



'ABDU'L-BAHÁ IN ENGLAND
at the Clifton Guest House, Bristol, September 1911.

THE DEVELOPMENT AND INFLUENCE OF THE BAHÁ'Í ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER IN GREAT BRITAIN, 1914-1950

by Phillip R. Smith

As I have argued elsewhere, the Bahá'í Faith began in Great Britain not as an independent religion, but as a millenarian movement that sought to hasten the approach of the coming millennium by spreading the ideas of racial, religious, and global unity that had been proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh.¹ The first Bahá'ís formed a loose inclusive movement with no requirements for membership, no official organization, and no distinctive ritual practices. Many remained practicing and active members of Christian churches or cultic groups. Often they had little contact with other Bahá'ís. What united these individuals was a belief in the coming millennium and a devotion to the person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

The life of millenarian movements is generally short. For most, the crisis comes when the promised millennium fails to arrive, or when their leaders die or lose charisma. The Bahá'í Movement in Great Britain managed to avoid dissolution on the death of its charismatic leader by transforming itself into a formal religion. The principal instrument of this transformation was the development of an effective administrative structure. This structure served the dual function of binding



LADY BLOMFIELD

together the movement's members, once their charismatic focus had been removed, and of allowing religious beliefs and practices to become standardized. The purpose of this essay is to trace the development of this administrative structure among the British Bahá'ís and to show how this structure enabled the inclusive Bahá'í Movement to be transformed into the exclusive Bahá'í Faith.

The Early Years. The first Bahá'ís in Britain were held together by their admiration for the teachings and personality of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. They had no formal organization: they simply met together as friends to discuss the Bahá'í teachings. As in any social group, there were dominant personalities. These persons assumed leadership, rather than being given it officially; and their authority was informal.

The dominant personality and unofficial leader of the British Bahá'ís throughout the early years was undoubtedly Ethel Rosenberg. Rosenberg was the first Englishwoman to become a Bahá'í in her native land, but her position did not stem solely from this fact. She made two visits, in 1901 and 1904, to the Holy Land. There she conversed at length with 'Abdu'l-Bahá and with members of his family. She also learned Persian, and so she was able to read and help with the translation of Bahá'í scriptures. This made her an invaluable source of information to the British Bahá'ís at a time when very little Bahá'í literature was published. She was also very clearly trusted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who sent her on important teaching missions to the United States and to France.

There were, of course, other individuals who assumed prominent positions in the early community. Mary Virginia Thornburgh-Cropper was the first avowed Bahá'í to reside in the British Isles and the person who had introduced Ethel Rosenberg to Baháism.² When Lady Blomfield became a Bahá'í in 1907, her wealth and social status automatically guaran-

teed her prominence. Eric Hammond, whose book of Bahá'í scripture and history was published in 1909, was probably the leading Bahá'í man of the period.

These leading personalities, along with a few others, related to one another in an informal way. They met in one another's homes to study; and later they hired halls to hold public meetings. They published books and pamphlets about the Bahá'í Cause. However, these were probably the collective actions of individuals, rather than the result of corporate decisions. There is no evidence of any formal organization. These early Bahá'í activities were limited to London.

Eventually, there developed a small group of Bahá'ís in Manchester. One of these, Sarah Ann Ridgeway, had become a Bahá'í in the United States in 1899. But most of the group had been introduced to the Bahá'í teachings by Edward Hall, and he became their unofficial leader. Although Ethel Rosenberg corresponded with the Bahá'ís of Manchester, and visited them in January 1911, there seems to have been little cooperation between the two groups. There is some evidence of tensions between them over the next twenty years.

These groups, plus a few isolated individuals like Daniel Jenkyn of St. Ives, Cornwall, made up the Bahá'í Movement in Britain. We can conclude then that this movement was organized very informally, and largely dependent on the actions of a few individuals. While some of them must certainly have discussed their activities with others, there is no evidence that an individual's actions needed group approval, or that there was any formal arrangement for group decision-making. There were personalities who seemed to have prestige or influence, but their leadership of the community was based on a variety of factors which never included democratic elections.

The Bahá'í Councils. As time passed and both the number of Bahá'ís and the range of their activities grew, there developed the need for a more formal organization. The first evidence we have of this formal organization is the Bahá'í Committee that met during 1914. This committee gives us clear evidence of Bahá'ís working together, making joint decisions, raising funds, and laying down rules, long before the advent of the Administrative Order introduced by Shoghi Effendi, the future Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith.

Although the committee kept and read minutes, no record of them can now be traced. The only firm evidence that we have of the committee's existence and activities are copies of agendas for three meetings held in 1914, which were sent to Lotfullah Hakim by the secretary, Arthur Cuthbert.³ These agendas reveal that the Bahá'ís were engaged in a range of activities and that the committee operated under normal business procedures.

One topic on the agendas was the proposed publication of leaflets and books. Also under consideration was the financing of meetings and the question of paying the expenses of speakers at these meetings. The conduct of people who attended such meetings was also a matter of concern. On one occasion the issue of "clapping at meetings" was discussed, and at another time the issue of "undesirable persons at private meetings" was raised. The appearance of the item "Finance" or "Encouragement of Financial Support" on all three agendas clearly shows that, even at this early stage, some sort of fund for the administration of the Cause had been established.

As early as 1914, therefore, the British Bahá'ís were organizing themselves and their activities in a way that was very similar to that under which they would later operate as Spiritual Assemblies formed at Shoghi Effendi's instruction. The very membership of this Bahá'í Committee was similar to

that of the assemblies to be formed later. All of the known members of the Bahá'í Committee,⁴ with the exception of Cuthbert and Hakim, were later to serve on Spiritual Assemblies. There was, therefore, a continuity of organization in Britain spanning the periods of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's and Shoghi Effendi's leadership, and not a sudden imposition of administrative structure as some writers have suggested.

The Bahá'í Committee of 1914, however, did not itself span these two eras. It ceased to meet after 1916. Although no official explanation can be found, it is possible to speculate on the reasons for its demise. One reason may have been the problems caused by the war, including lack of communication with 'Abdu'l-Bahá. However, if this were the only reason, one might reasonably have expected the committee to resume its functions once hostilities ceased and normal communications were restored. This it did not do.

A more likely cause of the committee's lapse is the disharmony that existed among the members of the British Bahá'í community. As already stated, the Bahá'ís were dominated by strong personalities, and none of them had any real authority over the others. They were accustomed to thinking and acting independently; and, there is evidence that their personalities sometimes clashed.

Divisions and disagreements among the Bahá'ís are often mentioned by Esslemont in his letters. In December 1915, he wrote:

I am sorry to hear that there is not more unity between Mrs. Holbach⁵ and the London Bahá'ís, but I hope that on both sides prejudices and whatever else keeps them apart may be outgrown. We are all but babes in Baháism and must be very charitable to each other's weaknesses.⁶

Later that month he referred in another letter to his own correspondence with Mrs. Holbach:

I had a nice letter from Mrs. Holbach enclosing one from Mr. Hall of Manchester. Mr. Hall seems depressed and feels that the London Bahá'ís have given him the "cold shoulder."⁷

Two years later, he is still concerned about the divisions among the British Bahá'ís:

Oh! If only the friends in this country could be more united, could cultivate the "sin-covering eye," be less conscious of each other's faults, and more conscious of the wonderful Power of the Holy Spirit.⁸

These comments suggest that the British Bahá'ís were probably not at that time ready to work together, to allow their individual wishes and opinions to be overruled by the decisions of the majority. The committee of 1914 does not appear to have been elected by the Bahá'í community, nor does it appear to have been granted any authority by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Unlike the American Bahá'ís, who had been set the task of building a Bahá'í Temple, the British Bahá'ís had no single project to unite them. Therefore, the Bahá'ís would not necessarily have felt bound to any decision the committee made. Whether there was some crisis or dispute that brought these divisions to a head and resulted in disbanding this Bahá'í council cannot now be determined with any certainty.

Whatever the reason, the Bahá'í Committee ceased to meet, and the community returned to its former state for the next few years. It was 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself who encouraged the committee to reform and once again to guide and direct the activities of the movement in Britain. 'Abdu'l-Bahá clearly believed that the Bahá'í Movement needed to be organized.

The instruction to revive the Bahá'í Committee was given to Esslemont by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during the former's visit in Haifa in 1919. Although Esslemont left Haifa in January 1920, it was not until almost a year later that he was able to report to Hakim that the new council had at last met:

On Tuesday we had the first regular meeting of the new Bahá'í Council. There were present Miss Rosenberg, Mrs. Thornburgh-Cropper, Miss Gamble, Mrs. George, Miss Herrick and Mr. Hammond, of the old members, and the new members were Mrs. Coles, Miss Grand, Miss Musgrove, Mrs. Crosby, Mr. Simpson and myself. We met at Miss Grand's flat, and the meeting was very harmonious. I think that we all felt that it marked the beginning of a new era in the history of the Cause in this country. The meeting was arranged in accordance with the advice given by Abdul Baha through me that the old members of the council who were still able to act should add to their number a few new ones whom the friends approved and they should then work together. There has been no regular meeting of the council since 1914, I think, but now we have decided to meet regularly at least 3 times a year, while a special meeting can be called at any time, when it is considered advisable.⁹

It seems that this council did manage to meet during 1921, and made several decisions about distributing, approving, and publishing Bahá'í literature. They also maintained funds for the movement. Having been formed at the direct request of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the body seems to have had greater authority and cohesion than the first committee. By October 1921, Esslemont was able to report that the Council was beginning to work as a collective body:

I think we are making a little progress towards greater Unity in the Council itself, although we are a long way from the ideal in that way yet.¹⁰

We can see then, that towards the end of 1921, a formal administrative organization was already beginning to emerge in Britain. The fact that 'Abdu'l-Bahá not only approved of this organization, but was instrumental in its development, is an important factor to bear in mind. The process of organizing the Bahá'ís had begun, and it was soon to be accelerated under the influence of the successor to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi.

The Guardianship of Shoghi Effendi. 'Abdu'l-Bahá died on November 28, 1921. The Bahá'í Movement, centered as it was on his charismatic authority, was thrown into temporary crisis and confusion. In his Will and Testament, 'Abdu'l-Bahá appointed his grandson, Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, as the Guardian of the Bahá'í Movement. From that first period of confusion, the new Guardian led the Bahá'ís into a period of stability and growth which resulted in the movement becoming established as a separate religion in the West. As Vernon Johnson has observed:

Shoghi Effendi gave to Baha'í a precision of historical understanding, doctrinal formulation, and institutional organization which had not yet been fully achieved in the religion.¹¹

Under Shoghi Effendi the Baha'í faith became truly the Baha'í World Faith.¹²

The process of transforming the movement into a religion was one that Shoghi Effendi began immediately. Until that time, many Bahá'ís had remained active within their previous religious communities, and in contemporary Bahá'í literature one finds references to Christian Bahá'ís, Muslim Bahá'ís, and Zoroastrian Bahá'ís. 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself continued to attend Friday prayers at the mosque in 'Akká right up to the week that he died. He observed the Muslim, as well as the Bahá'í fast. Indeed, he was accepted by many as an exemplary Muslim.¹³

The behavior of Shoghi Effendi was very different. From this assumption of office, he refused to attend prayers in the mosque and observed only the Bahá'í fast and prayer rituals. By his actions, he demonstrated his belief that Baháism was already a separate religion. His task over the next fifteen years was to ensure that all Bahá'ís came to the same realization.

The first stage of this task was to unite and organize the



National Bahá'í Archives. Wilmette, Illinois.

A BAHÁ'Í GATHERING IN LONDON, c. 1925.

Bahá'ís themselves. From the very beginning of his Guardianship, Shoghi Effendi began the task of providing for the Bahá'í Movement an efficient, democratically based, administrative organization. To a large extent, it was this organization that transformed the inclusive movement into an exclusive religion.

In his first communication to the Bahá'ís throughout the world, Shoghi Effendi urged them to form Spiritual Assemblies in every locality where there were nine or more believers, and wherever possible to elect a National Spiritual Assembly. He quoted extensively from both 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Bahá'u'lláh to demonstrate that the concept and the duties of these assemblies were derived from their writings, and not from himself. However, elaborating the details of this system was certainly to become the work of the Guardian. He made it clear to the Bahá'ís of Britain, even in this first communication, that the presentation of the Bahá'í message to the world could no longer be left to individual initiative and interpretation.¹⁴

Shoghi Effendi requested that the new national bodies should be established as a matter of urgency. The British Bahá'ís seem to have responded to his request, despite the fact that their activities were at a low ebb. As early as May 1922, Esslemont was able to write of the progress they were making:

The election of the new Assembly is now in progress. Ten members are being elected from the London group and these 10 with Mr. Hall and myself will constitute the National Assembly for Great Britain.¹⁵

Later, he reported that the first meeting of the "new Bahai Spiritual Assembly" was held in London on June 17, 1922.¹⁶ Although he was unable to attend the first meeting, Esslemont did go to the second meeting in July 1922, and reported that it was "very harmonious." He lists the ten members elected



National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, Illinois.

BAHÁ'Í UNITY FEAST
held in London, England, during 1923.

from the London group, and it is significant to note that seven of them had served on the Bahá'í Council that had been formed in 1920. Shoghi Effendi was not imposing a new structure upon the movement, but merely continuing a process that had already begun. The main effect of his leadership was to give the Assembly an authority that it had not had before. This authority came from the outline of their duties as defined in the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Bahá'u'lláh, and from the fact that they were now democratically elected. These changes were being made not only in Britain but throughout the world.

This transition was from a time of individual action and personal interpretation to a period of much more centralized control over the presentation of the teachings. Leadership of the community was in the future to be based on democratic support, and not merely on the strength of personality. Individuals would not only have to gain the support of their fellow Bahá'ís for any teaching initiative, but would be restrained by the community if they could not gain that support. To effect these changes in the administrative system would take several years, but the British community did attempt to follow Shoghi Effendi's instructions.

Local Assemblies were soon established in Manchester, Bournemouth, and London. The National Assembly was also reelected each year, with the number of members being fixed at nine after 1922. However, even in the simple matter of these elections, there were new rules to follow and simple mistakes were made.

In 1927, Ethel Rosenberg visited Haifa and discovered that the delegates at each annual convention had been wrong to elect the members of the National Assembly only from among their number. She immediately wrote to the Assembly in Britain to inform them of the error:

. . . Shoghi Effendi says, all the 19 delegates must clearly understand that they must select from the whole body of the believers in Great Britain and Ireland those 9 whom they consider the most fit and suitable members to constitute the National Assembly. Therefore it will be necessary to supply each of the 19 delegates with a complete list of all those believers in Great Britain and Ireland.¹⁷

As with all communications from the Guardian, or from his secretary, the National Spiritual Assembly was quick to follow his advice. The National Assembly of 1927 was, therefore, the first to be elected in accordance with the Guardian's new instructions. However, as two people tied for position as the ninth member of the Assembly, they decided that for that year the Assembly should consist of ten members. Within a month, they received another letter from the Guardian:

I feel sure that next year, the number of members should be strictly confined to nine, and a second ballot is quite proper and justified.¹⁸

In the same letter he appears also to be concerned that the Reverend A. H. Biggs, who was a Unitarian minister from Altrincham, should have been elected to the National Assembly:

I trust the choice of the Rev. Biggs signifies his unreserved acceptance of the faith in its entirety—a condition that we must increasingly stress in the years to come.¹⁹

This instruction began to point the British Bahá'ís in the direction of greater exclusivity. At this time, there still remained no initiation, nor even interview, that one had to go through before being added to the list of those Bahá'ís eligible to vote for Assembly members. Indeed, in London anyone who attended several meetings was automatically added to the list of London Bahá'ís.²⁰ Also, most British Bahá'ís at this time

seem to have retained the belief that theirs was an inclusive movement, and not a religion. These beliefs and practices help to explain how a Christian minister could be elected to the National Assembly as late as 1927.

Despite the misunderstandings that we have listed above, the British Bahá'ís did attempt to carry out the duties that the Guardian had laid upon the first Assembly in 1922:

I need hardly tell you how grateful and gratified I felt when I heard the news of the actual formation of a National Council whose main object is to guide, co-ordinate and harmonise the various activities of the friends.²¹

During the 1920s, the National Spiritual Assembly organized and coordinated a variety of activities, including public meetings, the publication of books, and the presentation of the Cause at the "Conference of Living Religions within the Empire" that was held in 1924. It also maintained contact, albeit intermittently, with both the Guardian in Haifa and other Bahá'ís around the world.

However, it would be wrong to infer from this activity that all was well within the community or that a full transition to the new Administrative Order had been achieved. There were problems with this new organization from its very beginning, and by the end of the 1920s, the Bahá'í Movement had all but disappeared from the British Isles.

Problems and Difficulties. The main problem that the British Bahá'ís had to face was the decline in their numbers. This is the same problem faced by virtually all millenarian movements when the promised millennium does not arrive or their charismatic leader is removed. For many, being a Bahá'í had simply meant being a follower of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. On his death, these Bahá'ís may have had difficulty finding a focus for their admiration and devotion. This resulted in an almost immedi-

ate falling away of activity and interest, even as early as May 1922.

There is little news about the Cause in England. Mrs. George's meetings seem to be the largest now. At Lindsay Hall there are only a very few except on special occasions when people are rounded up by postcards!²²

There were, undoubtedly, some Bahá'ís who found it impossible to accept the new situation. They had been able to accept the decisions and authority of 'Abdu'l-Bahá whom they regarded as a Christ-like figure. However, now they not only had to accept the authority of his grandson, the twenty-five-year-old Guardian, but they also had to recognize the authority of an Assembly elected of their equals. Some were never able to do this, and others took many years to do so. As late as April 1926, Shoghi Effendi wrote to the British National Assembly to express his pleasure that one of the London Bahá'ís had ". . . at last complied with my request and written to the London Assembly acknowledging their authority."²³

In addition to getting ordinary Bahá'ís to acknowledge the importance of Assemblies, Shoghi Effendi seems to have had some difficulty in getting even the members of the National Spiritual Assembly to do so. One of the persistent problems the Assembly faced was achieving a quorum. In May 1926, its members wrote to the Guardian requesting permission for substitutes to attend Assembly meetings. They received this reply:

I realise the special and peculiar difficulties that prevail in London and the nature of the obstacles with which they [the National Spiritual Assembly] are confronted. I feel however that an earnest effort should be made to overcome them and that the members must arrange their affairs in such a way as to ensure their prompt attendance at 9 meetings which are held in the course of the year. This is surely not an insurmountable obstacle.²⁴

It was, nevertheless, an obstacle, and it may have been exacerbated by the continued personality clashes among members of the Bahá'í community. The difficulties that prevailed during the previous decade seem to have been overcome for a while in the early 1920s, partially due to the skillful chairmanship of both the London and National Spiritual Assemblies by George Simpson. However, towards the ends of this decade the problems began to surface once more.

A glimpse of the conflicts that arose is given by Ruth White in her account of a visit to London in April 1928. White was an American Bahá'í who believed that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament was a forged document. She was visiting Europe to gain support for her opposition to Shoghi Effendi and his efforts to organize the believers. According to her account, she met ". . . practically all the Bahá'ís in London," and was invited to meet with members of the National Assembly at the home of Florence George. Here, she was kept waiting for two hours outside the room where the National Assembly was meeting. She could hear the sound of raised voices within.

Finally, at nearly six o'clock, the members emerged limp and tired. No sooner were greetings exchanged than Mr. G. P. Simpson approached each member of the National Assembly and said very dramatically: "I have finished with you forever! You are not Bahais! You are not Bahais!" And then he strode from the room beside himself with rage.²⁵

Ruth White later spoke with one of the members of the Assembly, a prominent Bahá'í for over twenty years:

Lady Blomfield, who was present at this meeting, said to me that there was practically no longer a Bahai Cause in England, and she had come to the conclusion that the Bahai Cause cannot be organized.²⁶



National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, Illinois.

BAHÁ'Í GROUP WITH MARTHA ROOT (center)
in Bournemouth, England, July 4, 1926.

Of course, White cannot be regarded as an objective observer. She had vested interests in proving, perhaps provoking, disunity within the British Bahá'í community. However, there are indications from other sources that all was not harmonious. In the same month that White visited Britain, April 1928, Shoghi Effendi sent a brief note of encouragement to the National Assembly in which he said that he would pray for the guidance of the Beloved to ". . . help you to remove misunderstandings and difficulties amongst the friends."²⁷ During the next eight months only four extremely short telegrams were received from Shoghi Effendi; but on the last day of the year, he again wrote a short letter which referred to their problems:

Not until harmony and concord are firmly established among the friends of London and Manchester will the cause advance along sound and progressive lines.²⁸

Whatever the problems were, they did not result in complete inactivity, and administration never ceased altogether. In September 1929, a new Bahá'í Center was opened in London.²⁹ At approximately the same time, a new translation of Bahá'u'lláh's *Hidden Words* was published. It may, however, be significant that the book was published despite the Guardian's advice that its publication be delayed.³⁰ There is also some indication that the type of activity the British Bahá'ís were engaged in did not meet with the full approval of the Guardian, and that he may have been dissatisfied with the development of the British community:

He is much hopeful of your new centre in Regent Street or thereabouts, and he trusts that it will mark a turning point in the history of the Cause in England — from happy tea-parties at individual homes, into a group of less personal but eager, active and thoughtful workers co-operating in a common service.³¹

It seems, however, that his hopes were to be disappointed. The ranks of Bahá'ís continued to dwindle, their numbers and activities reduced by old-age, illness, and death. While there were individuals who continued to think of themselves as Bahá'ís, the activities of the group almost ceased completely.

From the end of 1930 until early 1934, the minutes of the National Spiritual Assembly are very brief and indicate that it held only five or six short meetings a year. There are no records of any cables or letters received from the Guardian and, moreover, the minutes contain few references to him. J. R. Richards, a Christian minister, writing in London about the Bahá'ís in 1932, had no doubt that Baháism in the West was in decline. However, he did not dismiss it entirely:

But whilst the movement is undoubtedly losing ground its missionaries continue to be active, and their insidious propaganda must be fought down.³²

Despite his obvious antipathy, Richards is correct in his assessment of the Bahá'í Movement in Britain. It was certainly losing ground. In a sense, he was also correct about their missionaries, as it was Bahá'ís coming from communities outside of the British Isles, where the new Administrative Order was more fully established, who were successfully to bring about the reorganization of the movement and revitalize the community.

Resurgence. In other parts of the world the Administrative Order was more fully established and the movement was moving towards greater centralization and more exclusivity. This was especially true in the United States, which would provide the model for all Bahá'í Administration in the West. Following a decline in activity there, and a possible drop in numbers in the years after the death of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, it was

during the 1930s that activities and numbers once more began to increase. In the mid-1930s, the Bahá'ís of Britain began to benefit from this resurgence.

In 1934, the Guardian's communications with the British National Assembly were fully restored. From that time onwards, we can begin to detect a revival in activity among the Bahá'ís. By this time, the number of Bahá'ís in Bournemouth had dropped below the nine required to form a local Spiritual Assembly, and so there remained only the Assemblies of London and Manchester. Also by this time, the personalities who had dominated the movement since the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá had ceased to do so. Esslemont had died in 1925, Ethel Rosenberg in 1930, and George Simpson in 1934. Mrs. Thornburgh-Cropper and several others were in such frail health that they could no longer be active. The new personalities who came to lead the community were generally people who had become Bahá'ís during Shoghi Effendi's Guardianship and who, therefore, had no difficulty in accepting the idea of the Administrative Order. Some of them, moreover, had come from other countries where the administration of the movement was already established. In 1933, Hasan Balyuzi, from Iran, was elected to the National Spiritual Assembly and was to remain a member of it until 1960. Helen Bishop was an American Bahá'í who came to Britain during the 1930s to help teach and spread the faith. Madame Gita Orlova came to London simply to help the community and established a theatrical group for Bahá'í youth in the city. All of these people helped reactivate the British community and introduce new people to it.

In 1936, David Hofman returned to his native England having become a Bahá'í in Montreal in 1933. He was immediately elected to the National Assembly. It was during the first year of his membership that a real resurgence in Bahá'í activities took place. That these two events should have coincided was a

fact that was not overlooked by Shoghi Effendi. He wrote to Hofman at the very end of the year:

Your splendid collaboration with the English believers is, as I am gradually and increasingly realising it, infusing new life and determination into individuals and assemblies which will prove of the utmost benefit to our beloved Cause. Persevere with your remarkable efforts and historic achievements.³³

During 1936, many things of importance had, indeed, been achieved. In July, a paper on the Bahá'í Faith had been read to the newly established World Congress of Faiths, and two Bahá'ís had given short addresses there. In August, the first official Bahá'í Summer School was held.³⁴ In September, the first issue of the *Bahá'í Journal*, a national newsletter, was published and sent free to every registered Bahá'í. The *Journal* was to play a vital role in creating a sense of community among the British Bahá'ís and became an important tool for informing and educating them. In December, the entire National Spiritual Assembly met in Manchester for the first time in an attempt to reduce the dominant influence that London had held over the British community. This was to become an annual event, being transformed in later years into the Teaching Conference. Very early in the following year, the Bahá'í Publishing Company was established and this too would become an important part of the future community.

Having stopped the decline in numbers, the community now began to grow. For the new believers, the Bahá'í Administrative Order was an essential part of being a Bahá'í. Unlike earlier Bahá'ís, they had little difficulty in accepting the decisions and the authority of the Spiritual Assemblies. There was now a clearly accepted definition of what it meant to be a Bahá'í. In January 1937, the *Bahá'í Journal* had published Shoghi Effendi's guidance about what was necessary for a person to become registered as a Bahá'í:

Full recognition of the station of the Forerunner, the Author, and True Exemplar of the Bahá'í Cause, as set forth in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Testament; unreserved acceptance of, and submission to, whatsoever has been revealed by their Pen; loyal and steadfast adherence to every clause of our Beloved's sacred Will; and close association with the spirit as well as the form of the present day Bahá'í administration throughout the world.³⁵

Anyone who wished to become a Bahá'í had to sign a "declaration card" that stated that they understood and accepted all of the above beliefs and conditions. It was the duty of existing Bahá'ís to ensure that the new believers did fully understand and accept all of these terms and conditions before they accepted their declaration. In this way, a uniformity of belief (and a degree of exclusivity) was imposed on the community such as had never existed before. It was also made clear that a Bahá'í could not simply believe in the Bahá'í prophets, but also had to accept the administrative organization as established by Shoghi Effendi.

In 1939, the National Assembly was to take a further step towards exclusivity by applying the above restrictions to those people who had been registered as Bahá'ís before the new definition had been formulated. The *Bahá'í Journal* informed the Bahá'ís that all believers in Britain were to be issued with a ". . . registration certificate stating that the bearer is recognized by the N.S.A. as a member of the Bahá'í community of the British Isles."³⁶ This was ostensibly because Bahá'ís were accepted as being exempt from combat service in the armed forces on religious grounds, and the National Assembly was anxious to ensure that nobody brought the Faith into disrepute by fraudulently claiming to be a Bahá'í simply to escape combat. However, it was also an attempt to ensure that those believers who had been registered as Bahá'ís during the 1920s, or even earlier, now acknowledged the authority of the National Spiritual Assembly.

To obtain one of these registration certificates, the believers had to send two passport-sized photographs to the National Assembly along with their personal details. In April 1940, however, the Assembly announced, in their annual report, that the “. . . friends have been very slow in responding to this plan.”³⁷ Clearly, some were reluctant to take such a step. A year later, the National Assembly reported that nearly all the believers had now registered, despite the fact that a few felt that the move “. . . conflicted with the liberal spirit of the Faith.”³⁸ That the majority had now followed the Assembly’s instruction may have been due less to its powers of persuasion than with its threat to withdraw voting rights from all those who did not register by August 13, 1940. For the first time, the National Assembly had been able to use the threat of administrative sanctions to ensure compliance with its decisions.

Such power was an effective way of imposing coherence and uniformity of belief and practice on the Bahá’í community. It is for this reason, among others, that the British Bahá’ís still carry registration documents today, despite the assurance of the National Assembly in 1941, that such a move was not permanent.³⁹ The issuing of registration documents completed the transition from an inclusive movement to an exclusive organization.

The British Bahá’ís of the 1930s had at last become united and organized. Their administration could now begin to serve the function that the *Guardian* had advocated for it more than ten years earlier. Now that its authority was generally accepted, the task of the National Spiritual Assembly was to transform the exclusive organization into a religion.

Developing the Faith. The earliest Bahá’ís in the British Isles did not consider themselves to be members of a new religion.⁴⁰ Theirs was a movement that existed within existing religions

and attempted to build bridges between them. The aim of the movement was to strip away the rituals and dogmas that each religion had developed and to return each faith to the simple truths and practices of its founder. In this way, each religion would become revived and renewed. Bahá'ís believed that it would then become apparent to all that the fundamental beliefs of all religions were identical.

Because of this view, the earliest British Bahá'ís had no religious practices of their own. Those Bahá'ís who came from a practicing Christian background were encouraged to return to their churches, although they would inevitably have a different attitude towards them. It was the sharing of the ideal that made one a Bahá'í, not uniformity of worship. Religious rituals and liturgies were seen as the creations of men, not of the founders of religions. They were the outdated forms of religion which the Bahá'ís hoped to sweep away, in order to restore the original spirit of true faith.

Of course, the Bahá'ís were not the first religious group to reject liturgical practice in favor of moral behavior. Various Christian denominations had repeatedly attempted to achieve just this. Some writers pointed out the similarity between the Bahá'ís and the Society of the Friends (Quakers). Harrold Johnson, writing in 1912, saw at least two similarities between these groups:

There are also, as in Quakerism, no priests in Bahá'ism and there are no ritual observances. The exceeding apprehension of the danger of mere formalism is very marked in the Bahá'í writings The important place given in Bahá'ism to silent prayer and to the workings of the spirit in silence are again suggestive of the Quakers.⁴¹

This latter point suggests what several other writers refer to, namely the importance of prayer to the early Bahá'ís. However, far less reference is made to prayer in early Bahá'í

writings than is made to ethical teachings. Even when reference is made to prayer, a uniform picture of Bahá'í practice does not emerge.

There can be little doubt that prayer was part of the life of the early British Bahá'ís, but it appears to have been a private activity, with no fixed form or ritual. Even by 1923, in Esslemont's important book, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, the author states that prayer is obligatory, but the form that prayer should take is not. While he includes a translation of the short obligatory prayer, Esslemont does not refer to it as such.⁴²

According to Alter and Wilson, the American Bahá'ís of this period had developed a ritual form of community worship. However, judging from the limited amount of evidence we have available, it would appear that there was no such development in Britain. During this phase, the period of the Bahá'í Movement, the meetings that were held were generally more intellectual than devotional.

The early meetings were generally gatherings in private homes held to discuss the Bahá'í teachings or to read the latest Tablet (letter) received from 'Abdu'l-Bahá. These do not represent acts of worship as we would normally accept this term, nor do they seem to have followed a set pattern or ritual. The one feature that was included in all meetings was "the delivering of prepared sermons on Bahá'í theology."⁴³

At the first meetings, Miss Rosenberg and others would explain the teachings and recount their experiences of meeting 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Later, Esslemont rarely refers to a meeting without stating who gave the prepared talk:

Tomorrow night at the meeting hall I shall speak on the Unity of Mankind.⁴⁴

We had a very nice meeting yesterday afternoon at the Theosophical Society's Rooms. Mrs. George spoke instead of Mr. Tudor Pole . . . on "Religion should be a cause of love and unity."⁴⁵

We had a fine meeting on Sunday night. Mr. Kanhere, a Hindoo Brahmin, and a friend of Mr. Eric Hammond, gave us a very interesting talk.⁴⁶

In 1920, the Manchester Bahá'ís began to hold weekly meetings which also featured the reading of a prepared paper:

These meetings always opened with a prayer. After a few moments of silence first some letters from friends abroad were read and then a paper on some aspect of the Cause. This was followed by happy, stimulating discussion and questions and the meeting would close with a prayer.⁴⁷

Although we can see that the more explicit forms of worship had been introduced towards the end of this early period, the meetings still seem to have remained intellectual rather than devotional. This was especially obvious to those coming from a different religious tradition. In 1919, Esslemont took Colonel and Mrs. Cuthbert, of the Salvation Army, to a meeting and later recorded their impressions:

Mrs. Cuthbert's impression is that we are not getting into touch with people as we ought—that the meeting seemed too much of a meeting of intellectual people for discussion.⁴⁸

This seems to have been true of all Bahá'í meetings including the Nineteen-Day Feasts. Feasts were certainly held, but not on a regular basis. Those that were held do not sound like the one attended by Alter in New York. If anything, they seem to have been less devotional in content than the normal weekly meetings:

... we had our first "19-day Feast." We had it in a tea-room in Boscombe. 17 friends were present. We had tea in the Persian style with glass cups and saucers which Mrs. Dunsby managed to borrow for the occasion. After tea I gave a short introductory talk and read some tablets of the Master's regarding the conduct of meetings, and regarding the importance of the 19-day feasts and

how they ought to be celebrated. Aflatun then gave us a most interesting talk, mostly about the life of the Beloved during the last year of the war, when Aflatun was at Haifa. Miss Pinchon read one of the tablets you sent in your last letter, and Mr. King gave us a delightful talk about the progress of the Cause in America, . . . Then we had more tea and fruit.⁴⁹

We can conclude then that, during this early period, no fixed congregational form of service had been developed by the British Bahá'ís, but the reading of prayers and Tablets was regularly practiced by some of them.

It also seems unlikely that many of the first British Bahá'ís fasted. Although it is known that Esslemont observed the fast in 1915, when he first became a Bahá'í, because of his chronic ill-health it seems unlikely that he did so again. Although a few of the other Bahá'ís may have fasted, it is rarely—if ever—referred to and so was probably not widely observed.

The major Bahá'í festivals, on the other hand, were commonly celebrated. The gatherings seem to have been primarily social events. The two main festivals that are referred to are Naw-Rúz and Riḍván. Although the early British Bahá'ís did not observe all Bahá'í Holy Days, or adopt special religious practices connected with the ones they did observe, the recognition of such festivals marked a significant step towards the emergence of the Bahá'í Faith as a religion rather than a movement.

As we have shown earlier, the 1920s and early 1930s were years of stagnation and decline for the Bahá'í Cause in Britain. It seems unlikely that any changes in religious practices were adopted during this period. The reluctance to accept the authority of the Spiritual Assemblies, and perhaps even of Shoghi Effendi himself, made the acceptance of the change from movement to religion difficult to achieve. Even after the historic court decision in Egypt which recognized the independent nature of the Bahá'í Faith, and the legal moves un-

dertaken by the Bahá'ís of the United States, it was possible for a prominent British Bahá'í to insist, during this period, that "... the 'movement' must not be called a 'religion.'"⁵⁰

Although no changes in religious practice took place, the reduction in overall numbers may have had the effect of concentrating the existing practices within the community. In its loose inclusive stage, the Bahá'í Movement had encompassed a wide range of beliefs and opinions. Its members came from socialist, New Thought, Theosophist, and Christian Science backgrounds, as well as the more traditional Quaker and Anglican. For some of these, Baháism was only an addition to their own more central beliefs. For others, the most committed of Bahá'í activists, Baháism already held a central place. It was this latter group who were more likely to use Bahá'í prayers and writings in preference to other scriptures. It was also these persons who were more likely to remain Bahá'ís in years to come.

When the move towards formalization and exclusivity began, it was those whose major allegiance lay elsewhere who felt excluded. On the other hand, those who could accept the Administrative Order, and all that it involved, were also more likely to accept new religious practices. Thus the decline in Bahá'ís, brought about by the death of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the rise of the Bahá'í Administration, paved the way for a resurgence of Baháism in the 1930s, no longer as a loosely structured movement but as an organized religion. Numbers, in all likelihood, declined to the point where there only remained mainly those who were already observing the limited religious practice of British Bahá'ís of that time.

Thus, with the administration established and functioning effectively, the majority of Bahá'ís in Britain had accepted that they now belonged to a new religion. It is probably also true, however, that their religious practices were still of the limited form practiced during the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. One of

the first tasks of the administration, therefore, was to standardize religious observance and to instruct its followers in the full range of Bahá'í worship.

Establishing the Faith. The first real insight we have into changes in Bahá'í worship comes with the publication of the *Bahá'í Journal*. It became the primary means whereby Bahá'ís were instructed in orthodox Bahá'í beliefs, and the primary publication from which they could learn how Bahá'ís should, and should not, behave.

From its very first issue in September 1936, the *Journal* refers to the "Faith" rather than the "Movement." Clearly the writers of the *Journal*, that is the members of the National Spiritual Assembly, saw themselves as the elected leaders of a religious community. The pages of the *Bahá'í Journal* over the next few years indicate clearly that they thought it their task to inform the rest of the community of this fact. They also attempted, in these pages, to impose a standardized form of worship on the British Bahá'ís. To a certain extent, they tell us when they were successful.

It is clear that one of the first goals that the National Assembly set out to achieve through the *Journal* was to establish the Nineteen-Day Feast as the most important Bahá'í meeting. In the very first issue of the *Journal*, a large amount of space is taken up quoting 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words on the vital importance of these meetings. Thus, the first stage of the campaign was to establish a scriptural basis for the Feast. It was not the Assembly, or the Guardian, who was attempting to elevate the Feast to some new importance. Rather, they were trying to give it the stature that Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá had always intended it should have. Having established scriptural authority for the central importance of the Feast, the next issue of the *Journal* explains how it should now be observed:

The Feast has a threefold function and is conducted in three stages. The first part is devoted to the reading of passages from Bahá'í Sacred Writings and is the "spiritual feast". The second part is the recognised and proper occasion for consultation between the believers and between the community and local Spiritual Assembly. The third part is the material feast and provides an opportunity for a social gathering of the friends in the atmosphere engendered by the spiritual meeting.⁵¹

It is interesting to note that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's description of the Feast mentions only two parts: the devotional and the social. However, with the growth of the Administrative Order, there arose a need for the addition of a third part during which organizational business could be discussed. This threefold pattern of the Feast had been fixed by the Guardian, and was already widely practiced in the United States. However, to some British Bahá'ís it may have seemed a radical innovation. For their benefit, it was important to emphasize both the spiritual benefits obtained by attending the Feasts and the moral imperative to do so:

It is the source from which the spiritual life of the community is regularly renewed. By attending the Nineteen Day Feast the believer integrates himself, not only with the local community, but with the entire world organism of the Most Great Name. . . . All believers are expected to attend regularly, only sickness or absence from the city being good reason for not attending. Bahá'ís are expected to adjust their affairs so that they can attend the Feast.⁵²

This latter point was frequently repeated in the *Journal*. Indeed, the National Assembly considered it to be of such importance that in November 1936, they circularized all the British Bahá'ís "urging the observance of two Bahá'í laws—regular attendance at the nineteen day Feast, and regular subscription to the Fund . . ."⁵³ In fact, attendance at Feasts is not obligatory according to Bahá'í law. But it is easy to see

why the Assembly overstated their case in this matter. They sought to draw together this scattered group of believers and to forge them into a community. The Feast was the ideal, and to them the God-given, occasion on which to do this. By coming together to worship and to mix in a social gathering, this sense of community identity could be encouraged to develop. It was also the ideal time to deepen the believers' knowledge and understanding of the Faith.

The National Spiritual Assembly has requested local Assemblies to arrange for a review of the current number of the *Journal* at each Nineteen-Day Feast.⁵⁴

If attendance at the Feasts could be ensured, and the *Journal* was properly studied during the administrative part of it, then the National Assembly could be sure that their communications were getting through.

Such was the importance attached to Feasts that the *Journal* carried reports of their observance by the communities. The fact that they had become "firmly established" in Manchester by April 1937, is presented as evidence that a new and vigorous spirit was at work in that community.⁵⁵ At the same time, the lack of reports about their observance in London can be taken as an indication that the Bahá'ís of that city were less enthusiastic in their support. Mary Balyuzi recounts that her mother, Kathleen Brown, was in the vanguard of the movement to establish Nineteen-Day Feasts, but that they were introduced only gradually, and "somewhat reluctantly."⁵⁶ The fact that by May 1938, the London Spiritual Assembly could only report that its Feasts were receiving "better attendance than before"⁵⁷ would seem to confirm this.

The people who became Bahá'ís during this period would have no difficulty understanding the need to attend the Feasts. In March 1939, the *Journal* reported that the new believers in both Bradford and Torquay were holding the

Nineteen-Day Feasts regularly, even before their Assemblies had formed.⁵⁸

After the successful establishment of Feasts as the devotional focus of the community, the *Journal* hardly mentions them again. There remained some Bahá'ís who were reluctant to attend Feasts regularly, and the National Assembly seems to have remained rather too anxious to make attendance compulsory. The *Guardian* pointed this out to them in June 1943:

He feels that Bahá'ís who, though still considering themselves believers omit attending the 19-Day Feasts for long periods should not be deprived of their voting rights; they should, however, be encouraged to attend these Feasts as often as possible.⁵⁹

The majority of British Bahá'ís did, however, attend the Feasts and, despite the addition of the administrative section, its primary purpose had become fixed as religious and devotional. By 1940, they had replaced teaching and discussion groups as the most important of all Bahá'í meetings and were in essence a form of community worship.

Prayer was always important to the Bahá'ís. Often it was not specified what form this prayer should take. But by 1936, prayer had begun to play an increasingly prominent role in the Bahá'í community. One example of this new role is the fact that the *Journal* several times calls on the Bahá'ís to pray for the success of a particular venture. For example, in April 1937, help was requested when a small group of believers had been formed in Devonshire:

The prayers of all the friends are asked for blessings and confirmations on the efforts made in this new outpost of the Faith.⁶⁰

Prayer is clearly seen as something positive that a Bahá'í can do to help spread the Faith. Although great emphasis is still placed upon putting the teachings into practice, no longer

is religious observance seen as less important than action. Rather, it is recognized that spiritual exercises are needed to prepare oneself for material activity:

We rise to our fullest capacity only through the power of the Spirit, and now, as never before, do we need its strength and energising influence. Let us resolve to remain continually in the clear light of prayer, individually and as a community. If we do this we know that God will use us to achieve His purpose.⁶¹

As this increased emphasis was being placed upon the power of prayer, there came a greater recognition of the special significance of prayers that were found in the Bahá'í scriptures. The National Assembly offered for sale, through the pages of the *Journal*, a prayer book that had been published in the United States in 1937. They also announced their intention of printing one or two prayers in each edition of the *Journal*, until the new prayer book was published.

In September 1939, the prayer book was finally in print:

The new prayer book is now available. It is printed in two editions one with a blue cover and one with a beige. The former costs a shilling and the latter ninepence. The shilling edition contains obligatory prayers, prayers for the Fast, and the prayer for the dead; these are omitted from the ninepenny edition, with a view to making it more suitable to non-Bahá'ís.⁶²

With the publication of these books, Bahá'ís were able for the first time to have a collection of prayers suitable for all occasions. These books established that there was now a distinctive Bahá'í form of prayer. Just as it was no longer possible to be both a Bahá'í and Christian, there were now prayers that should only be used by Bahá'ís. The use of these prayers reinforced their Bahá'í identity.

As we noted above, although some of the early Bahá'ís may have observed the Bahá'í fast, it is unlikely that its

observance was widespread. This situation does not appear to have changed very much by the mid-1930s. Mary Balyuzi has confirmed as much in her recollections of that period:

During the 1930s my mother observed the fast, as no doubt did some others, but I doubt if it was widely observed.⁶³

The sparsity of references to the Fast in the *Journal* during the period seems to confirm this. One notice that did appear suggests that Bahá'ís knew of the Fast, but they felt it was not appropriate—nor perhaps even possible—for the British believers to observe it.

Not all of us are able to keep the Fast, but we can all unite in making these days a special time of prayer and meditation.⁶⁴

We have seen that the early Bahá'ís had begun to observe at least some of the Bahá'í Holy Days, principally Naw-Rúz and, to a lesser extent, Ridván. This practice appears to have continued, and the *Journal* makes regular mention of these two dates in particular. It is also clear that the other Bahá'í festivals were not widely known and certainly were not widely observed. It was not until the 1940s that the National Assembly made an attempt to change this situation.

An article printed in the *Journal* in April 1943, points out that for Jews and Christians, it is the religious festivals that stand out as milestones in the year. It says that the same situation should be true of Bahá'ís:

Our year, with its milestones, should become indelibly engraved upon our consciousness. . . ⁶⁵

It goes on to list, and explain the significance of the nine most important Bahá'í Holy Days. This was an important step in establishing the Bahá'í Faith as a separate religion that should celebrate its own religious festivals. Although the

article admits that their commemoration was not widespread, it at least began the process of promoting their observance within the community.

There are several other matters that can be mentioned as examples of further developments in the establishment of the Bahá'í religion. In September 1939, the National Spiritual Assembly advised all Bahá'ís who were eligible for military service to register as conscientious objectors. Subsequently, several Bahá'í men were granted exemption from combative service because they were members of the Bahá'í religion.

On April 15, 1940, two Bahá'ís in Bradford were married. Hasan Balyuzi officiated at the Bahá'í wedding. This was the first of several Bahá'í weddings that were to take place during the next few years. In September of the same year, Bahá'ís were urged to carry identification with them wherever they went and "to specify that in the event of death they wish to be buried according to the manner of the Bahá'í Faith."⁶⁶ These events mark an attempt to establish distinctive Bahá'í rites of passage among the British Bahá'ís.

In addition to these developments, the establishment of the Bahá'í Publishing Trust made compilations of Bahá'í Scripture easier to obtain. In addition to advertising these compilations, the *Journal* regularly urged Bahá'ís to read some scripture every day. This practice, together with daily prayer, was to become established as a distinctive Bahá'í form of worship.

All of the above changes in religious practices were urged on the community by the centralized administration of the Bahá'ís. It was only after the authority of the National Assembly had been established that religious observances could be standardized and imposed upon the British Bahá'ís. It was, in effect, the organization that created the religion and turned the Movement into the Faith.

Spreading the Faith. By 1940, the Bahá'í Movement had completed its transformation into a separate and distinct religion. Its administration, theology, and religious practices were to remain largely unchanged from that date forward. However, further changes still needed to be made before it was to become the Bahá'í Faith as it is known today. Those changes were in the area of spreading the religion.

The British Bahá'ís during the era of 'Abdu'l-Bahá do not seem to have made serious attempts to gain converts. That, of course, does not mean that they were not interested in teaching their beliefs. Much of their energy seems to have been given to this task, but the aim does not appear to have been to recruit members to the Bahá'í Movement.

Their first objective was to inform the world of the life and station of Bahá'u'lláh, and of the whereabouts of the living exemplar of his teachings, his son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Secondly, they sought to make known the main principles of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, especially those concerning the unity of religions and races.

Having given their audience these two pieces of information, the Bahá'ís felt that it was then up to the hearer to decide whether to accept or reject them. The early British Bahá'ís were content that their audience might agree with and accept the principles of Bahá'í teaching. They were proclaiming Bahá'u'lláh's message, not seeking proselytes. If they spread the ideas of religious and racial unity, which they believed came from Bahá'u'lláh, then they were helping to spread the Bahá'í Spirit. If some people also recognized Bahá'u'lláh as the source of these ideas, this was an added bonus. But it was not their primary objective.

In the first edition of *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, Esslemont had written that the only way ". . . the real success of the Movement can be gauged is, not by the number of its

professed adherents, but by the way in which its principles are permeating and changing the world."⁶⁷

The first Bahá'ís used a variety of methods to disseminate these principles. They published books and pamphlets which could be sold or given to the public. They wrote articles for publication in newspapers and journals. They held meetings in hired halls to which the public was invited. They also tried to interest their friends and their families in the teachings, often through informal gatherings in their own homes.

It was perhaps through this last method that they were most successful in leading people to accept the faith. Many of the first Bahá'í groups were formed in this way. For example, the Hall and the Craven families, who formed the nucleus of the Manchester Bahá'í community, were related to each other. The Bournemouth group was mainly comprised of the friends, former patients, and colleagues of Dr. Esslemont.

In addition to these direct teaching methods, there is some evidence that the Bahá'ís were also involved in other organizations, such as Esperanto and pacifist groups. That is not to imply that Bahá'ís infiltrated these organizations in an attempt to gain converts. They joined these groups because their own beliefs required them to work actively for world peace. In the course of their activities, they might also lead some of their coworkers to recognize Bahá'u'lláh as a prophet of God, but that was an added bonus, not their primary objective.

However, we cannot be sure how successful this teaching method was. What we can say with some certainty is that during the first twenty years of Bahá'í activity in Britain, very few people were moved to openly recognize the claims of Bahá'u'lláh. Although no precise figure is available, it was probably less than a hundred. There was perhaps a larger number, equally hard to assess, who found the Bahá'í teachings interesting and attractive, and whose thinking may have

been influenced by them, but who stopped short of accepting the divine station of the Bahá'í prophet. During this early period, people in both of these groups might have been referred to as Bahá'ís.

As shown earlier, the ten to fifteen years following the death of 'Abdu'l-Bahá were ones of reduced activity for the British Bahá'ís. This was also a time during which Bahá'í identity became more carefully defined. However, teaching activities continued. The communities in London and Manchester held regular public meetings. Books by Esslemont, Florence Pinchon, and Elizabeth Herrick were published. A presentation of the Bahá'í Cause was given at the 1924 "Conference of Living Religions within the Empire" that was held in London.

Despite this activity, the tone of Bahá'í teaching during this period is one of general quiescence. Energy and direction seem to be missing from their efforts. Indeed, a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi summed up their activities as "happy tea parties at individual homes."⁶⁸

We can say, therefore, that during this period of transition of authority to the Guardian and establishment of the Administrative Order, very little was achieved in the area of growth. Few new people seem to have declared themselves Bahá'ís, in the sense of recognizing the station of Bahá'u'lláh, and many who had considered themselves Bahá'ís ceased to do so.

This situation appears to have remained unchanged until the mid-1930s. Once the administrative organization was established, and the inclusive movement had transformed into an exclusive religion, then far more organized efforts were made to draw new members into the faith. The changes in teaching methods that the organization introduced, and the effect they had on the community, can be divided into three distinct stages.

1936-1940. During this period we can trace the emergence of modern Bahá'í attitudes and methods of teaching. It was during this period that it became accepted that the greatest service one could perform for mankind was to lead people into accepting the religion of Bahá'u'lláh.

There is undoubtedly no higher call than that of bringing the Message to a world tormented and torn on every side by the forces of destructive materialism.⁶⁹

This message from the Guardian to the British National Assembly was quoted in the *Journal*, and became a common theme of this period. Indeed, the National Assembly went so far as to declare that "teaching is our most important obligation."⁷⁰ Much of their attention over the next few years was taken up, not only with developing methods of teaching, but also with finding ways of getting more of the Bahá'ís involved in the process of teaching.

The innovations introduced by the National Assembly to unite and educate the community were also used to promote the teaching effort. The *Journal* was used to urge the friends to new efforts and advise them of new methods. Bahá'í Summer School and the annual teaching conference were also used to develop teaching strategies and campaigns.

It was at the first teaching conference in December 1937, that an important change in activity was suggested to the National Spiritual Assembly:

To establish three rallying points during the year for all the believers; Convention in Spring; Summer School in Summer, and a midwinter Teaching Conference.⁷¹

These three events were to become the highpoints of the Bahá'í year, with the National Convention in London, the Teaching Conference in Manchester, and Summer School in

the Midlands whenever possible. These gatherings provided the opportunity for discussion, decision-making, and planning. But they also provided "spiritual reinforcement," through a sense of being involved, that could never otherwise have been given to isolated Bahá'ís or those from small local communities. It was the Bahá'ís who attended one or all of these events who would be most likely to become actively involved in the teaching campaigns.

A feature of the newly established administration was an increasingly centralized control of teaching. One way this control was achieved was through the Bahá'í Fund. It was the promotion of teaching campaigns that took the largest part of the Fund's resources and since the National Assembly controlled this national fund, it controlled most of the teaching. Through administration of the Fund, the National Assembly could promote teaching work in localities as far apart as Bradford and Devon, and even in areas where no Bahá'í yet resided. Increasingly, it was emphasized that teaching relied upon a steady income to the Fund, and that this was one way in which every Bahá'í could help with this work:

The response to our appeal for funds to carry on the work until the end of April, has been most disappointing. The amount required is £30, and without this the N.S.A. will have to curtail its programme of teaching. Let every believer ask himself this question: *Do I want the Faith to progress in England?*

If the answer is "yes," it means you will make sacrifices. . . . Our support of the Fund is the gauge of the measure of our Faith.⁷²

This emphasis on teaching the Faith reached a peak at the National Convention of April 1938. It was at this convention, in its annual report, that the National Spiritual Assembly put forward what must have seemed to some a remarkable suggestion:

The N.S.A. recommends for consideration the suggestion that the Faith in England should, for one year, regard itself, and attempt to function as, a teaching organism. Let all our efforts and energies be directed to this supreme aim. The work of individuals, spiritual assemblies, and the national assembly can be co-ordinated through the methods and institutions of the administration.⁷³

The delegates at the convention accepted the suggestion, and the Guardian's support of it was whole-hearted. The primary purpose of the Faith was no longer to be regarded as the unification of religions, the reconciliation of races, or even as offering help to the poor and needy. For that year, the purpose of the Faith—the very reason for its existence—was to bring more people into the Bahá'í community. The Bahá'ís were to become an evangelical organization, actively and openly seeking proselytes.

Equally significant is the fact that, at the end of that year, no one suggested that the Faith should now cease to function as a "teaching organism." From that time forward, the Bahá'í Faith in Britain was to remain an organization whose main activity and purpose was to increase the number of its adherents.

This decision resulted in the first attempt at a planned and coordinated teaching campaign. The new National Assembly met in London in May 1938, and decided to concentrate its efforts in Bradford and Torquay, with the object of establishing Spiritual Assemblies in those localities as soon as possible. Of the £250 that the Assembly believed they would need during the coming year, £100 was set aside for the teaching work. At the end of the year, the Assembly was able to celebrate the success of its campaign:

We are happy to report that owing to the persistent efforts of the resident believers, to the work of visiting teachers, to the sacrifices of all who have given to the Fund, and the unfailing assistance of the Holy Spirit, Spiritual Assemblies were elected in both places on April 21st.⁷⁴

Undoubtedly the success was also due to the careful planning of the National Assembly that preceded and accompanied the teaching work. It was a lesson that would be noted by the Bahá'ís when later plans were drawn up.

During the period of 1936-40, teaching achieved a new priority and was centrally planned, controlled, and funded. These changes helped to achieve the establishment of the two new local Spiritual Assemblies. But this success was also due to the introduction of new teaching strategies that began to emerge at the very beginning of this period. The Annual Report for the year April 1936 to April 1937 reported these new developments:

In the work of the Spiritual Assemblies there is apparent at this end of the year, a different and more impressive method than could be seen at the beginning. In both London and Manchester the old type of teaching in wide generalisations has been succeeded by intensive and vital discussion groups.⁷⁵

A year later all believers were being urged by the National Spiritual Assembly to adopt this new informal approach:

The Spiritual Assemblies are urged to arrange more meetings to which the believers can ask their friends. These should be informal, part of the time being given to teaching and part to social enjoyment. The isolated believers especially can undertake this sort of activity.⁷⁶

This style became the normal Bahá'í teaching approach used in Britain. Public lectures and meetings were still used, but only to make contact with interested persons or "seekers." Once this contact had been made, those interested would then be invited to informal discussions, known as "firesides," usually in one of the homes of the Bahá'ís. Here their questions could be answered and the teaching focused more appropriately to their individual needs and interests. Moreover, the

feeling of being part of a warm and friendly community could be given.

Another development was the establishment of a Library Committee in 1937, "to be in charge of placing Bahá'í books and literature in libraries."⁷⁷ This was a task that had been undertaken by individuals before, but it too was now to be organized on a national level.

In November 1938, a monthly newspaper called *The New World Order* was issued whose sole aim was to contact people who might subsequently be drawn into the Faith:

The paper is chiefly a means of contact and publicity, and the first number will be sent free to five thousand people. It will contain an editorial, short articles, quotations from the Bahá'í Writings, excerpts from current speeches and other material which will help to create a body of opinion in favour of the universal principles of Bahá'u'lláh. It is intended to follow up the contacts which will be established by those people who respond to the first number.⁷⁸

In fact the paper was never very successful and the *Journal* regularly carried appeals to the Bahá'ís to take out more subscriptions to it. During the next dozen years, its format was often changed and its frequency of publication altered. Despite all of this, it never became financially self-sustaining, and it was of only limited help in the teaching work. For these reasons its publication was suspended. It reflected, however, a new maturity in the Bahá'í approach, a more sophisticated attempt to reach a new and wider audience.

The publication of *New World Order* and the establishment, during 1937, of the Bahá'í Publishing Company mark a more businesslike attitude of the Bahá'ís in their dealings with the outside world. Here is further evidence of the increasingly centralized structure of the Faith. These businesses established by the National Assembly were to be an important aid in teaching. By 1939, the publishing company had

been established as the Bahá'í Publishing Trust and was the chief subsidiary of the National Spiritual Assembly, which had become legally incorporated as an unlimited company. The Trust distributed all Bahá'í literature and also published whatever the National Assembly required. So important was its function that the Assembly regarded the Trust as ". . . its right hand in teaching."⁷⁹

All these new developments in teaching, however, although regarded as successful, did not result in a dramatic influx of converts. The Annual Reports to the National Convention each April show a very slow increase in numbers. Nine new believers in 1937, seven in 1938, and probably about ten in 1939. During this same period, several of the older Bahá'ís died, diminishing the overall increase in numbers. The small number of converts did, nonetheless, have a large effect on the Bahá'í Administration. The increase in overall numbers of approximately ten percent at the end of 1938-39, allowed for a one hundred percent increase in the number of Local Assemblies. This was because some of those new Bahá'ís lived in areas where their presence raised the number of local believers to, or above, the nine required to form a local Assembly. And so they raised the number of Assemblies in Britain from two to four.

Thus, when we come to the end of the period 1936-40, despite only a slight increase in numbers, we can sense a feeling of both triumph and expectation within the British community. Their new teaching methods, centralized administration and planning, and relative teaching success gave the Bahá'ís the confidence to launch an ambitious teaching plan, despite the rigors and restrictions of war.

1940 to 1944. Other Bahá'í communities around the world had already organized teaching plans by this time. For example, the Bahá'ís in the United States had adopted a Seven-

Year Plan in 1937. The British community, in effect, had set themselves a one-year plan in 1938-39, when they aimed to establish Assemblies in Torquay and Bradford by the end of the year. It was the successful completion of this plan that inspired them to set themselves a more difficult task.

The Teaching Conference held in January 1939, made the following recommendation to the National Assembly:

That a five year plan should be adopted, with the aim of having at least one believer in every county of England by the end of 1944.⁶⁰

The Assembly seems to have ignored this suggestion, perhaps judging it to be a little too ambitious, but the following year they did accept a recommendation put at the National Convention:

That the whole Bahá'í community should engage in a four year plan of Teaching, with the object of having nineteen local Spiritual Assemblies established by Rizwan 1944.⁶¹

Ultimately, this plan was also to prove too ambitious. To expect to achieve growth of nearly five hundred percent in only four years would have been optimistic at any time, but to expect such growth during wartime was unrealistic. At the completion of the four years, there were only five local Assemblies in Britain, fourteen short of the target. But this was not regarded or reported as a failure, since the plan had effectively been abandoned in 1942. Although the four-year plan was rarely mentioned after that date, the period of the plan did produce some significant and lasting changes in the Bahá'í community.

The first of these changes was administrative. At the very outset of the plan the National Spiritual Assembly appointed a separate teaching committee with well defined guidelines. Originally, all its members were based in London, so that they could consult freely. This was later changed so that the

committee was comprised of Bahá'ís from all over the country. Although the plan was a failure, the idea of a National Teaching Committee was not. Such a committee has continued to exist down to the present day and has played a role in the community second in importance only to the National Spiritual Assembly itself.

Another important innovation was the employment of David Hofman as full-time editor of *New World Order* and manager of the Bahá'í Publishing Trust. These were posts which he had filled for some time in a voluntary capacity, in addition to being secretary of the National Assembly. The Assembly now paid him a salary so that he could devote himself to full-time Bahá'í work, though they seem to have adopted an unusual attitude to this appointment. On the front page of the *Journal* they announced:

It should be emphasised that Mr. Hofman is not employed as a teacher, nor as secretary of the N.S.A., but in the capacities mentioned.⁸²

However, later on the very same page they go on to mention an important side-effect of the appointment:

Mr. Hofman will be able to spend far more time in teaching, and will be at the full service of the N.S.A.⁸³

From the reports of his activities over the next few months, it is apparent that a large part of his time was spent in traveling the country, giving talks, and becoming involved in other teaching activities. In effect, despite the National Assembly's protestations to the contrary, he was employed as a full-time teacher. This was an extension of the established practice of merely paying the expenses of teachers. Although his appointment lasted only until his military call-up in 1942, it did set an important precedent.

Another minor innovation was the introduction of advertisements in the press. These first appeared during 1942, and were placed in seemingly obscure papers:

. . . advertisements have been placed in the following: "The British Esperantist," in connection with which fourteen enquiries have been received already, "Opus," which circulates mainly amongst young people, "Stand-By," the paper of the North Regional Fire Service, and "One and All," the magazine of the National Adult School Union.⁸⁴

The Annual Report for 1942-43 claimed that these advertisements along with others placed subsequently, had stimulated a significant response:

So far between seventy and eighty enquiries have been received In addition to this London alone has had fifty fresh people at public meetings since Christmas, mainly on account of advertising.⁸⁵

Again, because of its success, this was an innovation in teaching methods that survived after the demise of the four-year plan.

Perhaps the most important of the changes that were introduced during the years 1940-44, came about with the abandonment of the Four-Year Plan. The Teaching Conference held in January 1942, when failure already seemed inevitable, arrived at some important conclusions about the nature of teaching:

The outcome of the conference was to stress the two sides of teaching: the making-known of the Cause, however slightly, to more and more of the people of the British Isles, and the gradual introduction of the more spiritually receptive individuals to a full understanding of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.⁸⁶

This could be seen as little more than putting a brave face on

failure. Success in teaching was not to be judged by the number of converts alone, but also by the number of people who had learned of the Faith, even if they then rejected it. In this way, the failure of the Four-Year Plan to increase the number of Assemblies, could be transformed into the "success" of having the Faith better known to the general public.

However, it could be argued that the British Bahá'ís were facing up to the fact that only a small proportion of the public was ready to accept their new religion. If they desired large numbers of converts, then they had to accept that much larger numbers of people had first to become acquainted with the Faith. For every hundred people that heard of the Faith, perhaps only one or two would be "spiritually receptive" enough to go on to accept it. This being the case, publicity became an end in itself and could be classed by the Bahá'ís as teaching.

Later in 1942, this position was to become an official one, when the National Assembly accepted a recommendation from convention:

To modify the Four-Year Plan to the extent of combining a publicity campaign with intensive teaching in places where there are existing groups and centres, and that special efforts be made in three places: Bournemouth, Nottingham and Blackburn, the publicity to be followed by visits from a teacher.⁸⁷

Thus the plan of taking the Faith into new areas was officially abandoned (except for three specified towns), and for the first time publicity came to be regarded as a teaching activity in itself. Later, Bahá'ís would term this form of publicity-seeking "proclamation."

The Four-Year Plan had been a failure, but from the attempt the Bahá'ís of Britain had introduced changes that became permanent features of the community. They had established an efficiently functioning National Teaching Committee that would plan and coordinate all future teaching



National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, Illinois.

CENTENARY EXHIBITION
at Bradford, Yorkshire, showing a shop window on one of the
main streets.

activities. The use of paid officials as an aid to teaching was introduced. Publicity as an aid to teaching was firmly established. Through the activities of the Publicity Committee, established in 1942, experience was gained not only in advertising but also in successfully getting reports of Bahá'í activities into the newspapers.

All of this was to be of great importance in the next few years. In 1944, the National Spiritual Assembly adopted a new teaching plan that was to see the Bahá'í Faith at last firmly established in the British Isles.

1944 to 1950. The six years from 1944 to 1950 may arguably be the most important in the history of the British Bahá'í community. At the Annual Convention held in May 1944, the delegates decided to adopt a new plan, this time to last six years. They cabled their decision to the Guardian in Haifa, asking him to set the goals, and he sent the following telex in response:

WELCOME SPONTANEOUS DECISION ADVISE FORMATION
NINETEEN SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES SPREAD OVER EN-
GLAND WALES SCOTLAND NORTHERN IRELAND AND EIRE
PRAYING SIGNAL VICTORY.⁸⁸

This was almost precisely the same goal that the community had set themselves in 1940, and had abandoned as being too difficult two years later—except for the added requirement that the new Assemblies be spread throughout the British Isles.

The announcement of the plan followed successful centenary celebrations of the founding of the Faith. The British community had published a history of the Faith in England, mounted exhibitions up and down the country, and obtained a good deal of publicity. This limited success gave them the confidence to embark upon this new plan, although they were

still suffering from the same wartime restrictions and depletion of numbers (due to conscription) that had led them to abandon their previous plan.

At the beginning of the plan, there were less than one hundred fifty adult Bahá'ís in Britain and only five local Spiritual Assemblies. By the end of the plan, in April 1950, there were three hundred forty adult Bahá'ís and twenty-four local Spiritual Assemblies. All the goals of the Six-Year Plan had been achieved.

The completion of the Six-Year Plan saw the Bahá'í Faith at last firmly established in the British Isles. Up to this point, the existence of the Faith in Britain had always been precarious and, as has been shown, had almost ended around 1930. From 1950 onwards, the Bahá'í presence in Britain was assured. From this base of twenty-four Assemblies, the community continued to grow. Indeed, it was soon able to send pioneers (missionaries) abroad to found and support other communities.

How was this success achieved? One important factor was that the Bahá'ís were now reaping the benefit of the changes the community had undergone and of the experience they had gained in previous years. Teaching, or the seeking of converts, was now seen as the priority of the community, and the Bahá'í Faith continued, in effect, to function as a teaching organism. The Summer School program was able to function normally after the war. From 1946 onwards, it became the highlight of the year, with approximately half of the Bahá'í community of the British Isles attending. This event, together with the Teaching Conference and Annual Convention, helped to establish a feeling of community which facilitated national planning and action on teaching.

The National Teaching Committee continued to function and played a vital role in the success of the plan. The now well-established local Spiritual Assemblies organized local ac-

tivities and raised funds for the National Spiritual Assembly. The *Bahá'í Journal* continued its role of informing the believers of national decisions, as well as of exhorting the community to ever greater participation in the teaching program.

Most of these developments had been initiated in the 1930s, but their successful operation had been interrupted by the Second World War. Seen in this light, the growth of the Faith in the late 1940s was not a new development, but simply the resumption of a process that had begun before the war. However, several important changes were introduced during the Six-Year Plan.

One new feature was the energy that was injected into the community by new believers. It is a common feature of all religions that new converts can be more zealous than long-term adherents. This was true of the Bahá'ís. Those who became Bahá'ís during the plan were often more committed and active than those who had been Bahá'ís for far longer. This can be shown by an analysis that was made of those Bahá'ís who attended the Teaching Conference in January 1949:

It is of interest to note here that of the 76 Bahá'ís who had attended during the Conference, 38 (or 50 per cent) had become Bahá'ís during the Plan, and only 18 (or 23.5 per cent) since the last Teaching Conference. Only 40 per cent of the believers attending were Bahá'ís in Britain before the Plan started.⁸⁹

The enthusiasm and commitment brought to the community by new converts helped revitalize its teaching efforts and increase their success rate. All the new believers were aware of the plan, and they saw it as a natural part of their faith. Indeed, many may have declared because of the plan.

In the last month of the Six-Year Plan, when failure seemed inevitable, twenty-two people made their declarations of faith. Undoubtedly, many of these would have been people who had been studying the Bahá'í Faith for some time, but who were

moved to make their declarations in the knowledge that their declarations would aid the plan.

Another change in the community was the success of the technique of "pioneering." It was Bahá'ís moving out from the larger established communities, particularly London and Manchester, that brought Bahá'í activity to the goal towns. Once there, the pioneers set about publicizing the Faith, organizing public meetings, and setting up study classes with any contacts they made. The hope was, of course, that these people would eventually become converts.

Some of the pioneers, having established the required nine believers in one place, would then move on to another town to begin the process again. Thus, some Bahá'ís moved two or three times during the Six-Year Plan. Any town that had numbers over the required nine was automatically a target of the National Teaching Committee, to encourage some of their number to become pioneers. What was new for the British community was the response that the committee received to their requests. Throughout the Four-Year Plan the National Spiritual Assembly had called for pioneers, but not one person had answered the call. During the Six-Year Plan many of the believers did move their residence.

In fact, it was estimated that during the first four years of the plan twelve and one-half percent (or one in eight) of the British Bahá'ís were pioneers.⁹⁰ The fact that so many were willing to move, often leaving jobs and families behind, is further evidence of the new spirit that was affecting the community.

Another development was a changed view towards the Guardian of the Faith. Shoghi Effendi at first based his authority on the instructions left in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The establishment of the Administrative Order had reinforced his position. Even with this support, the British National Assembly had felt able to ignore an instruction of his in 1929.

However, during the Six-Year Plan we can observe a change in the way the Bahá'ís refer to the Guardian. He seems, as it were, to acquire charisma. In 1947, the Bahá'ís of the world commemorated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Guardianship, and the *Bahá'í Journal* published an article about the Guardian by Marion Hofman. In this article, she states that for the last twenty-five years, most Bahá'ís have been blind to the "brilliance and power" of Shoghi Effendi. She goes on to describe him in words that would previously have been used only with reference to 'Abdu'l-Bahá or Bahá'u'lláh:

. . . the depth and wonder of his nature, the sharpness and poignancy of his feelings, the weight of his inconceivable burden, his sufferings, his sacrifice, the fullness and magnitude of his dedication.⁹¹

From this point onwards more space in the *Journal* was devoted to printing letters and cables from the Guardian in full. Failure to achieve goals was increasingly described in terms of the community failing the Guardian. There were few believers left alive who could remember 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Gradually, Shoghi Effendi became the focus for the love and adoration of the Bahá'ís, in the same way that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had done for an earlier generation.

This new respect for Shoghi Effendi is one of the factors that animated the community during the years of the plan. It paved the way for many later Bahá'ís, who now regard him with awe and veneration, habitually referring to him as "the beloved Guardian." Some of the Bahá'ís who arose as pioneers undoubtedly did so out of that love for Shoghi Effendi.

The last change that affected the development of the Bahá'í Faith in Britain is perhaps the most significant. During the 1930s, the major achievement of the National Assembly was to unite the scattered Bahá'ís into one national community.

During the years of the Six-Year Plan the British Bahá'ís finally became part of a world faith.

This event has to be seen as part of a worldwide process. Now that National Assemblies were established in several countries, the Guardian was encouraging closer links between them and assigning them the task of taking the religion to new territories. His aim was the establishment of a world community of Bahá'ís.

This new awareness of being part of a world community allowed the British Bahá'ís to see the goals of their national plan as also being part of a much greater plan:

Is it too much to suppose that through this task, our labours will also affect the speed and the adequacy with which the Most Great Peace, the Kingdom of God upon earth, is established.⁹²

This feeling, that the establishment of local Spiritual Assemblies was not just some bureaucratic whim, but part of the unfolding plan of God for bringing peace to the world, helps to explain why so many British Bahá'ís were willing to devote their lives to achieving the goals of the Six-Year Plan. Pioneering and teaching were expressions of their religious belief and commitment.

In addition to these psychological and theological changes, the emergence of the global community of Bahá'ís was also to have important practical implications for Britain. The first of these was an increase in funds. The Guardian made regular gifts of money to the British Bahá'í Fund. This money had been donated by the larger, more established communities, principally by the Bahá'ís in Iran. Without this money, the programs of teaching and pioneering carried out in Britain would not have been possible.

One of the primary benefits of being part of the global community of Bahá'ís, therefore, was that it enabled the British community to take on far more ambitious teaching pro-

grams than would ever have been possible otherwise. While the British community remained so small, the only way it could function effectively as a teaching organism was by accepting funds from Bahá'ís elsewhere in the world.

Another practical benefit of being part of this developing worldwide community was the influence of Bahá'ís abroad. With the end of the war, Bahá'ís from overseas could again visit. Some of these Bahá'ís were students who remained for several years. Others were more or less permanent settlers. In either case, they were registered as part of the British community and helped to increase its growth. For example, the list of thirty-six adult additions to the community given in June 1950, shows that three came from Iran, two from Canada, and one each from Australia, Denmark, and Holland.⁹³ Many of these settlers were willing to move to the goal towns and, therefore, also qualified as pioneers.

Another major benefit from foreign Bahá'ís was in the form of "travel teaching." There were many Bahá'ís from abroad who were gifted and experienced teachers. Marion Hofman, the wife of David Hofman, came from America where she had served on the National Teaching Committee. She soon became an active teacher, traveled throughout the country, and was appointed to the British National Teaching Committee. There were also Bahá'ís who visited Britain for short periods simply to help with the teaching work. Often these visits were effective:

It has been reported that the Canadian National Assembly sent John Robarts, its Chairman, at its own expense on a fortnight's tour of the British Isles. (He gave up most of his annual holiday to this trip.) John Robarts was instrumental in bringing about the final confirmation of about three-quarters of the 22 people who, after full study of the Faith over a period, made their declaration of Faith in the last month of the Plan.⁹⁴

Becoming part of a world faith had a major influence on the success of the Six-Year Plan. It brought practical benefits in terms of money and foreign teachers. The immigration of overseas Bahá'ís helped to increase and invigorate the community. Perhaps most importantly, it helped British Bahá'ís to believe that their ideals of world peace and world unity could be achieved, inspiring them to greater efforts to bring them about.

Conclusion. In the early years of the Bahá'í Movement, activities had been carried out on a very informal basis. The main aim of the early Bahá'ís had been "diffusing the fragrances," by which they meant informing the world of the life and teachings of their founders. Although they were pleased if people chose to declare themselves to be Bahá'ís, this was not their primary aim. Many of them continued to practice their previous religions.

The establishment of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, while it did lead to more formalized activities, did not result in an increased number of Bahá'ís. By more narrowly defining what it meant to be a Bahá'í, it may have even resulted in an initial drop in numbers. As the Bahá'ís from the era of 'Abdu'l-Bahá grew older and died, there were few young recruits to replace them.

The 1930s saw the emergence of an effective administrative structure and the transformation of the movement into a religion. This change was accomplished largely through the addition to the community of Bahá'ís from abroad. With this change came the elevation of teaching to the foremost activity of the community. Deliberate and carefully planned attempts were made to bring new converts to the Faith. Some progress had been made when the Second World War intervened.

The period from the end of that war until 1950, saw the largest growth in the Faith. By the end of this period, Bahá'ís

could be found throughout the British Isles and their numbers and organization were such that the future of the Faith on these islands was assured. Teaching was now the primary aim and purpose of Bahá'í activities. From a time when it had been considered impossible for Bahá'ís to proselytize, the community had evolved to the point where it seemed equally impossible for them not to. They were now part of a world-wide religion whose aim was to draw more and more people into it, thus uniting the world and establishing the Most Great Peace, God's Kingdom upon earth.

From this point on, the form and practice of the Bahá'í Faith in Britain was fixed. Its evolution from movement to religion was complete. The Bahá'ís of the 1950s held beliefs, lived their lives, and practiced their religion in ways that would be completely familiar to Bahá'ís of today. The Bahá'í Movement had become the Bahá'í Faith.

NOTES

1. Phillip Smith, "What Was a Bahá'í? Concerns of British Bahá'ís, 1900-1920" in *Studies in Honor of the Late Hasan M. Balyuzi: Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, vol. 5 (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1989) pp. 219-251. I have avoided any attempt to define the word religion in this paper. The definitions that I use here are those given by the Bahá'ís themselves, at various times. As shall be seen, the early British Bahá'ís described themselves as being members of a movement, and often insisted that they did not belong to a religion. At a later date, they were equally insistent that they were members of a religion, not a movement. The purpose of this paper is to seek to establish why and how they made this change.

2. The term Baháism is used here to cover both the period of the Bahá'í Movement (in Britain from 1900 to approximately 1930) and that of the Bahá'í Faith (from approximately 1930 onwards).

3. Written by Arthur Cuthbert, these agendas were circulated in advance of the meetings. Agendas dated 28/2/14, 25/4/14, and 30/5/14. Lotfullah Hakim papers. Bahá'í World Centre Archives. Haifa, Israel.

4. Mrs. Thornburgh-Cropper, Miss Rosenberg, Miss Gamble, Mrs. George, Miss Herrick, and Eric Hammond.

5. Mrs. Maude Holbach met 'Abdu'l-Bahá in both New York and Paris, was acquainted with Lady Blomfield in London from about 1912, and visited 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Haifa during 1914. She wrote an article about the Bahá'í Movement in the magazine *The Nineteenth Century* (February 1915).

6. John E. Esslemont to Lotfullah Hakim, December 1, 1915. Lotfullah Hakim papers. Bahá'í World Centre Archives.

7. *Ibid.*, December 12, 1915.

8. *Ibid.*, June 20, 1917.

9. *Ibid.*, December 10, 1920.

10. *Ibid.*, October 16, 1921.

11. Vernon Elvin Johnson, "An Historical Analysis of Critical Transformations in the Evolution of the Baha'i World Faith," Ph.D. dissertation (Baylor University, 1974) p. 276.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 279.

13. See *Bahá'í News*, vol. 1 (1910) no. 1, p. 5; *ibid.*, no. 8, p. 5; *ibid.*, no. 19, p. 10; *Star of the West*, vol. 2 (1911) no. 3, p. 7; and Sydney Sprague, *A Year With the Bahá'ís in India and Burma* (London: The Priory Press, 1908 [Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1986]) p. 52 and *passim*, for references to Christian, Muslim, Zoroastrian, and Sikh Bahá'ís.

See Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1944) p. 311; Myron Phelps, *Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1903) p. 101 [*The Master in 'Akká* (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1985) p. 132]; and Rúhiyyih Rabbani, *The Priceless Pearl* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1969) p. 55, for references to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Muslim observances.

14. *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community: Messages from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'ís of the British Isles* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981) p. 5.

15. Esslemont to Hakim, May 30, 1922.

16. *Ibid.*, June 18, 1922. Note that this information conflicts with that given on p. 9 of *Unfolding Destiny*, which states that "Dr. Esslemont and E. T. Hall were 'chosen' to represent Bournemouth and Manchester respectively and they met with seven others representing 'The London Groups' to form the first 'All-England Bahá'í

Council' which met at the London home of Mrs. Thornburgh-Cropper 6 June, 1922."

17. *Unfolding Destiny*, p. 63.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

19. *Ibid.*

20. This information was supplied to me by Mrs. Balyuzi while recalling her childhood as a Bahá'í in Britain in the 1920s. She was the daughter of Kathleen Brown (later Lady Hornell), a leading Bahá'í of that period. (Letter to the author, December 19, 1984.)

21. *Unfolding Destiny*, p. 11.

22. Esslemont to Hakim, May 30, 1922.

23. *Unfolding Destiny*, p. 47.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

25. Ruth White, *The Baha'i Religion and its Enemy the Baha'i Organization* (Vermont: The Tuttle Co., 1929) p. 98.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

27. *Unfolding Destiny*, p. 74.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

29. At Walmer House, Regent Street, London.

30. See *Unfolding Destiny*, pp. 86-87.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

32. John Richard, *The Religion of the Bahá'ís* (London: S.P.C.K., 1932) p. 227.

33. *Unfolding Destiny*, p. 112.

34. "In 1933 an informal Summer School was held at Shoreham, Sussex in a bungalow lent to us, and attended by six to ten young Baha'is with my mother as chaperone and housekeeper." (From a letter to the author from Mary Balyuzi, October 13, 1984.)

35. *Bahá'í Journal*, (1937) no. 4, p. 5.

36. *Ibid.*, (1939) no. 18, p. 10.

37. *Ibid.*, (1940) no. 23, p. 6.

38. *Ibid.*, (1941) no. 29, p. 3.

39. *Ibid.* "It is not permanent, but must be maintained as long as necessary."

40. See Smith, "What Was a Bahá'í?" *Studies*, vol. 5, pp. 240-46.

41. Harrold Johnson, "Baháism: The Birth of a World Religion," *Contemporary Review*, vol. 101 (1912) p. 400.

42. J. E. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1923 [Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1950]) pp. 90-91.

43. Neale S. Alter, "Studies in Bahaism," Ph.D. dissertation (Edinburgh University, 1924) p. 61.
44. Esslemont to Hakim, August 4, 1915.
45. Ibid., August 20, 1916.
46. Ibid., August 14, 1917.
47. O. Z. Whitehead, *Some Bahá'ís to Remember* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1983) p. 54.
48. Esslemont to Hakim, July 4, 1919.
49. Ibid., January 3, 1921.
50. J. R. Richards, *The Religion of the Bahá'ís*, p. 137.
51. *Bahá'í Journal*, vol. 1 (1936) no. 2, p. 4.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid., (1937) no. 7, p. 2.
54. Ibid., (1937) no. 4, p. 3.
55. Ibid., (1937) no. 7, p. 5.
56. Mary Balyuzi to the author, December 12, 1984.
57. *Bahá'í Journal*, no. 13, (1938), p. 4.
58. Ibid., (1939) no. 17, p. 3.
59. Ibid., (1943) no. 42, p. 1.
60. Ibid., (1937) no. 6, p. 5.
61. Ibid., (1939) no. 16, p. 1.
62. Ibid., (1939) no. 19, p. 6.
63. Mary Balyuzi to the author, December 2, 1984.
64. *Bahá'í Journal*, (1939) no. 17, p. 1.
65. Ibid., (1943) no. 39, p. 4.
66. Ibid., (1940) no. 25, p. 2.
67. Esslemont, *New Era*, , p. 216.
68. *Unfolding Destiny*, p. 87.
69. *Bahá'í Journal*, (February 1938) no. 11, p. 1.
70. Ibid., (January 1938) no. 10, p. 2.
71. Ibid., (January 1938) no. 10, p. 1.
72. Ibid., (April 1938) no. 12, p. 1.
73. Ibid., (May 1938) no. 13, p. 5.
74. Ibid., (May 1939) no. 18, p. 2.
75. Ibid., (June 1937) no. 7, p. 5.
76. Ibid., (January 1938) no. 10, p. 3.
77. Ibid., (April 1937) no. 6, p. 4.
78. Ibid., (November 1938) no. 15, p. 3.
79. Ibid., (May 1939) no. 18, p. 4.
80. Ibid., (January 1939) no. 16, p. 3.

81. Ibid., (June 1940) no. 23, p. 1.
82. Ibid., (July 1940) no. 24, p. 1.
83. Ibid.
84. Ibid., (June 1942) no. 34, p. 6.
85. Ibid., (June 1943) no. 40, p. 4.
86. Ibid., (February 1942) no. 32, p. 1.
87. Ibid., (June 1942) no. 34, p. 2.
88. *Unfolding Destiny*, p. 169.
89. *Bahá'í Journal*, (March 1949) no. 71, p. 6.
90. Ibid., (February 1948), no. 65, p. 6.
91. Ibid., (March 1947) no. 60, p. 10.
92. Ibid., (November 1948) no. 69, p. 2.
93. Ibid., (June 1950) no. 79, p. 8.
94. Ibid., p. 5.