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Pilgrim Notes

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Extracts from “Memories of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá”

Ramona Brown

Notes

Extracts from her book, Memories of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá,
Recollections of the Early Days of the Bahá’ís of California
(Bahá’í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1980).

[unedited online version provided by Robert Stauffer, 1998.]

Ramona Allen Brown was born in Boulder Creek, California, on August 10, 1889, the only daughter of Dr. Woodson and Frances Orr Allen. In 1904 she heard about the Bahá’í Faith, which she embraced immediately. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s visit to California in 1912 only deepened her commitment to her Faith. Except for a short trip to Hawaii, Mrs. Brown remained in California, raising her family and teaching the Bahá’í Faith - until 1954. In that year she made a pilgrimage to the World Center of the Bahá’í Faith, then settled in Majorca and later in Austria. In 1963 poor health forced her to return to California, where she lived in La Jolla until her death on February 23, 1975, at the age of eighty-six. To the end of her life she continued to share her memories of the beloved ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

In 1946 my husband, Arthur Brown, and I moved into a new home in Oakland. Shortly afterwards Agnes Alexander spoke at our first meeting, and on that day Arthur and I dedicated our home to the service of Bahá’u’lláh. Many Bahá’í activities took place in our home; friends enjoyed the meetings where Ella Cooper, Mark Tobey, Marziah Gail, Bahia Gulick, Loulie Mathews, and many others spoke. It was from this home, after the passing of Arthur, that my daughter [Barbara], my granddaughter ["Bobbin"], and I attended the dedication of the Bahá’í House of Worship in Wilmette in 1953. After this I went to the International Conference in Stockholm, Sweden,

and visited the Bahá'ís of Oslo and Copenhagen for several months before returning to my home in Oakland in December. My desire was to arrange my affairs quickly and go pioneering. However, to my surprise and joy, I received an invitation to make my pilgrimage in May, and I deferred my other plans.

Extracts from “Memories of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá”

Ramona Brown

1954

It was early afternoon on May 10, 1954, when I arrived in Haifa. As my taxi approached the Eastern Pilgrim House, suddenly through the treetops I caught a glimpse of the golden dome of the Shrine of the Báb. Never will I forget the exhilaration of that moment! After my first outburst of joy, I was silent. Other fleeting views of the Shrine appeared, but I was too overcome to utter a sound. {{p112}} Arriving at the Western Pilgrim House where we were to stay, I was greeted by Jessie Revell, who told me that she would accompany me to the house of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá where I had been invited to have tea with Rúhíyyih Khánum. As I walked up the steps, I was thrilled by the thought that the Master had for years climbed these same steps, and I entered the large main room where He had so often received His guests. As Rúhíyyih Khánum came toward me with outstretched arms and lovingly embraced me, I could feel the very presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Later I was able to spend some time alone in prayer and meditation at the side of the iron bed in the modest room nearby where the Master had slept and passed away in 1921.

Soon it was the dinner hour at the Western Pilgrim House, and my dream of being in the presence of our beloved Guardian was coming true. Shoghi Effendi and Rúhíyyih Khánum had already entered the dining room. I stood with the group of friends outside the dining room waiting for others to go in. They said to me, “Go on in. Go in!” But I hesitated. Then I was gently pushed by Milly Collins into the room. There I saw him — “The sign of God,” the “priceless pearl!” My heart stood still. I could not speak or move until he came toward me smiling and took my hand, saying, “Welcome, Mrs. Brown. We are very happy to see you and have you with us. Please sit here”; he indicated a chair opposite him at the dinner table. The warmth of his greeting and his gentle courtesy made me feel comfortable and happy. I sensed his quiet, deep, spiritual strength. Shoghi Effendi asked me about my daughter. He looked a long time at the pictures of my family, and I gave him the message each one had sent him his greetings and a special message, which I relayed to him. He said, “Tell your son that I hope his wishes to serve and help will be gratified.” Looking again at the photographs, the Guardian said that he would pray in the Holy Shrines for my family.

[^] ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (Wilmette, Ill: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1944), pp. 11, 3.

Then in a gentle and loving manner he inquired about the believers in California and spoke of some of the early Bahá'ís whom I had known — Helen Goodall, Ella Cooper, Phoebe Hearst, and Lua Getsinger. {{p113}} Often as we sat with Shoghi Effendi he seemed to know what was in our hearts, for he answered questions that were in my own heart but which I had not asked.

In the morning of the second day at Bahjí I went with Mary and Alan Elston, two pioneers from Africa, and [the gardener] Sala to pray in the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. To enter the Shrine one passes through a beautiful, small, wrought iron gate and steps on a short path of white pebbles leading to the handsome bronze door of the Shrine. On either side of the path is a pillar. I put my hand on the ledge of the pillar to steady myself as I removed my shoes before entering the Shrine, and my hand fell upon three glorious white carnations! I was surprised and exclaimed over them because I had not seen any carnations in the gardens. I was deeply touched when Sala said, "Shoghi Effendi put them there yesterday when he visited the Shrine, and I am sure he meant them for you!" When Sala said this, I wondered whether Shoghi Effendi knew that carnations have a special significance to me and are very dear to my heart. I remembered that Zikr'u'lláh Khadem, a Hand of the Cause of God, had once said to me, "The beloved Guardian knows the heart of each one of us."

Each evening at dinner Shoghi Effendi wore a light tan camel's hair overcoat, a white shirt, and a black tie. His complexion was a soft tan and his large brown eyes expressed his every emotion. From under his black fez, on each side, a few white hairs were mingled with the black. He was not a large man, but his presence filled the room. When the Guardian spoke of the accomplishments of the Bahá'ís the world over, he never included himself. He was a humble, gentle person and generally spoke in a soft voice; but when he explained the Administration, he spoke with a firm tone and great authority. When he was not speaking in a serious vein, he often made us laugh as he related some funny incident or experience that he or someone else had had, and then his eyes twinkled as he laughed. Nothing made Shoghi Effendi happier than news of the unity among the believers. {{p114}} During dinner he often spoke of what was occurring in many parts of the world. Some evenings he would stay after dinner was over and tell us of good news he had received or explain some special Teaching.

Each evening after the Guardian had left the dining room, Rúhiyyih Khánum and we three pilgrims would visit in the sitting room, and she would tell us of some special news or incident that had made Shoghi Effendi very happy. After she left, we would recall the words of the Guardian and later compare our notes. One evening Shoghi Effendi said, "Please share your notes that you have taken here with the friends when you return home." This I have tried to do ever since, and following are some of the important and interesting things which he said to us while we were his guests in Haifa:

Bahá'ís must have a new way of life. They need to be different from other people. They must be distinguished. The more distinguished, the more they will attract

people. The greater the distinction, the greater the attraction. They must read the Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, study the text of the Teachings. It is not enough to be good and kind and to lead a religious life today; it does not count for much unless one accepts the Manifestation of God, if one has heard of Him; it is almost wasted. One must accept the Manifestation in His day. If one has not heard of Bahá’u’lláh, they are not to be blame; the blame lies with the Bahá’ís. If the Bahá’ís fail to teach the Faith, the people who do not hear of the Faith are not to blame. The blame lies with the Bahá’ís.

All men are not of the same capacity. {{p115}} To serve to full capacity is meritorious with God. God judges men by how they use their capacity.

Every city, every town, and every village will have a [Bahá’í] Temple and a House of Justice in the future.

There are three processes in teaching: the first is to attract the people; the second is to convert the people; and the third is to be consecrated. There must be attraction, conversion, and consecration. The teachers must not be unwise. There are three Charters to be used: (1) the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh, or the Divine Plan; (2) the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá with the plan for world administration; and (3) the Tablet of Carmel, the Charter for the development for the World Center of the Faith. the Tablet of Carmel is the symbol of the House of Justice. The Ark is the symbol of the Administrative body. The higher cave of Elijah is the real one where Bahá’u’lláh revealed the Tablet of Carmel in such a loud voice that the priests heard it.

[^] See Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, rev. ed. (Wilmette, Ill: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 194 and Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, trans. Ḥabíbu’lláh Taherzadeh and Committee at Bahá’í World Centre (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1978), pp. 3-5. —Ed.

It is essential that the youth of today study deeply the Faith as they will usher in the Most Great Peace. The Lesser Peace will be established within this century. The Most Great Peace in the next century. The Global Crusade will establish the Bahá’í Faith the world over but will not have a direct influence in establishing the United States of the World. The first period will be that of suffering and cleansing; the second period will be that of unification; and the third, the establishment of the Bahá’í World Faith. After the International State is established and wars cease, the money now being expended for destruction and war will be used for education and science, and a method will be discovered for interplanetary communication, even interplanetary conferences. The time will come when people can cross the entire nation in one hour and eventually beyond the continent into interplanetary travel. The cycle of six thousand years of city building has come to an end, and now we will have a new pattern starting with villages, etc. Material civilization is becoming like the ancient city of Babylon, and it must be destroyed.

The young people must disperse far away, the old ones to outlying places; they

must settle goal cities. {{p116}} Sell your property and pioneer!...The young people of America should go out into the country on farms and work with their hands and produce food for their families.

Americans are exposed to great dangers. Today the power of America is in the hands of the masses.[^] There is a terrific power in the press, and the people are swayed by it. The United States, on a national scale, sets the pattern for an international pattern... There will be a world civil war followed by the establishment of a world state; all the nations will be part of it and will have to conform to it. This war has already started in Korea. Mankind cannot be purified and cleansed without suffering... It is positively dangerous to live in cities. The cities are doomed. They will evaporate... The Bahá'ís must disperse from the cities...why do they not disperse? If they do not respond and disperse, they will suffer spiritually, materially, and physically...In America the destruction will be great!... They must disperse for their own protection. the cities are doomed: New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles. They must flee from the United States because America will become the storm center of the future... Buy property in Central Africa! Those with independent means must pack up and go.... Those with spirit must pack up and go.... There must be a mass response... I can warn them, but I cannot make them go.... The Cause will triumph in spite of the actions and inactivity of the believers. If one country falls down, another will make up for it. The Bahá'ís have been given the method. Now they must have the spirit. It is hopeless for capable teachers in the cities (the people will not listen).... The friends are calculating too much, and there is too much emphasis on nonessentials. [^] See Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 218

People are flocking to churches through fear. Americans must have a totally new way of life, become a race of wholly devoted souls, devoted to God and His ways. {{p117}} They must get to a simpler way of life. The standards of America must be lowered, have fewer luxuries.... Americans do not have enough belief in God, not enough detachment. They must be more spiritual, disencumber themselves from things, have Bahá'í standards, not American standards. Americans are too materialistic, too mechanized, too attached to family, health, and death. There must be less materialism, less intellectualism, and more spirit... America is the most disturbed nation, politically, on earth... There is too much organization in America and too little spirit.

Joseph Smith was a seer, not a Prophet of God, neither major nor minor Prophet. He had a high standard... but the Bahá'ís have a higher standard coupled with God's power that comes direct from God for this age.

We must encourage the marriage of blacks and whites... Bahá'u'lláh was sent to bring about world unity, and world unity is the cornerstone of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

It is not enough to go pioneering; one must start immediately teaching the Faith... For pioneers to leave their posts means the next to arrive will have to

go through the difficulties all over again, and it will be twice as difficult for them... {{p118}} As soon as the community is strong enough, one should leave and pioneer elsewhere.

The new race will be wholly devoted souls.

As the hours passed in the presence of Shoghi Effendi, I became more and more aware of his tremendous vision of the Faith and of his one aim to establish good will and peace throughout the world. He was modest about his efficiency, but one could not ignore it. He lovingly encouraged the friends in every country. Rúhíyyih Khánum said that gossip did not influence the Guardian. No one received any special things for serving the Cause; whether they did it well or poorly, the principle was the same.

Before departing at the end of my pilgrimage, I asked Shoghi Effendi if there were any service I could render him. He said, "Please visit the Bahá'í pioneers on the islands in the Mediterranean and give them my love, cheer them up, and beg them to remain at their posts; for if they leave, those who come to replace them will find it much more difficult. Share with them the spirit of the Holy Places here, particularly that of the Sacred Shrines, and tell them of the latest developments of the Ten Year Crusade."

According to the Guardian's wishes, I traveled among the Mediterranean Islands and visited the pioneers in many places. Wherever Shoghi Effendi asked me to go, I felt secure under his protection and shelter and had no anxiety although I traveled alone through these foreign lands, amid strange surroundings, and spoke only English.

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