

... description: 1925, Effie Baker 29 Mar MS 2.01
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title: Pilgrimage to Haifa Part Three notes: ...

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William Sears

April 1-11, 1954

The Pilgrims House,

HAIFA, PALESTINE

29th March, 1925.

To Melbourne, Adelaide & Perth Assemblies,

also Tasmania and Sydney.

To my dear Co-workers and Friends,

We have been in Haifa just a little over two weeks and the days and nights have been so crowded with wonderful things it has been impossible to find time to write. It is getting quite late now but I must make a beginning as we think our boat leaves next Friday. We will not know until tomorrow whether we can get berths though. We will be very loath to leave. It is heavenly to be among these dear people. One cannot realise what self-sacrifice means until one comes in contact with them. I must start and give you as best I can all that has transpired since I last wrote to you and posted by the "Jervis Bay". I think I wrote to Father and Mother and told them of our trip up the canal etc., so will just continue about landing at Port Sa'íd. We reached there at daybreak on Thursday 12th March at 6.30 A. M. Martha came on board. We were surprised to see her. Her boat had been delayed so she waited for two or three days and came to meet us and then travel with us to Haifa. Three Persian Bahá'ís were with her and gave us a warm welcome. It is lovely to see Martha, and she is looking so well. We had breakfast on board and then went ashore. Had to go through the Customs House. After a lot, of wrangling our luggage was put on a conveyance and taken to the hotel where Martha was staying. Here Monaver Khánúm the youngest daughter of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and wife of Mizza Malumed

Yardi came to see us. She is very sweet and gave us such a beautiful welcome. After lunch Monaver and a friend called on us again and some of the Bahá'ís. One Muḥammad Mustapha offered to accompany us as far as Kantara E. (that is the station you change at for Haifa) and see us safely into the train for Haifa. We left P. Said at 0 P. M. and reached Kantara at 6.45 p. a. Here we had to go through the customs and we saw what thought and kindness of heart Mizza Mustapha had. He interpreted for us at the Customs etc. saw all our baggage loaded on the ferry and finally had us at Kantara E., where we had to settle down and wait till midnight for the express to Haifa. He had to leave us at 9.30 P. M. to return at P. Said wanted to stay and see us safely off and then spend the night at the Railway Station and return early in the morning, but of course we would not let him. We had a very good journey and reached Haifa at 10 A. M. Friday 13th. Fugeta met us at the station. He is a bright merry hearted little fellow and gave us a hearty welcome. He certainly is a fine Bahá'í general and soon had his little band of happy pilgrims marshalled and in order. We were installed into carriages and driven to the Pilgrim House in Persian Colony, which is opposite the Masters House. Here we received another warm welcome from an American Bahá'í Mrs. Corinne True. You all would just love her.

Shoghi Effendi sent greetings to us and asked us to come and see him before lunch. We had a wonderful interview. To me it was a wonderful meeting. His step is quick and decisive also his manner of speech, but the sweetness of his countenance and the bright alert expression of his eyes conveys to you a wonderful tenderness of heart which radiates to you such graciousness and simplicity, you feel at once at your ease as if a weight has been removed from your heart and a great peace reigns, you feel a great happiness in his presence. He inquired about you all and Australia and New Zealand. He said the essential point is to speak of and teach the principles but first and most of all live them. After giving principles, give the history of the cause. He promises to visit Australia, I said we would like him to come, and his answer was "Surely I will," After lunch Mrs. True took us for a walk down Carmel Road. The Holy Tombs are right opposite this road on the mount. Every night just as it gets dark a wonderful light (electric) is lighted just above it. Just after Shoghi had it installed some ships were coming into port and they were so confused with this new light looked on their charts and couldn't pick it up. They had the light house on Mt. Carmel and the one at 'Akká but not this one, so they were afraid to come in and stayed out at sea till daylight. They complained about the confusion, but the British Government instead of ordering the light to be removed had it marked on the chart.

Saturday 14th we visited the Holy shrines with Mrs. True. 'Abbás Kuli keeper of the Tombs chanted the prayer of visitation revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. It was beautiful. Shoghi Effendi is endeavouring to keep those shrines in the greatest simplicity. Everyone who is visiting saws what wonderful improvements Shoghi has made with the laying out of the gardens. If you could only see the rock lime stone that Mt. Carmel is composed of you will see what a stupendous work has been undertaken. He could only do one side because it was so expensive but four

young Bahá'í men offered their services free and are working there excavating the stone and carrying soil. It is a labour of love.

How everyone serves is a lesson to all. They prepare at the Masters house food for eighty or ninety people each day. Each one doing his share with such love and joy. At the Tomb we saw the .ton Cyprus trees under which Bahá'u'lláh pitched his tent and stayed for some time. In the afternoon we visited the ladies of the household. The Greatest Holy Leaf, The Holy Mother and Holy Leaves are charming. So simple and sweet with hearts over flowing with love for you all so eager to hear news of you. To see with what sweetness, and patient submission they have borne all the trials and persecutions heaped upon them and not one trace of embitterment towards those who were the cause of their sufferings is hard to comprehend. The only recompense to them is our faithfulness to the cause so dear to their pure hearts. Let us make fresh efforts to bring the unity and concord and be the cause of comfort and promotion of humanity.

Mr. Mountfort Mills arrived this evening. He had been on a special mission for Shoghi Effendi. He has a charming manner and is so full of fun. It was nice hearing him talk with Mrs. True and Martha.

Sunday 15th went and spent the morning at Rúhá Khánum's home. It is next the Masters house, she gave us a beautiful talk about Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. She told us how the Master when war broke out started the cultivation of cereals in a village near the Jordan River where it flowed into sea of Galilee which belonged to him. Grew barley, wheat, lentils, beans etc., so that the poor could be fed. Rúhá's husband went there (Mizza Jelai) also 'Abdu'l-Bahá aid during the hottest months he showed them how to irrigate and cultivate the soil. Spent 3 months there. He had the grain brought to Haifa and distributed to all classes not only Bahá'í. An incident where a woman came to the Masters house in the middle of the night – poor, ill and weak. He arose, had her brought in and attended to, found a woman to look after her and hired a room for her to live in. She lived for three months then passed away peacefully. Told us how a Russian Bahá'í brought furs to make a coat for him but he made 20 caps to keep old folks heads warm. Told us Bahá'u'lláh's wife was only daughter of 2nd vizier of Shaly. She was very wealthy and had a wonderful trousseau. It was sold to buy food for them when they were exiled to Baghdád. Her wedding dress was all embroidered with pure gold thread. She would cut portions of it and sell it to the goldsmith to procure bread. Purest Branch was 2 years old and very ill and she had to leave him with her Mother. He did not join thorn till he was nine years old always very delicate. He used to write tablets as Bahá'u'lláh dictated them when in prison at 'Akká. He went the evening, he met with his accident to Bahá'atllah but Bahá'u'lláh said "I will not meet you tonight." He then went to the roof top to pray and became so absorbed in his devotions that as he was chanting he fell down the opening to the stone floor below (we saw this place when we visited the prison). Bahá'u'lláh and his mother heard the noise and Bahá'u'lláh said "That is my Masdi he has been sacrificed. They went out and he was lying on the floor with his bones broken. They carried

him to a room and put him on a couch. Bahá'u'lláh asked him that whatever he desired he would grant but he said, "There is nothing that I desire but that my life may be a sacrifice, so that the doors may be opened to the Friends, and Bahá'u'lláh said it should be as he wished. He died 24 hours afterwards. They had nothing to procure necessities for his funeral except one of their carpets so that was given to one of the soldiers to sell at one of the bazaars. They were not permitted to go to the funeral, four soldiers took the body and it was not till 2 years afterwards that they were allowed to visit his grave outside the city walls of 'Akká.

She told us of the great shock Shoghi Effendi received at the news of the Masters death. Rúhá said about a fortnight before the Masters passing he called Shoghi Effendi's mother and said for her to write and tell him to come home, that she was not to say anything to other members of the family to alarm them. He also told his Father, who said "Perhaps we had better telegraph", but 'Abdu'l Bahia said "No:" Shoghi's mother wrote but the letter did not reach him before the telegram that they sent when 'Abdu'l-Bahá passed. So as not to alarm him they had sent, "Master ill, come home quickly". Shoghi Effendi was in the library at Oxford studying when he was called to receive the telegram. He hastened to the office of major Tudor Pole. He was out but on his table was an open telegram announcing the passing of the Master. When the Major returned he found Shoghi lying unconscious on the floor. It was over a month before he could get his passport and start for the Holy Land.

In the afternoon we visited the Men's Pilgrim House which is situated in Mt. Carmel just near the Holy Shrines. We were invited to take part in a Bahá'í marriage celebration. We were all asked to speak about our different countries and how the work was progressing there. I conveyed your greetings to them all and they sent their love and to you all. You cannot imagine the pleasure and joy they get when news comes from the friends of other countries. Their faces just shine with light and devotion. I shall give you a full description of the wedding when I return it would take a long time to write, but according to Eastern custom the men and women do not meet together so we then went to the home of Abbal Kuli (keeper of the tomb) and visited the women and congratulated the bride, after partaking tea we went with Rúhá and Yaiba Khammi to the Holy Shrines to pray. It is Father's birthday today, so I asked a special blessing on his work.

We had a talk with Mr. Mills and Mrs. True tonight, Monday 16th. Had an interview with Shoghi Effendi. He again emphasised the fact of speaking on the principles whenever opportunity arises and then give short outline of the history. In speaking of the cause our great object and mission is to create harmony and unity. If differences arise we must consult with one another and when decision of a just settlement is arrived at go to the ones with whom it has arisen, and tell them in great kindness and love, advise them of your decision. Do not force or insist but leave it to them to meditate on, and then pray earnestly that they may see things in the right light.

Literature on cause must be distributed in a dignified and tactful manner. Must not be made cheap. Not given out at doors or put on park benches. It is necessary to be careful in giving out propaganda. Tells me not to visit America but to see the friends in London and then return as soon as possible and help Father and Mother Dunn with the work in Australia. His heart is very laid at the progress of cause in Australia. We must make every effort to continue the good work and not let him be discouraged. Where ever we are he says our object is to make a firm believer instead of just interesting a lot of people, it is not sufficient. We must concentrate our efforts to make a firm believer who will be capable of carrying on the work when we are not there. We must strive to study the teachings and to impart truth fluently. And with conviction not superficially. Must devote as much of our time as we can so that we may grasp the inner meaning of the teachings and be able to satisfy without hesitation, and referring to books questions asked. This afternoon we went for a walk with Mrs. True she took us to see an old olive tree planted by the Romans about 2,000 years ago. 'Abdu'l-Bahá used to sit very often under this tree. Had afternoon tea with Holy Mother and family.

Tuesday 17th. - left for 'Akká at 1.15 A. M. Passed the Keshon River where Elijah slew the priests of Baal 400 in number I think. We visited the house where 'Abdu'l-Bahá lived. It is now a hospital. He was there 4 years and not allowed out of the walls of 'Akká. Then we went to the house where Bahá'u'lláh was for seven years. Then the Most great prison. This is being renovated and the part where Bahá'u'lláh his family and followers were imprisoned is now a hospital for tubercular prisoners. The window of the room where Bahá'u'lláh was, has been enlarged, with a photo of it outside to show you, the difference. We saw where they were put the first night they arrived. Next went to the pilgrim House at Bahjí Bahjí is outside the city walls about hour's walk. The Pilgrim house is the one 'Abdu'l Bahá lived in, his half brother is still in Palace of Bahjí. We visited the Holy Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. Had tea then visited shrine again. In the house where Bahá'u'lláh was Imprisoned for 7 years, we saw the room where Kit-bel-ad Kas was written, also the Bath, built in great love for Bahá'u'lláh by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Sleeping at Belijeh Pilgrim house tonight.

Wednesday 13th. - Margaret and I slept in the room at-Pilgrim House where 'Abdu'l-Bahá revealed part of the Divine Plan, had breakfast, visited the shrine and we repeated our Prayers in English. We then went to the garden of Rizuan which is about 2 miles from Belyels Palace. It is a beautiful little spot. We lunched under the two huge mulberry trees where Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá used to sit. Margaret photographed the seats. I took a photo of the carriage (we would call it a waggonette, it holds 9 people), 'Abdu'l Hahn drove in when he was knighted. He drove us to the Ridván in it and to the Station. Schiel who accompanied us (he is 'Abdu'l Bahá's grandson, son of Youba Khánúm and Ghogli's cousin) told us about the Master being knighted. It was not his wish but the British Government wished it so he consented after refusing Once or twice. he has a beautiful carriage someone presented him with, but he didn't wish any fuss so he drove An this waggonette to the governor's residence - didn't

go by the main entrance, just entered a little gate at the back. Everyone was waiting for 'Abdu'l-Bahá to drive up in great pomp and ceremony. The walk to the governor's louse was lined with soldiers ready to make the guard of honours, when to everyone's surprise 'Abdu'l Hahn quietly came in at the back and took the seat allotted for him. He graciously received the papers of knighthood etc. then when the ceremony was over just went out the way he came and drove off in the old carriage, we saw the room where Bahá'u'lláh used o stay in the garden of Ridván. They have left it just as it was. We sat in there and felt such a wonderful peace. I prayed for every one of us that we will be firm to the cause and be the means of establishing It In our land. We returned to 'Akká at 4 P. M. caught the train hack to Haifa. Travelling 3rd class deluxe as Fugeta put it. I walked through the streets of Haifa instead of going home in a carriage. They are very quaint.

Thursday 19th. Ronlia Khánum visited us just after breakfast and gave us a beautiful talk on the life of the Master. find there is so much to write to tell you I cannot possibly finish for the mail, so I will try and write you the rest of our visit to date when we are on the boat. We expect to leave Friday 2nd. April. All the holy family and Shoghi Effendi wish me to send their love, in which we all join in His name.

Your co-worker,

EFFIE.