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author: Sadie Oglesby

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Pilgrim Notes

Sadie Oglesby

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Sadie Oglesby

March 1927

Arrival in Haifa March 11, 1927.

During our first visit with Shoghi Effendi, which was a few hours after our arrival in Haifa, Shoght Effendi having greeted us (the American pilgrims, five in the party) and having asked of the American believers as to health, unity, etc., He turned to me and said he was very pleased that I had come to visit Haifa, that I was the first colored believer to visit there during his time, etc, Then proceeded to ask how many colored believers there are in America.

I told him we were very few. He then asked about the number of colored believers in Boston, New York and other centers. He said the master loved the colored people very much and that the Cause needs the colored people and cannot be established without them.

He said, "The believers should practice great kindness and show great love so that the colored people may be attracted to the Cause until the doors are opened and the colored people are attracted into the white people who are not believers will not have confidence in the sincerity of the friends and will not enter The Cause. The friends should practice all the teachings and not only a w the colored people to The Cause.

At another time he said, "He is not pleased that so few colored people are in The Cause" and that special effort must be made to attract them. He asked if I had been urgent in this matter, if I had been forceful in explaining this feature of the teachings to the understanding of the believers.

I told him I thought that if we should meet together, read the teaching and practice, great love, doing all possible at the same time to draw others into the

Cause, all other matters would adjust themselves and perfect amenity among believers would ultimately be attained.

He said I should be insistent and urgent upon this matter. That I should be persistent and not quiet so that the believers may learn of this great need, He told me I had been negligent, indifferent and had done my duty upon this subject.

I told him Mr. Oglesby had often been persistent in speaking to the friends upon this subject but that I had just as often tried to keep him quiet. He said, "Mr. Oglesby's way is the better way."

I told him I had, tried all I could to be in harmony and amity with the friends. That I had understood the Master to say we must give on the right and accept the wrong for the sake of harmony and unit then said, "Yes, the Master said that and the Waster wrote that but was then. This is another time. It is important that we have center in America composed of colored and white believers, where all differences are removed. A center established upon the teachings of the Master. This is most important.

"Continuing, he said, "Racial unity and harmony cooperation and freedom from racial prejudice is the first principle. If we will not keel' the first principle, how can we hope to keep the following principles. We must find unity and harmony upon the principles. If we find unity and harmony other than upon the principles we will establish that which is not the Cause."

I told Shoghi Effendi that I thought the friends of America loved him very much and I believed if they knew how anxious he was upon this matter that they would do all they could to satisfy his desire.

He said when I should have returned to America, I should seek no lest but be constant and urgent. That the importance of this matter should be understood by the friends. That I should be fearless and compelling. I expressed my great sorrow to him but told him I was quite unprepared, unqualified for the work he wished me to do. I said to him, "I have no strength or importance in America. I am so sorry"

To this, Shoghi Effendi said, "When you return to America do as I have told you. Be fearless and know that the invisible concourse will assist you and I will supplicate at the Holy Shrine in your behalf."

Another day when Shoghi Effendi had talked upon this subject I said to him, "Shoghi Effendi, it presents itself to me thuswise: since the infancy of the human family, races and nations one after another have arisen and fallen in their long march around the cycles and to maturity and at this time, the oldest race represented upon the earth is the colored race while the youngest or last to have attained a high civilization is the white race and in order to lose this cycle and save the civilization of this day, the oldest and youngest or first and last, that is the white and colored, or outer ends of the cycle must link together, then the inner, or intermediate races will automatically take their places in the circle.

Thus the family of Bahá'u'lláh will be established. Shoghi Effendi said, "That it true but if we fail to do this, lie will be dispersed."

Again Shoghi Effendi said, "The believers must establish in America a center composed of white and colored people who are living in perfect harmony and unity having settled all their differences through the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, thus when the people have suffered and are tired and weary ready to seek hope and comfort, the attention of the ruling heads of the nations may be called to this center in America and upon investigation, they will gather around this center and establish the world of Bahá'u'lláh, but if we fail to establish such a center, the people will find no hope anywhere."

One day at dinner with the pilgrims, both eastern and western, Shoghi Effendi, as he discoursed upon the matter of unity between the white and colored people, was interrupted several times and to each of those who sought information upon other matters he said, "That is not important," but urged the need of a center in America composed of the two races saying, "India has her problem, Germany has her problem, Persia has her problem, the other nations each has its problem but America's problem is the establishment of unity and harmony between the white and colored people."

He said, "Racial prejudice and differences on the part of non-believers should astonish the world by their fellowship and cooperation with the colored people. This, he said, is an open door of service in which the Bahá'is will not be molested."

March 23. During the dinner period, Shoghi Effendi said a colored believer should be elected upon each committee even if it required that the same one should be elected upon each committee. I then asked him this question. "If after having gone into the meeting for election, we prayed for spiritual guidance, proceeded to vote and no colored believer was elected, what should we do in such a case? He said, "To pray for spiritual guidance is not sufficient, we should also study the needs of The Cause, discuss the needs of The Cause at the nineteen day feasts, speak of the needs and the qualifications, committees require (not at the time of election), discuss it during the year so that the friends may be informed. At present, the colored are overwhelmed by the white."

Shoghi Effendi asked, "Had the friends read the master's teachings upon racial amity? Have they enough teaching upon this feature of The Cause? Do they understand its great importance? Do they know of the master's fearless example in His attitude toward Mr. Gregory in Washington and elsewhere?"

I told Shoghi Effendi I had often heard the friends read the master's teachings upon this subject, in the meetings. Then he said, "I have never written upon it, I will write."

March 27. As I sat with Shoghi Effendi in the master's parlor, he said to me, "My charge to you is that when you go back to America, tell the friends to look within themselves and find there the reason of so few colored people being in The Cause. Until this is removed, The Cause cannot grow. If we wish the Cause

to grow in America, that which is the cause of so few colored believers must be removed. This is vital.

“I told Shoghi Effendi I had believed that since the colored people were not responsible for this breach or chasm, never having desired a separation from the white, that the white believers would be the ones to work upon this feature of The Cause, Shoghi Effendi said, “Yes, but we must help them.

“I asked Shoghi Effendi if it would not be well for us to have prayer meetings. Answer, “Yes, it would be very effective if the believers should gather and engage in prayers from different friends even as many as would take part. It would no doubt be of much benefit in bringing about amity and harmony but this should not be forced won anyone.

One day I asked Shoghi Effendi if a Bohai should have in a la and testament a desire to be cremated and it were in His the power of the reasonably to deny this request and enter according to the teachings, should this be done. Answer, “Undoubtedly, to enter according to the teachings is most important and will be a favor to the departed.”

Shoghi Effendi said that when I felt I had done all I could upon the feature of racial amity among the believers to take trills South and teach there. The South is in great need of the teachings.”

During my last interview with Shoghi Effendi, he said; “You must be earnest and constant in your effort to press to the understanding of the believers the vital need of a perfect unity between the white and colored people, Be eager, earnest and forceful in this matter and be assured that the invisible concourse will assist you In your works and I will support you, I will pray for you, I will pray for you at the Holy Shrine, I will pray for you. Be confident.

An extract from a discourse given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at Howard in Washington, D.C. April 23, 1912.

“For the accomplishment of unity between the colored and the white will be an assurance of the world’s peace. Then racial prejudice, national prejudice, limited patriotism and religious bias will pass away and remain no longer.”

Extract from Mrs. Watson’s tablet from The Master.

“This question of the union of the white and black is very important, if it is not realized, ere long great difficulties will arise and harmful results will follow.

“Therefore, the believers and the maidservants of the merciful must exercise the utmost endeavor to bring affiliation of hearts between the white and the black, and seek the confirmation of The Holy Spirit.”