

My Bahai Pilgrimage

Autobiography
from Childhood
to Middle Life

MIRZA AHMAD SOHRAB

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I Heard Him Say

Broken Silence

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The Will and Testament of Abdul Baha—*an analysis*

The Human Charter (*compiled*)

The Bible of Mankind (*compiled and edited*)

co-author of

The Gate

Silver Sun

Living Pictures

Introduction

These pages give, in his own words, the background of one of the most effectual leaders of our age in the struggle toward a spiritual interpretation of modern problems, the day by day application of ideals we all acknowledge in theory but often fear to implement.

Mirza Ahmad Sohrab found his lifelong inspiration in the Bahai Cause, a movement launched in Persia in 1844 toward human oneness — oneness of all religions (and respect for all of them), oneness of mankind regardless of race, an ideal of peace and of the brotherhood of man. In addition to the Bab, known as the Forerunner, this Cause had two major seers or teachers, Baha-O-Llah and his son Abdul Baha, the latter playing a key role in the present book since Sohrab for years was his secretary and reverent companion. But while the Bahai Cause from its inception

has been non-violent and has practised as well as preached the utmost tolerance, it and its champion, Sohrab, have had to face bloody persecutions in the East. Later, even in America, those who struggled to put into practice the precepts of the Bahai Cause have met with resistance and hardship.

This partial autobiography (ending in 1929) ran serially in *The Caravan*, the quarterly published by the educational organization known as the Caravan of East and West. It now appears in book form following its author's death so that it can be available to inspire many, particularly the young, by presenting an extreme instance of triumph over difficulties through terrific personal effort and faith in a vital cause. Nothing in the story, on the other hand, suggests a desire to convert or to preach. Stress here is on a plain tale of actual happenings in a colorful and very active life.

In other writings, the author has told of the years of accomplishment that started where the present volume ends — in 1929 when Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Stuyvesant Chanler began to add their strength to his. From 1929 until his death in 1958 Sohrab and a small number of volunteers headed by Mrs. Chanler carried on a dynamic struggle to put into practice Bahai ideals throughout the world. Contests were organized that stimulated young people in many lands to study problems of world peace and think out for themselves the feasibility of One World. Mass Meetings and debates were organized. Men like the great Einstein and Tagore became friends of the movement. The cause of freedom in India and Africa was stimulated. At a crucial time in Germany's life, when Hitler vanished leaving that nation cut off from liberal trends, Sohrab's creation, the Caravan of East and

West, brought inspiration to young Germans through hundreds of clubs in which study of and contact with other lands and races were put into practice. The peoples of West Africa, now peaceably gaining freedom from Britain and France, have been affected profoundly by the Caravan program under Sohrab's leadership. All religions have profited from a famous law suit won by Sohrab, in which it was decided that in the U.S.A. no group can monopolize or hold control over the name of a religion. The indefatigable Sohrab was in contact by personal letter with an incredibly large number of individuals of all races, personally sending medicines to various countries, helping Europeans and Asians to gain access to fruitful lives in U.S.A., pioneering in bringing the first German and Japanese art exhibits to America following World War II. The story of the Bahai Cause was put on the stage of New York's Metropolitan Opera House and its principles were dramatized at the New York World Fair. Sohrab meanwhile edited magazines with world-wide audiences, travelled to Europe and Israel to stimulate interest in the Caravan. He laid such firm foundations in this intricate, farflung program for the betterment of human life through application of spiritual principles that his work continues undisturbed — even by the death of the great man himself.

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1

Esphahan



Haji Seyyed Zeinel-Abedin, uncle of the author

There are no beginnings to a race, but in seeking the beginnings of the Aryan race as an entity, the scene will be placed in Northern Persia, which as a consequence became known as Iran. In early times, thousands and thousands of years before Christ, these Aryans having outgrown their homeland, started out on a movement of migration. A part of them pushed Westward and by degrees spread over Europe; another part directed itself Southward and penetrated into India. Now this second company, passing over a vast plane situated at a comparatively short distance from its point of

departure, left a group behind to settle on its broad surface, and these men laid the foundations of a town. The town, little by little, developed into a city which, with the passing of centuries, was repeatedly razed to the ground by the invader and again built up, but which despite the excesses of fortune, endured. This was Esphahan.

A national story dating back to 2,500 or 3,000 B.C. has come down to us. A certain tyrant named Zohak, Babylonian conqueror of Iran, imposed such heavy taxes on the people that he descended in legend as carrying on his shoulders two serpents which were part of his body, each of which had to be fed daily with the brains of a young man or woman. This human tribute was exacted for decades with the result that the families in that region were decimated. Finally Kaveh, a blacksmith of the town, who already had submitted to the sacrifice of fourteen children, was ordered to offer up his last two sons. Then Kaveh lifted the standard of rebellion, which happened to be the first object available—his own leather apron. This he mounted on a spear and he marched along the streets demanding justice, while the people gathered in multitudes at his call. He overthrew the tyrant and established a liberal government in Esphahan, and the leather apron splendidly embellished with jewels was treasured in the city as a sacred relic, eventually becoming the emblem of the nation.

So Esphahan was considered by the generations as the cradle of liberty, and many forward-looking enterprises took root on its soil. Indeed the Esphahese, venerating their inheritance, did not stiffen

at the approach of new thoughts. Both consciously and unconsciously they developed into the *originals* of Iran.

It was appropriate, therefore, that the first Persian follower of Mohammed should have been born in Esphahan. Salman, reared in the native Zoroastrian Faith, was an ardent seeker after Truth his interest in religious matters causing him to frequent the Christian churches, a few of which had sprung up here and there in Iran. Having studied the doctrines offered, his insatiable thirst for knowledge and experience led him to the Arabian Peninsula, and there, in the city of Mecca, he heard of the young camel driver who was looked upon as Prophet.

When, after some wanderings, Salman came into the presence of Mohammed, he had already learned the fundamentals of the Faith, and he accepted Islam with the sacrifices that it entailed, setting his name in history as one of the earliest and most courageous of the Disciples. The writings of Salman are included in the Hadiths, a compilation which, in the eyes of Musslemans, ranks second to the Koran.

Esphahan dated its golden age from the Safavi Dynasty founded in the 16th century by the illustrious Shah Abbas. Under this talented ruler, the city was laid out in contours that still hold today. We have the same wide avenues bordered by magnificent palaces; the same parks and gardens; the same reservoirs and rivulets brought at that period from Zayandeh-Roud (River of Immortality) and set aflowing down the great boulevards.

vard. We have the same Royal Square, termed by Europeans the most imposing in the world; the same bridges and later ones besides, and then bazaars, baths and plazas of every date combining their marvels for the embellishment of the original design. Above all in import and beauty, stand the hundreds of gorgeous mosques, on account of which Esphahan is generally referred to as The City of Mosques and Minarets.

This Esphahan, a modern metropolis flourishing amid decaying grandeur, had been the home of my mother's ancestors for hundreds of years and it was in these surroundings that my family first felt the impact of the *New Forces* that were destined to outline the epilogue of the Iran of the past.

In the early part of the 19th century the scholars and mystics of Iran, through their studies of the Holy Books and their computations regarding the prophecies, were becoming increasingly aware of the fact that the Promised One of Islam (*Medhi* as he was called) was due to make his appearance at almost any moment. For centuries the prayer "Oh, Mehdi! Hasten thy coming!" had been pronounced five times a day by the Faithful, and now, on the recognized eve of fulfillment, the centers of Islamic learning were pulsating with anxious expectancy. My family was among those which were fully conscious of the import of the times, so it was not surprising that my Grandmother, as a sensitive girl in her teens, made contact with coming events through a dream.

She saw a young man, slim and beautiful, clothed in the green which symbolized descent from the

Prophet, and this apparition smiled at her with a smile of warmth and intimacy that touched her soul to the quick. Then, in a few words, which she heard pronounced very clearly, he promised a future for her descendants which would be involved with him.

In this dream my Grandmother was transported to the threshold of Paradise. I can say that she remained on that plane thereafter.

Some years later, a youthful reformer from Shiraz arose upon the horizon of Iran, announcing the imminent collapse of the old systems of thought and the dawn of a *New Day* of spiritual and practical emancipation. This teacher of modest parentage who, at the beginning of his mission had called himself the Bab (the Gate to knowledge) later had the temerity to assume the title of *Mehdi*.

Needless to say the clerical authorities, who for so long had anticipated this very contingency, arose as one man in opposition, and pursued the daring claimant with unremitting ferocity. They were successful in their efforts which very shortly culminated in the execution of the Bab on the prison square of Tabriz.

Nevertheless, in spite of the short duration of the drama in which he played the central figure, the Bab had had many opportunities to leave the impress of his message on the multitudes. Among the Esphahanese there are two striking examples, taken from the opposite ends of society, of those who responded to his call.

The first in this city to unreservedly champion

the New Cause of Freedom was a wheat sifter. When news of the unmerciful persecutions inflicted on the followers of the Bab in a distant locality reached this man in his barn, he left his work and, still holding his sieve, rushed out into the street.

"Where are you off to?" his neighbors cried after him.

"I go to the assistance of my friends."

"And what do you intend to do with your sieve?"

"My sieve! Oh!" and he looked, as if for the first time, at his humble implement. Then he said thoughtfully, "I will sift the people that I meet on my way. Those that pass through the sieve will be left behind, but those that remain in it will accompany me to the field of martyrdom."

This symbol—the sieve, wherein are collected the self-forgetful, is one worthy to stand at least on a par with the leather apron of Kaveh, the blacksmith.

The second example of a devoted Esphahani was the Governor of that city, and we are told of a remarkable scene which took place in the state gardens between the Bab and this distinguished official. The latter said: "I have, through the grace of God, become aware of the truth of your claims and it is my ardent desire to consecrate myself to the furtherance of the movement. Now, I have fifty thousand men at my command. At the head of this army I plan to march to the gates of Teheran where I will demand an audience with the Shah. It happens that our sovereign has complete confidence in me, therefore this military demon-

stration will simply serve as proof of my determination. I believe that I can gain his support and it is even possible that I will obtain for you the hand of one of the royal princesses. I can see you as the virtual ruler of Iran, extirpating all traces of the superstition and intolerance that have stained the fair name of religion, and lifting high the standard of this wondrous Cause before the eyes of the nations." Then he closed with these words, "I am very rich and have no children. All that I possess is yours."

Was this a Satan tempting his Lord? Was it a Constantine able to direct the course of history? Certainly to an obscure propagandist, burning with eagerness to spread his ideas, it was a dazzling offer, yet how was it received?

"May God requite you for your noble intentions," the Bab answered. "So lofty a resolve is more precious than the act itself, but the diffusion of God's truth cannot be effected by such means."

Once more the Governor strove to serve his Master. In the mosque "Masjid-i Shah" (Mosque of the King) he convened the ecclesiastical dignitaries of Iran, so that the validity of the Bab's claims might be discussed with the reformer in person. He counted on the logic that had so impressed him to have like effect on the church. The proceedings were conducted with great pomp and lasted several days, thus giving opportunity to the hierarchy to oppose in body, and at great length, their single antagonist. The verdict was as might have been expected. The Mullahs had no intention of admitting that their Promised One had re-

vealed himself in so simple a guise, nevertheless, as many of the sessions took place in public, the people of Esphahan had the privilege of judging the arguments for themselves. In this way the seeds of spiritual reformation were scattered, and took root in many receptive hearts.

On one of these occasions, as the Bab stood in the mimbar (pulpit) presenting his case, a girl, who afterwards became my Grandmother, slipped into the mosque. Leaning against a pillar near the entrance, she listened, at first curiously and then with absorbed interest, her well-trained mind weighing the speaker's every point until presently all her being was startled into something very like acceptance. After the address was terminated and the mosque had emptied itself, she waited, unable to tear herself away, and then gaining courage, she sent an attendant to request for her an interview with the preacher.

The Bab never refused himself to any one, and within a few moments my Grandmother found herself in his presence. Shyly she advanced toward him and, as her eyes rested on his face for the first time, she realized in a flash that this was the Being that had appeared in her dream. Then, the Bab smiled as he had smiled upon her before, and he said, "We have met already. Do you remember?"

2

My Grandmother

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One of the wisest of teachers once said to his followers: "There is a certain word that should never be used. It is the word I."

Obviously in giving this advice, Confucius struck at the very root of all the evil in the world, and yet here I find myself launched on the task of recounting the story of my early years. The explanation is that my life was never meant to be an individual one. It simply was a small lamp lit in the vicinity of the Sun of Truth, which has burned since then, feebly, sometimes intermittently, as testimony to that Great Light from which it had caught its flame.

I was born in about 1894 in the village Sedeh, situated about twenty miles from Esphahan. My father Abdul Baghi, direct descendant of Moham-med through Hussein, (eldest of the Prophet's two grandsons) was a farmer possessed of broad lands, granaries and gardens. He also was chief dyer of the town, and I well remember the great vats in

his factory filled with indigo dye in which the white cloth woven by the villagers was colored blue. In appearance he was a tall, gaunt, black-bearded man, with his black turban, symbol of his descent from the Prophet, ever on his head. A rigid, orthodox observer of the law (he never prayed less than five times a day), he was an example of the virtuous Musliman who was convinced that he and his fellow-believers alone had direct passports to Paradise. Lord of his domain, of his flocks, of his men, intelligent, energetic, shrewd, dominating, he nevertheless at times showed a stern kindness and was looked up to by the villagers, who imitated him in everything, as a model of honesty and rectitude. My father was a fine example of a Persian of the old school.

On the maternal side, my ancestry was altogether different. For centuries residents of Esphahan, its members consisted of poets, philosophers, educators, lawyers. They were leaders of thought in many departments—a line of dreamers par excellence. In a word it was a non-conformist family, one seeking untrodden paths, while strangely enough its descent was of the same as my father's—from the Prophet through the martyred Hussein.

My Grandmother had four sons, of which I distinctly remember two, and a daughter who became my mother. One of these two sons broke class traditions to the extent of leaving home to study medicine in the capital, a departure from custom which astonished the community in view of the fact that physicians did not rank high in the eyes of the Islamic world. As it turned out,

MY GRANDMOTHER

my uncle had chosen a calling for which he was well-fitted, and he became one of the greatest surgeons in the royal hospital of Teheran as well as the founder of several modern medical schools.

My other uncle remained at home. Philosopher, author, poet, and student deeply versed in the history and lore of ancient religions, he also was possessed of a strange mystical quality which did not imply asceticism in the least sense. Rather the reverse condition existed, for he was renowned for his conviviality, and *Khodaa Deevaneh*, as he was called, (Inspired Madman) attracted the unconventional and the daring, becoming the center of a liberal group of which he himself was the fascinating entertainer.

My Grandmother's house, which was home to the family, fronted on a small street named *Mahalleh-Noe* (New Street), that is, the entrance through the outer wall was there. The visitor who passed through this small gateway found himself in a passage, at the end of which was a door. A knocker summoned an attendant, who let the guest through another passage and lifted a curtain. Then the house was revealed standing beyond an inner streetway.

The house was large, enclosing a long luxuriant garden in the center of which a fountain played. The women's apartments and reception rooms overlooked this large garden. Beyond were the men's quarters built around a smaller garden, and yet beyond the kitchen, the store-house and granaries, and the stable.

This was my Grandmother's home. In it she lived as an inspired Madonna, surrounded by her

children and their children. Her personality, so lofty, so sane, so generous, was the pivot around which the family circle turned, and even as the pivot was firmly fixed, so did the circumference move in perfect balance. I do not remember an instance of anything inharmonious taking place within that house. The relations among the members of the family, among the servants in regard to their masters and themselves, among all toward the crowds of guests which frequented these most hospitable premises was everything that could have been desired, while through all the activities of this normal and most busy Oriental household, a certain consciousness brooded—dream-like, detached, uplifted.

My Uncle owned several farms in the village of Sedeh. During the summer season the whole family used to migrate to them in order to escape the city's heat. On their broad lands they cultivated rice, tobacco, barley and wheat, and lived a life of pastoral informality. It was a vacation in every sense, the women even going to the length of discarding their veils for the time being. Under these conditions, a young neighboring farmer, who later became my father, saw the pearl of the household and fell in love with her.

It was a meeting of two sides of the world. On the one hand was a sensitive city bred girl who had been reared in an atmosphere of scholasticism and culture, on the other a man from the very heart of nature, vigorous, determined, hard-headed. My Uncle saw the advantageous sides of such a union from the material standpoint, but my Grandmother opposed the idea in her own gentle way,

MY GRANDMOTHER

expecting that her simple disapproval would carry full weight as usual. This, however, was an instance where precedent gave way. As was often said afterward, it was the only time that she lost her case.

The wedding took place in Esphahan and, as is customary in Persia, was a very elaborate and costly affair, lasting seven days and seven nights. My Grandmother's house and garden were crowded to capacity with guests coming and going, eating and sleeping, watching fireworks, singing songs, repeating poems and prayers. Then, at the close of the festivities, the young farmer took home his lovely bride, together with her substantial dowry of money, furnishings and livestock.

What happens when a nightingale flies into a cage, when a wave runs into a reservoir, when the Spring dislodges itself from its own blossoming trees and tries to function in mid-winter? Heart-break, suspension of animation, death. After a year or more of existence in the restricted village, far from the pulse-beat of mental and spiritual life, my mother, still in her teens, quietly slipped away from the confines of the earth, leaving behind a baby a few months old. Then my Grandmother came and carried me to her home in Esphahan.

I was brought up in the garden. From the farthest boundaries of my memory the scent of roses comes back to me, as do the colors on the sectioned flower-petals of the morning-glory and on the lilac trees. Interlocked with the charm of this recollection is the current of my Uncle's voice, still reaching me, melodious, enthralling, while through

it all, an influence more tangible than any that can be treasured by the senses yet bears upon me—the influence of my Grandmother.

I was fortunate in having my teacher close at hand. I did not have to cross the street to study Saadi, Hafiz and Jelal-Ed-Din Rumi; my Grandmother was there to instruct me. Nor was I the only pupil. From every side the children came, rich children and poor children, to learn reading and writing, history and poetry, to say nothing of manners, for everything that my Grandmother knew was at the disposal of everyone. "Never disown anything" she would tell us, meaning that profound truths may lurk behind the most trivial matters, and again "Never term your country nor your religion as best, for the others are just as good."

Often she would tell us fairy tales, and among these there was a certain story which went something like this:

Once upon a time there stood an ancient city, beautiful, rich and prosperous. It was adorned with palaces, bazaars and gardens, and everything that the heart could desire was to be found within its precincts. So the inhabitants were happy and untroubled until, with the passing of time, all the open spaces were taken up by buildings and the sky spaces became less and less and less. So it was that men, thinking only of their physical comforts, forgot the Divine Comfort.

As a result of living in the obscurity, divers strange maladies began to afflict the once healthy population; the music in the public parks ceased

and even the birds forgot to sing. Then one day a young Teacher appeared in the market place, and he gathered the people around him and announced that all must move out of the old city. "You cannot live in these restricted quarters," he told them, "for here you cannot see the sun, and the clouds and the panorama of God. Hasten, and get to work, and build for yourselves a New City in the open."

"Did the people do it?" the children asked of my Grandmother.

"Oh no," and she shook her head very sorrowfully. "The people made fun of the young Teacher and abused him, and they picked up stones and pelted him with them. Yes, they killed the architect of the New City."

"Then it was never built, and everyone continued to live in the dark?"

"The plans still exist," my Grandmother said, and then, "Perhaps you will be the ones to carry them out."

I remember that I jumped to my feet at this challenge. "We can, we will do it," I cried. "We shall gather the bricks! We shall grind the mortar! We shall plant the gardens!" and off I started with the others trotting after me, a company of a dozen tots, and we marched round and round the fountain shouting at the top of our voices. "We shall build the New City—out in the open—out in the light!"

And my Grandmother stood on the terrace smiling at us very wistfully.

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Childhood Days

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The eastern world believes in dreams. To an Oriental, dreams are not fantasies but projections of events that will transpire. The theory is that in dreams we enter the sub-conscious realm which is a treasury of explanation and penetrable mysteries. If a person is very sensitive and idealistic, he can unravel the mysteries and find guidance. In sleep the spirit, like a great white canvas, receives impressions of the infinite world.

When my Grandmother dreamt of the Bab, she knew that she had seen *ahead* but she did not expect that realization would be hers. Later, on meeting him, her life was transfigured. She felt that she had found the ultimate. However this was not the case, for as she absorbed the teachings of the young reformer which more and more were being repeated in many quarters, she came to grasp the essential point of his mission: He, a Prophet of

Islam in his own right, was likewise the Forerunner of One greater yet. It was the obligation of his followers to find *Him whom God shall Manifest*.

Thus my home was alerted to recognize Him when he came, and, when Baha-O-Llah took leadership of the Bahais, my Grandmother recognized him with ease as the fulfillment of prophesy. She would tell us about Him whom she herself had never seen. "He is a joy maker" she said, "and a joy giver. He will bestow a peace that overcomes all quarrels and all disputes—a peace that will establish actual family relationship among the children of men." And then especially: "He is free, and will establish freedom in ideas and in living."

The eastern world lives by authority—authority in religion, authority in politics. For ages these people have bowed to authority and actually have required it, and here was my Grandmother who had outgrown the system of authority which binds the minds and makes people and nations slaves! Authority yes, but not one that demands obedience, rather one that compels it through its own purity and truth.

Again she said: "A teacher must have no selfish thought, no desire to be served by others, but must ever be at the disposal of his fellow men."

In childhood I would sit for hours in our garden, dreaming of Him who was the embodiment of joy, freedom and servitude to all men, and ever I passed my play-hours around this idea. Together with the neighbors' children I would construct little houses, many of them made of clay-bricks

with thatched roofs. We would make tiny tables and various pieces of furniture, and place them in the houses, always designing one chair for the Great Teacher should he happen to drop in. We used to plant seeds in the garden, but always I reserved one patch of soil for Him to plant his seeds, and at our parties, when the maid would bring in the refreshments and light the candles, I would insist that one candle remain unlit for Him to light. This system of leaving an empty chair, a patch of soil, an unlit candle obsessed me for years; while my Grandmother drilled us in the idea that we must always keep space in our lives to be filled by the Higher Powers.

My earliest education was derived from my Grandmother and my Uncle. They read to me from the Holy Books of Islam and taught me to recite Persian poetry. The visions and dreams of philosophers and scholars became part of my life, and the excitement and romanticism of the Arabian Nights continuously haunted me. My memory was so well trained that I became adept at recitation and in the telling of tales, and I would entertain the other children by the hour with passages from books of all kinds, theological, historical, mystical, with poetry much accentuated. Then I went to school.

In the Mohammedan schools both teacher and pupils sat on the floor; there were no tables, and the thought of punishment was always present. The bastinado stood in the room, to be used on the backward or difficult children. This instrument consists of a heavy board fitted with ropes. The

culprit lies on this board and his feet are lifted high by means of the ropes. Then the teacher beats the soles of the feet with a long, lithe stick. The pain is great because the soles of feet are very sensitive. Often blood would flow. I came in for this punishment quite often and I would stuff my robe into my mouth to prevent me from crying out. I was not very long in that school, although I did stick it out for about a year longer than many of the others who ran away.

Next I was sent to a school in a colony of Armenians which had resided some three hundred years in the vicinity of Esphahan. My Uncle had business relations with these Christians who often came to our house and when they proposed that I should study with their children, he did not think the idea out of the way. However to Mohammedan orthodoxy, which was dominant in our city, this association with Christians was a terrific breach of religious and social etiquette. The distance to be covered was six or seven miles on my donkey, but I did not mind this in the least as I was eager to learn.

Two items in my educational program left a mark on me. I began to study French, and I heard about America—the New World, *Yanga Donya* as it was called. We did not have any maps; it was just a name in the books, but somehow or other it rang a bell in me.

"You know about Yanga Donya?" I would say to my classmates. "Some day I will be there. I will write to you from that place," and the children would laugh at me, and they dubbed me with the

CHILDHOOD DAYS

name "Yanga Donya" and I was known as such among the Armenians.

I was about seven years of age when I felt that this school had nothing more to offer, so I induced two other boys to go forth with me and see the world. We did not travel far, for there were few roads and we were afoot, but we managed to stay away for a year and a half. Sometimes we did strike a highway and a passing caravan would give us a lift, and so by hook or by crook we subsisted, going from village to village where I would tell stories in exchange for food. That period was training in resourcefulness and initiative, and I never regretted it, the more so that my family was not too deeply disturbed at my absence, counting on Allah to bring me back unharmed.

On returning, I found that a great change had taken place in our house. It had become the centre in Esphahan for the Bahais. Constant meetings were going on, all of them held with great precaution for we were surrounded by enemies. Often some mysterious visitor or other would call on my Uncle and the two would engage in long, private consultations. I was used as errand boy and would carry secret messages to all kinds of places. Through it all I knew that something tremendous and dangerous was happening, and I would catch such words as the New Revelation, the New Day, and especially the wondrous and arresting name—Baha-O-Llah.

After a while my Grandmother decided to visit her other son who had become a leading physician

and surgeon in Teheran. I accompanied her, and we travelled for fourteen days through villages and deserts until we arrived at the capital, where we remained over a period of nearly two years. Here my uncle taught me from elementary books on medicine, encouraged me to learn the properties of various herbs and even allowed me to mix drops and make pills. I spent my days in his clinic and became so absorbed in the art of healing that I certainly would have become a doctor if I could have chosen my career at that time. However it was decided that we return to Esphahan.

At home we found conditions changed to this extent, that the numerous meetings were held even more secretly. Pass words and signs had to be given by visitors before entering the house. A sense of peril was manifest and encompassing.

In the month of Moharram, during which fanaticism always seeks expression, my Uncle was denounced from the mimbar (pulpit) as an enemy of Islam, deserving death. His property was declared to be the possession of the public.

One evening at about eight o'clock we were gathered in the garden, old people and young people conversing in hushed voices and sometimes breaking into a low-toned chant, when a knock was heard at the door. I went to see who was there and could hear muffled sounds in the street. It seemed that a great crowd was without. Then someone shouted "Open the door or we will break it through!"

I ran to tell my Uncle, but before I reached him

the battering on the door began and no words were necessary. Our people scattered, melting away in different directions, to the back of the house and over the garden walls. The mob was now in possession; clubs and stones in hand, the men were rushing about seeking my Uncle. Fortunately the women's quarters were overlooked, or else respected. I was huddled in a corner of the main house, hearing the shouts, the threats, the unhinging of the doors which were being carried away. Everything was taken, furniture, hangings, rugs, utensils of all kinds. Even the flowers were trampled and the bushes uprooted. My half-brother was caught, and hauled away, and finally I was noticed and pulled to the open. "This boy knows the name and address of every Bahai in the city!"

"Bring him along" the people shouted, and I was hurried to the house of the chief Mullah. In the presence of this dignitary I was questioned, gently at first, then roughly: "Where is your uncle? Where are the Bahais? Name them!" I did not answer. Then they placed me in the bastinado and began to beat the soles of my feet. "Name them!" they kept repeating, while I too addressed myself: "You did not cry out in school. Keep silence now." The torture was so great that presently I became numb all over and fainted away, so they carried me back to our entrance and left me there.

My Grandmother had been wandering around our ruined house and, as she stepped through what once had been the door way, she stumbled against my body and caught me up in her arms. By this time I was just regaining consciousness. Rejoicing

in that I was alive, my Grandmother carried me indoors and proceeded to wash my feet which were just a bleeding mass of flesh. The pain was excruciating, yet I kept my eyes on her face, so happy, so proud and stained with tears and the blood of my feet which she was kissing, and she said: "These blessed feet which have entered the service of the Master!" As I looked at her face, I fainted again—this time for joy.

My Uncle had escaped by running along the roof of the house and dropping into the adjoining garden, which happened to be owned by a bitter enemy of the Cause and of himself. In falling, he had broken his leg. As he lay there he couldn't help moaning, so the neighbor's family found him and took him to the garret where they kept him for two nights and a day. God inspired these people to protect an injured man, and he was sheltered in a house where no one would have thought of searching for him. The second night he was brought to us.

At the far end of the stable which was stripped of all the animals, a small, frightened donkey remained hidden in the hay. Before dawn, my Grandmother brought him out and helped my Uncle and me to his back—a strong man and an eleven year old boy, neither of whom could stand on his feet. Then she led the donkey along the deserted streets, past the empty market place, and through the gates of Esphahan where she bade us farewell. As we slowly advanced along the road, I turned back to wave my hand, and there was my Grandmother smiling bravely as she watched us leaving home, in my case forever.

4

The Open Road

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Among Orientals, fanaticism rises from the people's sincerity in regard to their religion and their zeal to protect it from infidelity or innovation. We realized this, so the persecution applied to our family was quite comprehensible to us, the more so because we well knew that religion brings out both the best and the worst in men. We respected our fellow-citizens on account of their love for Islam, but we also feared them knowing that they would stop at nothing in order to destroy my Uncle, which act in their eyes would be one of high devotional value. We had to make plans to get out of the radius of danger, but for the moment this was impossible as both my Uncle and I were incapacitated.

A certain Bahai had a house and garden at a distance of some three miles from the city. We presented ourselves at his door, still on our little donkey, and asked for temporary shelter. This he afforded willingly in spite of the danger involved for him, and we spent our days in this garden under the care of a physician, while my Grandmother visited us regularly and brought us the news.

My half-brother had been beaten exactly as I had been and fined 1,000 tumans. Then he was set free as being of no account. Meanwhile my Grandmother had sold some jewelry, with the proceeds of which she bought needles, thread, thimbles, scissors and all kinds of knickknacks useful to women and almost indispensable.

After forty days in his garden, we were in condition to leave the generous Bahai. We mounted our donkey, armed with a knapsack, half of which was packed with the sewing materials and half with herbs supplied by my Grandmother, also drugs which my apprenticeship in the Teheran clinic had given me a slight knowledge of. Heartfelt thanks to our host, a long farewell to my Grandmother and we started off on the road to nowhere!

After a day's travel we reached a spring and sat down to rest under overshadowing branches. We made a little fire and prepared tea. Whilst drinking it, a horseman passed by, looked at us curiously and stopped. Our hearts were in our mouths for we knew that search-parties were scouting the roads for us, nevertheless he either was doubtful as to

our identity or else took pity on us, for after a few questions he rode on.

We were gypsies, wending our way from village to village, from town to town. We had to move among frequented areas which afforded us the means of subsistence. Our little store of sewing appliances was exchanged for food and sometimes for pennies which we spent on re-stocking, while our main practice was the relief of pain. My Uncle, who knew nothing of healing, was presumably the doctor, while I did the actual prescribing to the best of my abilities. In many cases it was easy to help, with quinine to lower fever, aspirin to relieve aches and colds, iodine to disinfect and lotions to dry up rashes. My Grandmother's herbs, the benefits of which I knew, stood me in good stead, while my Uncle's confident manner and benevolent interest contributed as much as the drugs toward bringing good results.

In one village many of the children had eye trouble, and we treated them with boric acid. We saw the eyes becoming brighter and then went on our way. Having reached a distance of about three miles, we heard shouts coming from a distance, and turning, saw a group of men hurrying after us. Naturally we were alarmed, thinking that something had gone wrong with someone and that the doctor was blamed, but no, quite the reverse was the case. Word had gone around that miracles had been wrought and the townsmen were bent on showing their gratitude with offerings of wheat, barley, chickens and eggs, enough to load up four donkeys.

When it was seen that we could not carry all our gifts, another idea came to our grateful patients. We were to return, to be royally entertained and attend to the many who required our services. So we went back, took part in a big feast and cared for dozens of visitors from other villages who had heard of the miracle man and were clamoring for attention. We stayed there for almost a week.

An experience in the wilderness was very frightening. We were called in to examine a man who had a serious stomach malady and, while in his tent, saw him pass away in a convulsion. As there was nothing to be done, we thought it wise to hurry off before any accusations could be made against us, and were well on our way when we were caught by his angry friends. They drove us back without ceremony, the while charging us with the death of the patient and threatening that if he were not brought back to life, our own lives would be exacted in place of his. We were led into the tent where the body lay, and ordered to set to work. My Uncle and I looked at each other, then we knelt beside the couch and I watched him as he gave himself up in prayer. I had never seen a face so wrapt, so strangely detached. I prayed also in my own way. We must have been kneeling for something like half an hour when suddenly the body stirred. I felt the pulse. It was beating.

My Uncle rose to his feet. He looked exhausted. The man asked for a drink. Then the people began to scream. They carried the news outside, and an uproar arose in the tented city. Men and women danced, sang and jumped about making funny

noises in their throats. We thought it time to slip away and tried to, but they would not have it so, and we remained for a full week of celebration, while the sick man improved daily and finally, himself took part in the festivities.

In our wanderings we reached Abadeh, a remarkable town in that half of the population was Bahai. A feast was held in a lovely garden abloom with flowers and alive with a clear running stream. More than a hundred elderly men, most of them with long white beards, sat on the ground in two rows, facing each other over a marvelously laden banquet board. The younger ones stood about. No women were present.

Before taking part in the feast, all began to recite the words of Baha-O-Llah, but ere they had gone far, someone rushed in with a sealed letter. Knowing from whence it came, the envelope was carefully cut. Then the contents were chanted to the assemblage. This was a copy of one of Abdul Baha's earliest tablets to the Bahais of the United States. Through it we became aware of the fact that there actually were Bahais in America.

I watched the faces of the listeners; there was not a dry eye to be seen. All were weeping at the surprising news that the Bahai teachings had reached *Yanga Donya*, the New World.

It was a happy group of people who finally turned their attention to the waiting feast, and they sat for long hours eating and discussing the amazing turn of events that had brought America within the circumference of the Cause. Meanwhile

I was writing. Our host had given me permission to copy the Tablet, so when the time arrived for us to leave Abadeh, I was able to take with me the earliest words of Abdul Baha (among so many that were to follow) addressed to the New World.

I memorized the Tablet and from then on during this pilgrimage in Iran, I recited it at all the Bahai meetings that we attended.

After some months of wandering, we reached the holy city of Shiraz where the Bab had declared his Message. Here, among the many Bahais whom we met, one stood out, majestic and marvelous—Seyyed Assadullah. This great disciple, who had been chosen as teacher to the children of Baha-O-Llah, singled me out as being worthy of special instruction, and I spent long hours absorbing his knowledge and rejoicing in his characteristics.

In those days every Bahai teacher had the privilege of taking a person with him to visit Abdul Baha in Acca, so Seyyed Assadullah wrote to the Master and asked permission to bring me. When the answer came, it was stated that my Uncle should return to Esphahan, as the conditions were ameliorated and his presence was needed there. I should travel with Seyyed Assadullah and come to Acca. The Master added that the Cause held a great future for me.

On receiving these instructions, my Uncle and I parted. I left him who had taught me so much in learning and living, in whose presence I had always delighted, in whom the combination of mysticism, art and conviviality had always stirred

me to happy acceptance—I left him with the prospect of our meeting no more on this earth, and, in the care of Seyyed Assadullah, pushed southward on the road of my destiny.

At Bandar Abbas we again found ourselves in a Bahai community. A person might live for years in such towns without knowing that any Bahais were round about, but by means of a letter of introduction he could enter into another world, so different from the Islamic society of prejudice, so fraught with love and spiritual understanding. In this way we went from city to city, from village to village, always finding our own kind—simple people who could not write their names, scholars, philosophers, all united in the realization of something transcendent that had come their way.

From Bushir we took a little steamer to Bombay, where we found a large group of Zoroastrians who had become Bahai. Many of these people had restaurants and, as they were most hospitable, we seldom had to pay for our meals. Unaccustomed as I was to Indian cooking the food seemed very hot, but little by little I became used to it.

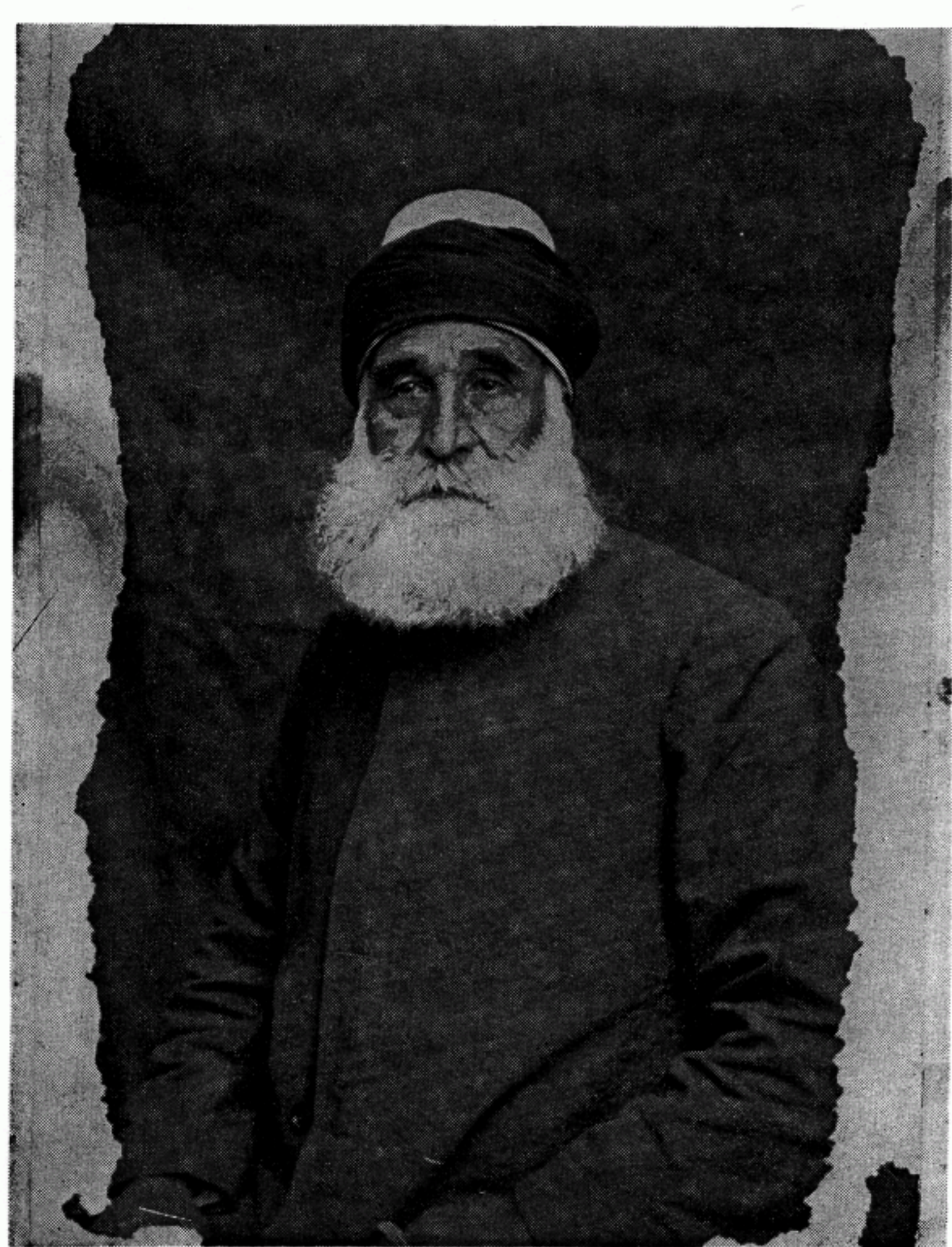
In Poona I received a shock. My Uncle suddenly appeared on the scene. It seemed that his family had advised him to delay his return for a while, so he had decided to run down to India to see me again. This event was so unexpected that joy left me breathless, and I remained in this state for the short period which fate had allowed us as a bonus. Then the time came for him to turn homeward in earnest so as to fulfill Abdul Baha's

wishes, and we parted on the deck of the boat on which Seyyed Assadullah and I sailed to Port Said.

I remember looking on him for the last time. He seemed strangely tall, and his beard, which had altered during the months of wandering, was of unaccustomed white. His eyes were sad, with the deep sadness of resignation. So I saw him, and so I see him yet.

On the boat we spread our blankets and belongings on the deck as did everyone else. All cooked and ate right there. It was a conglomeration of humanity, of various extractions and walks of life. One day a storm arose, and the little steamer, like an empty walnut shell, was raised to the sky and forced to the bottom of the sea, up and down continuously, whilst mountains of water drenched everything in sight. When we put in at Port Said, we were minus everything except the clothes on our backs.

On the dock, Mirza Ahmad Yazdi, who later married Abdul Baha's youngest daughter, was awaiting us. He took us to his apartment, fed us and started us off on another boat to Haifa. Here we were met by Mirza Taki Menshadi, secretary to Abdul Baha. This man was the channel of correspondence between the Master and the outside world. Thousands of letters came through his pen, the method used being a system of short-writing which he had developed himself and which later became current among the Bahais of Persia. In addition to this use of abbreviated writing, Mirza Menshadi did not indulge in the usual epistolical, eloquent and flowing Persian style, in which pages



Seyyed Assadullah

were covered without anything being said. No preliminary prayers and blessings went with his letters—only news.

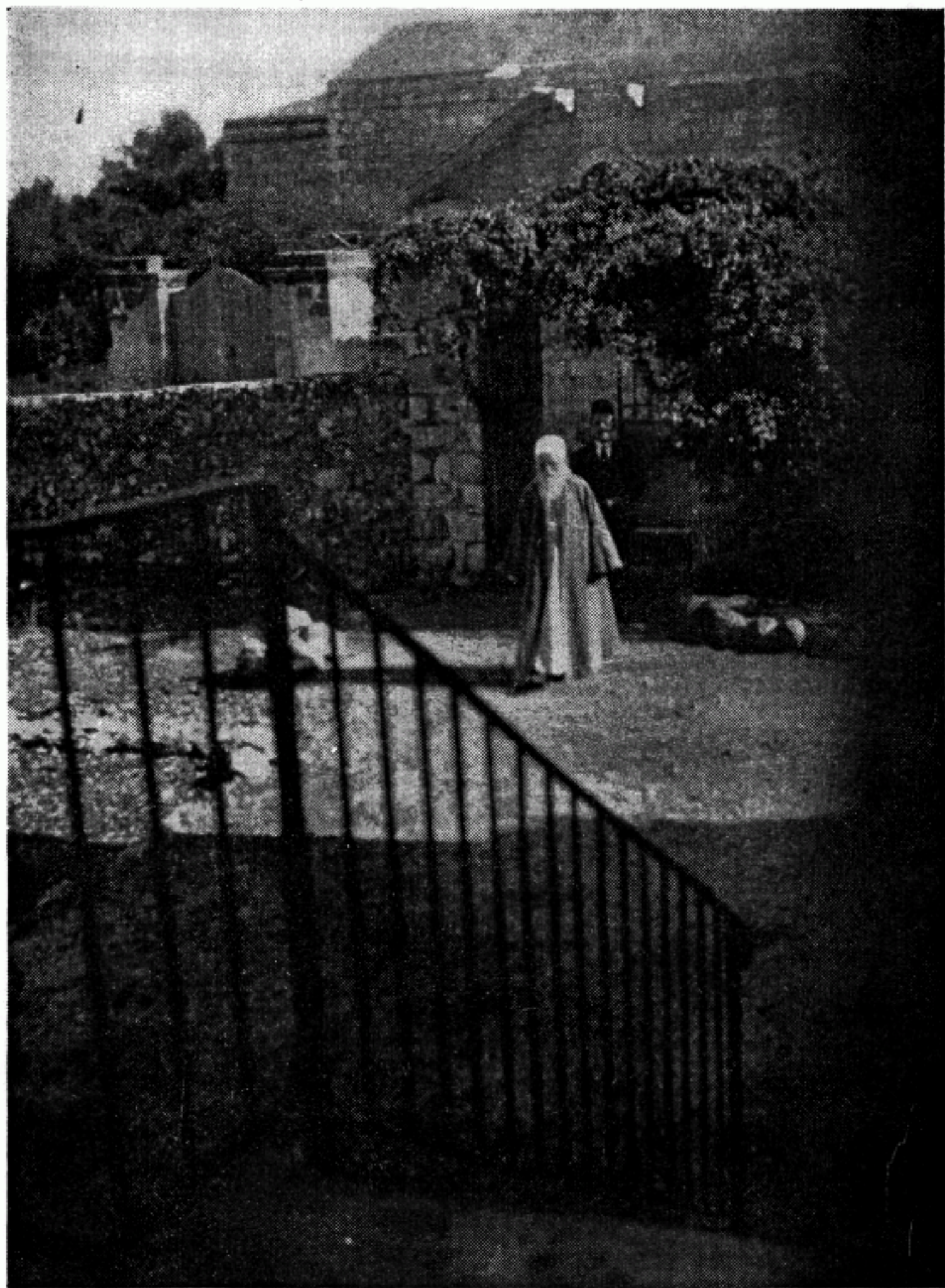
Mirza Menshadi told us that Abdul Baha was awaiting us in Acca, so we took a cab and covered the distance which was about ten miles. On arriving, we were informed that the Master was visiting the Shrine of Baha-O-Llah, in Bahjee, quite a bit beyond the city, so we went on afoot from there. As we were crossing the plain of Acca, we saw a company of people surrounding a person who was riding on a donkey. The group was moving slowly in the same direction as ourselves. We quickened our pace and caught up with the party. The rider looked over his shoulder, saw us and dismounted. He advanced toward Seyyed Assadullah, his followers making way before him, and reaching us he exclaimed:

"Marhabah Khosh amadeed" (Welcome! Welcome! You have travelled far). Then turning to me, he opened his arms and drew me to him, and he kissed my forehead.

"You have suffered much," Abdul Baha said. "Now you have reached home. I will take care of you. I will protect you." He held my hand and together we walked toward the Shrine of Baha-O-Llah, while the Sun of my life took its place in the heavens.

5

Acca and Port Said



Abdul Baha in Acca

In Acca, life was a profound experience. Here were exiles earning a bare living in the bazaars, and all the while conscious of a *presence* in their midst around which they revolved. These families, well to do or rich before they left Persia, had accepted danger, hardship and want in order to follow Baha-O-Llah without compromise, and now that their Lord had passed from the confines of this earth, they were turning to the same horizon of light, on which the personality of Abdul Baha now shone upon them, warm and radiant. They called him Aga (Master) and they existed only with the thought of serving him, and of carrying out his wishes either spoken or unspoken.

In Persia, the art of calligraphy has always ranked high, and excellent calligraphers were in great demand. Usually a period of study, covering ten or fifteen years, was required in order to turn out an expert. When these students had mastered the practice of handwriting, they produced beautiful manuscripts

which were bound and took the place of printed books. Among the Bahais the teachings were disseminated through the written word, and it fortunately happened that the group at Acca included two calligraphists of the first rank.

I met Jenabe Zain when he was at the age of ninety-two. Since his arrival in Acca, he had devoted his entire time to the copying of the works of Baha-O-Llah for the benefit of pilgrims who were constantly arriving in the Prison City. The pilgrims would buy the manuscripts at a nominal price, or if they couldn't pay anything receive them for nothing, and then they would take the precious pages with them to be recopied in other places. Jenabe Zain lived with his family in one small room. He was active, versatile and delightfully humorous. On reaching Acca, I began to visit him daily at five o'clock and he would tell me the story of the Bahai Cause, much of which he had experienced personally. It was the Master's wish that my knowledge of the movement, initiated in my Uncle's garden and extended on my journey with Seyyed Assadullah, should be deepened through association with Jenabe Zain.

Musgin Galam, tall, sinewy and quite comical in appearance, was considerably younger than Jenabe Zain, being about seventy when I landed in Acca. Also a super-calligraphist, he used his own type of expression which may be called poster or pen and ink painting. From a distance his work might look like a rooster or a bird of paradise, but on closer inspection one would find that the various parts of anatomy and the long swirling feathers consisted entirely of words. A saying of Baha-O-Llah: *Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this,*

that he loves his kind, might appear in the tail — another: *Oh people, be not occupied with yourselves! Be intent on the betterment of hte world and the training of nations*, would be discernible in the wings. The feet also and the head consisted of words, intricately and perfectly wrought, making of each poster a masterpiece. These word-paintings were at the disposal of visitors for a small sum or for nothing, even as were the manuscripts of Jenabe Zain, and travellers would take them back to Persia, Turkey, India and many parts of the Orient to be held as valuable reminders of halloed days in Acca.

Absorbed as they were on their practical work for the Cause, these artists yet recognized the fact that amusement is a necessary part of life. So, as their talents were varied, the two aged men organized meetings to entertain the exiles and pilgrims. They would relate fables and illustrate them with shadow pictures on the wall, cast by their deft hands. The people followed each motion with appreciation, and often laughed till the tears ran down their cheeks. I can say that any performers of the West or East would have a hard time to find so receptive an audience. Those exiles knew how to entertain and be entertained. Being Bahais, they accepted the fact that life must be rounded, containing if possible a little of everything that is good.

As for me, I began to develop my memory in earnest. This accomplishment is considered essential among Orientals, and they teach their children to recite, not only chapters, but books in their entirety. I was pretty well started on this path, having recited the Arabian Nights for a living, during my days of vagrancy, as well as many other collections of stories.

Now I had a more lofty purpose. The Tablets of Baha-O-Llah should be learned for use at Bahai meetings, where the heart expression was needed more than mere reading. In recitation, the feelings have full play. Imagine an actor reading his part! This duty was a delight and, after studying these writings in the daytime, I used to walk by night on the parapet of Acca, declaiming to myself the marvellous words of the *Prophet of our times*.

For thousands of years, Orientals have chanted their sacred literature, and it became so engraved on their beings that they unconsciously translated these teachings into deeds. Now we were living under conditions of immediate urgency. A new Cause of unimaginable import had to be introduced to people everywhere. The early followers had to be trained to meet the tasks ahead. There was no time to lose.

It was easy to work under the surveillance of Abdul Baha, although he was not easy to please. Of the rank and file he expected little, but when he counted on a person, his requirements were many. I did my work to the best of my ability, and when he slapped me on the cheek and said "Marhaba (well done) Mirza Ahmad!", the reward so far outweighed my efforts that I was on fire to start again, at something, anything that would bring a smile to the face of my Master.

I stopped at the Inn, a square, one-story building within the walls of Acca, where both transients and residents were received. The rooms overlooked an inner court on four sides, this space accommodating the camels, horses, mules and donkeys of the travelers. Several stunted, unproductive fig trees stood in the enclosure, affording habitation to three owls which sat in torpor on their branches throughout the day and hooted and screeched incessantly throughout the

night. On entering or leaving the Inn one had to pass the establishment of the undertaker, who carried on his business quite openly and without any squeamish oversensitiveness regarding the feelings of his fellow lodgers.

Abdul Baha had a room here, where the children of Acca, Bahais included, were taught the fundamentals of education together with the literature of Persia, Turkey and Arabia in the three languages. This was a pioneering international school, conducted without consideration of race or religion. It was a foreshadowing of those to follow, when nations and people will have caught hold of the Bahai spirit, whether or not they recognize it by that name.

During the early days of Acca, after his release from the barracks, Abdul Baha had lived here, free to walk the streets in the daytime, but locked within the Inn at night. The city gates were always locked. Later, when the young Turks had overthrown the Sultan, Abdul Baha moved to a house which still stands, and was allowed freedom to pass at will into the country.

Jenabe Zain and Musgin Galam lived at the Inn while I was there, as did many other Bahais. Their term of residence was long, while mine was very short — only thirty-nine days. When this time had passed, I went on my way with my head full of dreams — destination, Port Said — occupational field, the business world.

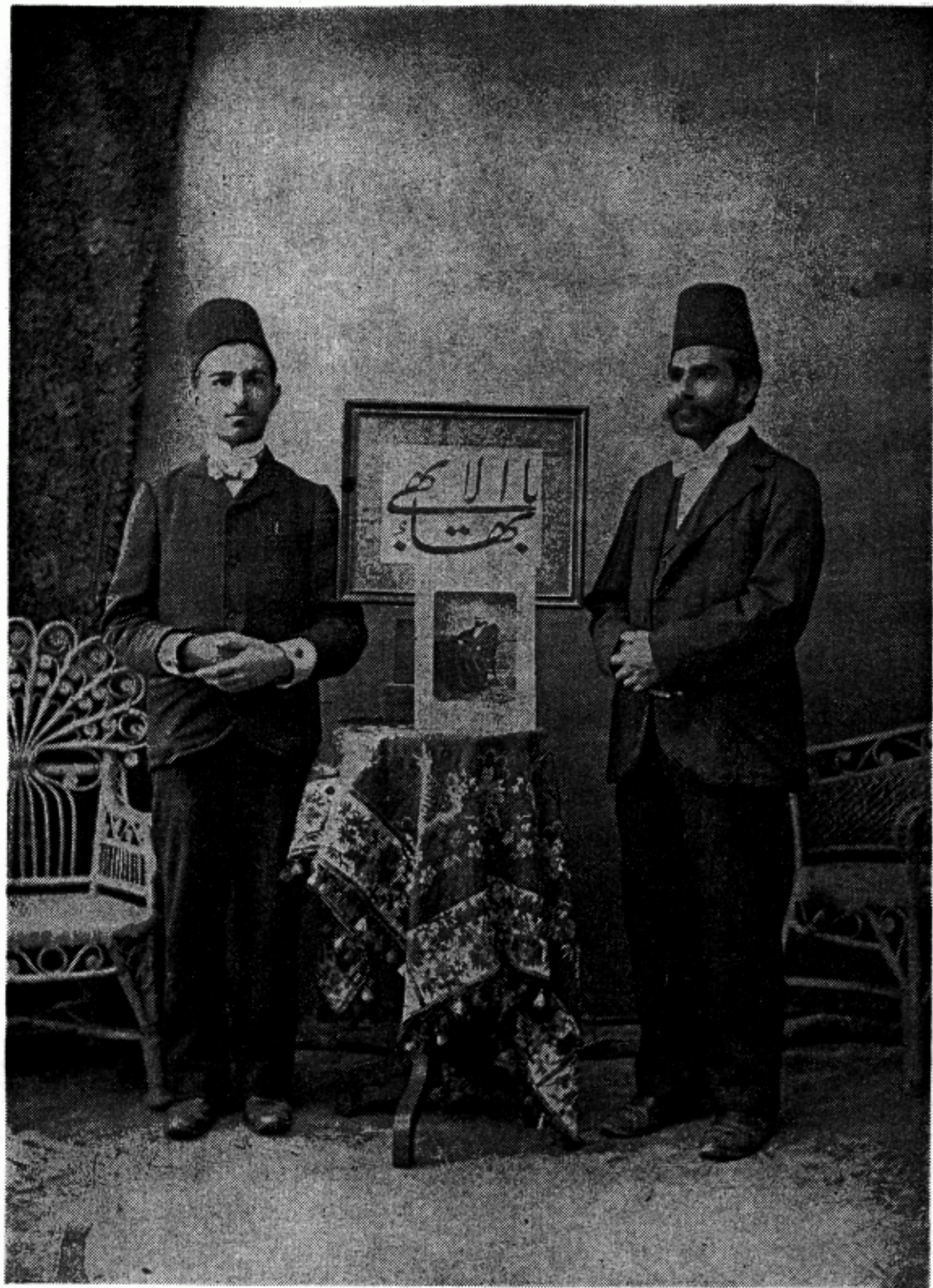
Mirza Ahmad Yasdi had a department store in this cosmopolitan terminal, where he acted as Persian Consul General. He was rather stout, convivial, quite shrewd in affairs, and at the same time gentle, courteous and cultured. He spoke French perfectly, in the

manner of a Parisian. I was expected here; a room was reserved for me in Ahmad Yasdi's own apartment and a salary assigned, namely \$5.00 per month. I didn't need even as much as that, as my food was provided for. These arrangements had been made through correspondence with the Master who wanted me to acquire practical experience along some line.

All steamers plying between Orient and Occident pass through the Suez Canal, and daily these would emit their passengers at the docks, to pass a few hours or more in the international city that is Port Said. Within a year I had picked up a smattering of Greek, Arabic, Turkish, Italian and English. Already I knew French to some extent. Thus, little by little, it became possible for me to understand what the customers wanted, and this was necessary to say the least.

Actually there is not much difference between the selling of goods and the selling of an idea, and my Uncle had trained me well in the latter art. So I was able to enter into rapsodies regarding the richness of fabrics, the delicacy of ribbons and the durability of cooking utensils. Besides I had a liking for order and before long I had reorganized the whole store, setting the various sections of merchandise in their proper places and bringing a new effect of comeliness to all departments. Ahmad Yasdi used to look about the premises and wonder at the changes that had been wrought. He couldn't any more find the things that he used to put his right hand on, but as his Consular duties kept him away much of the time, he was satisfied to let things run along under my supervision.

I interviewed the travelling salesmen who arrived from Europe with their bags of samples, and made good choices at satisfactory rates. I talked with the



Sohrab and travelling Bahai Teacher

clients on commerce, politics and religion, keeping them interested and amused. They were apt to return. At night I re-arranged the stock, dusted and swept and made the place spick and span for the morning. In fact I became almost indispensable to my employer.

In addition to running a successful department store and holding the position of Consul General, Ahmad Yasdi was a link between Abdul Baha and the Bahais of the Orient. Letters by the hundreds would be sent to Port Said in his care, and these he would turn over to special messengers who arrived weekly from Haifa to pick them up. We functioned as a little post office which was run most secretly, for the Turkish officials looked with disfavor on the Bahai Cause. In this activity we were scrupulously careful and discreet, while under our business aspect we were as natural and open as the day.

In this shop I first came in contact with Americans. Two young men from New York, sons of Mr. Arthur Pillsbury Dodge, stopped in on their way to Acca to visit Abdul Baha. They were full of love for the Cause, and I was struck at finding in them the same spirit that animated the Bahais of the East. In time other Americans turned up, and my childhood's wish to visit Yanga Donya flared up again.

I met a Scottish lady who ran a missionary school. She was an ardent Christian and most anxious to make converts. Thinking that I was a good prospect, she invited me to study with her, and I caught at this chance of learning the Bible and English too. I attended her school assiduously in the evenings, and while I was more interested in the language than in the Bible, I got a lot out of both. I owed this lady a great deal, and respected her love for Christianity



*Hagi Niaz, Disciple of Baha-O-Llah, Sohrab
and Mirza Ahmad Yazdi, Persian Consul*

which had impelled her to uproot herself from home and take up residence in a strange land. It was a good experience and very useful to me.

At this time I came to know another Bahai teacher, the greatest of them all. Mirza Abul Fazl of the College of Teheran, ranked among the outstanding intellectuals of the East. He could have had any position in Persia, but chose instead to hold himself at the disposal of Abdul Baha. He lived off and on in Cairo, where he wrote books and received American visitors coming and going from Acca. He knew all the philosophies and religions of the Orient and was an adept interpreter of the Bible. His mind was a fountain of knowledge. In regard to scholarship, Mirza Abul Fazl could be likened to no one except the Master himself.

Mirza Abul Fazi came to Port Said where he visited Ahmad Yasdi every day. He used to sit on the sidewalk outside the store and watch the throngs of passers-by. Whenever I had a free moment I would slip out and ask him questions, and pretty soon he invited me to his rooms where we would talk far into the night. Sometimes he would read aloud from a book that he was writing, and ask my opinion as to this or that. His works, as standards of Bahai writing, were studied in all countries where there were Bahais, and here was the author seeking the reactions of a teen-aged boy who couldn't understand half of what he was hearing. That was Mirza Abul Fazl! He would get an idea from the simplest individual, a carpenter perhaps or a salesman, and what is more, use it. He was a being so rare that, as I said before, one could compare him with no one short of Abdul Baha.

One day Mirza Abul Fazl abruptly asked me if I would like to accompany him to America. What!

Yanga Donya, where I had always wanted to go, where I had promised myself to go! I was so startled, so overwhelmed, that I could not say a word. My face must have been my answer.

Mirza Abul Fazl wrote to the Master asking permission to take me to the United States, and Abdul Baha always yielded to his desires. So I immediately despatched letters to Persia saying that my premonition had come true and that I was on my way to Yanga Donya. Then came a hitch.

When Mirza Ahmad Yasdi heard about the plans that had been made, he did not relish them at all. I was an integral part of the business. I took care of the money. What would happen to the department store! So he, on his part, wrote to Abdul Baha, and Abdul Baha yielded to him also, to a certain extent. I should stay behind and train someone whom the Master would send to take my place. When this was done, I could follow my teacher.

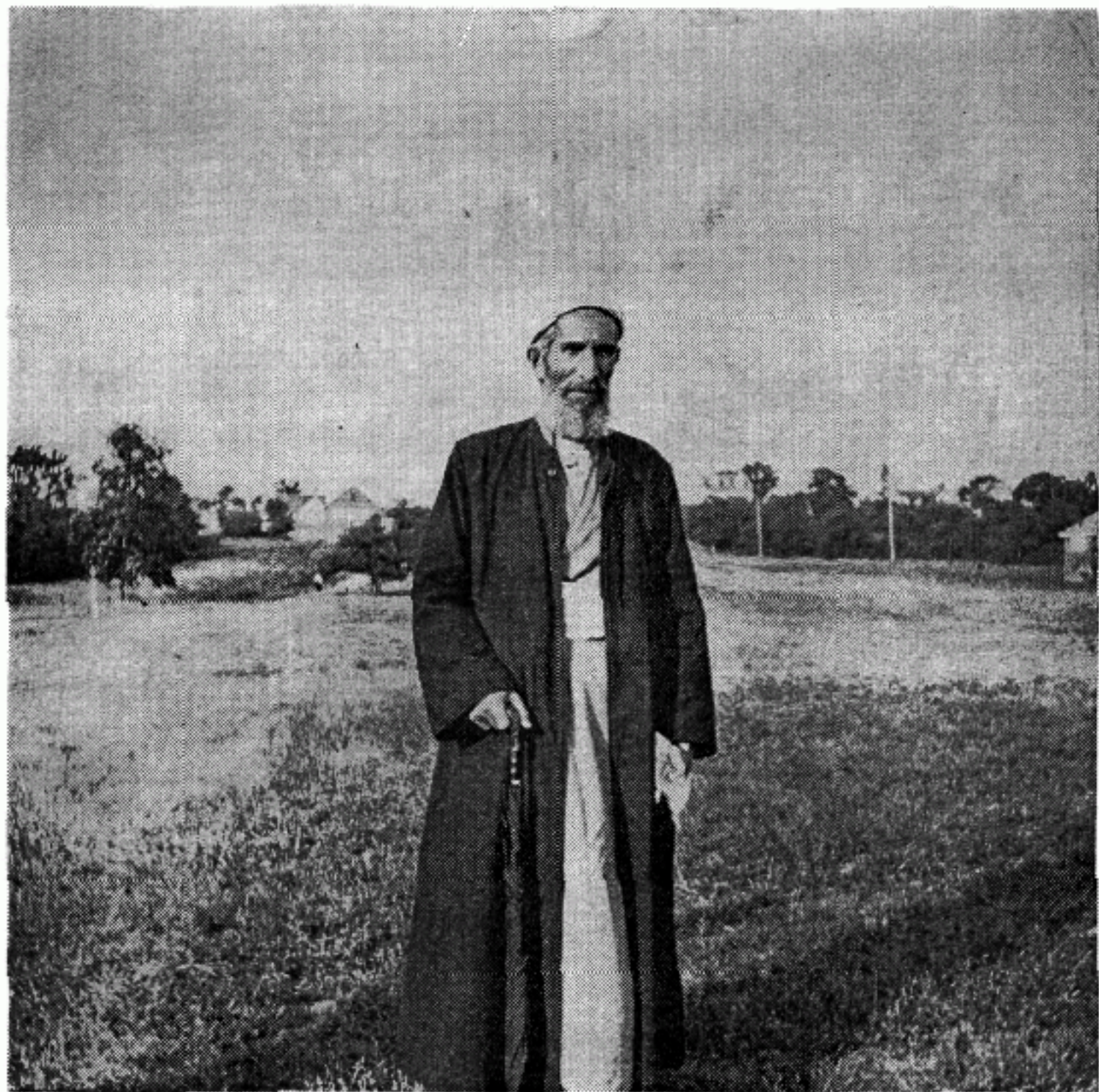
I was in a predicament. I couldn't write again to Persia saying that I was remaining in Port Said. I just didn't write at all and allowed the letters sent from home, care of Mr. Dodge in New York, to remain unanswered. I felt humiliated and baffled, yet I exerted myself to train my substitute in the thousand things that were required.

Nine months passed, and I had just about given up hope of ever seeing America when a letter came from the Master together with a little bag of gold. Mirza Abul Fazl was ill in Washington. I should join him at once and serve him in every way.

I packed my few belongings, bade farewell to Ahmad Yasdi and embarked on a steamer bound for Marseilles. I need not add that my heart was singing.

6

*Apprenticeship In
Yanga Donya*



Mirza Abul Fazl, the greatest teacher of them all

I had reached Yanga Donya, the new world on which my hopes had focussed way back in Persia. New York harbor struck me with wonder, but the immediate issue was to reach the house of Mr. Dodge. A porter told me to take a taxicab, so I jumped into one and gave the address. On alighting in a street on the upper West Side, I was informed by the driver that the fare was \$8.00. Impossible! Why, in Persia one could buy two donkeys for that sum! However it was not the time to comment on international economics; the money had to be paid and I did not have it. So Mr. Dodge advanced the \$8.00 with the rueful aside that I might have covered the distance for five cents on the elevated train.

Mr. Dodge was largely occupied with writing books on the Cause. He started the first Bahai journal in this country. One of his sons was District Attorney. Mrs. Dodge spent much of her time supervising activities in the kitchen, for their house was a center of Bahai hospitality. The table was spread every day and every night, and hosts of people felt at liberty to drop in and take pot luck.

Of course a meeting was called to welcome me. About twenty-five persons came and I was expected to say a few words.

Now I had learned English from the missionary in Port Said, but I did not feel competent to first try my wings in public, so it was arranged that I should speak in French, while a Swiss woman who served in the house as cook would translate. I was shaking from head to foot and beads of sweat were standing on my brow, but I managed to make myself understood. I said:

“My brothers and sisters of America. I bring you a message from Abdul Baha. He wishes you to forget yourselves and love your fellow men—to live, not for yourselves but in and for humanity—to rise above the limitations of nature and abide in the limitless nature of God, of truth, of eternity.”

That was my initial speech in this country, to be followed by countless others, yet in all my subsequent experiences, I never addressed a group more full of love, expectancy and appreciation. These people were the pioneers of the Bahai Cause in New York. They had caught the message at its early dawn, and their devotion was hard to match. My heart felt warm in their company. Two days later I had reached my destination—Washington.

Mirza Abul Fazl, who had recovered from his illness, was daily receiving people of all sorts in his room. Although he had been using other interpreters, my advent would enable him to have one constantly at hand. He spoke on the Bible, of which his knowledge was unexcelled, explained

prophecies pointing to the Bahai Revelation and taught the Cause mainly through the authority of this one book. A distinguished Persian, by name Ali Kuli Khan, continued to interpret, while I observed his methods and prepared myself for taking over, the while cooking, serving, acting as errand boy and studying the language by night. When summer came, we went to Green Acre, Maine.

This was a remarkable center which had been founded by Miss Sarah Farmer who had attended the World Parliament of Religions, held at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. Here the Bahai Cause had been launched in America by an Arab named George Kheirulla, and Miss Farmer had immediately responded to it, accepting the new teaching with all the ardor of her warm nature. In the environs of her home at Green Acre, she reproduced the World Parliament of Religions in miniature form, adding to it—continuity. Thus, religious leaders and philosophers from both East and West came every summer to exchange thoughts on their beliefs, with a view to arriving at conclusions of unity, and Green Acre shot into sudden prominence in intellectual circles.

Miss Farmer, who had some money and was willing to expend it without reserve, did the preparation and organizing of these conferences. A large tent was erected for meetings on a meadow overlooking a broad river, happily named Piscataqua (River of Light) and people gathered from various parts of the country to attend these feasts of reason. Many came from Portsmouth which was only four miles away, also from Boston and other parts of

New England. "The Transcendentalists", inheritors of the illumination of Ralph Waldo Emerson, found kinship with the groups attending these meetings and the center became a haven for the liberals and the progressives.

In the mornings, the teachers would wander through the pine forests along the riverbank and many of them developed the habit of conducting classes under different trees. Consequently certain ones became signalized under names, such as: Persian Pine, Hindu Pine, Christian Pine, Arabian Oasis, and when Mirza Abul Fazl identified himself with the place, we had a Mirza Abul Fazl Pine.

At the formal meetings Miss Farmer acted as a consummate, divine chairman, holding the reins of her little government with such kindness and charm that the effect was indescribable. Thus through her leadership, intellectuals and students of all races and creeds came together in joy and fragrance under the impelling influence of the Bahai Cause.

Many notable Bahais figured on the scene of Green Acre: Charles Mason Remey, son of the Admiral; Mr. Hooper Harris, deeply instructed in the teachings; Mr. Harlan Ober, Mr. Howard McKnutt, Mr. Alfred Lunt, Mr. Mountford Mills a valuable and distinguished personality; Mrs. Mary Hanford Ford, who later became an effective teacher and Mr. Joseph Hannen who in future years cooperated with me under difficult circumstances when I badly needed support. Also there was Mrs. May Maxwell, and her pretty little daughter Mary who long years after became the wife of Shoghi Effendi. Mrs. Maxwell, as delicate

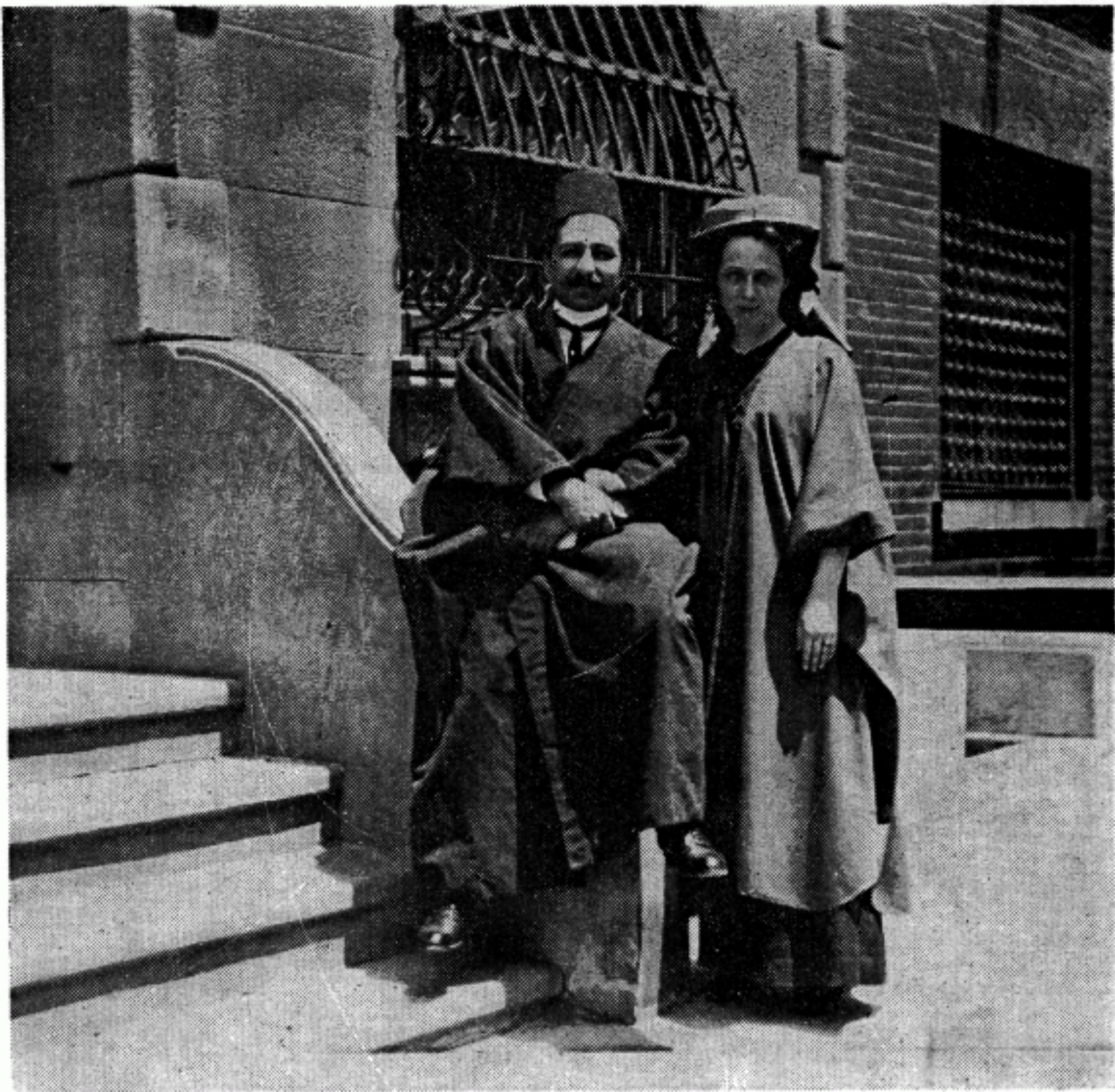


Miss Sarah Farmer

in appearance as a Dresden china shepherdess, was remarkably intelligent and forceful. In subsequent years she became very influential. Among these devoted men and women, little lights in their own ways, a single person stood out as a star of magnitude. It was Lua Gettsinger.

This young woman was among the first American Bahais, having studied under the direction of Dr. Kheirulla who had brought the Cause to the United States. I think that Lua had just about every quality—beauty, good heart, a keen mind, scholarship, fluency, passionate fervor and incomparable charm. Shortly after accepting the Cause she made a trip to Palestine and met Abdul Baha, who recognized her talents and made of her a favorite. On returning to this country, she studied at the feet of Mirza Abul Fazl and became a competent teacher. As a matter of fact, she was a school teacher to start with. Lua Gettsinger was a major attraction at Green Acre, but she always held herself free to travel at the behest of Abdul Baha, going as far as India where she was royally received in many cities by personages of high rank. Unquestionably, apart from Mirza Abul Fazl, Lua Gettsinger was the most brilliant of all Bahai speakers.

After three years of teaching in this country, spent in New York, Washington, Chicago and Green Acre, word came from the Master that Mirza Abul Fazl was to return to Palestine. It went without saying that I was to accompany him, however my private instructions from Abdul Baha read that, if possible, I should remain behind.



Sohrab and Lua Gettsinger

This was difficult to explain because, as my orders were given to me personally, I considered that it was a matter purely between the Master and me. So I just stated that I would remain in the United States and let it go at that. Of course the Bahais raised a big cry, asserting that I was ungrateful and disloyal, and even Mirza Abul Fazl felt surprised and a little hurt, but I held to my resolve of silence and parted with my beloved teacher without a word of explanation.

I was left in New York with exactly fifty cents in my pocket, and the Bahais were taunting me a bit: "How will you support yourself?" they said. "Be sure you don't come to us."

"I will not ask you for anything," I assured them and went on my way, quite alone in a big city.

As I walked along, feeling very desolate, the face of a woman came to my mind. Mirza Abul Fazl and I had visited this person in West 12th Street. I knew that she ran a boarding house and I thought that I could recognize the entrance. So I tried out my luck, rang a certain doorbell which turned out to be the right one, and was admitted.

I lived there for three months, earning my board and lodging by cleaning the rooms for eighteen people, helping in the kitchen and waiting on table. Then the boarding house was closed and I became a vagrant, possessed of two dollars which were savings from tips. My economic situation, compared to the recent one when I had bade farewell to Mirza Abul Fazl on the dock, was bettered by four times, yet I realized that I must husband my resources carefully. I had been meeting with

no Bahais nor did I intend to until my prospects were brighter.

About this time I received a letter from Abdul Baha in which he praised my discretion at having remained in New York apparently to suit my own whim, and the knowledge that I had pleased him was more satisfying than any security whatsoever.

After my teacher had left, I had worked for three months in a boarding house job, now came three more months, again in one job—that of joblessness. I couldn't find any other. All day I walked the streets, and at night I slept on benches in Central Park under newspapers which I would tuck about me. Sometimes, on the most deserted walks, a policeman would turn up and send me scooting. As to food, I frequented saloons where bread, and sometimes butter, were given free with an order for beer at five cents. I didn't drink beer, but was at liberty to take all the bread I wanted, and often a kindly bartender would substitute milk for the beer. On other occasions I stood in a bread line on 6th Avenue, close to 14th Street. I ate once every twenty-four hours. My clothes, none too dapper at the start, had become ragged and dirty. I realized that I cut a very unprepossessing figure.

Habitually I trudged the pavements, along rich streets and poor streets, and one day, near 31st Street on Fifth Avenue, I heard my name pronounced for the first time in oh so long. Ahmad! I turned, startled and looked into the kindly eyes of Mr. Goen, father of a very intelligent Bahai whom I knew.

"I saw you on the platform, interpreting for Mirza Abul Fazl," he said.

I nodded, happy at the unexpected flash of friendship, while he took note of my appearance. Then without any preliminaries, he asked:

"Do you need a job?"

I nodded again.

"Come with me."

We walked together for a block and a half, entered the Waldorf Astoria and made our way to the dining room. The headwaiter came forward.

"I would like you to give this boy a job," Mr. Goen said.

The headwaiter put me in the care of another waiter who marshalled me to the kitchen. A long apron was tied around me and I learned that I was a busboy.

Busboys collect dishes and take them to the pantry. The task was easy and the pay good—\$30 a month with food. I rented a room close by and was more than satisfied. Then, after nine months of playing second fiddle to the waiters, the idea of becoming a full fledged waiter myself was presented to me by my fellow busboys.

"Why not?" they urged. "We have learned enough, and there are plenty of openings at Atlantic City".

I was dazzled at the prospect and agreed to go, but Fate planned otherwise. One early morning on my way to work, I bought a paper. There on the front page was news that the lately appointed

Persian Minister had arrived in New York and was stopping at the Waldorf Astoria.

Quietly I stuffed the paper into my pocket, walked past the service quarters and into the hotel through the main entrance. In two minutes I was knocking at the door of the Persian suite. A tall, thin man admitted me.

"Salamon Aleikom," I ventured timidly.

"Aleikom Salam," was the genial response. "Welcome, come in." I was offered a chair.

"So you are a Persian," the Minister said. "What are you doing here?"

"Oh, I'm working."

"Well, I'm working too. I'm starting on a new job, as you must know."

Evidently the Minister was relieved at finding a person to talk with in his own language, for he kept me for hours, while I also took pleasure in this sudden contact with one of my own species. Presently he said:

"When I left Teheran, many young men asked to accompany me as secretary, but I didn't take any of them. Somehow I felt that Allah would provide. Now I am offering the position to you. Will you come with me to Washington?"

Looking back on it, I cannot imagine how I expressed myself. All I know is that I accepted.

My host ordered lunch and it was wheeled in. The waiter looked at me frowning, but I shook my head and he said nothing. After we had eaten and the dishes were removed, I explained the

situation. I was a busboy in this very hotel.

What did the Minister do? He just laughed. I think I never heard a man laugh so heartily. The matter simply struck his fancy. Then he gave me money to buy a suit of clothes.

The next day at one o'clock, I followed my new employer into the dining room. The headwaiter tried to keep me out. He whispered in my ear, "You're fired!", but the Minister said, "He is my guest. Let him be."

Then I was served by the very waiter whom I served for months, while my friends the busboys whispered and giggled amongst themselves.

Immediately the story went about in kitchen quarters that I had never really been a busboy, but a spy on official business, and the next morning one newspaper carried an article headed "From Kitchen to Persian Legation."

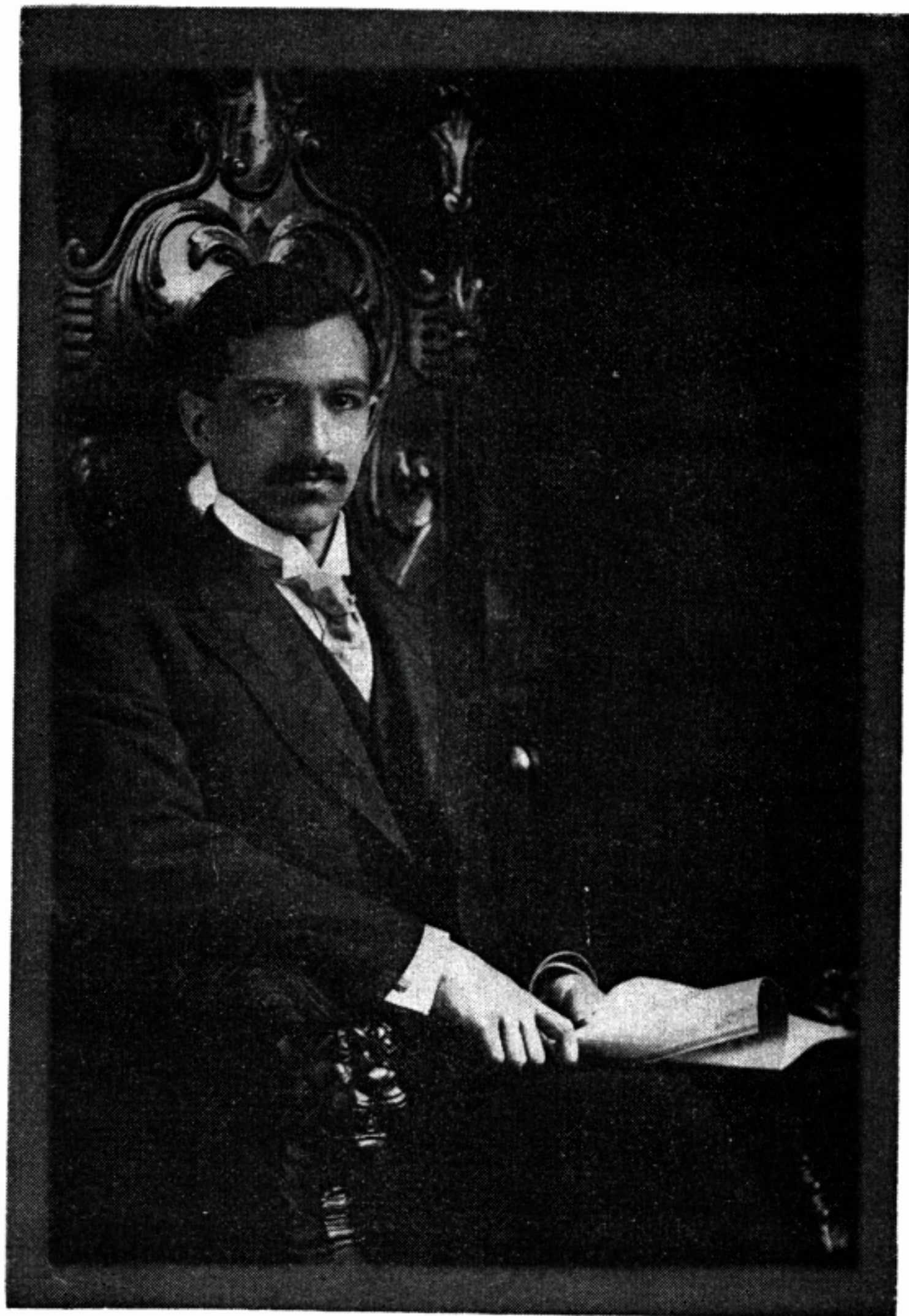
As closing scene to this experience, the waiters and busboys gave me a farewell dinner below stairs in the service dining room, but I was not the guest of honor. Oh no! The Persian Minister himself sat at the head of the table, and kept the conversation on a merry key with his few words of English. Needless to say, the management provided a very good meal. Finally the busboys presented me with a pair of gold cuff-links, bearing my initials and the Persian rose. I still have them.

A day or two later I said my grateful goodbyes to the Waldorf Astoria and, following the Persian Minister into the taxi, gave the order:

"Pennsylvania Station!"

7

Diplomatic Service



Sohrab as Secretary to the Persian Minister

Miam-Taz-Ol-Mulk, Persian Minister to the U.S., was well fitted for diplomacy. Responsible toward his obligations, cultured to a high degree, liberal in his thinking, he was moreover a *bon enfant*. Everybody liked him. When we reached Washington, a house on 16th Street which had been rented for the Legation stood ready to receive him. Also were waiting some twenty five or thirty trunks filled with Persian rugs, hangings and art objects. The first duty was to unpack the trunks and make the place livable. This was done with very good results. The Persian Legation was a little museum.

For me obviously it was a side of life altogether new. I came in contact with the diplomatic ways of East and West, rubbed elbows with statesmen and tasted of the intrigues that were operating behind the Oriental curtain. I shared in the social life that was ceaselessly going on at the Legation, answered personal and

MY BAHAI PILGRIMAGE

official letters, and had enough time left to accept the position of correspondent offered me by two Persian magazines, the one published in Calcutta, the other in Cairo. These articles of mine, dispatched weekly, dealt with politics and education, and served to explain to Eastern readers the unfamiliar American attitude. They were reproduced in other Persian publications. This independent activity, added to my official ones, gave me the sense of being a conciliatory influence and recalled to my mind the farewell of Abdul Baha spoken to me at Acca. He had said:

The world is your school. You have come to me from that school and I have taught you. Now I am sending you back to the world to learn more, to suffer more, to feel the pangs of hunger, to know the agony of disillusionment and to descend to the depths of sorrows so that you may rise to the heights of understanding. I am sending you back to the world. Keep your eyes open, your ears unlocked, your mind unprejudiced, your spirit unsullied by worldly ambition. Have one, and only one object before you — to make of yourself a more and more perfected instrument, so that when the time comes and I call you to the field of action, you may be ready.

So vast was the correspondence of Abdul Baha that he kept six secretaries, not only busy but overworked. Acca was the international nerve center of the Cause from which issued teachings and instructions to many parts of the East and West. Now Abdul Baha sent his communications to me, and Washington became the American nerve center. Thousands of letters descended on the Persian Legation. I would translate them, keep a copy and forward another with the original to its

destination. Likewise the American letters written to the Master were addressed to me, to be dispatched to Acca. During this period, hundreds upon hundreds of letters designated for the American Bahais came from the Master, and several decades later, these were bound in volumes and placed on the shelves of the Record Room in Caravan House.

Needless to say, all these events caused the Bahais to forget their feelings of aloofness toward me, and I became *persona grata* with them. Here I must mention the fact that only a small percentage of them had known about my refusal to return home with Mirza Abul Fazl. The majority was unacquainted with the situation and wondered why I had drifted away from them.

So the Persian legation became a Bahai post office.

"You have more correspondence than I" the Minister would remark. "Actually you are working for Abdul Baha, not for me."

Just the same he did not in the least object to this dual employment, but showed interest in the letters, many of which I read aloud to him. In fact, he accepted a very strange situation, which was that the American promotional center of a Cause which had been banned by his Government was now firmly set in the hallowed precincts of the Persian Legation.

Social life holds an outstanding place in the program of any Embassy or Legation, and the Minister more than fulfilled this duty. He entertained constantly in diplomatic circles and even encouraged the High Schools and Private Schools to send their students to study Persian art in his little Iranian museum. The boys and girls loved to come, for they would be served with tea and oriental sweets prepared

in the kitchen by the Persian chef, and always the Minister had information to dispense on eastern weaving, painting or carving, together with little stories and jokes.

In spite of all his social obligations, the Minister had the desire to reserve one evening weekly for Bahai receptions. These were always crowded, becoming more and more so as the months passed. I began to teach, choosing one or another book of Baha-O-Llah to read from and discuss, and the Minister, who relied on me to conduct this group by myself, would be apt to drop in about ten o'clock and call for refreshments to be served.

From earliest childhood I had lived under conditions where hospitality was the key-note. My Grandmother had held herself at the disposal of all who came in; Abdul Baha welcomed, not only the world in his heart, but any individual to his side and at his table, and now I was with the Persian Minister who was the prototype of cheer and conviviality. When any free evenings came around, my Chief would gather a few friends about him and entertain them informally, and on these occasions I felt it incumbent on me to take a part in making the time pass pleasantly.

In spare hours, which I had managed to find off and on, I had browsed in the Public Library, and there I had come across some books on hypnotism. The subject intrigued me and I learned quite a few points on putting a person into a trance, giving him orders which were supposed to be obeyed, and most important of all, extricating him from the trance. With this book-knowledge at hand and no experience whatsoever, I offered to divert a small group at the Legation with a try-out of my newly acquired science.

I chose a subject, made the required passes and to my own amazement saw my man drift into somnambulance. I told him to pronounce a certain word I was concentrating on, which was to be found at the top of page so and so in the dictionary, and heard him repeat it. Then I brought him out of the trance with the pre-arranged signal.

This form of entertainment delighted the guests and I was encouraged to proceed with my experiments. I did so about once a week, becoming more and more adept until I could make any member of the group do whatever I said. In fact one of the guests so fell under my influence that he would start drifting off at the very sight of me. Of course it is understood that a subject will comply with orders only within the limits of his conscience.

Having experimented successfully with every member of the little circle, I became ambitious to the point of attempting a mass-hypnotism. One night all were put into trance and individual instructions given, but in the general excitement I forgot to specify the sign that would bring them back to normal. So proceedings started off on schedule, each doing his part. One man walked on four feet, roaring like a lion; a second declaimed the opening lines of the Declaration of Independence; a third sang "Celeste Aida" at the top of his voice, while a fourth raised an insistent inquiry "To be or not to be, that is the question!" The remaining guests were engaged in other stunts, and I stood in the midst of the bedlam, supervising my subjects with pride and satisfaction.

The Persian Minister had been ordered to read aloud a certain confidential document received that morning, and he showed obstinacy. In the whole

group, he was the only one that was not complying. However the spell proved too strong for him, and he made a beginning, but halted after pronouncing a few words. Caught by the power of hypnotism, yet unable to betray his conscience, he looked for a way out — the window! We were on the third floor of the house. At that moment I realized the awful fact that I had not given the sign to break the trance. Desperately I threw myself on the Minister, the while calling for help with all my might, but my companions continued roaring, reciting, singing, and paid no attention to me. The Minister's strength was super-human, due to the hypnotism, and he was intent on jumping. We struggled on the window sill, and then, as an Angel of Deliverance, the Persian chef rushed upon the scene. He had heard the din from below stairs. So the two of us overpowered the Minister, and I kicked him unmercifully until he snapped into normal. Then turning to the others, I applied the same unorthodox remedy to them, and it worked. Everyone became his natural but exhausted self. Finally I took account of the situation and said: "It isn't worth it. I will never touch hypnotism again," and I never did.

The Minister was most lavish in his expenditures. He spent everything he had, and one time he found himself in difficulties owing to the fact that his salary was unaccountably late in arriving from Persia. Without losing time, I explained the case by letter to Abdul Baha and received instructions that the Bahais should raise the money. Three thousand dollars were needed, and three thousand dollars came to my hand almost instantaneously. The major part of the sum was lent by May Maxwell with two others contributing. This assistance, unexpectedly coming to him out

of the blue sky, impressed my Chief deeply and he never forgot it. Of course the debt was paid in due time.

After three years in the United States, the Minister was recalled. He bade me an affectionate farewell and returned home to receive another assignment.

Left to myself in Washington, I felt that it was opportune to develop cultural relations between my country and the United States, so with the assistance of a few friends, I formed the Persian American Educational Society. We organized a Conference at which was held a three-day lecture and discussion series, and prepared an exhibit of Persian weeklies and various publications that had sprung up here and there. Likewise we sent American literature to Persian libraries and schools. These activities, linking America with the Orient, caused me to conjure up a plan for an eventual building in Washington which would stand as a center of the arts, culture and science of East and West.

As a very practical form of service for the Persian American Educational Society, I instituted a scholarship fund for teaching children in Persia. This was subscribed to by American Bahais, \$18.00 annually covering the cost for one child. The distinguished teacher, Dr. Susan Moody, carried the brunt of this work in Teheran and its environs. She taught the children English, and the rudiments of schooling in that language. Many progressed into higher brackets of learning. Between one and two hundred children were scholars at this Teheran school which was called Tarbiat. It received support from American Bahai until Abdul Baha came to the United States, at which time I was too busy to give it proper attention. After

a few years, the interest in this country dwindled and the scholarship project was mainly given up. However-Tarbiat, as a Bahai school supported in Persia, continued to function.

At this juncture I founded a bi-lingual journal in Persian and English, named Bahai News. Later it was printed in English only. Of course I continued to handle the correspondence from Acca as my first duty. I had my office for which Abdul Baha paid the rent, and was busy up to the eyes.

During these days the Ottoman government had been overthrown by the Young Turks, and the gates of all political prisons throughout the Empire had been opened. Abdul Baha, after close to a life-time of captivity, was free to go and come as he pleased. Suddenly we heard that he was in Egypt, and the Bahais initiated a movement to invite him to the United States.

On my own initiative I started to raise funds to defer expenses, and in no time the sum of two thousand dollars was forwarded to the Master as an initial contribution toward the proposed trip. Presently his answer was received with the money order enclosed. Abdul Baha stated that he was coming, but that his expenses were provided for. He said that there were many social needs in this country and, while he thanked the American Bahais for their consideration, he would be glad if the money were expended on the poor of their own cities. It became my task to return the contributions to the donors, which I did rather sheepishly.

Abdul Baha instructed me to meet him in Paris, so the chapter of my residence in Washington was closed. I sailed immediately, stayed with him for about

Bahai School at Tarbiat



عکاس کنیه مولود صبیحہ طاہرہ ۱۳۳۸

ten days at a pension, during which time he spoke of his plans for a trans-continental trip in the United States and Canada. He told me that he expected to sail for New York in about nine months and gave me three thousand dollars for any necessary work, preparatory to his arrival. Then he sent me to Germany for a short sojourn with Mirza Assadullah, (not my old friend but another great servant of the Cause) at the close of which I accompanied him to Marseilles where he took the boat for Alexandria.

Back in Washington, this time as a transient, I launched on the great work. I created a board of writers, consisting of about one hundred men and women, and commissioned each to write from ten to twelve articles on various phases of the Cause. When finished, these were carefully read by a group of Bahai scholars, and the best selected — some twenty five papers in all. Forty thousand copies of these articles were printed in galley proofs, also forty thousand cuts of Abdul Baha and forty thousand booklets giving a resumé of the teachings. These were mailed to all newspapers, weeklys and monthlys as well as to institutions, colleges and universities throughout the United States and Canada. The former office of the Persian American Educational Society was a beehive where ten persons, more or less, worked feverishly all day and much of the night.

In time our efforts began to bear fruit. Invitations to the Master came in from churches, synagogues and educational institutions. One month before his arrival, two hundred and fifty requests to hear him speak had been received. A schedule of appearances was in process of organization. The intelligentia of the country was alerted to receive Abdul Baha.

8

The Great Tour



Abdul Baha in Brooklyn—1912

On the morning of April 11th, 1912, S.S. Cedric of the White Star Line sailed into New York harbor. A tugboat, engaged by the Associated Press, went out to meet it and dozens of reporters clambered up the side of the ship. Radio messages from all parts of the United States and Canada were coming in. About three hundred Bahais from various cities waited on the dock. Abdul Baha disembarked and, followed by a cortège of cars, was transported to the house of Mr. and Mrs. Edward J. Kinney, at 780 West End Avenue. Here he and his entourage took up residence during his stay in New York.

MY BAHAI PILGRIMAGE

When asked why he had undertaken such a long voyage, which might prove to be beyond his physical endurance, the Master answered:

“When it is necessary, my body can endure everything.”

The first meeting at which Adbul Baha spoke was held under the auspices of the Theosophical Society in Carnegie Recital Hall, and the first church that presented him was the Church of the Ascension on 10th Street and Fifth Avenue, of which Dr. Percy S. Grant was Rector. After numerous addresses delivered in New York, Abdul Baha started on a tour of the United States. He visited Washington, Baltimore, Boston, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Denver, Salt Lake City, San Francisco, Los Angeles and any number of towns along the way. He rested very little. Actually he worked from eighteen to twenty hours in the twenty four, as did the five or six Persians who accompanied him, half of whom were secretaries. Dr. Ameen Fareed, a very eminent scholar, interpreted at the large meetings and I at the smaller ones. My main duty was to conduct the trip.

The schedule in most cities was identical. Long lines of men and women waited for interviews which started at six o'clock in the morning and continued until eleven o'clock, at which time the Master gave an address. Then luncheon. Often fifteen, twenty or thirty people would be invited, and we would have to rush out to buy extra supplies and prepare the meal. The hotels in many places allowed us this privilege. In the afternoons

the Master spoke at one public meeting after another, to Christians in their churches, to Jews in their synagogues, to students in their auditoriums, to Women's Suffrage groups, Peace Societies, Socialists, Spiritualists, agnostics, philosophers, teachers, officials of all sorts, together with the poor and the unlearned, and all listened to the words which for nine months flowed from his lips like a Niagra Falls, irrigating the parched ground of minds and hearts. His marvellous treatises, comprising all aspects of religious and scientific thought, constitute an example of what one man can do—a captive since the age of nine, venturing into the world at sixty five, appearing before the elite of the nations, overturning the inherited concepts of his listeners and setting up new standards for people and for their governments.

Among the wealth of ideas which Abdul Baha scattered from coast to coast, I am picking out one sentence which gives the Bahai ideology with arresting brevity. At Howard University, Washington, D.C. he said: *I pray on your behalf that there shall be no name other than humanity amongst you.*

In the Record Room at Caravan House are to be found thirty one volumes of press clippings that appeared in the newspapers and journals of the United States during this momentous trip. The publicity was extraordinary. After the Master's visit to the University of Palo Alto, a newspaper of that city reproduced his talk, with photographs and comments, covering four full pages. So it was to different degrees throughout the country. The public interest did not let down.

Probably Abdul Baha was the first Oriental lecturer who never received a cent for his talks. Often institutions were willing to pay, even as much as \$500 which was an enormous price in those days, but the Master would just laugh at the thought. "I have not come to America to collect money" he would say, "but only pure hearts and dedicated minds." Incidentally he never passed a collection plate without putting at least \$5.00 into it. When he visited the Bowerie Mission in New York, he placed a shining fifty cent piece into every hand. Although these poor waifs had never heard of Abdul Baha before that night, at the close of the meeting it was impossible to buy back one of these coins for double the value.

On December 5th, Abdul Baha and the rest of us sailed for England. That day I wrote the first chapter in my Diary, a series of volumes destined to become historic. Here daily, month after month, year after year, I took down the words of the Master, spoken formally and informally, recorded his actions, enumerated his plans and gave an intimate account of him to be found nowhere else. If I had done nothing more in life, I could approach my Maker at the very end and say: Here is my gift to our times and those to follow. It is a portrait of Abdul Baha, sketched with unwavering attention by one who loved him.

This Diary covers the period from the Master's departure from the United States to the day when I saw him in Palestine for the last time. It constitutes a storehouse of information, which appeared



Abdul Baha in Bristol, England

successively in Bahai periodicals. A small section likewise was published in book form under the title: "Abdul Baha in Egypt." Bahai historians of the future will have a May-day in brousing through this six-year record of the Master's life.

In London, Abdul Baha and his party stayed at the apartment of Lady Bloomfield which, fully equipped with servants, had been placed at his disposal. Lady Bloomfield and her family moved to a nearby hotel. Here as in the United States, lines of visitors formed early in the morning, and the men and women were received one by one, or in groups. The high and the low came, a former Vice-Roy to India, statesmen, clergymen, journalists, suffragists. Mrs. Pankhurst and her daughter held a meeting for Abdul Baha on their cause—Women's Rights, which was also his cause. Thousands of people attended. To this lecture as well as to most others, the press gave generous space to the words of the great visitor.

A meeting for mothers was arranged in one of the slum sections of the city and the Master poured his love on these poor women and children, speaking to one after another and giving a shilling to each. On New Year's Eve he held a dinner at the Salvation Army. The appreciation shown by those lonely and dispossessed ones was something to long remember.

One day a hobo rang the doorbell and some argument took place in the hall. Apparently he was being turned away. Abdul Baha sensed what was going on and sent me to bring the man in.

THE GREAT TOUR

Now this hobo had been walking along the road forty miles away, when the wind brought a newspaper clipping to his feet. He glanced at it and proceeded to read about Abdul Baha. "Can this be true?" he said to himself. "I will go to London and see for myself." The Master kept him for quite a while and gave him money to buy a suit of clothes. After that he came continuously to the house and sometimes brought his hobo friends. Abdul Baha found him intelligent, and liked to have him by. Sometimes he would place him alongside of Lady Bloomfield, just to demonstrate his feeling of democracy, and Lady Bloomfield responded nobly and, after a while herself made a favorite of the hobo.

Archbishop Wilburforce was invited to meet Abdul Baha, but he held back, merely sending a message: "We are all one behind the veil." Like a flash, Abdul Baha responded with his own message: "Return to the Archbishop and say 'and the veil is thinning quite.'" Later the veil became so thin that the Archbishop made up his mind to call, and when he had spoken to the Master he felt that there was no separation between them.

Abdul Baha was invited to Oxford to speak before the professors of the University. His talk was along scientific lines and produced considerable effect. Among those who were especially impressed was Professor Chayne who later wrote of him: "He was a complete man. No one in our time, so far as my observation reaches, has lived the perfect life like Abdul Baha."

In closing this brief account of Abdul Baha's visit to England, I want to show him as he delivered his first talk in that country and repeat his words delivered on that occasion, which have become immortal. Incidentally, the Master always spoke without notes. He never referred to any paper.

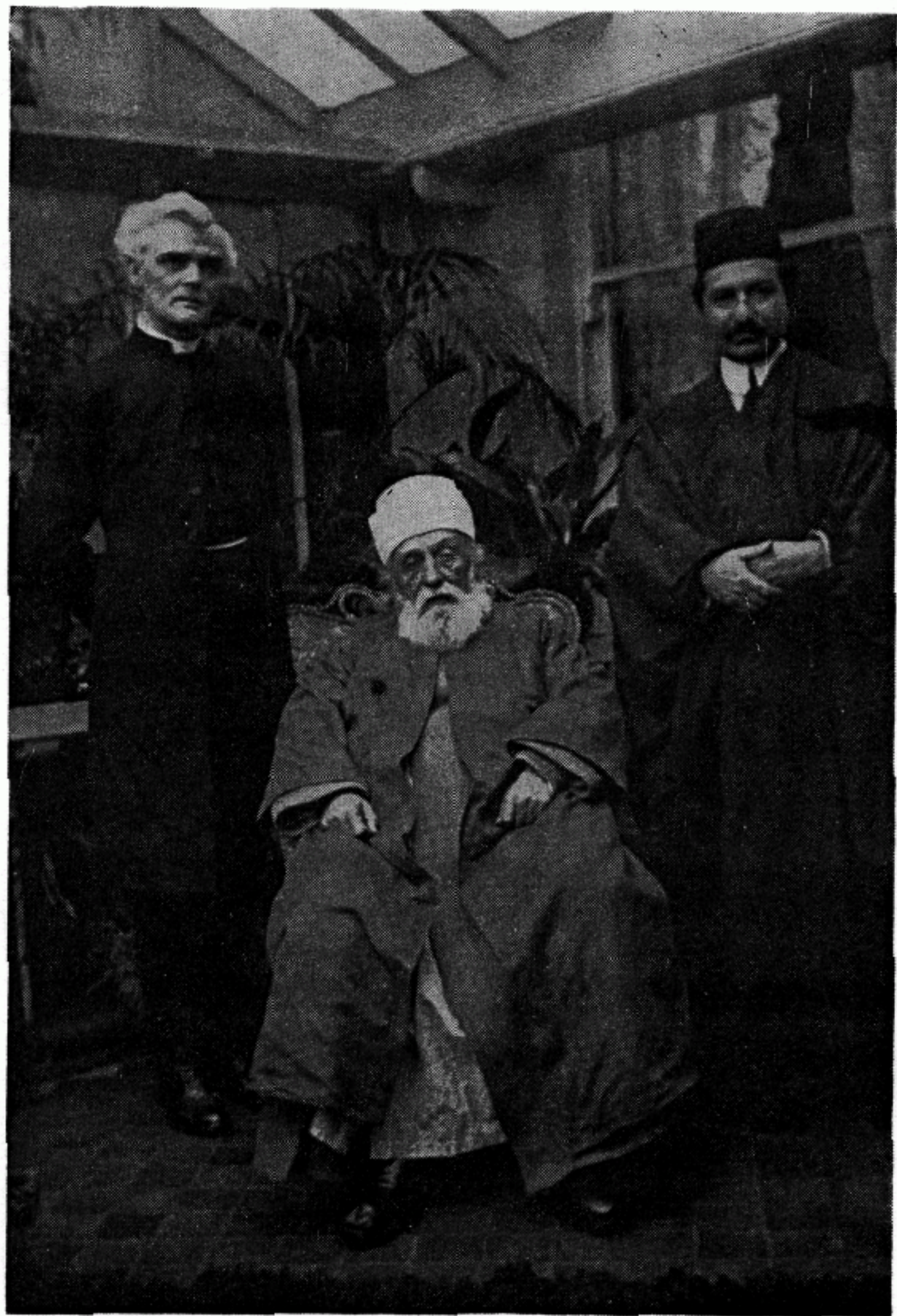
The Reverend R. J. Campbell, Pastor of the City Temple, introduced his distinguished guest saying:

"This evening we have in the pulpit of the City Temple the leader of one of the most remarkable religious movements of this or any other age . . ."

The English correspondent A.D. takes up the thread in one of his articles:

"Abdul Baha then advanced and addressed the congregation. He spoke for eight minutes in Persian with considerable animation, his voice rising and falling as in a rhythmic chant. Towards the close he placed the palms of his hands together as in prayer. The translation (of his words which had been taken down) was read afterwards by Mr. W. Tudor Pole, as follows (in part):—

“ . . . This is a new cycle of human power. All the horizons are luminous, and the world will indeed become as a garden and a paradise. It is the hour of the unity of the sons of men, and of the drawing together of all races and classes . . . The gift of God to this enlightened age is the knowledge of the one-



Abdul Baha at the house of Rev. R. J. Campbell

ness of mankind and the fundamental oneness of religion. Wars shall cease between nations, and by the will of God the Most Great Peace shall come; the world will be seen as a new world, and all men shall live as brothers . . . There is one God; mankind is one, and the foundations of religion are one."

A flying trip to Edinburgh, replete with the same activities, and we went on to Paris where the atmosphere was totally different. Only little meetings here, but the succession of interviews continued. Then Germany where the people melted with love wherever the Master went. A short stop in Austria, and we took the boat for Port Said.

For quite a while, Orientals had been gathering in Egypt and Palestine to await Abdul Baha, and as we sailed into port, we saw the dock alive with hundreds of people in their native dress—Persians, Arabs, Turks, Russians, Hindus. It was a gay sight, glinting with color, but underneath was fervant emotion. The East was welcoming back its own.

9

*War Years In
Palestine*

Throughout his talks given on the great tour, Abdul Baha had stressed the imminent approach of disaster if the people did not recognize the spiritual bonds that united all of them under the outer covering of mistrust and hostility. "Go into battle!" he would say. "Kill someone you have never seen — your brother!"

Sometimes the people objected to his ideas. After a certain meeting, a few complained: "Why has this Persian come to Stuttgart? What has he to do with us? We do not want pacifistic principles. Peace is for the weak. War is for the mighty. Germany is a warlike, demonstrative nation."

In other places the men stated that they were not factors in the making of wars. The governments attended to these things. It was their duty

to obey. Abdul Baha was never afraid to deal with the rulers, any more than Baha-O-Llah had been. He repeatedly addressed them directly. I have the copy of a most marvellous talk given by the Master at a slightly later period than the one of which I am now writing. Actually it was delivered in March, 1913, but as it is along lines which were familiar to him, and being especially uncompromising and bold, I am quoting one paragraph. Addressing their overlords in the name of the soldiers, he says:

Vain are you and vainer your thoughts! Let it be known that we no longer agree to shed our blood so copiously for the upholding of your fantastic reasons for war. Rather we are determined to break your combinations of powers, to hurl down your despotic thrones and regain the authority that you have usurped and assumed. We are fighting to uproot the tree of your coarse influence, to cleanse our bodies of its tenacious burrs, to destroy their thousand nettled thistles of evil and promote the ideal of democracy upon the expanse of the earth. We are fighting to establish the principles of Divine Civilization in the hearts of men and to hold aloft forever the banner of a Universal Commonwealth.

Here was the voice of a man who had known

almost life-long captivity and surveillance. Was his spirit broken?

Repeatedly during that American and European trip did Abdul Baha assert that war was inevitable unless the governments suppressed their selfish interests and came to a general understanding. The newspapers of those months bear witness to this fact. Among the many, we have as heading: "Abdul Baha Prophecies Universal Conflagration – 1914."

The Master returned home in a state of deep disappointment. Outwardly, his journeyings had been successful beyond the expectations of anybody, yet he left Europe with a sense of grief and frustration. Arriving in Palestine about the middle of the year 1913, he resumed his normal life among his followers. About a year later the war broke out and Abdul Baha became a farmer.

Adjacent to the Sea of Galilee was a large community of Zoroastrians who were tillers of the soil. Abdul Baha moved to Tiberias and Adassiah and, through the experience of these people set up a vast planting project. Corn, wheat, barley and other foodstuffs were sown, and in due time the harvests were taken in and stored. So rich was the ground in this area that it yielded three or even four crops during the season.

With the transfer of the scene of war from the Dardanelles to Syria, the possessions of the people were requisitioned. The Turkish government took everything, livestock, household furnishings, even clothing. The houses were swept clean; there were no homes; there was no means of subsistence. Then came the locusts in numbers unprecedented as far

back as the memories of the oldest inhabitants could reach. Then came the famine.

To adequately describe the misery and degradation that ensued would be impossible, were I to cover pages. Suffice it to say that death was the order of the days and nights. In Lebanon alone, more than one hundred thousand persons succumbed to starvation.

Owing to the foresight of Abdul Baha, conditions in Haifa and Acca, though none too easy, were vividly different. Trains of camels plied between Tiberias and Adassiah and the Master's house in Haifa. Here sacks of grain and cases of vegetables, fruits, nuts and olive oil were unloaded and packed in the great store-room. After a night's rest, the caravans would return to the plantations for other consignments.

My duties lay at the distributing end. The people would come to the house, Jews, Christians, Mohammedans, Druses, Bahais, and I would supply them with coupons. The Master computed the amount required by each family. It was a thoroughly organized ration system. So the war years rolled on, with Abdul Baha guarding, protecting, saving the communities of Haifa and Acca.

Caring for the needy was not our sole occupation. Thought had to be given to the years succeeding the war. One day the Master found me pouring over a world atlas. He pointed to the text and said: "Translate," so I began. While I was reading, he picked up some of my notes. "I see you have been making a skeleton listing already. Very good. Proceed with it and later bring the ma-

terial to me." I still have this geography in my possession – a book which was destined to be associated with a spiritual plan for the healing of nations.

On a Monday morning, it was March 26th, 1916, Abdul Baha was sitting at the window of his room, looking over the sea and far into infinitude. Suddenly he ordered me to bring pen and paper, saying "I will dictate a Tablet to America."

This was the first of a succession of Tablets, addressed to the different sections of the United States, to Canada, to the nations of the earth and the islands of the seas. They are documents of great beauty and power, revealing his vast intention. They are a charter for world teaching. The collection is called "The Divine Plan." Dictation on this document, which the Master took up on and off when he was in the mood, covered a period of close to two years.

When completed, these Tablets were transcribed on large sheets of vellum by Noured-Din Zeine, who had learned the art of calligraphy from his father Jenabe Zain. They were beautifully illuminated, with borders of intricate tracery, and were placed underground until the day when they could be made public. Meanwhile the Master had instructed me to learn these Tablets by heart as precaution against the possibility that they might fall into the hands of the Turks and be destroyed.

It was a big undertaking, but I applied myself to it unremittingly and in eight or nine months I was letter-perfect. During this time of concentration, I became familiar with every country to

which the words were addressed. I felt that I was involved with each, that I was part of each. High on Mount Carmel, I responded to the vibration of the globe as it spun before the eyes of my mind.

Often during the course of this memorizing, the Master would tell me to repeat to him one Tablet or another, and when my training was completed, he gathered his followers together in the great room adjacent to the shrine of the Bab. Then he *told them that he had drawn up an order of the day concerning the nations and races, to the end that they might come together in the realization of the oneness of all phenomena and the consciousness that all inspiration is one.* He concluded: "Now Mirza Ahmad will recite for you the Divine Plan." It was five o'clock.

I began to chant the first Tablet to America. The Master's eyes were on me. The Bahais were listening, absorbed, enthralled. I lost myself in the words that I was repeating. An hour passed, two hours; my audience began to relax. Presently some were nodding, some were drifting off, but Abdul Baha's attention never wavered. Sometimes he *scanned his court of fitful sleepers and smiled at me encouragingly.* So I went on through the last Tablet and stopped. It was eight o'clock.

The closing day of fighting in our region took place on September 23rd, 1918. The Turks and Germans had raised a barricade on the waterfront, which was broken through by a detachment of Hindu cavalry. These horsemen drove through the streets, cutting down everyone in sight, and continued round the bay to Acca and down the road

toward Tyre and Sidon. At evening General King, arriving at the head of the British troops, received the keys of the city.

"Is Abbas Effendi safe?" These were the historic first words of General King, who presently was conducted to the house of the Master. He carried with him a little bag of sugar which he presented to Abdul Baha with the compliments of General Allenby.

That night the plain of Haifa had become a tented city, glimmering with lights, and the next morning the task of civil readjustment began.

General King picked out many young Bahais to help him, and the Master was most cooperative, however when I was included in the number, he objected. "This one you cannot have. I have other work for him to do."

After the Armistice was declared, streams of letters from all parts of the world began to pour in. The Master was especially eager to hear from the United States, but when news did arrive, it brought no happiness. What had the American Bahais been doing while Abdul Baha was isolated in Palestine? They had been quarreling. They had been ostracizing one another. They had formed a "*Committee of Investigation.*" They had chosen the birthday of Baha-O-Llah to persecute the innocent in public.

As I started to translate to the Master the first letter from Chicago, my hands shook so much that the pages fell to the ground. Abdul Baha arose, picked them up and handed them back to me. He was very quiet. I think he knew something of what

was coming. I began again and read for a long time, the Master sitting motionless. On reaching the end, I looked into his face and saw that it was wet with tears.

"What have they done to the Cause!" He was speaking as if to himself. "What have they done to the Cause!"

He commented on the information received, point by point, then turned to me.

"You will go to America. You must dispel these clouds. The time has come when you are to render a mighty service."

I did not relish this assignment and, for the first time in my life, began to make excuses to the Master, but he did not listen to me.

"Baha-O-Llah will support you, and I will pray for you. Have no fear."

During the next few weeks, I received minute instructions regarding my course of action in the United States, but the first requisite was to get there in time for the coming Bahai Convention. This seemed next to impossible as communications between America and the Near East had not yet been set up. One night we dug the Divine Plan from the soil of Mount Carmel and I was ready to leave. On the last morning the Master spoke with me for three hours, from eight to eleven o'clock. Then he kissed me on both cheeks and blessed me. According to my notes which I recorded at the first opportunity, some of his words were as follows:

Concentrate all your time in the service of

the Cause. Attach not yourself to particulars. Endeavor as far as possible to sadden no heart. I will never forget you. Day and night you are before my sight. Few souls have stayed with me for so long a time. I declare by Baha-O-Llah that always at midnight I shall pray for you, saying: "Oh God! Confirm Mirza Ahmad, my son."

With these words in my ears and encompassed by his wistful smile, I left the presence of my beloved Lord. It was the morning of December 22nd, 1918. I never saw Abdul Baha again.

At that especial period, Orientals were not permitted to pass the frontier, but I broke through, claiming to be an Aryan, which indeed I was. Although permits for the United States were unattainable, I managed to get one. In spite of the fact that no western bound steamers were leaving Port Said, I wheedled passage on a Japanese cargo ship and reached New York.

The events related in this chapter are embodied in my book entitled "The Story of the Divine Plan" which was published in 1947. Here I am just indicating the high points. The book continues with an account of my efforts in New York and Chicago to bring unity among the Bahais and of my championship of the excluded ones. It culminates with the great Convention held at the McAlpine Hotel, New York, where, during one week, the Tablets of the Divine Plan were unveiled one by one before enormous crowds.

All this was not done without opposition. Up to

the last minute, the Bahais put stumbling blocks in my path. They did not want me to appear on the platform of the Convention; they did not agree that I should be the one to read the Tablets which I had brought; they even questioned the credentials given me by Abdul Baha. All these impediments were overstepped, due to magnificent support which I received from Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Hannen, Mr. and Mrs. William Randall, Mrs. May Maxwell, Miss Juliet Thompson, Mr. Mountford Mills, Mrs. Agnes Parsons, Mr. Louis Gregory, Mr. Roy Wilhelm, Mr. and Mrs. Harlan Ober, Mr. William Hoar, Mrs. Isabel Chamberlin, Mr. and Mrs. Edward J. Kinney, Mr. Alfred Lunt and others, and the Eleventh Bahai Convention went into history as a complete triumph. The Bahai Committee of Investigation died a timely death, leaving behind only a ghost, yet a ghost apt to put on bones and flesh whenever given a chance, while the Tablets of the Divine Plan for the drawing together of all races and nations stands as an inspired charter for this era and those to come, given to mankind by the Servant of God.

The dramatic Eleventh Bahai Convention, held so successfully, carried a small price in its wake. Personally I was exhausted. Since my arrival six weeks before, I had met suspicion disguised in every form, as well as flat-footed hostility. I had been put on the carpet and cross-examined like a criminal. Cables as to my mission had been sent to Abdul Baha, and when the answers arrived, these were studied with a view to finding in them subtle implications. All this was very wearing.

A lady in Chicago, member of the National

Assembly, claimed that the Master had once said to her in confidence: "Do not trust Ahmad Sohrab." I allowed this rumor to circulate until my patience was exhausted, then I said: "Cable to Abdul Baha. Ask if he has said this of me. If the answer comes back 'It is so,' I will retire from the convention and leave all its affairs in your hands." The cablegram was not sent.

After the sessions were in full swing, accusations were brought that I was imitating the Master. "When you appear on the platform," they said, "you walk like Abdul Baha; you talk like Abdul Baha; you make gestures as he did. We are determined that such mimicry shall cease."

This was fun, and the answer easy. "When I left Haifa," I explained, "the Master said to me: 'Mirza Ahmad! When you arrive in America, I want you to walk as I walk, speak as I speak, move as I move, think as I think, act as I act and live as I live.' Now I never expected to fulfill this particular instruction, but if you think I have succeeded I can only be surprised and very happy."

In themselves these incidents were not too grave, yet the attempt in some quarters to forestall my plans were dangerous right up to the last minute. Through it all, I prayed for strength to see me through. If I could only read the last Tablet, after that I did not care! Then when my mission was accomplished, I went into delirium and did not know anything for four days.

The affairs of the Convention had proceeded according to plan, my critics having yielded step by step. The Committee of Investigation was

scrapped. All the ousted ones had been received back into the fold. I had had my way, which was the Master's way. I was simply following his instructions, yet victory as I said before entails a price. A sense of exasperation in my regard was felt in leading Bahai circles. These people had been told what to do by an Oriental, quite a young one at that, and although they recognized the precept of the equality of the races, the American *amour propre* had been wounded. Many who had held to me were still to be counted on, yet I knew that in the future my path in this country would be a thorny one.

Abdul Baha sent Mirza Jenabe Fazel to lecture in the United States. He was a devoted Persian and well versed in the teachings, but with no knowledge of English. The Master wished me to interpret for him and conduct his tour from coast to coast. This was done with great success, the publicity arrived at in one state after another being remarkable and sustained. I had developed a system. On reaching a certain city or town, I would study the history of that region in the public library. Then I would tie up the facts learned with the lecture of Jenabe Fazel which had been, or was about to be delivered right there. This measure was conducive to public interest.

I engaged myself with a newspaper in Portland, Maine, to send a weekly article on the tour, and the philosophy which actuated it. This series was called "Persian Pilgrim's Pen-Pictures" and lasted for the duration of the trip.

I kept the Secretary of the National Bahai As-

sembly informed as to all our doings, and sent copies of the talks given. These were released to the press and published in five booklets under the title "The Solution of the World's Problems" by Mirza Jenabe Fazei of Teheran, Persia.

Thus every aspect of our teaching campaign, covering the country from New York to Oregon and back through Canada, was preserved. This literature is now to be found in the Record Room of Caravan House.

At the close of our journeyings, which lasted sixteen months, Jenabe Fazel and I parted in New York, to come together a year or so later on a repeat trip over the same territory. During the interim he returned to Palestine, while I made my way westward to start a new chapter in my life.

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10

*The Winding Trail
to the
Little Blue House*



Sohrab starting life in New York

With little money, I managed by hook and by crook to reach Chicago, after which I *rode the rails* for the rest of the journey to California. Lying face downward under the cars, gripping to one's position with hands and feet, watching the road-bed of the train flying past only a few inches away from one's face, is an unrestful mode of travel, to say the least. On arriving at a city, I would dodge the conductors and station officials, find a place to wash and something to eat, rest in some corner and then board another train. So it went. I became identified with soot, and, on reaching the quiet of my destination and breathing the pure air of California, had to be re-introduced to my former self. I did not mind the experience too much, for while my body was racing, my mind was at a standstill and that was a relief.

In Los Angeles, I reached my financial low-water mark. A weekly dinner with Mrs. Platt, a good Bahai friend of mine, constituted my main source

of subsistence for seven days until the next weekly dinner came around. Through this lady I found some opportunities to lecture and developed two subjects which proved to be very acceptable to audiences. These were "The Religion of Humanity" and "The Religion of Art." I used these subjects countless times, with variations. The latter was quite remunerative. Meanwhile, I lectured consistently on the Bahai Cause. These talks were more frequent and were of course given free.

One evening in 1921, on arriving for dinner at Mrs. Platt's house, I was handed a cablegram. I opened it, glanced at the signature "Bahieh" and read the message which told me that Abdul Baha had ascended to the Kingdom on Monday, November 28th. It was a blow between the eyes. I couldn't understand what had happened. I simply was terror stricken. I ran out of the house.

Somehow I got to my room and sat down in a chair. Was it true? Could the Master have left the earth so quietly, so suddenly? It was inconceivable that I wouldn't see him again, yet the cablegram came from the Greatest Holy Leaf, his sister. Yes, it must be true. The Sun of my life had sunk past the borders of the world into realms where I could not follow. Abdul Baha was gone.

For three days I sat in my room, helpless and weeping, then I turned my spirit to him, as I always had when in need, and I felt his fingers tightening around my heart. This was the first sensation I had had since I opened that yellow envelope. I was coming back to life.

The Master hadn't trained me for collapse in

emergency. The work that had to be done in his lifetime was all the more imperative now. I must go on, use my ingenuity, find ways and means of service. In his first Tablet to me, when I was just a young boy, he had said:

Although in the path of the True One thou art homeless and a wanderer, nevertheless put thy trust in Him.

and in his second Tablet, he had addressed me:

Oh thou my perpetual companion!

I had to take his word for it. I would proceed with my life, wounded and desolate, yet never forsaken. Had he not called me his perpetual companion?

In spite of this resolve, periods of depression ensued. The movement was now under new leadership and I no longer had a Court of Last Appeal in Haifa. The surface of my spirit became blank. Poverty was my only companion. I came to a point where life was unendurable, not a very admirable frame of mind for anyone, least of all for a person who had drunk so deeply at the Fountain of Life, but so it was.

It is a platitude to say that there is no perfect crime, and my attempted suicide was as crude as any could be. When I turned on the gas in my stove, I overlooked a crack in the window pane. Early the next morning, my landlady rushed into the room to find me woozy, but alive. She turned off the gas, threw open the window and dragged me into the hall.

“What have you been doing?” she looked at me

severely, then softening: "Don't worry about the rent. You can stay as long as you like, and now come down to breakfast."

She gave me coffee with a ten dollar bill, while I applied to myself a good mental shaking. The landlady's hand, stretched out to me that morning, remained a detail in high relief on the design of my life. When I presently took up residence in Hollywood, I returned to Los Angeles to call on her from time to time, but she never allowed me to repay the ten dollars.

I became a frequenter of movie studios. As *atmosphere* I was acceptable and I got many a job in the crowds that figured in the big productions. I took part in films of Rudolph Valentino, Douglas Fairbanks, Lon Chaney and other actors and developed into an enthusiast of the drama. I came to know many stars and spoke at their houses. Sometimes of an evening I took in a double fee, the first for cooking dinner for as many as one hundred people, even two hundred, and the second for delivering a lecture afterwards in full Oriental dress. I gave Soirées on Omar Khayyam, whose *Rubayyat* I knew from cover to cover. These were in costume, the text being accompanied by music, eight or nine persons taking part. I spoke to groups on Persian poetry, Eastern philosophy and the great religions of the world. I founded "Firdosi Salon" and "Persian-American Dramatic Club," through the instrumentality of which my plays were produced before associations and in little theatres.

The seven years following the departure of



*Sohrab as Omar Khayyam in a musical production
of the Rubayyat*

Abdul Baha from this earth were my period of writing. Looking backward, it seems that my pen was never still. I brought out my first published work "Heart Phantasies" and later "The New Humanity," a compendium of universal ideals which had appeared daily, chapter by chapter, in a Santiago newspaper.

For current and future use, I prepared twenty-one lectures on the religions of mankind. This entailed extensive study which was most rewarding as it familiarized me with the history and scriptures of the various faiths which, in the light of Bahai understanding, are inspired and magnificent. This study was necessary for teaching a cause, the outstanding note of which is the authenticity of the religions to which the blocks of humanity turn. When people have put the word *heathen* in the closet along with the wives of Bluebeard, and added the parable of creation in six days followed by a seventh in which to relax, and the rest of the paraphernalia of horrors and ignorance on which mankind has been fed, there will at last be a chance to measure and deal with life in the light of maturity and confidence. One can not forever dip up the waters of Truth in a sieve. We may have caught a few drops, but how much has been wasted!

I was on familiar ground when I delved into the beauties of Persian literature. The spirit of the epic poets, the lyric poets, the mystic poets had been injected into my blood-stream at an early age, and my later pre-occupation with the Bahai Cause had only accentuated my appreciation of art. So I

prepared approximately one hundred lectures on Persian poetry, and these stood me in good stead as a means of meagre and intermittent livelihood. The Bahais complained of the fact that I gave so much time to the arts, and countless times accused me of having "left the Cause." Actually, one of these fellow-believers of mine ordered twelve copies of "Heart Phantasies" in order to help me personally, and, having read the book, burned the whole lot. These people could not understand, what was so clear to me, that the Bahai Cause is life in its totality. This conviction of mine was a chief reason for the constant misunderstandings which arose between the Bahais and me.

Hollywood Bowl, America's greatest musical amphitheatre, lies open to the sky in the clasp of the hills. It is the home of melody for the general public and a never-ending source of power and help to the professional musician and the novice. The spirit of the Bowl touches everyone. People come to it as to a vast cathedral. Night after night they sit on its wooden benches, rich and poor, a quarter of a million during the season, and the hearts are melted by what is heard and seen. "Surely the Bowl must have its own emotions," I thought to myself, and so I wrote a poem entitled: "I am the Bowl."

The Hollywood Bowl Association published this poem in a beautifully illustrated booklet, and for a year or more it was sold at the gates every night at a price of 25c, half of which came to me.

The press of the West is generous in giving space to those who have a story to tell or ideas to im-

part, and this held in my case. I was used to seeing long articles about myself, with my picture in Oriental robes, and this wasn't a success story by any means for I was always at a loss as to where the next meal would come from. Nevertheless, I enjoyed myself and made many friends.

An article on "The New Humanity" which appeared in the book section of the "Hollywood Citizen," gave me a bit of morbid satisfaction. If I had indeed been ground through the millstones of life (as who isn't!) I was glad that the fact was recognized by some. Publicity is often balm to the spirit, and I felt isolated enough to seek solace in my own personality which I felt had been singled out for special hardships. This article which I might have written myself, so well did it describe me in my own eyes, read in part:

“. . . a soldier of fortune, acquainted with grief, the Exile passed through that Arcana of loneliness through which those must pass, who have the gift of rhythmic speech . . . for Beauty is not a cheap thing, nor lightly reached, and it is fed at bitter breasts and instructed at the bony knee of disillusion . . . The boy is now a man, Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, and the Hand of the Potter made of him one of that polished court of diplomacy at the nation's capital, a member of the Persian Legation . . . and he wrote. The years that had ground him through their nether and upper millstones, ground out a fine grist, hot with pain and wet with tears . . . In an age of frenzy and of crass materialism, this milling of grim years reached, with something of the *great compassion of Divinity*, out through the

unclean dust of striving and sweating peoples. And they, many of them, turned and listened to him . . . *Dare, dare, and then — dare more!* this bugle call of a soul that itself had *dared* is the third of his Rosary of Nineteen Pearls in his just issued book — *The New Humanity*.

“There is no saint without a past; there is no sinner without a future he reminds us in an all-compassing epigram.”

We had a Vagabond Club to which actors, writers and poets belonged, most of them destitute, all of them hungry. We used to meet at one another's apartments or rooms and read aloud, recite, and discuss various schools of philosophy. Dr. Tisdale, psychologist and artist, evolved an ingenious principle of allaying hunger pangs. He would paint pictures on cardboards, using vivid color with inscriptions below. A bag of potatoes, motto: *Idaho*. A bunch of carrots, motto: *Juicy*. An ear of corn, motto: *Sweet*. A can of stew, motto: *Nourishing — it has everything*. A slice of watermelon, motto: *Succulent*.

“You have to look at these pictures,” he would say, “not with the old method of just seeing them, but with the new method of realizing them.”

So we would stare and stare, and then go to bed on empty stomachs.

Sometimes one of us would have a little windfall and a celebration would take place. Provisions were bought and cooked, and we would have a wonderful time. Dr. Tisdale acquitted himself nobly as trencher-man, the while saying, “You see! I taught you to realize these things. I know the law.”

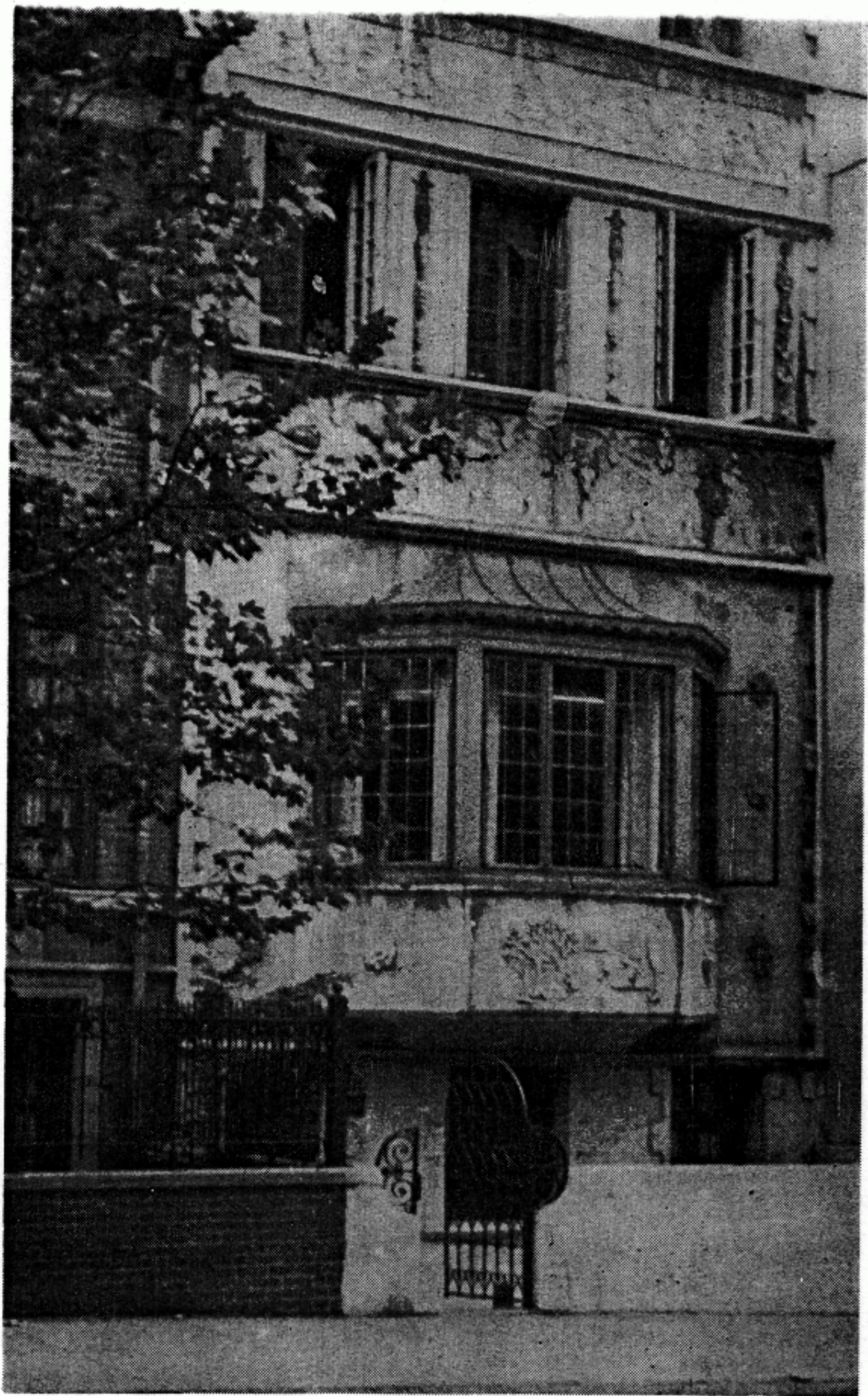
The Dean of our little group was Peter Gray Wolf, columnist and poet. A vegetarian and health expert, he was possessed of a cheerfulness that did not wane. He never brought in any food, and he never helped with the cooking or washing up; he simply sat at the head of the table, our host wherever he happened to be. Peter Gray Wolf was everybody's favorite.

A budding actor named Taylor Graves occasionally visited the Vagabond Club. We were sympathetic to each other and often met on our own. Sometimes we would take long walks and, if the night overtook us, would clamber to the top of a haystack and sleep under the stars. He was a Bohemian like myself and never stayed long in any place.

I knew Rabbi and Mrs. Mendes very well. They did not by any means fall into the category of vagrants and hobos, but were none the less my friends. Mrs. Mendes was most concerned with my welfare and did not want me to loiter in California for too long. "There is nothing for you here," she would say. "Your future lies in New York."

Then I would complain: "Believe me, Mrs. Mendes, I have done a lot in Los Angeles and Hollywood," but she would shake her head, insisting: "I will expect to hear news of you from New York."

The downs of life had not weakened my sense of responsibility toward the Cause, rather they gave me opportunity to spread the teachings in entirely new circles. I was known as a Bahai lecturer and went from house to house, from hall to hall,



*Residence of Mr. and Mrs. L. S. Chanler
now Caravan House*

wherever there was an opening. When there were no openings, I simply had to make them.

One night in Los Angeles, after I had given a lecture on Mary Magdalene, a very striking looking woman approached the platform and asked for an appointment with me. She had been impressed by my treatment of the story, which contained many anecdotes on the life of this great disciple which are unknown in the western world, and she wanted me to write a scenario in the hope that it might prove a suitable vehicle for her talents. This lady was a well known vaudeville actress. Her name was Valeska Surratt.

The script was prepared and placed in the hands of Miss Surratt, after which it went through many vicissitudes. At one time it was close to being produced and much publicity flared up in Hollywood, but my scenario did not reach the Klieg lights of the movie world. Instead it served a much better purpose. I found it necessary to go to New York to discuss business matters with Miss Surratt, who incidentally was a Bahai. Through her I met Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Stuyvesant Chanler.

Except for a few periods when I was anchored, most of my life had been spent on the road. As a child I wandered among the hills of Persia, then down to India, through to Acca where I received my baptism of love, along the travel routes of the United States with periodical repetitions, up to Canada, among the countries of Europe, back to the Near East and now meanderings on the Pacific coast. I had kept going, and I was still young. I expected a future like unto the past, with never

a roof raised above my head, and then — I presented myself at the doorway of 132 East 65th Street, a vagabond, empty handed, possessing only *fabrics spun within my brain and woven in my heart.*

That was some thirty years ago, and I am still here. The building has changed. It is now an office, a Bahai Library, an Art Gallery. It hums with activity, early and late, year in, year out. It is Caravan House, the center of an international movement. It is my home — the home of the world.

As I write these closing lines to the unfinished story of my impetuous career, I look through the broad window of the little blue house that stands so innocently on the quiet street. Behind that window are the records of feverish years of effort conducted from this spot, covering 1928 until this writing in 1957, which years have figured in so many publications that there is no need to comment on them here. These rooms contain my books, making quite a stretch on the shelves; they contain a varied and abundant stock of pamphlets and leaflets in many languages, with which the surface of the earth has been deluged; they contain a collection of Bahai documents and literature unparalleled anywhere. Among all these writings, one leaflet stands out significantly. It is *The Ideals of the New History Society*, which constituted the opening shot in the world-wide campaign directed from this address.

That campaign was made possible through the gallantry and generosity of Mr. Chanler, and the talent and selflessness of Mrs. Chanler who has

MY BAHAI PILGRIMAGE

been standing by me all these years, dreaming the dreams of Baha-O-Llah and Abdul Baha, even as I have dreamed them and am dreaming them yet. I thank them and the many friends whose encouragement made it possible for me to carry on from this place, where the living spirit of Abdul Baha walks by day and by night — Caravan House, in his name, at his service.

INTERMISSION

1. The first step in the process of creating a business plan is to conduct a thorough market research. This involves identifying the target market, understanding the needs and preferences of the customers, and analyzing the competitive landscape. Market research can be conducted through various methods, including surveys, interviews, focus groups, and secondary research.

2. Once the market research is complete, the next step is to define the business goals and objectives. These should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART). The goals should be aligned with the overall mission and vision of the business.

3. The third step is to develop a marketing strategy. This involves identifying the marketing mix (product, price, promotion, and place) and determining the most effective ways to reach the target market. The marketing strategy should be based on the results of the market research and the business goals.

4. The fourth step is to create a financial plan. This involves estimating the costs of the business, determining the revenue streams, and calculating the profit margins. The financial plan should be based on realistic assumptions and should include a break-even analysis.

5. The fifth and final step is to write the business plan. This is a comprehensive document that outlines the business strategy, financial projections, and other key information. The business plan is used to attract investors, secure financing, and guide the business operations.