

The German
Bahá'í Community
Under
National Socialism

A Historical Perspective
With Notes and Postscript

Harry Liedtke

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"Historians ought to be precise, faithful, and unprejudiced; And neither interest nor fear, hatred or affection, should make them swerve from the way of the truth." -

Cervantes

The Author of this article was born in November of 1927 in Berlin, Germany. He was therefore five years old when Adolf Hitler came to power and not quite 12 at the outbreak of World War II. He spent his school years in Hamburg and Stuttgart and survived the war against many odds. He has a clear and detailed memory of the events that marked the decades of the '30s and '40s when his cosmopolitan upbringing and international family ties left him with an intense feeling of isolation, surrounded by a storm of nationalist frenzy.

One of his few trusted friends was a boy his own age who lived with his parents in the same neighborhood. Amid terror and destruction they frequently shared their visions of a global order in a world at peace, and soon discovered a mutual conviction in a saner future. Only after the war did it come to light that his friend's family had belonged to the Bahá'í Community before it was outlawed in the spring of 1937. In fact, his friend's mother¹ had met 'Abdu'l-Bahá² back in 1913 when she was 14 years old. These people had quietly borne the grief and frustration of being unable to share the healing message of Bahá'u'lláh³ with their friends and neighbors. It would have helped buoy their spirits at a time of great hardship and danger.

The observations and sentiments contained in this account were gleaned from the author's personal notes of recollection. They reflect as accurately as possible those of the many German Bahá'ís with whom he had dialogue.

Today, much of the work done to resolve conflict between nations and to build a collaborative global society is spearheaded by the United Nations Organization. The U.N. was founded as a direct result of the bitter lessons taught by World War II, a conflict that had brought modern civilization to the brink of total collapse and anarchy. The Bahá'í Community which by the end of the 20th century had spread to virtually every country, territory and island on earth, is today recognized by many governments and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) ⁴ for its tireless work to inject a new spiritual dynamism and global vision into the many efforts that are currently under way to bring humanity together and to build a peaceful and progressive planetary society.

Almost three quarters of a century after the rise and fall of the *Third Reich*, which history holds largely responsible for what led to the cataclysm of World War II, it should therefore be of historic interest to examine how the Bahá'í Faith fared under National Socialism. At the same time it may be legitimate to ask whether the Bahá'ís in Germany and elsewhere could not have prevented Nazism's rise to power, or at least have mitigated its excesses and shielded its victims.

Armed with hindsight it can be said that Bahá'ís showed great courage in the face of oppression. Often at personal risk, they acted exactly as they had been directed by Shoghi Effendi⁵ who was then the spiritual head and *Guardian* of the Bahá'í Faith. Some tried to reason with the authorities, others spent time in

jail, still others upheld and defended the verities of their faith before public tribunals. The occasional insinuation, therefore, that German Bahá'is cozied up to the regime and denied its evil, strays from the truth and mires the memory of those stalwart believers who were fated to keep the Faith's tender flame alive throughout a stormy and seemingly endless night of barbarism. They kept their faith inviolate and at war's end stood ready to bring its message of hope to their vanquished and disillusioned fellow men.

For someone who has vivid recollections of those years and who became closely associated with many of that small band of devoted early Bahá'is⁶, it is a pressing obligation to set down an accurate record of their expressed high hopes and heroic deeds, lest these become forgotten and are lost to posterity. This effort must be undertaken in the context of what German Bahá'is experienced in the decades leading up to the crisis, and the turmoil they later faced. The reader should pay particular attention to the excerpts taken from a copious correspondence that flowed between Haifa and Germany. Without a clear understanding of their import and implications this account by itself would be worthless.

The first Bahá'i in Germany was a dentist by the name of Edwin Fischer. Born in the small town of Ludwigsburg, just north of Stuttgart, he had emigrated to the United States where he studied dentistry and became acquainted with the Bahá'i Faith. He returned to Stuttgart in 1904 to share the Faith's message of renewal

with his former countrymen. His approach was quite unusual as we shall see.

Mrs. Alice Schwarz, the wife of Konsul Schwarz, frequently told us this anecdote: *When I needed to see a dentist, our family physician, a Dr. Felix von Gussmann, suggested that I see Dr. Edwin Fischer. He said he was an excellent dentist, but he warned me that while I sat helpless in his chair, Dr. Fischer would probably regale me with all sorts of strange tales which I should simply try to ignore.*

Whenever Dr. Fischer began to drill teeth, his patient at his mercy and quite unable to respond, he would suddenly announce: *Have you heard that Christ has returned?*

Much as she tried, Alice Schwarz was unable to ignore Dr. Fischer's *strange tales*. She and her husband became Bahá'is in 1912. Only a year later, during His visit to Germany in the spring of 1913, 'Abdu'l-Bahá spent time at the home of Konsul and Mrs. Schwarz in Stuttgart. In March of 1913, 'Abdu'l-Bahá stayed in Stuttgart, Esslingen and Bad Mergentheim. After visiting Vienna and Budapest, He paid Stuttgart a second visit in the month of April before leaving for Paris.

Two years earlier, on March 12, 1911, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had sent a message to the Bahá'is in Stuttgart that read in part:

"...Strive with heart and soul, that the divine light be shed on all people, that every heart be-

come enlightened and the spirits of the human race partake of His glorious splendour. Work and toil until all regions of this world are illumined by this light. Fear not when you encounter certain calamities. Ye shall be criticized, ye shall be persecuted, ye shall be cursed and vilified. Remember in those days what I am telling you: Your triumph shall be assured! Your hearts shall be filled with the joy of holy enlightenment, for celestial forces shall sustain you and the divine power shall be with you. This is my message to you."

(Translated by the author from *Der Bahá'í Glaube in Deutschland* p.10, NSA of Germany 1980)

Along with such warnings of future *calamities* and *persecutions*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá also promised that Germany was destined to become part of a peaceful and united global society. Addressing a New York audience on April 16, 1912, He offered this vision:

Germany, France, England, Turkey, Arabia--all these various nations will be welded together in unity. When the people of the future are asked, "To which nationality do you belong?" the answer will be, "To the nationality of humanity. I am living under the shadow of Bahá'u'lláh. I am the servant of Bahá'u'lláh. I belong to the army of the Most Great Peace." The people of the future will not say, "I belong to the nation of England, France or Persia"; for all of them will be citizens of a universal nationality--the one family, the one country, the one world of humanity--and then these wars, hatreds and strifes will pass away.

Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 19

After the Master's visit to Southern Germany in the spring of 1913, a lively correspondence between Him and the German believers fostered feelings of great mutual affection. The Master had repeatedly promised the coming unity of nations, deliberately including Germany in this divine Master Plan and exhorting the German believers to play their vital role. In this they were most anxious not to disappoint.

Even the convulsion of World War I that immediately followed 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visits to America and Europe, did not lessen their faith or weaken their resolve. Wiping out almost an entire generation of Europe's young men and claiming an additional 20 million victims in an influenza epidemic, the Great War was seen as the calamity to end all wars. The *lamentations of Berlin* predicted by Bahá'u'lláh (see page 44), seemed to have come to pass in the prolonged suffering of her populace, the ignominious exit of their Kaiser, and the shots of internal revolt fired from the city's roof tops. Once the nightmare had passed, one wished for peace and hoped that the warning "*the banks of the Rhine shall have another turn...*" may not be cast in stone, but could yet be averted by bringing the message of Bahá'u'lláh to the attention of people and governments.

After the war German Bahá'is were visiting 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Haifa, and when the Master passed away on November 28, 1921, young Johanna Hauff (later Johanna von Werthern) of Stuttgart was one of five Western Bahá'is present. She had been visiting 'Abdu'l-Bahá during the last weeks of His life. In the morning of

His passing and before His body was placed into a casket, Johanna and her four fellow pilgrims were the only people outside the Master's own family who were given the great bounty of saying prayers at 'Abdu'l-Bahá's bedside. Later that morning, Johanna joined a great multitude of over 10,000 to follow the bier up to the Shrine of the Báb on the slopes of Mount Carmel where the Master's earthly remains were laid to rest. Her return to Germany only served to increase among the Bahá'ís their intense dedication to the work for the Cause of God.

Among the Master's last tablets He dictated one to the German Bahá'ís on November 22, just six days before His passing:

"... O heavenly friends! In this transitory world nothing is permanent..."

The Bahá'ís in Germany were imbued with the same faith in Bahá'u'lláh and His teachings as is the present generation of believers. However, being contemporaries of both the Master and the Guardian they may have felt an even closer affinity towards them. Along with this burning love and devotion, the Bahá'ís were entirely focused on bringing the teachings of the Faith to others, because in those years there were fewer administrative tasks that required their time and energy.

After Shoghi Effendi had been named Guardian of the Cause in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament, he continued to promise a bright future which to

German Bahá'ís implied peace and orderly progress. There was simply no reason to expect the approach of a great spiritual and physical apocalypse. Shoghi Effendi sent this first message to the German friends.

17 December 1922

Blest and beloved ones of 'Abdu'l-Bahá!

To have been unable, owing to sad circumstances over which I have had no control, to keep in close and constant touch with you, the beloved children of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, since His passing from this world, is to me a cause of sad surprise and deep and bitter regret. To say that ever since the Dawn of a New Day has broken upon me I have in the least felt reluctant or disinclined to enter into relationship with every one of you, or felt indifferent to a Cause which is so close and dear to your hearts, would indeed betray every sentiment of love and fellowship which animates every one of us in our servitude to His Holy Threshold. It was rather my utter exhaustion, my profound feelings of sorrow, the overwhelming sense of my own position and responsibilities and the pressure of work that have caused me to maintain such a long silence and seem forgetful of those brave and valiant lovers of the Master in that land.

Of the thoughts that sustained and comforted me during my hours of restful retirement was the realization, never dismissed from my mind, that in the German friends the Master will surely find loyal and grateful children who will repay the tender love and paternal care which He had for them with a devotion and service, so profound and lasting that will prove worthy of the many blessings that have been theirs in the past.

The news of your most spiritual gatherings, since the Great Plan of the Master as revealed in His Testament has been unfolded to our eyes; the formation and functioning of the National Body with efficiency and harmony; the extension of

your activities; the widening of your correspondence; the generous and spontaneous help you have extended us in connection with our difficulties in the Holy Land and above all the spirit of ready devotion and ever-increasing zeal which is back of it all—these are sweet thoughts that cheer the bereaved Ladies of the Holy Household and encourage here and abroad the many friends who look forward to the hour when all the Master has promised His friends in Germany will come to be fulfilled.

Having returned to the Holy Land with a renewed vigour and a refreshed spirit, I shall not fail with the help of the Master to do my part in enabling you to carry on further and still further the Glorious Standard of Bahá to the very heart and uttermost confines of Germany and thus hasten the Day when the Spirit of Faith and Peace as revealed in the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh will fill the world and the darkness of strife be no more.

In sweet remembrance at the Three Holy Shrines of your labours of love for His Cause, I am and remain your brother and coworker in His service.

Shoghi Effendi, *The Light of Divine Guidance*
Volume 1, p. 7

From this day onward, there developed a most intimate cooperation between the Guardian and the German Bahá'is. Time and again the Guardian promised great spiritual victories and repeatedly alluded to Germany's growing influence in healing a spiritually and materially impoverished continent.

In the midst of a chronic depression and internal political strife, the German Bahá'is despaired at their country's ability to advance the Cause of God to a degree Shoghi Effendi was expecting it. The

Guardian had asked the rhetorical question who might bring the necessary means and muscle to this vast global undertaking. In a Ridván message on April 21, 1933 he wrote to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada ⁸:

"Fellow-believers in the American continent! Great indeed have been your past and present achievements! Immeasurably greater are the wonders which the future has in store for you! The Edifice your sacrifices have raised still remains to be clothed. The House which must needs be supported by the highest administrative institution your hands have reared, is as yet unbuilt. The provisions of the chief Repository of those laws that must govern its operation are thus far mostly undisclosed. The Standard which, if 'Abdu'l-Bahá's wishes are to be fulfilled, must be raised in your own country has yet to be unfurled. The Unity of which that standard is to be the symbol is far from being yet established. The machinery which must needs incarnate and preserve that unity is not even created. **Will it be America, will it be one of the countries of Europe, who will arise to assume the leadership essential to the shaping of the destinies of this troubled age?** [Author's highlight] Will America allow any of her sister communities in East or West to achieve such ascendancy as shall deprive her of that spiritual primacy with which she has been invested and which she has thus far so nobly retained?"

Shoghi Effendi
The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p.94

In the Guardian's view, as late as Ridván of 1933, it seemed by no means a foregone conclusion that an isolationist and racially torn America would be willing and able to assume this role. As for "*one of the countries of Europe*," the Faith then had its strongest foothold in Germany. In France it was confined to the city of Paris and in England largely

to the city of London. For all the rest of Europe the Bahá'í map was still a blank 9.

The German friends who had been constantly encouraged by the Master were now in closest communication with the 'World Center.' They were deeply concerned how they might be able to help the Guardian in this immense task.

Today, almost 1,000 people work at the Bahá'í World Center in various departments serving the Universal House of Justice¹⁰ and its Institutions. In the 1930's the 'World Center' in Haifa consisted of just a handful of lone servants. After 1937, the Guardian Shoghi Effendi, who directed and protected the world-wide affairs of the young Faith, was mainly helped by his young Canadian wife Rúhiyyih Khánum who was his secretary and tireless assistant¹¹. Today there are several thousand Bahá'ís in Germany with Local Assemblies in most major cities. In the 1930s there were less than 200 German Bahá'ís with perhaps 150 adult believers living in a handful of small communities that were mainly clustered in the south-west corner of the country. Their means were limited, their economy lay comatose with over a third the working population unemployed. American capital that had turned a post-war inflationary slump into a temporary recovery, had been repatriated after the Wall Street crash. Credits offered by former enemies like France came at prohibitive interest rates which no entrepreneur could afford to pay.

At this moment a virtual unknown Austrian by the name of Adolf Hitler made his appearance. He chose as his economics advisor a financial wizard by the name of Horace Greeley Hjalmar Schacht, a prominent figure in Europe's banking circles. Their answer to this seemingly intractable problem was to abandon the gold standard, to calculate Germany's wages, given full employment, and to issue currency to cover them. This way every employable person could immediately be put back on the payroll. Despite their promises of a dramatic economic turnaround, many people, especially the establishment, felt very lukewarm towards '*that upstart Austrian corporal*' who did not even become a German citizen until 1931. But in January 1933, the ex-corporal, now leader of Germany's largest political faction, was invited by State President Paul von Hindenburg, the ex-Field Marshal, to form a government. Although many detested the rowdy manners of Hitler's storm troopers, few quarreled with his economic kick-start that had put food back on empty tables. Fed up with entrenched petty regionalism and class bias, most people also embraced the new government's proclaimed aim of solidarity and social justice.

Nowhere was there the slightest indication that this new experiment in governance would end in war and genocide. Some people even drew parallels between Germany's spectacular rise from the ashes and President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal in America that had begun at almost exactly

the same moment in history. When the new regime turned on Communists, there was little public outcry, because people recalled the street skirmishes communists had fought in Berlin and in other cities after World War I in an effort to export the Bolshevik revolution and gain control of the country. Even some pacifists reluctantly accepted the re-building of Germany's armed forces as sad necessity against a perceived Soviet threat.

By 1932, when pre-Hitler Germany lay prostrate and both Britain and France lingered in deep recession, Stalin produced 3,300 tanks and 2,500 aircraft per annum and had the world's only airborne regiments. They were seen as tools for offense rather than for defense.

(The Red Army, Liddell Hart, P. Smith, Gloucester, Mass. 1968)

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Germany kept a close watching brief on all these early developments and communicated its observations to the Guardian. The Guardian's reply of February 11, 1934, sent to Dr. Mühlischlegel¹² in Stuttgart, was to serve as definitive guidance for the critical decade that lay ahead. Even today it deserves the closest scrutiny by students of Bahá'í history.

Dear Bahá'í Brother,
I am charged by the Guardian to thank you for your letter of Jan. 30th [Author's remark: exactly one year after Hitler took over the reigns of government] as well as for the enclosed pamphlet containing the address delivered by Herr

Hitler on Oct. 14th, 1933, on the subject of Germany's attitude towards peace, all of which he read with deepest care and sustained interest. He wishes me to convey to you and to all the members of your German National Assembly and through them to all the followers of the Faith in Germany his views on the present conditions in that land, and particularly in their relation to the nature and scope of the Bahá'í activities of our German believers.

At the outset it should be made indubitably clear that the Bahá'í Cause being essentially a religious movement of a spiritual character stands above every political party or group, and thus cannot and should not act in contravention to the principles, laws, and doctrines of any government. Obedience to the regulations and orders of the state is indeed, the sacred obligation of every true and loyal Bahá'í. Both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá have urged us all to be submissive and loyal to the political authorities of our respective countries. It follows, therefore, that our German friends are under the sacred obligation to whole-heartedly obey the existing political regime, whatever be their personal views and criticisms of its actual working. There is nothing more contrary to the spirit of the Cause than open rebellion against the governmental authorities of a country, specially if they do not interfere in and do not oppose the inner and sacred beliefs and religious convictions of the individual. And there is every reason to believe that the present regime in Germany which has thus far refused to trample upon the domain of individual conscience in all matters pertaining to religion will never encroach upon it in the near future, unless some unforeseen and unexpected changes take place. And this seems to be doubtful at present.

For whereas the friends should obey the government under which they live, even at the risk of sacrificing all their administrative affairs and interests, they should under no circumstances suffer their inner religious beliefs and convictions to be violated and transgressed by any authority whatever. A distinction of a fundamental importance must, there-

fore, be made between spiritual and administrative matters. Whereas the former are sacred and inviolable, and hence cannot be subject to compromise, the latter are secondary and can consequently be given up and even sacrificed for the sake of obedience to the laws and regulations of the government. Obedience to the state is so vital a principle of the Cause that should the authorities in Germany decide to-day to prevent the Bahá'is from holding any meeting or publishing any literature they should obey and be as submissive as our Russian believers have thus far been under the Soviet regime. But, as already pointed out, such an allegiance is confined merely to administrative matters which if checked can only retard the progress of the Faith for some time. In matters of belief, however, no compromise whatever should be allowed, even though the outcome of it be death or expulsion.

There is one more point to be emphasized in this connection. The principle of obedience to government does not place any Bahá'í under the obligation of identifying the teachings of his Faith with the political program enforced by the government. For such an identification, besides being erroneous and contrary to both the spirit as well as the form of the Bahá'í message, would necessarily create a conflict within the conscience of every loyal believer.

For reasons which are only too obvious the Bahá'í philosophy of social and political organization cannot be fully reconciled with the political doctrines and conceptions that are current and much in vogue to-day. The wave of nationalism, so aggressive and so contagious in its effects, which has swept not only over Europe but over a large part of mankind is, indeed, the very negation of the gospel of peace and of brotherhood proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh. The actual trend in the political world is, indeed, far from being in the direction of the Bahá'í teachings. The world is drawing nearer and nearer to a universal catastrophe which will mark the end of a bankrupt and of a fundamentally defective civilization.

From such considerations we can well conclude that we as Bahá'is can in no wise identify the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh with man-made creeds and conceptions, which by their very nature are impotent to save the world from the dangers with which it is being so fiercely and so increasingly assailed.

The Guardian hopes that these brief explanations will be sufficient to guide our German National Assembly in their efforts to safeguard and promote the interests of the Faith, and that through them they will be given a new vision of the Cause and a fresh determination to carry forward its message to the world at large.

With greetings and best wishes to you and to all the friends in Germany,...

Appended by the Guardian in his own hand:

Dear and valued co-worker:

I wish to add a few words in loving appreciation of your strenuous, your intelligent and devoted efforts for the spread and consolidation of our beloved Faith. May the Almighty bless your endeavours, deepen your understanding of the essentials and requirements of our beloved Cause, and enable you in these difficult and challenging days to promote its interests and consolidate its institutions.

Your true brother, Shoghi

Shoghi Effendi, The Light of Divine Guidance

Volume 1, p. 53

A letter dated 30 July 1934 stresses the *supreme objective* of consolidating the Administration and of holding Summer Schools.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Your letter of June 19th written on your behalf by Miss Köstlin [Author's remark: who had met the Master] has been received, and its contents as well as the accompanying documents and notes have been carefully read by the Guard-

ian. He wishes me to thank you for them all, and to convey to you his deepfelt appreciation of your painstaking labours for the consolidation of the administration in your community. It gives him real pleasure to learn of the spirit with which you are toiling for the attainment of this supreme objective, and he is fervently praying for your guidance and assistance that you may speedily and effectively attain the goal of your heart's desire....

In closing may I also express his hope for the success of your next summer school. From various communications and reports recently received from the friends, he gathers that a large number of believers both from Germany and abroad are planning to attend the summer classes. May such a gathering prove to be the right medium for bringing the German believers closer than ever, and for fostering among them the spirit of initiative, of service and of selfless and wholehearted cooperation in the path of service to the Faith...

Appended by the Guardian in his own hand:

Dear and precious co-workers:

The message you have sent me is indeed most welcome. It has filled my heart with joy and thanksgiving. I am continually urging the friends and pilgrims to visit the German Bahá'í centres and particularly the Esslingen Summer School, as I attach the greatest importance to this vital national institution. I will continue to pray for your success from the depths of my heart.

Your true and grateful brother, Shoghi.

Shoghi Effendi, *The Light of Divine Guidance*

(Volume 1), p. 58

The reader should know a little more about this particular Bahá'í School which the Guardian called a *vital national institution*. It was located on one of the sun-lit hill tops of orchards and vineyards overlooking the broad Neckar valley just

south-east of Stuttgart. 'Abdu'l-Bahá had visited the immediate neighborhood in 1913, exactly nine years after car maker Gottlieb Daimler had started his world famous concern at nearby Untertürkheim. Very much like the school at Green Acre, Maine, the Esslingen Bahá'í School¹³ soon gained international renown. Among the early visitors from abroad were Mary Maxwell, later revered as Rúhiyyih Khánum, Tarázu'lláh Samandari¹⁴, Canada's Marion Jack¹⁵, Martha Root¹⁶, and many others, too numerous to mention here.

Among those who made it a very special point of attending the Esslingen Summer Schools was a pleasant gentleman¹⁷ who represented Hitler's government in Berlin. I was told by those who met him that he seemed genuinely interested, participated in discussions, and always asked for the latest Bahá'í literature. One can imagine how thrilled everybody was. Here, at last, was a national government that showed an interest in the Teachings. There was high optimism that some of the spirit may eventually rub off. Nowadays there is similar optimism whenever a government approaches the Universal House of Justice. I understand that the friends stayed in close touch with this man even between summer schools and sent him new Bahá'í books just as soon as they came off the press.

On September 8, 1934 the Guardian wrote the following in response to the summer school. He is praising the spirit of internationalism and calls Germany a "*promising country*." This message

must have engendered renewed hope and determination.

Dear Friends and co-workers,

On behalf of the Guardian I wish to thank you for your deeply-appreciated message of August 11th which conveyed the gratifying news of the successful conclusion of the meetings and classes held at the annual Bahá'í summer school at Esslingen. He was deeply impressed by the large number of the believers who have attended these gatherings, and particularly by the fact that they were representative of so many different communities both in Germany and abroad. It is his deeply-cherished and long-wished hope that these annual meetings will in the next few years develop into an important center for the teaching and training of Bahá'í teachers, and that through them the knowledge of the Cause will gain an increasing ground throughout Germany and in the neighbouring countries and regions. He would urge each and every one of you to make an effort to attend as regularly and as whole-heartedly as you can the future classes and meetings at Esslingen, and to advise your friends to do the same, so that through the collective and continued labours of you all these annual gatherings may develop both in their scope and in their influence.

The Guardian is ardently supplicating on behalf of you all, and is praying that Bahá'u'lláh may continue to bless, enrich and widen the scope of your labours for the promotion and consolidation of the Faith in your respective communities. With his warmest greetings to you all...

Appended by the Guardian in his own hand:

Dearly-beloved co-workers:

Your message, which I regard as a compelling evidence of the regenerative power and irresistible march of the Cause of God has brought immense joy to my heart. The convocation of such a representative gathering at such a historic spot, and on the morrow of the unprecedented trials which, through the mysterious dispensations of Providence have so severely af-

flicted the German believers, is indeed a historic event that every well-wisher of the Cause should heartily and joyously welcome. A splendid beginning has been made. I pray that as a result of the unshakable faith and the persistent endeavours of the German believers this institution may grow in effectiveness and scope and lend a mighty impetus to the spread of the Cause in your promising country.

Your true brother, Shoghi.

Shoghi Effendi, The Light of Divine Guidance
(Volume 1), p. 60

Following a successful National Convention¹⁸ in April of 1935, the Guardian was moved to call the German Bahá'í Community "*the standard bearers of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in Europe.*"

7 May 1935

Dear Bahá'í co-workers,

The Guardian has just received your warm and encouraging message of the 28th of April last, and has been deeply moved by the kind greetings and good wishes you have extended to him on the occasion of the holding of your thirteenth annual Bahá'í Convention in Stuttgart. He wishes me to reciprocate the sentiments you have been moved to express to him, and to assure each and all of you of his abiding appreciation and gratitude for the remarkable unity, efficiency and zeal with which you are fostering and safeguarding the manifold and vital interests of our beloved Faith throughout Germany and Austria. He feels confident that your mighty and sustained exertions will, even as a magnet, draw upon you the blessings and guidance of the Almighty, and thus pave the way for the wider penetration and firmer establishment of the Cause in your country.

The Guardian has been greatly impressed by the unusually wide attendance at this year's national Convention. His hope is that this active and close collaboration among the believers

in Germany and Austria will continue to manifest itself in all your local as well as national Bahá'í activities throughout the coming year. He is entreating Bahá'u'lláh, that His confirmations may keep, strengthen and inspire you in the fulfilment of your most urgent and sacred mission.

With the renewed expression of his heartfelt appreciations and thanks, and with his cordial and most loving greetings to you all...

Appended by the Guardian in his own hand:

Dearest co-workers:

Your impressive and most welcome message has revealed afresh the potency of the irresistible power of our Faith as manifested in the renewed activities, the solidarity, the consciousness and determination of the assembled representatives of the German believers. This year's convention marks a turning point in the history of the Cause in your land. It eloquently testifies to the tenacity of your faith, to your grasp of its distinguishing features and essential principles, to your firm resolve to lay an unassailable basis for the rising institutions, to your capacity to weather the fiercest storms and overcome the most formidable obstacles, to your worthiness to rank as the standard-bearers of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in the continent of Europe. May signal victories crown your high endeavours. Shoghi

Shoghi Effendi,

The Light of Divine Guidance p.72

It should be noted that here for the first time the Guardian is alluding to "*fiercest storms and...most formidable obstacles*" that would especially affect German Bahá'ís. Previous warnings as the one of February 1934 that "*...the world is drawing nearer and nearer to a universal catastrophe which will mark the end of a bankrupt and a fundamentally defective civilization...*" were understood to refer

to world conditions in general which in many respects are still present today. This new and specific warning, however, now gave many people pause. Yet, a year later after the National Convention of 1936, the following message once again referred to Germany as a "*promising country.*"

10 May 1936 (Convention)

Dear Friends and co-workers,

Dr. Mühlischlegel has kindly transmitted to the Guardian your very warm message, and he has read it with greatest pleasure and satisfaction, and felt deeply touched at the assurances of devotion and loyalty which you have been moved in conveying to him. He highly appreciates the sentiments you have expressed, and fully reciprocates your greetings and good wishes. He has been very much impressed indeed at the large number of the attendants of this year's Convention, and hopes that in the years to come that number will continue increasing.

The Annual Convention is indeed a very important gathering at which both delegates and visitors should try their very best to be present. It is a splendid and unique opportunity for the believers to come together and deliberate on the vital and pressing issues facing the Cause. It is for this reason, and also because the Convention is the sole body entrusted with the election of the N.S.A., that the friends, and particularly the delegates, should make every effort to take part in the deliberations and discussions of that annual gathering.

With most loving greetings, and sincere good wishes Appended by the Guardian in his own hand: to you all....

Appended by the Guardian in his own hand:

Dearly beloved friends:

The Convention of the German believers marks another milestone in the notable progress achieved in recent years by the German Bahá'í Community. My heart is filled with grati-

tude for the manifold evidences of the tenacity of faith, the collective efforts, the consolidated unity, the administrative accomplishments and the spiritual fervour so strikingly displayed by its members. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, whose special care, love and solicitude for the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in that promising country, most of you have recognized and no doubt still remember, is truly proud of your accomplishments and is well-pleased with the spirit that so powerfully animates you in His service. His spirit will continue to overshadow you in your labours and to sustain and guide you in your exertions. Persevere and be confident.

Affectionately Shoghi

Shoghi Effendi, *The Light of Divine Guidance* p. 82

A letter written after the 1936 Summer School expresses the hope that the German Summer School may eventually develop into a *Bahá'i University* and a focal point for Bahá'i studies in Europe.

10 September 1936 (Summer School)

Beloved Bahá'i Friends,

Our dear friend Miss Köstlin has kindly transmitted to the Guardian the beautiful message which you have addressed to him on the occasion of the holding of the fifth German Bahá'i Summer School at Esslingen, and I wish to hasten in thanking you on his behalf for the expressions of loving devotion and the assurances of loyalty which you have been moved in conveying to him. He profoundly values the warm sentiments you have expressed, and fully reciprocates your greetings and good wishes.

What has particularly rejoiced and cheered his heart is the realisation that the Esslingen Summer School is steadily developing and is speedily attaining the character of an international meeting place for all Bahá'i residents as well as travelers throughout Europe. The success that has attended your school this year, as evidenced by both the wide range and number of the attendants, is truly encouraging and augurs

well for the future of that institution which, we have every reason to hope, is destined to develop into a leading Bahá'i University throughout the West.

The Guardian's hope is that the German N.S.A. will, as in the last few years, continue extending to that school the moral as well as the financial assistance which it needs for its further expansion, and for a still wider and more effective penetration of its influence in every Bahá'i center throughout Europe.

He also hopes, and indeed would urge each and every one of the believers in Germany to extend full and continued support to the N.S.A. in its highly-meritorious efforts for the extension and development of the Summer School at Esslingen. He is confident that through such a close and whole-hearted collaboration between the individual believers and the N.S.A. that school will succeed in gradually fulfilling its unique and truly noble mission, both with regard to Germany and to Europe as a whole.

With the loving greetings and best wishes of the Guardian to you all,...

Appended by the Guardian in his own hand:

Dear and valued friends:

I am thrilled by the tone and character of the joint message you sent me. The splendid achievements that have signalized the proceedings of this year's summer school are a source of abiding inspiration to me in my work, and will as a powerful magnet attract future blessings upon the great and noble work which its organizers are labouring to promote. I will continue to pray for you and for your work in such a promising field and for so meritorious a purpose.

Gratefully and affectionately, Shoghi.

Shoghi Effendi, *The Light of Divine Guidance*
(Volume 1), p. 84

The foregoing correspondence is quoted at length in order to share with today's reader the Guard-

ian's many detailed directives and words of encouragement, and also to convey some idea of the prevailing atmosphere of high hope and optimism.

It was at this auspicious moment in time when Mary Maxwell, future wife of the Guardian, the 25-year old daughter of Sutherland and May Maxwell of Montreal, arrived in Germany to lend her enthusiastic and energetic support to the German Bahá'í teaching efforts. From July 1935 to the end of 1936 she traveled the country from North to South and from East to West, visiting every local community and isolated Bahá'í. According to a biography of Rúhíyyih Khánum written by Violette Nakhjavání¹⁹, *...she became so enamoured of Germany during this time that she asked Shoghi Effendi if she might stay in this country rather than returning to travel with her mother May Maxwell who wrote that Mary was "greatly encouraged by the Guardian to concentrate her efforts where her heart is!" She was, as her mother puts it, "among a people who seem so akin to her..." An old-time Montreal friend, S.H. Abramson visiting in Europe, wrote to May Maxwell that "Mary has fallen in love with Germany and become almost 100% German." She learned the language with such fluency and spoke with so perfect an accent that many thought her to be German...With her attention fixed solely on the work of the Cause, her efforts given entirely to the development of its institutions, and her time spent primarily in the company of Bahá'is who were later destined to suffer*

so terribly under Hitler's regime, is surely an indication of the metal she was made of.

To the long list of dedicated Bahá'í teachers who were laboring hard in that "*promising country*" to plant the seeds of a new and divine world order, there had now been added the name of Mary Maxwell. While nobody recognized it then, it was fortuitous that the Guardian's future wife and secretary²⁰ had been able to acquire first-hand knowledge of Germany's condition and circumstances. It would enable her to brief the Guardian in great detail. Her stay in Germany, therefore, had laid the groundwork for a particularly close and personal correspondence which was to be the only link between the German Bahá'í community and the World Centre of the Faith in a decade of great peril that lay ahead.

In 1935 and 1936, however, the Faith was making steady progress in Germany and many prayed that its spirit would increasingly influence the nation and, indeed, all of Europe. The country itself continued on a general upturn. Full employment brought a new sense of purpose. Universities were expanding, the arts and sciences reached a new peak. Growing industry and burgeoning foreign trade resulted in a large influx of foreign visitors, something Germany had never experienced in the past. American entrepreneurs arrived to take advantage of the general boom. For the 1936 Berlin Olympics many families opened their homes to



'Abdu'l-Bahá among German Bahá'ís at Esslingen in April 1913. Hede Schubert (l.) is the tall 14-year old girl in the dark dress. She spoke at a large public meeting in Stuttgart in January 1946 to re-introduce the Bahá'í Faith nine years after it had been banned. She was a member of Germany's first NSA after World War II. Next to her is her mother, Mrs. Jäger.





Elsa Maria Grossmann (above), sister of Hermann Grossmann, was grilled by the Gestapo and jailed for 9 days in a cell that bore the No 19. Paul Köhler of Dresden, spent six months in jail for copying and mailing Bahá'u'lláh's Daily Prayer to Martha Brauns-Forel in Karlsruhe. Paul later lost his life in an accident.

Below, l. to r.: Carla Macco of Heidelberg who spent many months in jail on trumped-up charges; Marie Schweizer of Stuttgart-Zuffenhausen, who told Bahá'í youths of her meetings with 'Abdu'l-Bahá and who courageously defended the Faith in court; Martha Brauns-Forel, daughter of Professor Forel, who was repeatedly interrogated by the Gestapo.



Emil Jörn who lived at Warnemünde on the Baltic Sea, was forbidden any contact with other Bahá'ís from spring of 1937 to the end of 1945.

Photo below: "World Youth Day" gathering on Feb. 23, 1947 at 'The Häusle' near Esslingen. In front row centre is John Eichenauer from Phoenix Ariz. who obtained permission for the resumption of Bahá'í activities. Back row at left is Manoutschehr Zabih of Teheran, who brought unlimited energy and inspiration. Seen at right in an ill-fitting dark suit is the author of this report.



The first Bahá'í Verwaltungszentrum (Hazíratu'l-Quds) in Germany at 24 Westendstrasse in Frankfurt/Main. - Along with most of the city, this former private residence was a burned-out ruin at war's end. It was purchased by the Bahá'í Community. Once the rubble had been cleared by Bahá'í youth, it was painstakingly re-built. The Hazira was dedicated at the 1951 National Convention. In the picture below architect Bruno Bauer a Bahá'í from Stuttgart, presents the keys to Dr. Eugen Schmidt, chairman of the NSA. In foreground is Dr. Adelheid Jäger, the sister of Hede Schubert.



Adelbert and Herma Mühlischlegel ca. 1955

They became a vital link between the Guardian and the German Bahá'í Community during a decade of crises and upheaval.



"Uncle" Hugo and "Auntie" Klärle Bender (ca. 1951)

They played host to many international visitors and later saved the Esslingen Bahá'í School from expropriation by the authorities.



Left photo: Hermann Grossmann (l.) and Ben Levy (r.) with Rolf Haug at train window. Right photo: Otto Pöllinger, an early Austrian Bahá'í from Vienna. All are shown traveling to the 1952 Intercontinental Bahá'í Conference held in Stockholm, Sweden.

Opposite page: German Bahá'í youth gathered at Heidelberg ca. 1950. This was one of many large youth gatherings held after World War II



The first post-war German NSA at Ridván 1946. All shown l. to r.:
 Back row: Fred Kohler, Dr. Adelheid Jäger, Dr. Hermann Grossmann, Martha Brauns-Forel, Erwin Knorr, Paul Gollmer; middle row: Edith Horn, Martel Weiss, Hede Schubert; front row: American Bahá'ís Bruce Davidson, Henry Jarvis, and John Eichenauer from Phoenix, Ariz. who obtained the permit below for the resumption of Bahá'í work in Germany.



visiting foreigners who had come to watch their athletes, but who could not afford to stay in hotels. Before and after the games some visitors toured the country and forged new friendships. Cruise liners were built to take thousands of German tourists on state-subsidized vacations to Scandinavia, the Mediterranean, and elsewhere. Giant airships ran scheduled services to New York and Rio de Janeiro. The world was impressed and Bahá'ís were wondering if all these dramatic achievements might not be the early harbingers of the New World Order promised by Bahá'u'lláh.²¹

However, just as the forces of light were steadily gaining momentum, the agents of darkness moved suddenly and without warning to silence them. On May 21, 1937 Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS and chief of the Gestapo, issued a special order that banned the Bahá'í Faith and its administrative institutions in Germany. His edict was promulgated through the press in June. All strenuous and fearless efforts by Mr. Max Greeven to have the order reversed failed. Similar attempts by Mr. Otto Geldreich in personal contacts with the Gestapo in Stuttgart were equally fruitless. All books and pamphlets kept by the Bahá'í Publishing Trust and Esperanto Club, the archives of the National Spiritual Assembly and of local Assemblies were all confiscated.²⁴

Prior to the public announcement, Bahá'ís, wherever they were residing, received letters in the mail

that ordered them to appear in court. Nobody had the slightest idea why. When they were assembled, a strangely benevolent judge read a government decree that banned all meetings and teaching activities. The official explanation was that the Bahá'í teachings ran counter to the new race laws of the *Third Reich*. In the Stuttgart court session Mrs. Marie Schweizer, who had met the Master, spoke up and assured the judge that Baha'ís were required to obey the government, but would rather die than recant their faith. The judge waved her off with a smile, shook his head and emphasized that nobody was trying to force the Bahá'ís to change their belief.

Personal appeals launched in the highest places by several courageous believers bore no result. All Bahá'í books, Assembly files and archives were confiscated. Even books and mementos owned by individuals were taken, despite an assurance by the authorities that private property could be kept. It felt as if a fast express train, well on its way to its destination, had suddenly been shunted onto a dead end siding and come to an abrupt stop. Those who had thrown that fateful switch had now cut themselves off God's grace and guidance. It is safe to say that from this time onward Germany would gradually forfeit her spiritual vitality and bloom.

The death spiral began that same year on November 5, when Hitler startled a secret cabinet meeting with the announcement that he would embark the

following year, in 1938, on the expansion of the German Reich. He said he would first annex his birthplace Austria, quickly followed by Czechoslovakia and Poland. Afterwards he would launch an all-out assault on the Soviet Union. He was driven by two objectives: to rid the world of what he saw as the Communist menace, and to reclaim former lands of the Vikings to gain '*Lebensraum*' (living space) for his so-called Nordic master race. Those of his inner cabal who voiced alarm were quickly replaced. The nation would now be led down a path of utter terror and degradation, until 3.5 million of her soldiers and 3.8 million of her civilians were dead, over 12 million Germans driven from their ancestral lands in the Eastern Provinces, and her once proud cities lay in ruins. Worse, a country so greatly honored by the Master would be turned into an efficient instrument of genocide, despoil most of Europe, and in the process betray her rich culture, blemish her history, and stain her honor with the blood of innocent millions. Such was the measure of punishment reserved for the attempt to silence the Creator's voice.

Following the government edict of May 1937 and right through to the outbreak of war, much ingenuity and courage were employed to maintain a link with the Guardian, and through him with believers in other countries. The person who was responsible for this brave effort was Herma Mühlischlegel, the wife of future Hand of the Cause Dr. Adelbert Mühlischlegel²². As she had a trained voice she ar-

ranged to take regular singing lessons in Zurich, Switzerland. From there she would be able to send the Guardian regular reports on the situation in Germany. Since she could not carry with her the Guardian's answer, she memorized his replies and repeated their contents to the friends back home. Here is one of the Guardian's letters:

December 10, 1937

Dear Frau Mühlischlegel,

The Guardian was deeply rejoiced to receive your very cordial message of the first inst., and is indeed happy to know that during the next few months you will be travelling regularly to Zürich, and that you intend in this way to communicate to him any news regarding the situation of the Cause in Germany. He truly welcomes your offer, and feels that it is a most urgent and valuable service you can render the Faith.

Mr. Greeven, as you may know, is in close touch with the authorities in Berlin, and has so far succeeded in inducing the government to give more sympathetic consideration to our case. The secretary of the Minister for Church affairs has promised him that the funds, books and archives will be returned, but that there can be no hope of having the government rescind the rulings entirely. The negotiations, as you see, have not been quite in vain. The friends should not feel unnecessarily agitated, but should have full confidence in the future which, we firmly believe, is gloriously bright. As in the past, the German Bahá'í Community will eventually overcome and crush such forces of opposition, and will arise, out of the storm and stress of its present-day afflictions, stronger and purer and more determined to accomplish its allotted task in the establishment of the New World Order. Assure the believers that they have no reason whatsoever to feel distressed. The Cause is God's and is therefore in safe hands.

Regarding the German translation of the "Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh"²³; a copy of the German text of that pamphlet prepared by Miss Grossmann was forwarded to Haifa about

two months ago through the care of Frau Brauns. The Guardian wrote her in answer, that he would keep the manuscript until such time when the time and means for its publication would be found. Now he wishes to know whether the translation mentioned in your letter is the same as the one sent by Frau Brauns, or is a new rendering made by Dr. Mühlischlegel.

To you, to him, as well as to all your children he sends his loving thoughts and greetings....

Appended by the Guardian in his own hand:

Dear and valued co-worker:

I wish to assure you and through you our dearly beloved German friends that the trials to which they are subjected are but a prelude to an age of unprecedented glory and activity in the service of the Cause of God. These clouds will dissipate and the splendour of the Faith will be shed with increasing radiance. Let the Cause grow silently and acquire greater depths in the hearts of the tested believers in that land, and the day will surely come when its potentialities will be manifested in a manner that would cause every beholder to marvel.

Your true brother, Shoghi

Shoghi Effendi, *The Light of Divine Guidance*, p.88

A letter dated May 21, 1938 reveals an ongoing determination to recover the German Bahá'í library and also plans to publish in Switzerland with American financial help a German edition of Dr. Esslemont's book *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*.²¹

Dear Frau Mühlischlegel,

Many thanks for your very kind letter of the 11th inst. just received, and also for the revised manuscript of the German translation of the "Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh" you have sent under separate cover²². He indeed appreciates Dr. Mühlischlegel's painstaking efforts in revising the text, and wishes you to assure him that he will pray that a way may be soon

opened for its publication.

As regards the German "Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era", it would certainly rejoice your heart to know that in a letter recently received from the American N.S.A. they have suggested to defray the cost of purchasing the types, and of arranging for its publication in Switzerland. The Guardian wrote them in reply approving of their suggestion, and urged them to take immediately the necessary steps, and also informed them of his offer to contribute thirty pounds towards the printing cost. He will send the sum directly to the N.S.A., as soon as he receives word from them that the necessary negotiations have been completed.

Regarding the confiscation of Bahá'í literature and archives in Germany; the Guardian in a recent letter to Mr. Greeven advised him again to continue his negotiations with the authorities, but also stressed the absolute necessity of avoiding the exercise of too much pressure on them. The situation is exceedingly delicate, and nothing short of Divine help and guidance can indeed enable the friends to obtain even this minimum of their demands from the Government. In closing please convey the Guardian's loving appreciation and thanks to dear Frau Vautier for the word of greetings she so kindly appended to your letter. Also kindly convey to Dr. Mühlischlegel and the friends in Stuttgart his warmest and affectionate greetings....

Appended by the Guardian in his own hand:

Wishing you and your dear and distinguished husband, the utmost success in your unceasing and noble endeavours for the promotion and protection of the Faith in these days of stress and trial, and assuring you of my abiding and loving gratitude. Your true brother, Shoghi.

Shoghi Effendi, *The Light of Divine Guidance*

(Volume 1), p. 94

The last words of encouragement were dated May 7, 1939. Perhaps it was coincidence that on May 7,

six years later, the German High Command surrendered to the Allies to end the war in Europe.

Beloved Friends,

Shoghi Effendi has received your welcome card dated April 20th, and immensely appreciates the message of love and greetings you have been moved to convey to him on the occasion of the Feast of Ridván.

He too wishes me to extend to you his deep love and good wishes on this happy and blessed occasion, and to assure you, and our dear friends in Esslingen, of his prayers for your protection and guidance in these days of widespread gloom and distress, that your hearts may be strengthened and assured, and that you may emerge from your present-day tests and trials more united, and firmer than ever in your love and loyalty towards the Faith.

However gloomy the immediate future may seem to appear, the prospect which the distant future has in store for the community of German believers is of such immeasurable brightness as it cannot but afford the deepest comfort and encouragement to you in your moments of uttermost sorrow and distress.

More than ever to-day the Guardian's thoughts turn towards you, and our sore-tried brethren in your land, in admiration for the courage and fortitude you have so well displayed in the midst of your afflictive trials, and in thanksgiving to the almighty God for having sustained and blessed you so repeatedly through His unfailing grace and mighty confirmations. May His Spirit continue to aid and guide your Community in the distressing days yet to come....

Appended by the Guardian in his own hand:

Dear co-workers:

It was such a joy to hear from you. You, as well as the other German believers, are often in my thoughts and prayers. I will continue to pray for the realization of your highest

hopes. Do not despair, may be assured that a glorious future awaits you all, more brilliant than any you can imagine.

Your true brother, Shoghi.

Shoghi Effendi, *The Light of Divine Guidance*
(Volume 1), p. 96

The long night of World War II now descended upon the world and engulfed the German believers. There would be no further message from Haifa until November 1945.

During the war years there was no uniformity in the treatment Bahá'ís received from the authorities. Several friends were able to keep a few books and pictures, but most of these were destroyed in Allied bombing raids. In other instances everything was confiscated. Even personal mementos were taken despite the assurances by the Heidelberg Gestapo that individual Bahá'ís were allowed to keep their books and continue to visit each other socially, even in greater numbers. On the other hand, Mr. Emil Jörn who lived in Warnemünde on the Baltic Sea was forbidden to make any contact with other Bahá'ís either in person or by mail.

To mark Germany's 50th National Bahá'í Convention in 1980, the German NSA published a commemorative booklet entitled *Der Bahá'í Glaube in Deutschland – Ein Rückblick*, *The Bahá'í Faith in Germany – A Review*. The following excerpts, translated by the author, leave posterity a vivid record of the faith and courage shown by German Bahá'ís during the years of persecution.

"In 1939 Mrs. Martha Brauns-Forel, a former NSA member

and the daughter of Swiss Professor Auguste Forel who had exchanged correspondence with 'Abdu'l-Baha, had her home searched by the Gestapo. All her books and correspondence were confiscated and she was interrogated for hours in a most scornful and insolent manner. Then a letter was discovered that had been mailed to her by Mrs. Anna Grossmann of Neckargemünd, who was also a former NSA member and the wife of future Hand of the Cause Dr. Hermann Grossmann. Even though her letter made no mention of the Bahá'í Faith, it was enough to have her brought to Karlsruhe for interrogation by a Gestapo officer. Since there was no evidence of her breaking any law, she merely received *"an official warning for having had suspect contact with Mrs. Brauns-Forel, a former Member of the National Spiritual Assembly."* Next, the searchers found a copy of Bahá'u'lláh's Daily Obligatory Prayer which had been copied and sent to Mrs. Brauns-Forel by Mr. Paul Köhler of Dresden. For this trespass a Dresden court sentenced Paul Köhler to six months in jail. (A few years later he tragically lost his life in an accident).

"The third wave of persecution against Bahá'ís began in 1943 and could have had grave consequences. Mrs. Carla Macco of Heidelberg was suddenly taken into custody on the strength of some completely libelous political accusations. It is believed that the driving force behind all court cases and persecutions that followed was the same Gestapo officer in Karlsruhe who had been responsible for the initial attacks that led to Paul Köhler's arrest and jail sentence.

"When it became clearly evident that the charges against Carla Macco had been trumped up, she was accused of being *"an active Bahá'í."* Based on falsified reports of her own testimony at the Gestapo office she was sentenced to six months in jail. These lies became the basis for charges and sentences against a number of other Bahá'ís, all despite Carla Macco's sworn court testimony that the Gestapo report was a falsehood. An appeal was impossible, because her lawyer was not allowed to see her, was not informed of the charges against her, and was barred from all court proceedings. Only

weeks later were Dr. Hermann Grossmann and his wife Anna Grossmann able to clarify the situation when they themselves were interrogated by the Gestapo in Karlsruhe. They were also able to get permission for Carla Macco's son, a most devoted Bahá'í who later was killed in the war, to visit her in jail while on home leave. It was he who managed to save his mother from being sent on to a concentration camp.

"Then, on December 1, 1943 the Grossmann's home in Neckargemünd was searched. Dr. Grossmann's sister, Miss Elsa-Maria Grossmann, was grilled by the police in the crudest manner and was threatened with a revolver. Her entire Bahá'í literature and copies of her private correspondence were confiscated. She was placed under arrest and without charges kept in jail for 9 days. Her cell number was No 19. Dr. Grossmann lost most of his valuable Bahá'í library and all his archives that contained documents and reports on Bahá'í activities of the 1920's and 1930's which he had so diligently collected and preserved. As a result of a strenuous appeal against this action, a small portion of the material was transferred to the University of Heidelberg for safekeeping. Thus Heidelberg University became the first German university to own a collection of important documents about the Faith.

"The Gestapo in Karlsruhe subsequently launched several other investigations in Heppenheim, Darmstadt (both south of Frankfurt), Stuttgart, Esslingen, Göppingen and in Dresden. All these probes established the fact that none of the Bahá'ís in any of these cities had contravened the ban of May 21, 1937. Despite these findings, seven Bahá'ís were called before a special court in Darmstadt on May 2, 1944. The accused were Mr. and Mrs. Hans Schmidt, and Mr. and Mrs. August Ehlers, all of Heppenheim, Mrs. Marie Schenk of Darmstadt, Mrs. Annemarie Schweizer of Stuttgart-Zuffenhausen, and Mrs. Anna Grossmann of Neckargemünd. They stood wrongly accused of having *"continued the organisation of the dissolved and outlawed Bahá'í sect."*

"It may sound strange, but all the while nobody seemed to pay much attention to Dr. Hermann Grossmann, despite his prominent role in the work of the German Bahá'í community. It gave him the golden opportunity to intercede on behalf of his accused fellow believers with the Gestapo in Karlsruhe and in the courts of Darmstadt and Heidelberg, where he was even given permission to speak for the defense. He pointed out the non-political character of the Faith and of its followers and called for fair treatment of the Bahá'ís who believed in a faith that deserved to be recognized as the firmest foundation of any order, in this country or elsewhere. He challenged the Gestapo to examine the true facts and to lift the ban against the Faith.

"As a result of his courageous intervention, charges against the Bahá'ís of being "*inimical to the State*" were indeed dropped, but the charge of being "*in violation of the ban*" was upheld. Nevertheless, this way the prosecution was reduced to a much lower danger level. When Dr. Grossmann and the friends were questioned about the international character of the Cause, they testified that the Bahá'í Faith was promoting a universal order which does, however, not exclude a national order. He also protested the attempt of having the Faith portrayed as an "*enemy of the state.*" He said that this was the complete opposite to the behavior of the Bahá'ís in Germany and throughout the world.

"The court in Darmstadt saw for the first time a larger number of Bahá'ís appear before it as defendants. The proceedings bore eloquent testimony to the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh. The accused were living proof of His majesty and power. Especially Marie Schweizer demonstrated a genial spiritual sovereignty and impressed the court by explaining the verities of the Faith in clear and forthright language. The proceedings in Darmstadt and elsewhere climaxed in the question whether it was the intention of the accused to continue to uphold the Cause and their belief in Bahá'u'lláh.

"On June 27, 1944 there was a court case in Heidelberg

against Miss Frida Eichler and 20-year-old Ruth Espenlaub. The charges were the same as in Darmstadt, but this time the proceedings were open to the public. This was most providential, because the prosecutor himself gave a detailed presentation of the history and principles of the Faith and explained the claim of Bahá'u'lláh! Again, the courageous testimony of the believers demonstrated the greatness of the Faith. The judges had promised to put an end to the Cause in Germany, but in the end the army of Bahá'u'lláh was stronger than its enemies. When they failed to prove their false accusations, the judges in the end were forced to acquit the accused, thus saving their lives and liberty. However, some believers were sentenced to stiff fines, among them Dr. Grossmann, his sister Elsa-Maria Grossmann, and all those tried in the court at Darmstadt."

Others were less fortunate. The three Wertheimer sisters who were Bahá'ís of Jewish descent, were picked up by the Gestapo in November 1941 and never seen again. Bahá'ís of Frankfurt, Darmstadt and Neckargemünd had all risked their freedom to shield them, but in the end to no avail. Edith Horn of Frankfurt, one of Germany's oldest Bahá'ís, was overcome with grief and despair when despite all her brave efforts her good friend Miss Sophie Rothschild was taken away by the police to suffer the fate of so many innocent millions.

Since no one was excused from army service on religious grounds, the war claimed the lives of several promising young Bahá'ís, all of whom the only sons of devoted believers, and in the case of Marie Schweizer and Carla Macco their only children. They were Jörg Brauns and Klaus Weber of Karlsruhe, Wilhelm Gollmer, Theo Leidinger and

Hansjörg Kohler of Stuttgart, Marie Schweizer's son Alfred, and Fritz Macco of Heidelberg who had been instrumental in gaining his mother's release from prison. The air war claimed the lives of Mrs. Else Gricke of Leipzig and her two daughters Margot and Rita. Fourteen believers in all, almost ten per cent of Germany's small community, are known to have perished.

The German Bahá'í Community was forced to co-exist with the Nazi regime for the duration of four years, from February 1933 to May 1937, when the Faith was officially outlawed. Quite apart from specific guidance given by the Guardian early in 1934, any active opposition by the Bahá'í Community, instead of their dedicated and tireless efforts to work towards change in society, would have been counter-productive and wrong, especially at a time when much of Western Europe and the Americas sought closer relations with Germany and when few anticipated the horrors to come.

After 1937, and during the years of war and genocide, the German Bahá'í Community did no longer exist. Any opposition to the regime, therefore, would have come from individuals. If any Bahá'í ever contemplated such action, he was not only restrained by the dictates of his faith, but he was also vividly reminded of what had happened in the 19th century in Persia when over 20,000 believers were systematically massacred and the Faith brought to the brink of extinction. There can be no doubt that

any overt resistance to the Nazi regime would have meant quick arrest and liquidation.

As this dark chapter in human history played itself out, it seems entirely due to God's saving grace that the handful of German Bahá'ís who were scattered throughout the country in small groups or as isolated believers, did not fall victim to the official policy of arresting any known dissident and have him vanish into night and fog, known as the dread decree of "*Nacht und Nebel*."

But behind it all, and unnoticed at the time, there hung yet another ominous threat over the entire German Bahá'í community. It, too, was miraculously averted. Hitler had forged an odious alliance with the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem who was a bitter enemy of both the British and the Jews. Hajj Amin al-Husseini met with Hitler in Berlin during World War II and was a prominent Nazi sympathizer who recruited Muslim volunteers to assist in Nazi extermination programs. At the same time the Grand Mufti was known to be an implacable enemy of the Bahá'í Faith. Either Hitler never got wind of this connection, or the Grand Mufti was unaware of the presence of Bahá'ís in Hitler's Germany. In either event it would have been an easy matter to have all Bahá'ís quietly rounded up and liquidated without causing much of a stir. Few, if any, of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's "*heavenly friends*" would then have been left alive to continue with their teaching work once the nightmare had passed, at

that brief and magic moment when a combination of utter disenchantment with the past and high hopes and optimism for a saner future had suddenly prepared so many hearts to receive the healing Message of Bahá'u'lláh.

A Postscript

To plunder, to slaughter, to steal,
these things they misname empire;
and where they make a desert
they call it peace.

- Tacitus

If there is a lesson to be learned from the German experience it is this: In this new age the well being of a nation rests entirely on its obedience to the Will of God as proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh. The same is true, of course, for the well being of humanity as a whole. Obedience before God will bring progress and prosperity, while disobedience to the divine decree will inevitably result in decline, destruction, and utter failure.

Some historians may argue that the aggressions of Nazism were not dissimilar to those of past potentates who invaded neighboring countries and butchered or enslaved entire populations in order to build their empires. Who condemns today the bloody depopulation of Gaul by Caesar's legions, or the fearful sack of vast and prosperous regions by the hordes of Ghengis Khan. In fact, successful aggression against once neighbor always brought fame to the perpetrator and secured his place in history books. To the surprise of many a modern-day Caesar,

Cortez, or Napoleon, the rules of the game appear to have been strangely altered: Aggression, ethnic cleansing, and genocide are suddenly no longer rewarded, but they risk condemnation and collective punishment. Still, some mourn the old-fashioned ways and wish for their return. But others, all over the globe, are becoming increasingly aware that the spiritual impulse that has abolished past behavior patterns once and for all, stems from a renewal of God's Law that governs man's existence on this planet.

One of these new laws given man by God's Manifestation for this new age is the Law of the Oneness of Humanity. This law, like any other divine law, is absolute, allows no compromise, and requires man's wholehearted obedience to win God's good pleasure and to avoid His wrath. It therefore demands that all our thoughts and energies, and all our material resources, shall be enlisted to build a peaceful global society. Punishment for disobeying this law is as certain as disobeying a 'law of nature,' but it shall be doubly severe if such disobedience is caused by arrogance, not just by plain old ignorance. In Germany's case all these spiritual factors combined to bring the house down. The Manifestation Himself had warned what would happen if the leaders of that nation refused to turn towards God.

O King of Berlin! Give ear unto the Voice calling from this manifest Temple: Verily, there is none other God but Me, the Everlasting, the Peerless, the Ancient of Days. Take heed lest pride debar thee from recognizing the Day-spring of Divine Revelation, lest earthly desires shut thee out, as by a veil, from the Lord of the Throne above and of the earth below. Thus counselleth thee the Pen of the Most High. He, verily, is the Most Gracious, the All-Bountiful. Do thou remember the one whose power transcended thy power (Napoleon III), and whose station excelled thy station. Where is he? Whither are gone the things he possessed? Take warning, and be not of them that are fast asleep. He it was who cast the Tablet of God behind him, when We made known unto him what the hosts of tyranny had caused Us to suffer. Wherefore, disgrace assailed him from all sides, and he went down to dust in great loss. Think deeply, O King, concerning him, and concerning them who, like unto thee, have conquered cities and ruled over men. The All-Merciful brought them down from their palaces to their graves. Be warned, be of them who reflect... O banks of the Rhine! We have seen you covered with gore, inasmuch as the swords of retribution were drawn against you; and you shall have another turn. And We hear the lamentations of Berlin, though she be today in conspicuous glory. - Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh

Next, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Center of the Covenant, visited Germany to teach and pray for spiritual progress. Afterwards, the German believers under the guidance of the Guardian spared no effort to bring the Teachings to the attention of their government. They were listened to, but in

the end their message failed to change hardened attitudes or alter political agendas.

Germany had been showered with all the prerequisites for serving this new enlightened age of man, but she missed her golden opportunity. The country's high educational standards were corrupted to serve a vile doctrine. The talents and industry of her people were hijacked to serve a false deity. Science and industry, instead of improving life, invented and built new weapons. The spirit of brotherhood, so prevalent in German music, art and literature, was mercilessly extinguished and replaced by a nationalist fervor and race hatred. It even introduced a new word to the vocabulary: *Untermenschen*, or 'sub-humans'.

As a consequence, many millions had to perish and the handiwork and the accumulated wealth of many generations was destroyed. Berlin's *conspicuous glory* was smashed into rubble and the lives of her survivors were reduced to stone-age conditions. Over 100,000 Berliners were killed and as many women were violated. Three once glamorous cruise ships, the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, the *Goya*, and the *Cape Arcona*, their decks now jammed with hapless refugees from Germany's Eastern provinces, went to the bottom of the Baltic Sea with over 20,000 souls. It was one of the worst maritime disasters in all of history. The proud dirigibles had also vanished, their girders cannibalized for building radar towers, their hangars bombed to smithereens.

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Notes

Although it can be assumed that anybody who is interested in this booklet has a basic knowledge of the history and teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, these notes provide additional information on personalities, explain some terms and historic background, and elaborate on certain events.

¹ Hede Schubert (1899-) met 'Abdu'l-Bahá in April 1913 at a *Kinderfest* in Esslingen. She celebrated her 100th birthday in October 1999. The magazine entitled *The Bahá'is*, published 1992 by the Office of Public Information of the Bahá'í International Community, shows Hede in a photograph on p. 53. She is the tall girl at left with straight blond hair and wearing a dark dress.

² 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844-1921), eldest son of Bahá'u'lláh, was named the *Centre of the Covenant* in Bahá'u'lláh's *Will and Testament*. He was frequently referred to as *The Master*.

³ Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892) was the Prophet Founder of the Bahá'í Faith.

⁴ Non-governmental organizations that deal with global issues such as education, health, environment, human rights, and others.

⁵ Shoghi Effendi (1897-1957). First grandson of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, appointed in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Will and Testament* as the *Guardian* of the Bahá'í Faith to guide its world-wide activities and to safeguard its unity.

⁶ The author was befriended or collaborated with all German Bahá'is who are mentioned in this

publication, except for Konsul Schwarz who was no longer alive at war's end, or Bahá'is like Emil Jörn who lived in East Germany and remained isolated from the West after the war.

⁷ Mirzá 'Alí Muhammad (1817-1850), Herald of Bahá'u'lláh. In 1844 He declared Himself to be the Báb (the Gate) to a new era. He foretold the advent of a new universal manifestation. He was incarcerated and on July 9, 1850 publicly put to death in Tabriz, Iran. His remains were eventually interred by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in a simple shrine he had built on Mt. Carmel (See also note 11). Today, the Shrine of the Báb is the focal point of the Bahá'í World Centre and its world-famous gardens.

⁸ Ridván commemorates the 21st day of April 1863 when Bahá'u'lláh publicly declared His Mission as a Universal Manifestation for this age. The event took place in a garden called Ridván. It was located just beyond the northern city limits of Baghdad. Ridván Messages were sent by the Guardian to the Bahá'is of the World. Today, such annual messages originate with the Universal House of Justice. – Not until 1948 did Canada form its own National Spiritual Assembly. – The National Spiritual Assembly is the Bahá'í governing body of a country. It is elected annually by regional delegates.

⁹ Prior to World War II, isolated Bahá'is were living in Vienna, Austria, in Budapest, Hungary, and in Sofia, Bulgaria.

¹⁰ The Universal House of Justice is the supreme governing body of the Bahá'í Faith. Its 9 members are elected every five years by members of all Na-

tional Spiritual Assemblies at an International Convention at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa.

¹¹ Rúhiyyih Khánum, neé Mary Maxwell (1910-2000), moved to Haifa and married the Guardian in 1937. She was the daughter of William Sutherland Maxwell and May Maxwell of Montreal. 'Abdu'l-Bahá stayed at the Maxwell Home when He visited North America in 1912. Mr. Maxwell, a renowned Canadian architect, later designed the beautiful gold and marble superstructure of the Shrine of the Báb on Mt. Carmel at Haifa, Israel.

¹² Adelbert Mühlshlegel, M.D. (1897-1980) received a Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá and became a close collaborator of Shoghi Effendi who elevated him to the rank of *Hand of the Cause*. In November 1957 he was asked by Rúhiyyih Khánum to wash and anoint the Guardian's body for burial. Speaking a dozen languages, he taught the Bahá'í Faith in both eastern and western Europe, India, Africa, and South America. Adelbert Mühlshlegel worked on many important translations, wrote a World History, and left a book of poetry. He passed away in Athens and is buried at the foot of the Acropolis.

¹³ This charming property was known as "The Häusle" (The Little House). For many years it was cared for by "Uncle" Hugo Bender and his wife "Auntie" Klärle. To frustrate its confiscation by the authorities at the time the Faith was outlawed, the Benders claimed the Häusle as their residence.

¹⁴ Tarázu'lláh Samandarí was an early Persian Bahá'í who in his youth had met Bahá'u'lláh. The Guardian later appointed him a Hand of the Cause.

¹⁵ Marion "General" Jack, a Canadian Bahá'í, became famous for remaining on her teaching post in Bulgaria despite the dangers of World War II.

¹⁶ Martha Root, early American Bahá'í teacher, journalist and world traveler, who brought the Bahá'í Faith to the attention of many heads of state.

¹⁷ A civilian of middle age, he was introduced at Bahá'í schools as a representative of the government's department for state security.

¹⁸ National Conventions are held annually where regionally elected delegates vote for the members of a country's National Spiritual Assembly.

¹⁹ Violette Nakhjavání was a long-time travel companion of Rúhiyyih Khánum.

²⁰ The large volume of correspondence was laboriously hand-written by Rúhiyyih Khánum and the Guardian. There were no electric typewriters and the desktop computer was still decades away.

²¹ Contrary to today's conventional opinion, most Germans welcomed foreigners. While proud of their country's spectacular rise from depression, they eagerly sought international ties. The often repeated story of Afro-American athlete Jesse Owens getting the official snub at the Berlin Olympics, rarely mentions that Germans enthusiastically cheered his 4 gold medals, and that his German rival Lutz Long even helped him correct the run-up for his winning long jump which bumped Lutz Long down into second place. — While the high-profile dirigibles were exploited for state propaganda, Hugo Eckener, their pio-

neer and head of the Zeppelin enterprise, rejected the regime. Only his world fame saved him from the concentration camp. Eckener was honored at the White House by President Hoover and his ships were allowed the use of the U.S. Naval Base at Lakehurst, New Jersey.

²² Herma Mühlischlegel (1902-1964) was one of countless unsung heroes. She tirelessly helped her husband in Bahá'í work and in running his medical practice. After the war, she accompanied him on extensive teaching trips. She made her home a refuge for homesick Persian students who had come to study in Germany. When one of them required a skin graft to save her foot after it was mangled in a tram accident, Herma volunteered to have the girl's foot embedded inside a pouch cut into her abdomen. Both were immobilized for agonizing weeks until the skin graft took. The grateful parents presented Herma with tickets to visit Haifa, but she chose to donate the money to the German temple fund instead

²³ *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh* and other books on the Bahá'í Faith were written by Shoghi Effendi and later translated into German by Adelbert Mühlischlegel. He also translated the Kitáb-I-Iqán, Bahá'u'lláh's *Book of Certitude* and he belonged to a group of four Bahá'í language scholars who worked on the first German translation of Bahá'u'lláh's *Hidden Words*.

²⁴ On account of government confiscation and bomb damage, there was hardly any Bahá'í lit-

erature available at war's end. A copy of the book *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* by John E. Esslemont, M.B., Ch.B., F.B.E.A., was discovered and key chapters translated by this author from the English original into German. The hand-written translation was then hammered into a manual typewriter on flimsy paper to produce nine precious carbon copies which were distributed to various Bahá'í communities. Shoghi Effendi had described 'The Esslemont' as "*The textbook of the Faith,*" and said it would "*inspire generations yet unborn.*"

A brief history of the years when
German Bahá'ís lived under the
regime of national-socialism.
It is a fascinating account written
by someone who lived through it all,
who became a Bahá'í at war's end and
who came to admire the
stalwart believers who kept
the Faith inviolate in their
country through years
of great upheaval

May future generations emulate
Their courage and devotion
and so honor their memory