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Pilgrim's Notes

by

Edith McLaren

1952

NOTES OF THE PILGRIMAGE OF EDITH MCLAREN MAY 2 - 10, 1954

My arrival in Haifa just before noon on May second was exactly one year after I made the decision to request permission from the beloved Guardian. To at last have the privilege to come to this blessed spot was the fulfillment of a long cherished dream.

This very first day was filled with unexpected events, for it was the anniversary of the Martyrdom of the Báb according to the Moslem calendar. Rúhíyyih Khánum was entertaining the Bahá'í women from 'Akká, the Persian women pilgrims, the American women on the Internacional Council at a luncheon. Since I was the only western pilgrim for the first two days they seemed as delighted to meet me as I was to meet them. The love shone out of their eyes, from the youngest girl to the elderly niece of Bahá'u'lláh in her simple gray flannel dress.

Later in the afternoon we were all taken to the Shrine of the Báb where we waited in the little portico outside the Eastern Pilgrim house until the beloved Guardian finished his conversation with the men pilgrims from Persia. Just at twilight when the stars were beginning to come out I had my first glimpse of the beloved as he came out of the house, slowly walked up the path to the Shrine followed by the men. The lights went on at the Shrine and the women followed going into the side reserved for them. Therein that matchless room, that sacred spot, I suddenly heard the voice of the Guardian chanting the Tablet of Visitation of Bahá'u'lláh as the fragrance of attar of roses permeated the evening air. Next we entered the room to the left where 'Abdu'l-Bahá is situated and heard the Guardian chant again. To have had this tremendous experience during the first hours of the first day was like being lifted into another world. It was nearly

nine o'clock when we went in to the dining room for dinner. The overwhelming feeling of unworthiness that comes over one as he walks across the dimly lighted room for the first time and sees Shoghi Effendi rise from the table in the dining room and come forward to greet him is felt to a great degree by every pilgrim. One can scarcely eat seeing his eyes for the first time and hearing him speak. After the first words of greeting and asking about the activity in Rome where I had stopped for a day or two, as compared to the activity of the Faith in the U.S. The Guardian asked about Mrs. Esty in Buffalo, near my town of Hamburg. Mrs. Esty is the believer who presented the large portrait of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the Guardian as well as one to hang in the Temple in Chicago. Then the conversation turned to the World Crusade and the need for dispersal. He told us that if the Bahá'ís do not bring about this dispersal God will do so. . . that we now have nearly 3000 centers in the world but what we need is more believers. Six hundred of these centers are in Persia. He spoke much about pioneering and remaining at your post. Do not go away after you get there. Remain and teach the natives.

When asked the question if the youth in the Faith should join the army or remain in college if one had already begun his studies he smiled as he answered that one could join the army and give a list of places where one would like to be sent - such as Guam. But each one has to decide for himself. The spirit and desire are the important things.

He spoke of Africa as an example to all, in the way the Faith is growing there. Americans should bring more of the Indians and colored people into the Faith. If we don't teach them the negroes from Africa will have to come to teach. The Bahá'ís like to go to social affairs but they should teach - pioneer. The European Teaching Committee is not doing enough {{p2}} This committee should send more pioneers to France, Malta, etc. The Bahá'í must teach, consolidate and incorporate. Then receive endowments. When asked which Fund is the most important at this time the Guardian answered that the World Center Fund and the National were more important at this time than the local. He said if we support the World Center and National Funds the local will benefit. (He did not mention which should come first of these two.)

More local assemblies should incorporate. But this should be done through the national assembly - that is, not without consulting the national body. They must be sure of holding it before incorporating. The Guardian spoke much about the small increase in believers in the U.S., the loss of local assemblies and the deficit in the National Fund.

The pioneers should go to the difficult places not to the easiest ones. The Americans are too materialistic. They will have to suffer to learn. America will suffer the most. The Guardian seemed tired and very serious this evening and there were many pauses which made one realize the seriousness of the times.

The next evening, Monday, May 3rd we found the Guardian very happy and healthy. His eyes were sparkling and his cheeks were pink. He had many cables

and letters which had come that day. They all had good news. He could scarcely eat for he wanted to read so many of them to us. Several new pioneers had arrived at their posts, the NSAs had sent cables - he read some of them - from Canada, Australia, India, Persia, Sweden. He was displeased with Sweden because the NSA has spent \$21,500 for land for the Temple, 20 miles from their capital when they had only 3000 in their fund. He was very pleased with Africa especially and Canada and Australia. He spoke of several youth who had gone to pioneer in different places. He also read to us the very cordial and friendly letter which had just come that day from the president Ben Svi of Israel who expressed great pleasure and appreciation of his recent visit with the Guardian and RúhíyyihKhánúm. He spoke warmly of the unity and friendly relations which exist between the Bahá'í Faith and the State of Israel and that both were working for the welding of the nations.....Leroy Ioas was to speak at the Rotary Club in Jerusalem the following day. The Guardian said that he wished to send some Bahá'í books to the president, since he had asked for literature. (I remember so well that he spoke of the books then - Prayers and Meditations, Gleanings, Dawnbreakers and the Appreciations of the Bahá'í Faith. He also said that he would send some plants to Mrs. Ben Svi for her garden. The reason the Guardian was so happy over this visit was because this was the first time a president or high official had called on him. The minister of religions had been invited to come but had refused.....Finally he read to us his cable to the U.S. in which he said that the Honor Roll was now being closed and giving us the latest information on the growth of the Faith. At the end of the dinner time there maps of the property of the SiyahChal prison which the Guardian brought out and talked about with the members of the Council. He mentioned that the individual who brought the property should now work with the NSA of Persia and decide with Bahá'í consultation how the building should be developed and financed.

On another evening The Guardian talked much about the development of the Faith in the East - of the NSAs of Japan, South East Asia, South West Islands and Australia. He was so pleased with the accomplishments of the {{p3}} Australians. They have the good qualities of the British and not the bad, and a few of the good qualities of the Americans. The East, he hope will progress even faster than Africa did. The Fozdar family was mentioned - how they had all been so active and were wonderful pioneers. In speaking of the Covenant Breakers in Persia he said that Mr. Samandarí is the shield of the Cause. He scatters the Covenant- Breakers. He had sent him to Mashhad and also to Tíhrán. He was the only one who could handle the Covenant-Breakers in these places.

Reference was made one evening to the Temple in Isaiah. The Súrah of the Temple is a Tablet written by Bahá'u'lláh in 'Akká. It represents the five pointed star as the temple of man. (page 213 God Passes By)

The Guardian pointed out the fact that the Bahá'ís were the only religion in Israel that did not have to pay tax on property used for the Faith because we comply with the rules in contract of land ownership, namely: 1- We will not sell.

2- We do not build. 3. We will not rent. 4. We will not sell produce from the land. We now have property valued at four million dollars. We waited 40 years for the Mansion at Bahjí, 50 years for the land on Mt. Carmel, 60 years for the Shrine and 100 years for the SiyahChal.

In reference to the Americans again the Guardian said that since they have failed to teach the negroes perhaps they will teach the Jews. They should form special committees for this purpose. The Jews character was effected due to enslavement by the Egyptians. That period is now over. Moses was angry and threw down the tablets, and broke them. God also became angry with them. They had persecuted Christ and had to suffer 2000 years persecution. The Jews are the chosen people to support the Bahá'í Institutions in the future - the distant future.

The Shrine of the Báb was in the heart of Mt. Carmel and the Temple will be built at the head.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas is revealed for future civilization. These laws will not be given out in their entirety at one time. They will be given out a few at a time over a long span of years. Then the beloved Guardian spoke about how this great Cause develops. First came the Revelation, then the Covenant, then Administration. Next will come World Order and finally World Civilization..... Once he mentioned that our enemies have made the right moves and aided the Cause and its development. Bahá'u'lláh would never have come to 'Akká of his own accord. He brought more than a revealed religion. He brought a plan for world civilization.

So often the Guardian spoke about America during the 9 days of my pilgrimage, how it must suffer to be purified, then obtain its destiny and be welded with the other nations. 1. Suffering - to prepare for the welding. 2. Administrative Cradle. These two will prepare America for its destiny to lead all nations spiritually. Not because America is so good but so corrupt was she chosen for this destiny. The early believers thought that the Master was referring to America at that time but he was referring to the destiny of America.

Again and he* again the Guardian spoke about teaching and pioneering. We must teach the Faith with dignity - never peddle it. The Faith is too precious for that. Example - the way it is handled in Israel.

**[this word "he" is apparently a typo. -ed] {{p4}}*

The pioneers should get out, stay at their posts and teach the Faith. They must not forget that they are there to teach the Faith. They must seek out the sincere souls who are prepared....As to the Summer Schools - the primary books to study are Kitáb-i-Íqán and Some Answered Questions. Keep away from the occult and mysticism. Study the writings and know them, then teach. Study, concentrate, then act. There is too much social life at Green Acre and not enough study. There should be study in the evening as well as the daytime. A little play, a little recreation, but not to overdo it. Concentrate on the goals

of the Ten Year Crusade and not introduce other things. Be light as the spirit, pure as the air, unrestrained as the wind and blazing like fire.

Some of the things I learned from the beloved Guardian were these: He has great patience. He loves the believers dearly, knows their faults and is always hopeful that they will exert greater and greater effort for the Faith. He has the vision of the Cause as no one else could possibly have. He is focused entirely in the Faith. He works tirelessly, ceaselessly, always keeping his eye on the goal. He goes ahead and makes plans even when there are severe blocks and obstacles not yet overcome as in the case of the property for the Archives Building at that time. The title was not yet clear for the land but the plans were all ready to begin work when they could. Though his station is not the Exemplar as was ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s yet he is still the great example to the believers every where.