and beads – looked, very handsome, then she wore a lovely veil of I think, chiffon or ninon. After some talk we were asked to lead her to her bridegroom and I had the honour to give her my arm (just because I happened to be nearest to her.) We took her to the bridal chamber where the bridegroom was waiting for her. He was standing near the door not looking at anybody. There were two chairs placed near the window and the bride was seated on one and the man :The was to perform the ceremony which is very simple, brought the bridegroom to the other seat and joined their hands and said something which of course we could not understand. It was so strange to watch them - they were both so shy, when he was asked something – (I suppose if he would have her) he answered with his head turned from her and when she was asked, this, I suppose same question, she did not answer at all, but just turned her head over her shoulder – (it was funny) and had to be asked again, when she did answer in a very subdued shy voice. Then some money was given to the bridegroom which he passed to her, for it is the custom that a man must give his bride money After it was all over we said good bye to them and they were left alone for a while, and we went back to the other room and had Persian tea, cakes and sweets, after which we went home. (I forgot to say that each of us took the bride a little gift). When we were passing the room where we had left the bride and bridegroom, he had one over to the men's meeting room and she had numbers of her friends round her. We visited the Holy Shrines before going home. I think I told you that Shoghi Effendi was not very well. I am glad to say he is a good deal better; but the Greatest Holy Leaf is not well - has, they think, (or rather the Doctor does) slight pneumonia, so they are all very concerned.

16th. We went to Cook's this morning to get some Egyptian money, then left some films at the photographers and when we came home got word that we were to go and see Shoghi Effendi and we had a lovely talk with him. I am taking notes, which you will see later. After this Mrs. True took us to see an old olive tree which was planted by the Romans about 2000 years ago and Effie and I took snaps of it. There is a seat under it, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá used to sit under it many times. We had aft tea with the ladies again. We always enjoy this time as we get such a lot of information from them. Sometimes one of them will come over here, and we get a lovely talk from her.

17th. This morning we started off for 'Akká. Shoghi Effendi had planned all the trip. We left Haifa in the 8:15 a.m. train, and it was quite interesting. First we crossed the R. Kishon where Elijah slew 360 Priests of Baal, saw camels, sheep, Arab huts and tents, and sand hills. I must tell you that 'Akká is exactly

opposite Haifa, both are on the sea shore in a big Bay (Aces. Bay) like this 'Akká Haifa. When we got out of the train (about an hour's journey) the carriage 'that 'Abdu'l-Bahá need and the same one He went in when He went to be knighted, met us. It has three seats, so holds quite a number. Our party consisted of the 3 Blundells, Martha, Mrs. True, Effie and myself, Fugeta and the cook and her little daughter. The journey was most interesting then. We first visited the house Bahá'u'lláh lived for seven years, it faces the sea and has a beautiful view - I took one snap. This house was really composed of two joined together, the back portion being occupied by another family. As the family of Bahá'u'lláh were so crowded, it was impossible for 'Abdu'l-Bahá to get married, so the man who was in the other part of the house, offered to out a door through the wall and give Him a room. This was done and He got married. We then went to the Baracks or the Most Great Prison, where the whole family and the followers who were banished to Aces were first brought. The authorities did not expect such a number of prisoners and so the first night they (about 70) were placed in the basement of this prison, but after that they, the family, were given the upper part and the rest of them given another part. These parts of the barracks are new used as a hospital for prisoners. We then went on and arrived at the Pilgrim House at 'Akká. Soheil arrived later on horseback and later still Mr. Mountfort Mills and 'Azíz'u'lláh, one of Shoghi Effendi's Secretaries, and who has his meals with us, as does Soheil. Soheil is a grandson of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and also Shoghi Effendi's Secretary. The Palace of Bahjí, which is ne.7t door to the Pilgrim House, was where Bahá'u'lláh went to reside during the last years of His exile and where He passed away. After Bahá'u'lláh's passing 'Abdu'l-Bahá rented a house for Himself and this is now the Pilgrim House -there we stayed, still rented. The room (quite a big one) where Mrs. Blundell, Ethel, Effie and I slept in (separate beds) was I understand where 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote "The Divine Plan". Muḥammad All, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's half-brother (the leader of the Náqíḍins) lives in the Palace with his wife. Bahá'u'lláh's Shrine is built adjoining the Pilgrim House. There is a beautiful little garden in the Shrine a' all the sow was carried there by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and some of the Believers. We all gathered some flowers from it and also from the beautiful garden outside, which we have pressed and when dry I will send some.

18th. After a good night's rest and breakfast, we visited the Shrine, and we all repeated prayers, Hidden Words etc. in English. Then we started off for the Riḍván Garden, but before we started Effie took snap of us in carriage and Soheil on horseback. (I took snap of 'Abdu'l Baba's donkey). This is the garden 'Abdu'l Baba made and the' beautiful now, is much better a little later in the season. Spring is just beginning here, so the trees are only beginning to burst their leaves. We were sorry the leaves were not further advanced, because there was not much shade and unfortunately a Sorocco wind was blowing and it was very hot. We had lunch under the two mulberry trees under which. Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá used to sit. In this trip everything was so beautifully arranged for our comfort and enjoyment - it was wonderful. We came home again by train - Effie and I wanted to go and get our films from the photographers, so we walked

back from the train, and Fugeta came with us and took us through the business streets.

March 23rd. My dears, I cannot write no mores as we are all off to Jerusalem etc. this A. M. leave in an hour, just after breakfast; but want to post as we will not be back here till Saturday (28th). We have hired a motor and dividing expenses. Such a lot I want to tell you, but more anon. We are all very well — hope you all are. We were so glad to get the Cable we surmised it was sent from Assembly. It came just as we were going to the men's meeting — so was read out and they were to send a reply. Amy, we are thinking of you today — many, many happy returns and heaps of love and all best wishes. All send love and birthday wishes to you Amy. My dear love to you three dear sisters, all relations and friends. Will you read descriptive part to assembly please and I will not have time for more. Also to any friends and relations.

Ever your loving sister,

Margaret Stevenson

So much going on here, we have little time for writing, so friends etc., must excuse.