

... description: 1920, Parmalees, Sylvia Paine
author: Sylvia Paine
title: My Pilgrimage to meet ‘Abdu’l-Baha notes: ...

My Pilgrimage to meet ‘Abdu’l-Baha

Sylvia Paine

1920, Parmalees, Sylvia Paine

My Pilgrimage to meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Sylvia Paine

1920

It is a joy and privilege for me to share with you some of my memories of the pilgrimage to Haifa in Sept. 1-8, 1920 when I had the great privilege of meeting the Master, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

I went with my mother, Mabel Paine and two other believers, Genevieve Coy and Cora Gray. We had a long and somewhat difficult journey – leaving Urbana, Il., in early July 1920 and arriving at Haifa Sept. 1. Of course, we travelled by train and boat going from New York to Naples, Italy, where we waited about two weeks to go to Brendisi, Italy, where we boarded a ship in the Adriatic Sea bound for Haifa. There were a few delays in the sailing, because of strikes. To enter Palestine, we needed visas, issued in Cairo, Egypt, which took several more unscheduled days.

Then by train from Cairo to Haifa. It was a trip taking all day, as the train could not run at night there – we boarded in the evening, slept on the train which started at daylight – arriving in Haifa in late afternoon.

In Alexandria, Egypt and later in Cairo we had the joy of meeting with many of the Bahá’ís – mostly from Persia and Egypt. They took us to the train, looked with baskets of fruit and flowers for the Master, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

The next day, after arriving in Haifa, we went up Mt. Carmel to the Shrine of the Báb where there was a gathering of believers (men only) and the Master spoke. We sat outdoor, in front of the Shrine, looking North to ‘Akká and beyond Lebanon.

He greeted us joyfully, inquiring for the friends in America – mentioning several – Genabis Faḍil, Abu’l-Faḍl, Roy Wilhelm. He spoke of the rain falling on both barren and fertile land, only the fertile land responding. So it is He said, with His words – some people hear them but forget, some do not even hear them but some people are ready, and so it is with His words; some fall on hearts that do

not have capacity – they do not take effect, others seem to understand but they forget my words and do not live in accordance with them while others have great capacity. They hear my words, they understand, they live accordingly although Christ's brothers were so near Him, they did not understand. But the soil of Peter's heart was fertile, He understand Christ.

At the close of the meeting 'Abdu'l-Bahá greeted us individually. I was excited, in awe of Him, but longing to be with Him. I remember the moment when He spoke to me, holding out His arms, and I spontaneously rushed into them. For a moment, I felt truly selfless – forgetting my customary and fear of demonstrating emotions.

'Abdu'l-Bahá was called away on business having to do with purchasing land on Mt. Carmel. Those owning a certain piece of land did not wish to sell, 'Abdu'l-Bahá let the matter rest, telling the friends not to be troubled.

We prayed in the Shrine of the Báb, our shoes removed and hands anointed with rose water.

Our pilgrimage lasted eight days and seven nights.

Breakfast was served in the cottage when we stayed – across the street from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's house.

For dinner we crossed to His house and ate at a long table with many people – when the Master joined us and served the friends.

When he was in Haifa; several days He rested near the Shrine on Mt. Carmel.

One day, we went to 'Akká, visiting Bahjí, seeing the barracks where the friends were confined when they first arrived for years, at the end of the day we entered the shrine of Bahá'u'lláh for prayer and meditation. I remember having been told that I should be very careful to pray for the right thing as my prayer would be answered (shades of the fairy stories). But I tried very hard to pray to be selfless and good – knowing all the time that this experience was far beyond my capacity to fully appreciate.

Mother and I had private meetings with the Master. He gave me the name Badieh – which I am told _____ - something new and wonderful. He was radiant and laughing with me, telling me an answer to the question what I should do in life, "It doesn't matter so long as she does it in love, with the right aim."

In our last evening in Haifa we were with Him – He bade us goodbye and called me "Badieh Khanoum" with a beautiful ringing laugh, I wished I could carry with me forever the sound of His voice and that laugh of greeting, His voice impressed me especially so full, musical, beautiful, I never heard another voice like it.

I have thought of these days in Haifa many times – trying to keep as close to the spirit I found there are possible. I truly believe that the blessings of such a pilgrimage last after the visit to over. I am sure 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Master has

guided me, protected me in ways which I experienced as a young child, though no which I can never be thankful enough – any small services which I can do for Bahá'u'lláh will never repay the gift He has given me.