My Pilgrimage

to Haifa

November 1919

by Bahiyyih Randall Winckler



Bahá’í Publishing Trust

Wilmette, Illinois 60091

Bahá’í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, IL 60091-2886

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National Spiritual Assembly of the

Bahá’ís of the United States

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Printed in the United States of America

99 98 97 96 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Winckler, Bahiyyih Randall.

My pilgrimage to Haifa, November 19191 by Bahiyyih Randall

Winckler.

p. cm.

ISBN 0-87743-254-6

1. Winckler, Bahiyyih Randall. 2. Bahais—United States—Diaries.

3. Bahai pilgrims and pilgrimages—Israel—Haifa. 4. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá,

1844-1921. 6. Haifa (Israel)—Description. I. Title.

BP395.W56A3 1996

297’.93446—dc20 96-4389

CIP

*My Pilgrimage to Haifa, November 1919* was first published under the title of *A Pilgrimage to Haifa, November 1919 (Memories of a Young Girl of 12 Years Old)* in 1995 by Mrs Mildred Mottahedeh.

Design by Suni D. Hannan

To my daughter, Beth Witham,

with deep appreciation and love

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Acknowledgments

I would like to give special thanks for their

encouragement and enthusiasm to Roland

Witham, Kim Witham McQueen, and Betty

Randall; gratitude to Peter and Susan Goodman

for their restoration of old photographs; and

special thanks to my spiritual sister, Mrs Mildred

Mottahedeh.

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Preface

This is the story of a twelve-year-old girl who

went with her parents, Harry and Ruth Randall,

in November 1919 to Haifa, Israel, to visit

‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He was the son of Bahá’u’lláh, the

Founder of the Bahá’í Faith.\*

This little story would never have been put on

the following pages had it not been for the insis-

tence of my daughter, Beth. She insisted that I

should share my memories of such a precious

experience. It was a happiness to begin to think

back over the years and to realize with what

\* Bahá’ís believe Bahá’u’lláh (1817-92) is the Messenger

of God for this Day. The pivotal principle around which all

of His teachings revolve is the oneness of humanity.

Bahá’u’lláh’s coming was foretold by the Báb (1819-50),

Who was His forerunner and a Messenger of God in His

own right. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1844-1921) was Bahá’u’lláh’s

eldest son, His designated Successor, and the authorized

Interpreter of His teachings.

clarity I could remember the events of those days.

But, of course, the experiences with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

would never be forgotten.

For many months I thought and prayed that I

could write it as a child would, and not as I am

now, an adult. Although my mother and father

each wrote diaries, I wanted my story to be as I

remembered those days, not as they had recorded

them. Therefore my story in some cases may seem

to differ, but only because as a child I saw things

my way.

It is my hope that this story will be inspira-

tional.

—Bahiyyih Randall Winckler

Pilgrimage

to Haifa

November 1919

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Day One

There was a splash. The anchor had dropped. We

had reached Haifa! Seven of us were standing on

the top deck of the dirty old ship that we would

be glad to leave, cockroaches and all. It was

early—before breakfast—but we were excited to

see Haifa, where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was. I was twelve

years old and was with my parents, Ruth and

Harry Randall. My three-year-old brother, Bill,

was sick at home in Boston and could not come

with us.

Soon little boats came from the shore with

men full of business, checking passports and

asking how much money we had. We hurried

them and ourselves and were finally led to the

side of the ship, where a thin-looking rope ladder

would take us to a small boat way below. We

made it, but it was scary. Mother started to fall,

but Father caught her. It was lucky the sea was

calm.

Dr Lutfu’lláh Hakím was waiting for us with

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s carriage. He was so capable and

pleasant. I learned later that he was a medical

doctor who had given up his business to serve

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, especially with the pilgrims. When

the officials began to argue about our luggage, Dr

Hakim told them we were ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s guests,

and they stopped at once.

As we drove past the town, it looked strange.

There were so many walls hiding buildings, and

the men were wearing long white shirts that

looked like Father’s nightgowns. We stopped to

let a line of camels pass. Strapped to their sides

were square tin boxes containing a year’s supply

of butter. I did not want to taste that butter!

We left town and began to climb upward until

the horses stopped before a wall with a large

wrought-iron gate. We looked through the bars to

see a large stone house in the middle of a sandy

yard. We were going to stay in this house twelve

days.

Suddenly it was as if a hand turned my face to

the left. I saw a window at the top of a small

building behind a wall. In the upper half of the

window was the face of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He was

[Photograph]

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looking at us and yet into some distant place.

Without any action on my part, I became close to

Him. His eyes were radiant, and they spoke of

love and wisdom, but there was also a look of

patient sadness. He did not speak or move. I

looked beyond Him and saw a large circle of soft

pink with a white center. The edges of the circle

were gray with sparkles of gold. It was very

beautiful, and I became aware that it was telling

me something about the Master—how wonderful

He was—but I did not understand. I did know

that His Father, Bahá’u’lláh, had given Him the

title “Master” because He must be respected.

Then I was wrapped in a feeling of love

towards the Master that flooded my heart. As

suddenly as this happened, it was over. Later,

after I thought about this unusual incident, I

decided it was a gift from the Master. It was a gift

that was beyond measure, one that would remain

with me forever. It was a gift in two ways: first, it

made me realize that the Master’s great station

was beyond comprehension; and second, it taught

me that I could be close to Him if I loved Him.

 The home we stayed in proved to be spacious

for all of my family and the Bahá’ís who had

traveled with us, except for Fugita, who went to

the household of the Master, where he longed to

be. There was Arthur Hathaway, Albert Vail,

George Latimer, and Dr Esslemont, who had his

own room because he was ill and was writing a

book about the Faith. We stood by his door and

greeted him. He looked tired but kind.1

We soon met Shoghi Effendi, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s

eldest grandson, who was ten years older than I.

He came to greet us and to say that the Master

would be coming very soon, and then there

‘Abdu’l-Bahá was, in the doorway! I caught my

breath, but the Master smiled and welcomed us

with enthusiasm. He shook our hands and made

us feel He was really glad we had come. We all sat

down when He did.

The Master asked us about our trip. No one

told Him about the terrible storm we had been

through in the Mediterranean. The old ship,

which had been out of use for some time and then

brought back into service to carry troops during

[Photograph]

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World War I, had groaned and shaken when the

huge waves crashed down upon us. The captain

had said it was the worst storm he had ever been

in. We had been a little frightened, but perhaps

the Master knew this and protected us.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke of President Wilson, and

it was interesting because Father looked so much

like him. When we had entered one of the

consulates in Europe on our way to Haifa, the

staff arose, thinking it was the President of the

United States traveling incognito.

The Master left us after a while, saying He

had many letters to write and an important guest

was coming for lunch. Our meal was brought

from the Master’s house. It consisted of soup, fish,

pilaf, and kabob. There was lots to eat, and we

were hungry. After lunch I went to my room to

open my steamer trunk. People at home wanted

us to take pictures, so I took out my Brownie box

camera and lots of film.

In the afternoon a Colonel and Mrs Allison

and a Mr Denham came from the ship, asking if

they could see ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Father had asked

Shoghi Effendi if it was all right. My family had

talked about the Bahá’í Faith to everyone on the

ship. These three people were not Bahá’ís but had

become interested in the Faith and wanted to

meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Later we were all invited to

the Master’s house. As we entered the gate, I saw

the little building behind the wall again. Shoghi

Effendi said it was a place where the Master

could be alone and rest. The Master’s house was

large. It had a big central room with doors

leading to other parts of the house.

That afternoon we also went to a gathering at

the Shrine of the Báb, the Herald of the Bahá’í

Faith. Mother and I were sad because the ladies

of the Master’s household could not be with us.

They had to stay at home while we visited the

holy places because it was a Muslim rule that men

who were not a part of their family—and there

were many—could not be permitted to enter their

company.

There were many people, including Persians,

on pilgrimage. The Shrine of the Báb has more

than one room, and the Master led us to a door

where we all took off our shoes. There was a big

pile of them, and I wondered if any were ever

stolen or if anyone ever took the wrong shoes by

mistake. I stood by the Master’s side. As each

person entered the room, the Master put rose

water in their hands. He had a very small bottle,

and I watched. There was always enough, even

for me at the end. How could it be? Maybe it was

a miracle. In this room prayers were chanted, but

I could not understand the words.

Then we took turns going to the entrance of a

second room where the body of the Báb lies below

floor level. A beautiful rug covers the spot. We

only went to the room’s entrance, which was

covered with flowers, and knelt and bowed our

heads. I wondered why some men were weeping.

My father said it was a very special and

important time for peoples’ hearts.

I was to learn that in Haifa there were many

experiences in a day, lots more than at home.

When we returned from visiting the Shrine of the

Báb, Mother showed me two things. One was the

toilet. Near the house was a small building the

size of a clothes closet. Inside, it had a wooden

shelf with a hole in the middle. That is where we

sat, over the hole! I was afraid that something

underneath would bite me.

The second thing Mother showed me was the

lighting in the bedrooms. There was a drinking

glass that was two-thirds full of water. On top of

this was a thin layer of oil, and on top of that was

a little round piece of stiff, pink paper with about

a quarter-inch of wick pushed through a hole in

the middle of the paper. Later, after dinner, it

would light my room enough so I could see to get

ready for bed. I was told it would burn a long

time. It was a gallant little wick!

To prepare for dinner with the Master,

Mother and I put on our best dresses. Dinner was

at 7:30, and we were on time. Father was never

late to anything. He said the Master was the

same. Unless there was a reason, I was never

allowed to be late.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá placed each person at the table.

He placed Mother at the head, Father and George

partway down, and Shoghi Effendi and Dr

Hakím at the far end because they were taking

notes of all that the Master said. He placed me at

His left side. That was to be my place all during

our visit.

Sitting across from me was someone the

Master called a “Shaykh”.2 I was fascinated

because I had read about such men. I wondered if

he had tents filled with silk pillows and women

lying on them. Fugita came in carrying large

plates of pilaf and other things. The pilaf had

dainty pieces of meat and vegetables mixed into

the rice, and on top, there were pine nuts. The

Master talked a great deal, but never lost sight of

anyone’s plate. When someone’s plate was empty

He would arise from His chair and, still talking,

fill it. He did this to Father twice, and I knew

Father was struggling to eat it all, but no one

would leave even a speck. When the Master was

silent, no one spoke. There was a loving respect

that one could feel. Shoghi Effendi interpreted as

the Master spoke, and he did not seem to have

time to eat very much.

 When dinner was finished the Master arose

and went to a wash basin by His bedroom door,

washed His hands and beard, and said good

night. As He went through the door, I felt lonely.

Everyone else arose and went on their way home.

Day Two

The next morning, bagpipes woke me up. A

division of the British Army was stationed on

Mount Carmel. They used bagpipes instead of

bugles. They were loud enough to wake everyone

up. Father came in, having walked up to the

Shrine of the Báb and back. He said we did not

come here to sleep. I thought, That may be true

for spiritual people, but not for me!

At 7:30 a maid came to the house where we

were staying to bring a large cup of black coffee

for Father. He was astonished. Who could know

what his custom was in the mornings? The dear

Master, of course! We were learning that He knew

us better than we knew ourselves.

Breakfast consisted of tea served in tiny

glasses so hot that one couldn’t hold them at first,

eggs, cheese, and bread. The bread was the size of

a large pancake. When cut open, it was hollow,

and food could be put inside like a sandwich.

Shoghi Effendi and Dr Hakím came to our

house after breakfast to begin translating the

talks of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá into English. Father and

George Latimer helped. They made every effort

to be accurate, talking about this word or that.

When they had finished, Shoghi Effendi took the

papers to the Master for His approval. Sometimes

the Master corrected a word or two, but seldom,

according to Shoghi Effendi. The Master always

spoke to me in English and did so with others

when He wished to.

Luncheons continued to be brought to us from

the Master’s house. Shoghi Effendi and Dr

Hakím were always with us, and sometimes Dr

Esslemont was, too. The wonderful surprise was

that on this day the Master came, saying that He

would be with us every day. Shoghi Effendi

assured us that this was a great honor because

‘Abdu’l-Bahá seldom had time to do this. The big

table with the white cloth was made beautiful

when the Master took fragrant jasmine blossoms

from a large handkerchief in His pocket and

tossed them into the center of the table.

The Master was always so happy, even when

one day He was terribly tired, having had only

four hours of sleep and no breakfast. We became

[Photograph]

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like a family, feeling free to laugh and ask

questions, but always with respect.

During lunch Mother spoke of the death of

Sandy Kinney, a family friend in America who

died while we were away on pilgrimage. The

Master said He would send a message. I asked for

a message for Howey Kinney, who was my best

friend. The Master spoke at once, saying,

“Although thy brother has ascended to the Abhá

Kingdom and has not remained long in this

world, my hope is that on behalf of thy brother

thou mayst strive on behalf of thy parents.”3

The Master had an inexhaustible supply of

stories. His facial expressions and tone of voice

made a story seem real. My favorite was a little

story He told about a dog.

The Master was in ‘Akká when Kamál Páshá

became prime minister. His brother became

governor of ‘Akká. In Turkey the brother of the

prime minister could do whatever he wished. One

day the governor came with a carriage, and he

and the Master went out together. On the way, the

Master noticed that the governor had a hunting

outfit and four or five large hunting dogs. A

gazelle was sighted. The dogs chased after it. An

Arab Bahá’í who had also come along had a

small dog. The governor’s five dogs did not catch

anything, but this little dog caught a large gazelle.

The governor was ashamed. When his dogs

returned he began to beat them. He said, “What

can I do? The Bahá’ís are assisted. These five

dogs of mine could catch nothing, but this little

dog did.” He dismounted and took the little dog in

his arms and kissed it. He told the owner of the

dog that he would not give it back to him.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá told us about all kinds of

things—even potatoes, my favorite food. He said

that sixty years earlier the potato had been

introduced into Persia. There was so much

superstition that a saying went around that

whoever ate a potato would become an infidel.

No one would eat potatoes, except those who took

them with wine. There was so much prejudice.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, “Now see what Bahá’u’lláh

has done. Now we are all gathered around one

table, filled with love!”

 On the day before, when the Master had first

come to see us, I had had a strange feeling in my

body. When He had left, the feeling had left. I

thought perhaps it had been due to excitement.

But the feeling came whenever I was with Him. I

tried to describe it to myself and thought perhaps

it was what a very mild electric current might feel

like. It did not hurt but made me feel uneasy.

Mother and I were invited to have tea with

the Master’s family in the afternoon. Tea was

served in the room opposite the front door of the

Master’s home. The Greatest Holy Leaf (the

Master’s sister), the Master’s wife, and their four

daughters—one of whom spoke English and was

named Munavvar—were there.4 (Munavvar

became Mother’s close friend.) They greeted us

with love and were eager to hear news of

America. The Master sat with us for a while. He

read the newspapers, but He talked with us just

the same. His little grandson Fu’ád rushed in to

say that his pet donkey had a fever and would the

Master please pray for him. They left together to

see the animal.

 There were meetings before dinner with the

Master, pilgrims, guests, and people from various

places in the world. They all showed their respect

and love for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Some had come for

the first time, yet the Master knew them and

spoke as if they were friends. Sometimes I would

forget how wonderful the Master was because He

was so natural, and yet we were but shadows

compared to Him.

Day Three

When Shoghi Effendi came in the morning, he

said that the Master would give us each a private

interview. Mother’s would be in the morning. I

was a little afraid to have mine for fear I would

cry or say something silly. To be alone with the

Master would not be an ordinary experience.

Mother said I could go with her, so we hurried

along. It was pouring rain. The Master greeted us

in His loving way by putting both hands to His

forehead.5 He took us to the room where He held

meetings and received guests, seated us, and then

sat down across from us. I called this room the

meeting room.”

Mother had lots to say. She had brought

messages from people in the United States. She

also wanted to know about herself. Her biggest

question was whether the Master would like for

Father and herself to build a Western Pilgrim

House—a place where Bahá’ís from the West

could stay when they were on pilgrimage. The

Master smiled and said, “Very good, very good.”

 Then it was my turn. I stood up and asked

(I heard this coming out of my mouth, with

surprise), “What can I do to serve the Faith?”

There was a long silence, and then I heard,

“Study, study, STUDY.” When the Master wanted

to emphasize something, He would repeat it three

times, His voice getting louder and louder.

I told Him about Ella Robarts, who was

publishing a little magazine for Bahá’í children. I

asked if the Master would please give it a name.

He replied, “‘The Magazine of the Children of the

Kingdom’—I will send a Tablet” (see the

appendix).6

At luncheon the Master turned to me, saying,

“Your name is ‘Bahiyyih’. It means light, and

there must be something to make the light.” He

had a twinkle in His eyes and a big smile. I loved

the name at once. It had a soft, musical sound.

“Margaret”, the name my parents gave me, had a

harsh sound, and I had never liked it. Later, I

learned the name Bahiyyih was the name of the

sister of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Greatest Holy Leaf.

My brother received the name “Bahá’í” in a

Tablet to our father. What a blessing for us

both—and what a challenge! I am sure the Master

heard my heart saying thank you.

Luncheon that day was especially fun. The

Master encouraged Fugita to try to teach Him to

eat rice with chopsticks. We all laughed, even the

Master.

The Master teased me about food during the

entire visit. He would ask if I liked something

that was being served. If I said “A little,” He

would usually say, “I know what you are

thinking.” And the next day, for me, we would

have chicken and potatoes, and it tasted good!

Another time, we had a delicious sweet that

looked like pink shredded wheat, only it was very

brittle. It was a real treat. He was so kind and

thoughtful.

When the Master left after lunch, it was

raining. Mother handed Him an umbrella as He

started down the front steps. It was a cold rain,

and Mother was worried that He might catch a

chill. He did not seem concerned and handed the

umbrella to Shoghi Effendi. The Master was not

really like us. I felt He could control nature, even

raindrops or a storm, as I had heard He did when

He was in the United States.7

Mother liked being with the ladies. They

talked about what was going on in the Faith,

because the ladies heard very little news. They

also talked about marriage, children, and

sometimes cooking.

I now enjoyed the little glasses of hot, sweet

tea, but I seldom stayed after tea. Since it was still

raining I went down to our house. Dr Esslemont

was sitting in a chair in his room, and I stopped to

talk with him. He said the Master was helping

him a lot with his book—helping him clarify

things.

I told Dr Esslemont about a dream I had had.

For years I had heard believers talking about

their dreams, all of them remarkable, according to

them. I wanted to have a dream that I could talk

about, but it had never happened. Then the night

before—I was so excited—it had happened. I

dreamed I was with Jesus. As people came to see

Him, He gave each one a pearl. The pearls were

[Photograph]

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about the size of a grapefruit, round and white,

wrapped in veils of soft color. They looked so

pretty. The people bowed as they accepted their

pearls. Jesus was happy. I was happy too! You

see, I had always enjoyed stories about Jesus,

especially the one about the five loaves and two

fish.8 I was glad my special dream was about

Him. Dr Esslemont smiled, saying it was a

beautiful dream, and we talked about it for a

while.

Before dinner we went to the evening

meeting. During the meeting visitors asked

questions rather than listening to what ‘Abdu’l-

Bahá might have wanted to say.

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Day Four

I decided in the morning to go down to the end of

the yard to see who our neighbors were. I was

about to start out when a message came from the

Master asking me not to go because His enemies

lived there. I was grateful He had stopped me,

but how had He known? I had not told anyone.

Living there under the protection of the loving

Master was a gift never, never to forget.

That morning Mother and I went shopping in

town with Dr Hakím. We went to stores owned

by Bahá’ís, wanting to give them business.

Everyone was friendly and polite. We drank tea

with them, and some gave me candy. Mother

bought rosaries to take back to friends. She had

heard that, if one repeated the Greatest Name

ninety-five times with a rosary, it could increase

one’s powers of concentration.9

At noon the Master talked a long time. Our

dessert was a dish of fresh dates. I had tasted

them in Cairo and had decided never to eat them

or yogurt (*mást*) again. When I made up my mind

about something, I seldom changed it. That was

why I was naughty lots of times—at least that is

what I was told.

The Master put two dates on a little plate in

front of me and explained that they helped the

digestion and gave heat to the body. Then He

arose from the table and left us. We always went

to the door to watch Him walk home. After He

left, I turned to the dining room table and saw it

had been cleared. I was thankful, for the dates

were gone. But in a corner of the room was

another table with the dates on it, and they were

looking at me! I stood on one foot and then the

other. Must I eat those dates? Every reason not to

came into my mind. I discovered one date was a

little rotten, so of course it would not be necessary

to eat that one. But something also kept saying to

me, The Master told you to. The Master never

asks you to do something unless it is for your own

good. After about ten minutes I ate both dates. I

felt heroic, wise, and relieved.

There was much activity at tea time. Mother

took my dresses to the ladies so they could copy

the patterns. Many Bahá’í women came and

went. The Master’s wife was going away, but she

had four daughters who would help take care of

things. But I had noticed that it was the Greatest

Holy Leaf to whom everyone turned for help and

advice. She was gentle and loving, but strong, too.

After tea I wandered into the garden that

surrounds part of the Master’s house. An old man

called Haydar-‘Alí was sitting on a bench in the

sun. I asked the young man sitting next to him

what Mr ‘Alí had done for the Faith. He

translated the question for Mr ‘Alí, and the

answer that came back was, “I have not done as

much as an ant would do for the Faith of God.”

The young man had fire in his eyes, and I realized

that I should not have asked such a thing. I

learned that Mr ‘Alí had given his whole life in

service to the Faith, which had meant spending

years in prison, being tied to a camel’s body and

.carried across a desert, and suffering many other

cruelties.”10

Shoghi Effendi was also in the garden. He

had a grapefruit in his hands. I asked if I could

take his picture, and he said yes. He was such a

smiling, kind person. He was completely devoted

to his Grandfather, working day and night with

Him.

At dinner there was another old man whom

the Master cared for. This man could not move

his arm to lift a spoon to his mouth. The Master

gently helped him while He talked and watched

peoples’ plates. This man was Ibn-i-Asdaq, one of

the four Hands of the Cause of God appointed by

Bahá’u’lláh. He, too, had done wonderful work

for the Faith.11

During dinner the Master turned to me,

saying, “Yogurt is very good.” He turned to

Fugita and asked him to get some for me. Fugita

went to get some yogurt but returned at once,

saying there was none and should he go next

door? The Master said, “No, that is not

necessary.” Then He looked at me with such a

kind look. This is what had happened to me.

When the Master had said yogurt, I had reacted

in only one way—instant obedience. I did not

remember that I had decided never even to smell

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it again. The Master had shown me, in a way I

could understand, what obedience means. When

God speaks through His chosen channels—His

Teachers—for your own good and happiness, do

not question it. This was yet another gift from the

Master that I had needed. It was a basic lesson for

a lifetime.

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Day Five

It was still raining. I guessed we were going to

have a wet pilgrimage. Shoghi Effendi said we

would go to ‘Akká on the first clear day. The

Master came to see Dr Esslemont because he was

not well. The Master stood in the doorway to Dr

Esslemont’s room for quite a while. He said He

was sorry He could not stay with us but would

come for lunch. At lunch He told more stories

about Christ and the Jews. He never said unkind

things.

In the afternoon I helped the ladies of

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s family and household clean

wheat.12 There were great bags of it, and we

pulled it towards us little by little, looking for the

small stones that cause trouble. We sat around a

large, round table. When we finished sorting, I

walked around in the house because it was still

raining outside. I saw a door standing partly open

down a little hallway. It was the door to the room

of the Greatest Holy Leaf. I was quiet, but the

Greatest Holy Leaf heard me and asked me to

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come in. She was on her bed, and I was sorry to

have disturbed her, but she smiled and got up to

show me some interesting pictures and things that

she had. She spoke little English, but her eyes

talked. Her face looked dreadfully tired, but her

eyes were like the Master’s, so alive and

expressive. She was not like the other ladies.

The Greatest Holy Leaf was apart, like the

Master. It was a joy to be with her. I loved her.

She gave me a Persian pen box before I left. The

pen box, which was decorated with birds and

flowers, held bamboo pens and a small box of dry

ink.

Mother often sat beside the Greatest Holy

Leaf in the afternoons because she, too, felt

something special. A few days before we left, the

Greatest Holy Leaf also gave us a piece of rock

candy that Bahá’u’lláh used to give to those who

visited Him in the Ridván Garden. It was the last

piece she had! It looked like crystal.

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Day Six

It was a very cold day, but the rain stopped.

Mother went to bed with a hot-water bottle. ‘Azíz

Yazdí came to see me. He was about my age, and

his family lived in Haifa. Imagine living near the

Master all the time. I enjoyed his visit.13

We had brought a small trunk full of gifts,

and Father asked if the Master would accept

them. The Master said that because we wanted so

much to give them it would be acceptable. When

lunch was finished the trunk was opened. To our

horror, a package of yellow bug powder that

Mother had put in the trunk in case it was needed

during our travels had broken. It took some time

to clean the powder off of everything. There were

typewriters, and Shoghi Effendi was very pleased

to have one. The trunk was full of things, and I do

not remember who received other gifts, except the

Master. Father had a most beautiful watch for

Him that fit in His pocket.14 There were also three

lengths of a special wool material for coats for the

Master. It was as soft as a bunny’s ear. Mother

took these to the Greatest Holy Leaf to be made

up as the Master wished. He said He had one coat

and did not need others. The Greatest Holy Leaf

asked Him to accept the material, as it would be

rude not to. A coat was made, and He wore it for

us to see. The next day, however, Father was

walking out the front door when he saw a poor

man walking down the street and wearing the

coat!

Seventeen people came for dinner that

evening. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá seemed tired, and He

answered questions rather than giving a talk. He

went to His room without even saying good night,

and we knew He was exhausted.

Day Seven

The bagpipes awakened me, and for once I was

glad, because Shoghi Effendi came early to say it

was clear and we could go to ‘Akká. We finished

breakfast by 7:45 and went to the street. The

Master was there making all the arrangements for

the outing. Eleven of us were going: our group,

Shoghi Effendi, Dr Hakím, Fugita, Dr Suláyman

Raf’at Bey, Isfandíyár—the Master’s faithful

coachman and devoted servant—and Khosrar—a

young boy. The Master seated us and saw that our

luncheon was safely packed. There were two

carriages with three horses each. The Master

wished us a happy day, and we were off!15

We went up the mountain a little, then turned

left, going along a road that soon dropped down

to the sea. This was the best road to ‘Akká, and

there were caravans and groups of loaded

donkeys slowly moving along. It was fascinating

to ride close to the sea, watching little waves wash

against the wheels and the horses’ hoofs. I walked

along beside my carriage for a little while. The

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beach was ideal for a swim! We stopped once to

rest the horses and stretch our legs. Then

Isfandíyár took us around in the back of ‘Akká

because the streets were narrow. We approached

the back of a huge fortress (now called the

barracks) where Bahá’u’lláh and His family and

followers had been imprisoned for two years. It

was a dreadful-looking place.

We left the carriage and walked along a path

towards the entrance of the barracks. We crossed

a flimsy bridge covering two deep moats that had

once been filled with water. I noticed an odd pile

of earth beside the path and dug at it with a stick.

It proved to be an old cannonball. Dr Lutfu’lláh

Hakím knew a lot about history, and he said it

must date back to about 1799, when Napoleon

had tried to take the fortress. I wanted to keep the

cannonball, but Father said “No!”

We entered the courtyard where Bahá’u’lláh

used to walk for exercise. While we were there, a

very old man named Agá Husayn came. Shoghi

Effendi had sent for him, as he was the only

living survivor of those terrible days, with the

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exception of the Master and Bahíyyih Khánum,

the Greatest Holy Leaf. As we saw each room in

the barracks, he told us about what had happened

there.

We learned that the Master had made soup in

one of the rooms. We saw the first room

Bahá’u’lláh had slept in, as well as the second

room He had slept in, which was at the top of a

steep flight of stairs. There was no furniture, not

even a bed or chair. It seemed impossible that

Bahá’u’lláh could have been treated that way. We

also saw the room where the Purest Branch,

Mírzá Mihdí (a son of Bahá’u’lláh), had fallen

through the skylight, mortally wounding himself.

It was sad to be in such a place. The old man

made those awful days vivid—he seemed to live

them over again.

We left the barracks and met the carriages so

we could be taken to the Ridván Garden. I

remembered something the Greatest Holy Leaf

had told us. She said they had been marvelously

happy in the barracks because they had not been

separated from Bahá’u’lláh. The garden was

surrounded by a stream, like an island. I would

call it a brook. We crossed a short bridge and

entered a place of flowers and fruit. It was

November, and yet the garden looked so fresh and

happy.

The gardener came to talk to us. He pointed

out special plants, some of which had been

carried all the way from Persia by pilgrims, some

of whom had walked the entire distance. He went

to the mulberry trees that shaded the bench where

Bahá’u’lláh used to sit, sometimes resting and

other times dictating important Tablets.

A table was set up near the trees for lunch,

and we enjoyed a delicious pilaf. The dessert was

fruit from the garden: oranges, dates, lemons,

pomegranates, and watermelon. It was truly a

very special garden. The little fountain near

where we were sitting was not working. I wanted

to see it flowing, because that would make it like

the days when Bahá’u’lláh was there.

The gardener took us to a corner of the

property where a fence enclosed a round dirt

track. A donkey was standing there. The donkey,

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when harnessed and blindfolded (the donkey

would not walk until it was blindfolded), would

walk round and round the track, and the water

would begin to flow. The fountain came alive,

making a soft sound. How cool it must have been

to sit beside the fountain on a hot day. It was

selfish of me to ask, but it was so lovely, and we

all enjoyed it.

After lunch we were taken to the little

building where Bahá’u’lláh used to rest and have

tea. It had not changed. His room was at the top

of a short flight of stairs, and below was where

the gardener lived. In this garden, one feels close

to Bahá’u’lláh, perhaps because He loved it.

Then we were off to the Mansion of Bahjí, the

last place where Bahá’u’lláh lived. It was some

miles outside the little town of ‘Akká. On the way,

we stopped to see the little house where the

Master had welcomed the pilgrims for many

years. It was partly in ruins, but there was still a

little garden.

When we were a short way from Bahjí, we

left the carriages and walked the rest of the way. I

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ran ahead and saw a little donkey standing in the

metal doorway. There was also a long, green

snake moving among some rocks. I didn’t like

that. Then we walked to the left of Bahjí to a

small building where the Master stayed when He

visited the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh. We were invited

by the caretakers to have tea, and we entered a

little room that was partly open to a small

courtyard where flowers grew. Little gray birds

flew in and out of the room, even landing on

furniture without fear. We enjoyed them.

We were now going to enter the Shrine of

Bahá’u’lláh—for Bahá’ís, the holiest spot on

earth. First we went through a small garden the

Master had made, and then we went through a

large door. We took off our shoes. Shoghi Effendi

gave us rose water for our faces, then we stopped

inside a large room with a small garden in the

center. It was raised above the floor level and had

a glass roof over it. The floor was covered with

beautiful Persian rugs. After a few minutes of

silent prayer, Shoghi Effendi chanted the Tablet

of Visitation, a special prayer to be said at the

Shrine. It was so spiritual.

Then we entered the small room where the

body of Bahá’u’lláh had been placed below floor

level. The spot where He lay was in the middle of

the room and was covered with a magnificent

rug. We stood silently. I could not even think. I

just felt great peace and power, as if nature also

stood still in that room. We stepped down from

the room with a feeling of reverence.

We went back to the carriages. Our day in this

most holy part of the world was over. I knew it

would live with me forever and ever. We went

back to Haifa by way of the sea, and this time the

waves splashed up on the wheels of the carriages.

When we returned, we saw the Master standing

at our gate, waiting to welcome us. “Have you

had a happy day?” He asked. “Rest now until the

evening meeting.” He knew our hearts were full to

the brim.

The evening was long. Three times dinner

was announced, but the Master had left us, so we

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just sat and waited. I thought I was approaching

starvation. Then we heard voices. The Master

was coming in with Colonel and Mrs Allison,

saying He had been waiting for them (they had

not said they were coming). Dinner was very late,

and it was good to finally get into bed. What a

day! My little light comforted me.

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Day Eight

It was a lovely day. I went for a walk up the

mountain. I kept thinking that perhaps one of the

Prophets had walked along this same path.

Mount Carmel is a fascinating place because it

seems to have been a center for spiritual thought.

There were a few wild flowers, but not enough for

Mother to dry. She wanted to take some back

home to the United States with her.

After luncheon the Master patiently waited

while we took lots of pictures. He also arranged a

group picture. Dr Esslemont was well enough to

be with us. He was such a dear person.

That afternoon, we all went to the Shrine of

the Báb. A carriage took some of us up over the

awful rocky road. Father had gone up earlier in

the carriage with the Master to have a private

meeting with Him. A few minutes after we

arrived, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá came and stood, looking at

the sea. He told us that someday the drive to

‘Akká and the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh would be

beautiful with orange groves. A great breakwater

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would be built to form a harbor, and ships from

all over the world would come. The Shrine of the

Báb would be lighted and would be a landmark

for ships and airplanes. He turned to the Shrine

and stood by the door of the large room. I stood

next to Him as He gave everyone a little rose

water. It was the same story as before—the little

bottle that never got empty. It was more than I

could understand. We went to the room where the

Báb’s body lies. Shoghi Effendi chanted the

Tablet of Visitation. There is something in the

Shrines that one’s heart responds to. Then the

carriage was waiting to take us down the hill.

At dinner the Master spoke about airplanes,

how they would get bigger and bigger and faster

and faster.

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Day Nine

It was another clear day. We had had so much

rain, but no one seemed to mind or even to talk

about it. Our house continued to be very cold. I

felt sorry for Dr Esslemont. The Master came

again early in the morning to talk with him.

The luncheons were our happiest times

because the Master was so jolly. I kept thinking

about this because we had grown so close to Him.

I asked Him which city He liked best in the

United States, and He said, “Washington,

Chicago, San Francisco.” Then He paused and

said, “San Francisco.” So the city in the West had

won.

After lunch Shoghi Effendi brought us a brass

charcoal burner. It took the chill off our big room.

Mother wanted to buy a brass burner to take

home because it was so nice to look at and

because the heat was pleasant.

We went to see the ladies a bit earlier than

usual in the afternoon. Mother was sad about

having to leave them soon. She asked the Greatest

Holy Leaf to tell her how to make the rice that

was so delicious. The Master came for tea, and

Mother spoke of the attractive brass heater that

gave such comfortable heat. The Master said He

did not like the furnace heat we had in America

because it was heavy and dull. He said that

ventilation was important and that He had had to

open windows in America. They talked a lot

about this subject.

Colonel and Mrs Allison came again for the

evening meeting and dinner. Mother said they

were deeply interested in the Faith. The dinner

hour brought us something that we had not seen

before. The Master spoke on martyrdom, and He

became radiant. His face shone, His voice was

loud and powerful, and we could hardly eat. It

seemed as if everything must be shaking, even the

atoms. He said that He longed to be martyred for

the Faith, but I wondered, Doesn’t He suffer

martyrdom every day? Shoghi Effendi had told us

about what the Master had endured, especially

from enemies.

Day Ten

It was raining again. At noon time it came down

in sheets, but the Master came for lunch just the

same. He sat with us, not as a wise man who can

accomplish anything, but as someone who was

part of our lives. I thought about this every day,

because there were many things I did not

understand. The little current was still with me

whenever He came near. Also, He never seemed

to leave us in spirit. Whatever I did each day, it

was as if He were by my side. My family talked

about things like this. I thought, Maybe one day I

will realize more than now, when I am older.

The Master was in the tea room reading a

newspaper when Mrs Allison, Mother, and I

arrived. His welcome was always so warm. He

did not stay long, so Mother asked the Greatest

Holy Leaf if she would tell us about some of her

experiences with Bahá’u’lláh. This time I stayed.

I loved history. The Greatest Holy Leaf talked a

long time, telling about things that were sad and

cruel. I will never forget one thing she told us.

During the second night in the barracks in ‘Akká,

when Bahá’u’lláh’s family and companions had

no comfort and little food, they got to laughing.

Bahá’u’lláh came to the door, telling them to be

quiet because the jailers would think they were

crazy.

After tea time Mother received a lovely

Persian headdress from Munavvar. Mother in

turn gave Munavvar what she had admired,

Mother’s long necklace of amber beads.

There was more interesting history to learn

about at dinner. The Master said that Mount

Carmel was the ground where the Prophets had

walked. They had dwelt here to. give the glad

tidings that a day would come when the tent of

the Lord would be pitched here. Bahá’u’lláh had

pitched His tent near where the Shrine of the Báb

was later built. Jesus used to walk across Mount

Carmel to Haifa and Nazareth. Muhammad had

come once when He was eleven years old and

again when He was twenty-eight.

After dinner, as the Master was leaving, He

said, “These meals have been very happy. They

are the Lord’s supper because the wish and

purpose has been concerning the affairs of God.”

Day Eleven

On this morning the Greatest Holy Leaf sent us

each a gift through Shoghi Effendi. He said we

must guess what it was and handed us each a

small envelope. We thought and thought, but

could not guess correctly. In each envelope was a

tiny dried piece of the blood of Bahá’u’lláh. No

one knew what to say. I felt sort of numb. I could

not grasp having such a thing. We were all silent.

It was the most precious gift in the world. How

do you say thank you for such a thing?

I wondered where I could put my gift. Mother

said hers must go into a solid gold box. This gift

did not leave my mind, my thoughts, for a long

time. When we went for tea, Mother asked the

Greatest Holy Leaf about the gift. She told us it

was a custom in Persia in the spring to draw a

certain amount of blood from the forearm of a

person, as it was considered to be healthful. The

blood of Bahá’u’lláh was drawn at that time and

put in a vase. There it became congealed. We

could not comprehend that we possessed such a

gift, that it was real. I prayed about it and finally

put it away in my trunk.

After all the spiritual excitement, the Greatest

Holy Leaf told us that she would show us how to

cook the rice we liked so much. We went to a little

room where a charcoal fire was burning. The rice

was washed and put into boiling salt water until

it was just soft enough to break—about four or

five minutes. It was then strained, and some

butter was put in the pot and browned a little.

The rice was slowly added with a sprinkling of

spices and some tiny pieces of meat. On top of this

were placed two large pieces of butter, and the

cover was replaced. This was put on a slow

charcoal fire, and ashes and more charcoal were

placed on top. It remained this way for three

quarters of an hour.

While the rice was cooking, the Greatest Holy

Leaf said it was strange that Mother had come to

find out how to cook when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s own

daughters did not know how. Munavvar laughed

and said she could not cook the rice, but that she

knew just how it should be done.

 Later in the afternoon, the Master told us our

ship had come and we must leave the next day.

He had told Father several days earlier that He

would like us to go to Germany and several other

places. Now that was all changed, and Father was

to go directly home to Boston, as things would not

be to his liking there.

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Day Twelve

Our last day. The Master came early for lunch

and asked us to join Him in Dr Esslemont’s

room. He spoke of His great love for us and said

that we must go back to America with our hearts

full of love to give to others. Lunch was short.

Mother and I said good-bye to the ladies, and

Mother wept. Then the Master called us again,

shook our hands, and gave us loving messages.

We all felt that it was hard to part.

We went back in the pouring rain to get our

luggage, and the Master called Father to Him

once again. Father came back weeping, only to

tell us that he had been alone with the Master and

that He was so wonderful.

The Persian believers came in the rain to

wave good-bye to us. Shoghi Effendi, Dr

Lutfulláh Hakím, and Fugita joined us in the

carriage and even went in the little boat to the

ship.

Then we were in the outside world again. The

people at the dock and on the ship seemed so

lifeless and dull. The world seemed cold.

I had left the heart of the world.

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Appendix

Tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to

*The Magazine of the*

*Children of the Kingdom*

To the children\* of the Kingdom—Upon them be

Bahá’u’lláh El-Abhá!—care of the daughter of

the Kingdom, Bahiyyih Randall—Upon her be

Bahá’u’lláh El-Abhá!

*He Is God!*

Praise ye God that in the days of childhood ye

have entered the divine kingdom and have been

encompassed by the bounty and favor of God. At

a time when ye were young He has chosen and

selected ye and has made ye intimates with the

mysteries, while the mature and full-grown have

\* The Bahá’í Juniors, a class for children of any age up

to about thirteen years.

been deprived. This is to be attributed only to the

bounty of God. Praise ye God therefore and say:

“O Thou compassionate Lord! O Lord of

Hosts! Praise be unto Thee, that thou hast

preferred these young children to the full-grown

and the matured, hast endowed them with Thy

special bounty, hast guided them, hast bestowed

upon them Thy light and hast given them

spirituality. Confirm us that when we attain

maturity we may be enabled to serve Thy

Kingdom, may train the souls, may become

ignited candles and may glitter like unto stars.

Thou art the Giver, the Bestower and the Kind!”

(Signed) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá ‘Abbás.

(Haifa, Palestine, Nov. 26, 1919.)

Notes

1. Fugita had first met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in 1912 in Cleveland, Ohio, as a young Japanese student. Father had seen him in Naples, Italy, stranded because he lacked money and ships were scarce, and had arranged for him to come with us to Haifa. Arthur Hathaway was another Bahá’í stranded in Naples whom my father helped to obtain passage to Haifa. Albert Vail was a Bahá’í and former minister from Chicago whom my father invited to come as our guest because he was such an eloquent speaker. George Latimer was a very active Bahá’í and a close friend of the family. Dr John E. Esslemont was an Englishman who was greatly loved by the Master and Shoghi Effendi. The book he was writing was *Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era* (5th rev. ed. [Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1980]), the first comprehensive introduction to the Bahá’í Faith written in English.

2. Shaykh Farajullah Zakí Al-Kurdí, a Kurdish Bahá’í who lived in Egypt and was responsible for the printing of a great number of Bahá’í books in both Arabic and Persian.

3. Sandy, or Sanford, Kinney was one of three sons of Edward and Carrie Kinney of New York City. When we returned from Haifa to the United States, my family delivered to the Kinneys the Tablet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá composed on the subject of Sandy’s passing. The words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that are quoted here were recorded by my mother as they were spoken.

4. “The Greatest Holy Leaf” refers to Bahíyyih Khánum, the saintly daughter of Bahá’u’lláh and sister of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá who was born in 1846 and passed away in 1932. She was designated by Shoghi Effendi as “the outstanding heroine of the Bahá’í Dispensation”. The Master’s wife was Munírih Khánum. She married ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in about 1873 and passed away in 1938.

5. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s gesture of putting His hands to His forehead may have signified the Persian idiomatic saying, “You may walk on my eyes,” which is a statement of honor and deference. He may have been pointing to His eyes to state symbolically how precious the guests were to Him.

6. Ella Robarts was the sister of Grace Ober, who was married to Harlan Ober by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Ella had decided that Bahá’í children should have a magazine and started one.

7. Our friends, the Kinneys, had attended a Feast given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in West Englewood, New Jersey, during His visit to the United States and Canada in 1912. They told us the following: It was a bright day, and the party was outdoors, food and all. During the early afternoon dark clouds formed and came nearer and nearer. Eventually, there were a few scattered raindrops. Everyone was concerned. Where could three hundred people and all the food go? The home of Roy Wilhelm, where the gathering was being held, was not large enough. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá walked away from the party by Himself. He stopped a short distance away, raised both arms upward, and looked up at the sky. The clouds parted and drifted away.

8. The story of the loaves and fishes is told in Matt. 14:14-21. A large crowd had come to hear Jesus. There were only five loaves and two fish available to feed everyone. Jesus took the food, blessed it, and all who had gathered were fed.

9. “The Greatest Name” refers to the name Bahá’u’lláh (the Glory of God) and its various forms, such as Alláh-u-Abhá (God is Most Glorious), Bahá (glory, splendor, light), and Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá (O Thou the Glory of the Most Glorious!). In this particular case, the term refers to Alláh-u-Abhá.

10. Haydar-‘Alí was a devoted Bahá’í who traveled widely in service to Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He died in Haifa in 1920.

11. Ibn-i-Asdaq was also known as Mírzá ‘Alí-Muhammad.

12. The ladies of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s family and household included His wife, Munírih Khánum, and their children; His sister, Bahíyyih Khánum, the Greatest Holy Leaf; and many other women serving in the household.

13. ‘Azíz Yazdí went on to perform many important services for the Faith, serving as a member of the Continental Boards of Counselors and as a member of the International Teaching Center in Haifa, Israel.

14. My family was later told by one of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s daughters that He had this watch at His bedside on the night He died and that He looked at it a few minutes before He left this earthly life.

15. Dr Suláyman Raf’at Bey was a Turkish friend of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

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About the Author

Bahiyyih Randall Winckler was born in 1907 in

Medford, Massachusetts, to Ruth and Harry

Randall, early American believers in the Faith of

Bahá’u’lláh.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá visited the Randall home when

He was in America in 1912. The Randalls were

well known in New England social and financial

circles. Harry was president of several companies.

They became deeply interested in the Green Acre

property in Eliot, Maine, that was to become a

Bahá’í center.

Inspired by the powerful words and supreme

example of the Master that are so lovingly

recorded in this account of her pilgrimage in 1919,

Bahiyyih did indeed grow into a bright “light”

among the handmaidens of His Cause, becoming

a tireless servant of the Bahá’í Faith. In 1953,

under the direction of the Guardian, Bahiyyih

and her husband, Harry Ford, assumed a

pioneering post in Johannesburg, South Africa,

working and sharing the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh

with the black population for over forty years.

She now lives in Sabie, Transvaal, South Africa,

and, as a young girl of eighty-eight years,

continues to teach the Faith. She is also the

author, with Mabel Garis, of a biography of her

father, titled *William Henry Randall: Disciple of*

*‘Abdu’l-Bahá*.