

... description: 1925, Margaret Stevenson 5 April MS 22.11.05
author: Margaret Stevenson
title: Pilgrim Notes notes: ...

Pilgrim Notes

Margaret Stevenson

1925, Margaret Stevenson 5 April MS 22.11.05

Pilgrim Notes

Margaret Stevenson

April 5th, 1925

S. S. "Esperance Bay"

April 5th 1925

March 19th. My dears, my last letter was up to the 18th and finished off in hurry just as we were going to Jerusalem, so I will go on from the 19th. Not much of importance to tell you today. Towards the morning of the 19th we were awakened by a great noise amongst the fowls, Ethel, Effie and I got up and awakened Fugeta and he went out and found that a roost-board had fallen down and some of the fowls must have been under it for a while – they made a fearful row. Before we got to sleep we had a thunderstorm but very little rain. Rain is badly needed, especially between Haifa and Jerusalem. They are afraid the wheat crop will be a failure and in parts where they are dependent on rain water for drinking and everything, they do not know what will happen. After breakfast Rooha tm one of the ladies came to see us and she was telling us all about their early days, it was so interesting.

20th. Not feeling very well today – sick, etc. The food, though so delicious is very rich. Effie and I went over to see Shoghi Effendi at 10 A. M. and had a delightful interview and I came back feeling a good deal better and just took creamed rice for lunch. In the aft, a Persian Bahá'í, Ḥusayn Rúhí, a school inspector came in from Jerusalem. He talks English very well and he told us the story of his Father who was a martyr in the Cause. We hear that Monever Khánun (the one we met on arrival at Port Sa'íd) has arrived and we are looking forward to meeting her again. She is the youngest daughter and is so pretty and sweet. Later – we have been over to see the Household and as 'Abdu'l-Bahá's sister was better we saw her too, sitting up in bed.

21st. This is the Persian New Year's Day. After lunch we had snaps of our party in Pilgrim House and then went up Mt Carmel. You can read what you like aloud, this page is private about Bahá'í talk. I just told you that this is

the Persian New Year's Day – Naw-Rúz Feast Day and the let day of Bahá'í Calendar. We went over to see the Ladies of the Household. Did not see the Greatest Holy Leaf as she was not well enough, but we saw the Holy Mother and three of the daughters (Holy Leaves as they are called). There were other visitors too - Arabs, Turks, etc. (ladies of course, no men, except those of the Household are admitted here). The Holy Mother gave us each a beautiful silk handkerchief and a ring – stone, which had been blessed by 'Abdu'l Baba, as a Naw-Rúz gift (a custom here to give its on this day). After lunch we went up Mt. Carmel - first to the men's meeting. Western ladies are admitted, but the Eastern ladies have a meeting of their own. It was the Feast of Naw-Rúz and the table was filled with good things. The room they: have is like this and as soon as we appeared the men all rose and we were gives the seats of honour round the semi-circle near the table. As soon as we were seated we were given Persian tea in delightful little glasses and biscuits, then there was some chanting. Then we were introduced to the bride roots for another wedding was on and then the feast begs and we were each supposed to take what was offered. So we all had to take it home, for we could not possibly have eaten it then. After that we six ladies were each presented with a bz.mch of flowers. Just before we left for Mt Carmel a cable arrived, we suppose from the Auckland Assembly to the Haifa Ass, and to the Family, so it was read out at the meeting. They were very pleased and decided to send a cable – asked add and we gave them Mrs. Axford, as she was Secy. And also shortest add. I suppose you got it all right, We then visited the Shrines and after coming down the Hill, called in at the Household to be introduced to the bride, and witnessed the ceremony, In this case they were not nearly so shy. She looked very nice.

22nd. We visited the home of Mírzá Anayatullah Estafahani, He showed us wonderful pictures of the funeral of 'Abdu'l Balls and told us many interesting things. His wife could not talk English, but dispensed the usual Persian tea and cakes, in the aft we visited (both these places by invitation) Mirsa Badi's home. He end his wife are a lovely pair, the light just shines from them. We heard a one record of the Master's Voice – it was wonderful. Then went to visit the Holy Family. Had a talk with Monever about her trip to Switzerland last year. Then went to see the G. H. Leaf, she was sitting up on her bed, a good deal better. She gave each of us a Pabst ring as a Naw-Rúz gift. We were then taken to the room where 'Abdu'l Babe passed away This room is kept just as it was then.

23rd. Left Haifa at 8:45 A. M. for Jerusalem. We hired a motor amongst us for a four day's trip from a Mr. Tannous, a Bahá'í friend of Ash's and either he or his partner went with us everywhere and explained everything to us. This made the trip so much more enjoyable. It was a beautiful drive, the scenery was so very interesting and the wild flowers wonderful, daisies, (white and yellow), cornflowers, poppies and red anemones, cyclamen etc. sometimes a big patch would be red, sometimes blue and sometimes yellow, and at other times mimed. Well, as to our journey – after getting away from Haifa we passed the Plain of Jezrael which looked very fertile and is under cultivation, chiefly by Arabs.

Passed a village called Jaffa near Nazareth, The roads are very winding and white and we all had to put on our dark glasses, We met any camel-trains, Arabs, sheep, goats and donkeys and the row is very stony and mountainous. At 10 A. M. we passed Nazareth and at 10:20 passed Little Hermon and Mt. Tabor and a little later Mt. Jebboah where Saul was killed. 10:30 passed Jezrael village. I have never seen such stony country – some of the hills seem composed of stone and everywhere there are stones. Many of the hills are cultivated and this seems strange after what I have said, but for generations I suppose, work has been going on and some of the hills are now beautiful terraces, stones have been gathered and these are used to keep the terrace in position, reinforced as it were by stone walls, especially during the wet season. Every available spot has crops or olives, fig trees and almonds and they are most beautiful. The crops are such a wonderful green and you know the colour of the olive trees, a grey-green and all the different shades with the grey stone is a wonderful sight. Then the valleys – they are something to remember all one's life. Mr. Tannous compared them to a carpet and it was a happy simile. Some of them were like wonderful Persian carpets. One particular one I have in my mind's eye at present; but I must tell you that the valleys are owned by many people and each one puts in his crops, - there are no fences, but when one is near can see that stones mark off the plots. These crops are perhaps put in at different times and so vary in shade, some dark green, others light while some of the plots are only ready for crops and the ground is chocolate red. These plots are not uniform in size, but a lot of them are oblong in shape, so ran you picture at all what it looks like? (When we were on our return journey when we passed some of these valleys, it was when the sun was setting and the result was just wonderful, indescribable.) The Arabs plough with very primitive ploughs. We saw many storks in the fields, and many Arab villages – the Arabs live in mud huts or tents. At 10:40 we passed a British Camp used during the war and at 10:45 the Village of Jenner and saw the Arabs drawing water from a well at road-side to water their flocks. We do not meet many women, but occasionally see them weeding their crops in the fields. At 11:10 we saw the Hill of Gotham where Joseph was sold by his brothers. At 11:30 got the first glimpse of the Mediterranean since Tie left Haifa. The scenery here was most beautiful, great valleys, rocky mountains, olive trees and green crops. Next, saw the Plain of Sharon in the distance and passed fields of lentils and wheat. At 12 noon, saw an old Roman Aquaduct – saw many of them during the trip. Then came to the Hills of Old Samaria, on the side of which was the ruin of the old gate built by King Saul. At 1:20 passed new City of Nablus – Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal, where the Samaritians go every year at this time (first week in April) to keep the Passover, as they used to do in olden times. We had lunch at the Hotel Palestine at Nablus and at 1:25 passed through Sheehan where Christ met the woman from Samaria, the tomb of Joseph and Jacob's Well, 2 P. M. saw the remains of a motor truck used in the late war and also a stone marked S. J. showing the boundary between Samaria and Jerusalem. At 2:25 we passed a village called Ainsenia which had been bombarded during the war, because it came in the way of their march. The ruins now remain, but even so, we saw that part of it was used by Arabs. After

this, the villages were cleaner and richer, for as our guide said they were owned by Christians. We passed Ancient Bethel where Jacob had his vision or dream. At 2:40 Passed Ancient Beireth (?) where the parents of Jesus, when He was 12 yrs. old, missed Him and went back to Jerusalem to find Him. We saw a school about here called, the Friend's American Mission School and the Hill of Mispah where the tomb of the Prophet Samuel is. We then saw a big piece of cleared flat ground and it was so unusual. We asked what it was, and found it was for the use of airplanes, made by the British for air service. Passed excavation of home of Saul built 4000 years ago and later Damascus gate and reached Jerusalem about 3:30 P. M.

Mr. Tannous had arranged for us to stay at the "Casa Nova Hotel" – outside the old city, a Christian part and it turned out to be quite good, clean and comfortable. We started almost at once sight-seeing with Mr. Tannous, first going through the old bazaar, very quaint but also dirty to visit the Holy Sepulchre Church. This Church is very magnificent and was built by Queen Helena about 300 years A.D. over the spots connected with the crucifixion of Christ. On first entering we were struck with the magnificent windows etc., gold in abundance, but I have not time to go into detail about it. After leaving this main part had to go downstairs and were first shown the stone of unction where Christ was anointed after the crucifixion, then the tomb of Jesus, which you remember Joseph of Aramathea gave for His burial and also a piece of stone which is said to be wart of the stone which was rolled in front of door. After Joseph of Ar gave his tomb to Jesus, he had another hewn out of the rock for himself and family and with lighted candles we went into this dark place. Then the place where Mary met Jesus and thought him the gardener, the place where the soldiers cast lots upon His garments, the place where Queen Helena found three crosses, and crown of thorns, the pillar upon which Christ sat as the Jews mocked Him Calvary where Christ was nailed to the cross and crucified.

We saw a most beautiful painting by Murillo, of Mary and the departed Jesus, said to be the artist's masterpiece, and a statue of the Virgin in a glass case, This statue, has a most beautiful face and is life size (1/2 length). It is almost covered with jewels, rings, bracelets, necklaces, indeed of almost every description, most valuable stones, altogether worth 25,000,000. These have been given by Pilgrims. All this and many in Jerusalem almost starving.

We then went to the Russian Church which is built over part of the old wall of Jerusalem (wall built in time of Solomon) and which we saw inside the building, Leading from the road is the door or gate through which Christ left the city to go to Calvary, passed the "needle's eye" – there are really two of them (these gates) fairly close together and one much larger than the other, but even the larger one would not allow a loaded camel to pass through, it would have to be unloaded. We then walked along a piece of old road, (which has been left intact), on which Christ must have walked on His way to Calvary. We went down a sort of underground portion and here we saw, what is believed to be the spot where the Star shone throes and then the spot where the "Manger"

was. (Mr. Tannous said they could not tell exactly each spot, but that they were certainly about right and some were quite correct.) In this underground part, (that is below the main entrance,) parts of the church are allotted to the different nationalities – Greeks, Arabs, Armenians, R. Catholics etc. and near this portion we were astonished and amused too, to see a policeman sitting - armed. We were told that he was there all day long – to keep the peace in case of the different sects quarrelling. There is a very bitter feeling against the Jew's in Jerusalem and no Jew is allowed even to enter the courtyard.

After lunch at Hotel we visited the Garden of Gethesemene and the Mt. of Olives. Then we passed a large building or Hospice built by the German Emperor and Empress and what is now the residence of the Governor of Palestine – Sir Herbert Samuel: then saw the Carmelite Convent, from which the nuns after entering behind its doors, never come out. Here we entered a Courtyard built over the spot where the Lord's Prayer was supposed to be given by Christ. Around this covered courtyard are hung large tablets on which the Lord's Prayer is printed in about 36 different, languages, At 3:15 we passed Bethany, the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Saw parts of the old road to Jericho. The new road, on which we are now travelling, used to be very dangerous owing to bandits or robbers, but now since the British control is quite safe. The roads all along here (the aides of the Hills of Judea) are very ceding and barren and are composed of limestone. Except for a call shrub, very sparse in parts too, after passing the hills it is all deserts, white sand and is of course trying to the eyes. Hyenas etc, infest these parts. The winding roads put me in mind of our N.Z. roads, say between New Plymouth and Te Kuiti and any such places, only on our roads it would be dense bush instead of desert. At 3:30 we passed the Apostles Spring where Christ and His disciples rested, on their way to Jericho from Jerusalem. There is now a wayside inn at this point. In going over all these parts in a comfortable motor-car, I could not help thinking of all the rough, weary walks Christ and His disciples had. How they got over that rough, stony or sandy ground I know not. They must have been very weary and tired.

At 4:15 we reached the Dead Sea, which is 1200 ft. below sea level. It is from 10 to 15 miles wide and about 47 miles loam and is 9 times saltier than any other sea water. Of course we had to taste it, it was terribly bitter and salt. We gathered a few small shells and stones. The R. Jordan flows into it, but it does not rise and fall much, though it has no outlet, owing to the great evaporation. From here we saw the village of Modern. Jericho in distance – an oasis in the desert, it was beautifully green. At 4:50 we reached the Banks of the R. Jordan and got a bottle of its water and I took a couple of snaps. Here there are many banana and orange groves. At 5:40 got to the Spying of Elisha in Modern Jericho, Th4s is the spring that was bitter and Elisha put a 11Pmdflal of salt in it and it became sweet. The British have built a huge cement basin round it and the water just gushes into it and the people are able to irrigate their lands – hence the lovely growth of bananas, oranges etc. People come from long distances to get water from here, Old Jericho, of which nothing but portions of the old walls remain, is just above Modern Jericho, We saw parts of the walls, they

were built of irregular stones and mud P110 it was no wonder they fell down when the priests and people tramped round 7 times blowing their trumpets. We poked round and found bits of the ancient pottery. From here we drove back to Jerusalem arriving at 7:15 P. M. On our way home saw a most beauties sunset.

25th. Lord Balfour is entering. Jerusalem this morning, is coming for the opening of the New Jewish University, There is a lot of ill feeling about this between the Arabs and the Jews and a strike is feared, so Mr. Tannous has advised us staying in Hotel all morning. So we are employing our time writing letters and P. Cds. Later – After lunch Mr. Tannous came again and said everything was quiet, that the strike was a peaceable one – all closing shops, schools and they hung black flags up to show they were mourning, so we went out with him for a walk and then went back to the Hotel for our things and started on our homeward journey. We went as far as Nablous, where we spent the night, arriving there about 7 P. M. Tannous had phoned for rooms and they had a good dinner ready for us at the Hotel Palestine which was very clean and comfortable. We were very tired but were glad to be on our way back to Haifa. Next morning started off again – passed Dothan where Joseph went to see his brothers, and they put him in the well; Sulam, the home of the Shumaite woman; Jezreel where Jezebel was eaten by dogs; Naim, where Christ raised the only son of a widow; Ender, home of the witchwoman; and Plain of Ezdraelon. We then went through Nazareth the home of Jesus; passed the Virgin fountain; Cana of Galilee; the Horns of the Hittites; where Christ gave the Sermon on the Mount; and the Plain where Christ fed the 5000 and 7000 people. We arrived at Tiberias at 12:30 quite ready for the good lunch prepared by the Hotel people at Nablous, and which we ate in the gardens there. After lunch, went out on the Sea of Galilee in a boat for about of an hour. The day was Perfect end after we started on our journey again and got higher up, we will never forget the view we got - the beautiful blue Sea, almost surrounded by hills which were reflected in the sea. Mt. Hermon snow capped in the distance and the town of Tiberias nestling on the shore It was a wonderful sight, We then passed Magdala, the home of Mary Magdalene; Bethsaida; the home of Jonah; and the forest where Debora killed Sisera and then passed through the same parts we had been through on our outward journey, but seen from the opposite direction, gave a different outlook. Needless to say we enjoyed our trip immensely, but we were very glad to get back to Haifa about 5 P. M.

27th. A German Bahá'í lady arrived this morning from Stuttgart, in time for breakfast. She is a Miss Horn, who has come for a week's visit and she too is to stay at the Pilgrim House. Effie and I have been into town with films and after lunch some men Bahá'ís came to visit us – two Arabs from Baghdád, an Indian from Bombay who lives in Persia and a Persian. Soheil tells us that nearly all the Arabs from Baghdád are most earnest Bahá'ís and that the two who came to see us are pure bred Arabs; they are such fine looking, big men, beautifully dressed and – with such bright happy faces. They had heard we were coming to Haifa and were most keen to meet friends from such a long distance. They are all so polite and though they could not speak a word of English, we got on

all right through an interpreter. So you see we were a unique company - Arabs, Persians, American, German, Australian and N.Z. and all meeting as brothers and sisters. This day Shoghi Effendi and Dr. Esslemont came and had lunch with us.

28th. Three Bahá'í ladies came to see us; one of them with two beautiful children, is a widow and is a sister of the wife of Zia Baghdád in America. The two boys (7 and 5 years old) recited to us in French, English and Arabic and Pension. One of the ladies, have mentioned before, Khánum Zia (where we heard the phone record) speaks English well so we got on all right. Shoghi Effendi and Dr. Esslemont came again to lunch and Shoghi Effendi gave us a beautiful talk, which he always does, whenever we meet him. In the afternoon we visited Madam Yazdí with Tooba Khánum and Monever Khánum. She Madam Yazdí is a cousin of the family and is a most charming, sweet and loveable woman. We all love her very much - she too talks English very well. Before we left she chanted to us so beautifully and though the chanting is in Persian, we get the spirit of it and appreciate it.

29th. Sunday - Shoghi Effendi sent for Effie and me to go over for another interview, but we had not been there very long before Schell came to say they were waiting at the Pilgrim House to take our with the Arabs, Persians, etc. We were taken in the dining room. I then took the two Arabs alone. in the afternoon again visited the Household and this time saw the G. H. Leaf, glad to say she is about again, she looked so sweet - one just its to sit and look at her. We then drove up Mt Carmel in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's carriage (waggonette with 3 seats we would call it) and first visited the ladies afterwards going to the men's meeting, Shoghi Effendi was there. As usual we were given the seats of honour and tea and biscuit. One of the men chanted a prayer and then we all went to the Shrines and Shoghi Effendi chanted so beautiful. He has a lovely sweet voice6 Everything is done so reverently, and as said before, we can feel the Spirit of it.

30th. In aft visited ladies and Effie and went up Et Carmel. It is a beautiful walk - there are two ways of going up, one is shorter but each rougher. The better road is longer and was built by 'Abdu'l Bay for the good of the town, with money presented to Him which He would not accent for Himself.

31st. This is our last day in Haifa and very sorry we are, we do riot want to leave at all, but must go to catch our boat at Port Sa'íd, we leave early tomorrow morning. Effie and I went up Mt. Carmel and took photos, visited the Shrines and when we came down hill, found we were to leave next morning, we thought we had a day longer. In aft, we visited Shoghi Effendi and He told us we were to see the pictures of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb and 'Abdu'l Baba, which we did. Shoghi Effendi had told us he would meet us up Mt Carmel, so after seeing the pictures we went up in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's carriage. Shoghi Effendi chanted for us and gave us flowers. Some of us walked home with Him and He talked so beautifully. Soon after we got home He sent for Effie and me to say good bye - this time we went upstairs to His room where he does all. His work and which

looks right out on the big light on the Shrine. We had a lovely – time and I asked him if He would read a prayer to us in English, which He did. He did read it so beautifully de then said good bye to Him and He assured us of His continued prayers and also for each one in our different assemblies. While we were having our evening meal, Mr. and Mrs. Badi‘ Bushivi (he Is Governor of the Province) came to bid us good bye and then we packed and got to bed about midnight.

April 1st Up at 5:45 A. M. Rooha Khánun came to breakfast and afterwards went to Household to pay our farewell visit, which was very touching, and though so early the G. H. Leaf was up. As we were going out of the garden Effie and I saw the H. Mother sitting on her verandah and went up to her for a minute - she, the dear, was quite overcome. We all drove down to the station in the carriage (our luggage having gone on before) and Martha and about eleven Bahá’ís came to see us off, they are all such dears. ‘Azíz’u’lláh came in the train with us as he is going to Germany for treatment for his hand, He had pernicious 7m7aria p_na the Dr gave so many injections that his wrist has become paralised0 This railway line was built by the British during the war to be used for transporting their mend Before we got past Mt Carmel (which by the way is not one Mt but a range and one particular point, is called Mt. Carmel, the rest Carmel Mts.) we saw lots of olive trees which Axis said must be 3 or 4000 years old, then the Church which is built over Elijah’s cave. When we came to Haifa it was a night trip, but now it is daylight so we can see what we did not before. We passed beautiful fields, just golden, others red with wild flowers. We saw several mirages, also many orange groves – the famous Jaffa oranges (and how we have enjoyed them). In one part of the desert we saw such quantities of date palms and in this part the Arabs dig deep in the sand till they reach moisture and plant vegetables and some looked quite nice. When we got to Kantara where we have to change trains and cross the canal, we were surprised to see Fugeta (who was on holiday at Port Sa’íd) and Muḥammad Mustapha at the station. (M. Mustapha was the one who was so kind to us at P. Said before and who came with us to Kantara). It was good to meet them again and needless to say they were of great help to us. We had to wait 3 hours for our train so had tea and toast on the platform. We at last got on the train for Port Sa’íd – the Canal divides Palestine from Egypt, so now we are in Egypt, and arrived at Port Sa’íd about 10:30 P. M. where several Bahá’ís were waiting for U.S. We went to the “Hotel de la Poste” and were glad to get to beds which were clean and comfortable.

April 2nd. Effie and I wrote letters till lunch, then went into town. We saw a Greek funeral, which was most impressive – a girl of 22. Went back to Hotel and found -the boat, (Es Bay) was delayed owing to a storm – was held up in the Canal. By this delay we were able to go to the Bahá’í meeting, but we were rather late as the rain was so heavy. At last we went in motor car and were received by about 30 men - all sorts of nationalities. We were given tea and biscuits and after some talk we were asked to speak. Effie and I both said a few words and Effie said a prayer in English by request, and Mrs. Blundell read

out of the “Hidden Words”. ‘Azíz gave a lovely talk and a man chanted and several of the men spoke. Of course all had to be interpreted. It was a beautiful meeting so peaceful and they were all so pleased to have us there. When we got back to Hotel we found two Bahá’í ladies waiting to see us, one the wife of a Bahá’í and the other his sister. They brought us a beautiful bunch of flowers and a box of sweetmeats made by the wife – an Amyrian.

3rd. We were called at 1:30 A. M. and were told we had to go on boat. Got up and dressed and Hugh and ‘Azíz went off in pouring rain to find out particulars and found that the boat was not leaving till 8 a.m. so we went back to bed till 5:45. Had a cup of tea and went to the customs office (Chad to pay a little on camera) and then went over to boat in a small boat to find that she was not leaving till noon. Mr. Mustapha, ‘Azíz and M. Norhongati all came on board with us and were most kind. Well, we left at noon and almost immediately got into rough water and after our lunch got into our bunks and there stayed till the morning of the 3rd when the storm had abated. Almost everybody was sick. 5th Sunday – A beautiful day and everybody well again – ship quite steady. This ship - Esperance Bay is not nearly as nice as the Larg’s Bay – it was so clean and comfortable, but we must take into consideration that the Larg’s Bay had only about 180 passengers and this one has nearly 800. 6th. Had a thunderstorm through the night but it is beautiful today – quite a strong wind blowing, but the boat is quite steady. 2:30 P. M. We are just passing Malta, can see it quite plainly.

April 11th Nothing of much importance since I wrote the above and I must finish off because a mail closes tonight. It was pretty cold in the Mediterranean, we could see snow on mountains on both the African and European coasts. We passed Gibraltar yesterday at noon and had a splendid view, as it was nice and clear. I took some snaps. We are now in the Atlantic Ocean and at present going through the Bay of Biscay. It is wonderfully calm, but a fair Ocean swell. We are due to reach Southampton early on Monday 13th Inst, so it won’t be long before we get to London now. We won’t be sorry – though we have enjoyed our trip, it has been so long, over three months since we left Auckland. With much love to everybody, to each one at meeting.

I remain,

Your loving sister,

Margaret B. Stevenson