



MRS. WATSON WITH A GROUP OUTSIDE THE GARDEN OF THE RIDVÁN.

MY PILGRIMAGE TO THE LAND OF DESIRE

by Marie A. Watson



*Approved by Reviewing Committee of the
National Spiritual Assembly of the
Bahá'ís of the United States
and Canada*

Published for the
EXECUTOR OF THE ESTATE OF MARIE A. WATSON
BY
BAHÁ'Í PUBLISHING COMMITTEE, NEW YORK

1932

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WASHINGTON LIBRARY

MY PILGRIMAGE TO THE LAND OF DESIRE

ON JULY 9TH, 1921, I sailed on the Greek ship "King Alexander" from New York to the Land of Desire with Jenáb-i-Fadil Mázandarání, the distinguished Persian sent to the United States by His Holiness, 'Abdu'l-Bahá. For over eighteen months Jenáb-i-Fadil had lectured in this country and Canada, expounding most eloquently the Universal Teachings of the Bahá'í Revelation to large and appreciative audiences. He was my companion on a voyage full of dramatic incidents, for the war between the Turks and Greeks was in full swing. Finally, however, after strange scenes at sea and stranger experiences on land, we arrived at the station of Haifa, Palestine.

Jenáb-i-Fadil and myself were greatly fatigued by the last troublesome stretch of our journey. For example, we stood for nearly two hours before a little window which I dubbed "postage stamp" because of its size, and which was most annoyingly out of my reach by two or more feet. The impatient crowd, composed of many nationalities, swayed this way and that around me, demanding attention. Behind the window was only one man to serve this mass of a hundred or more persons, all bent upon pushing their passports through the little opening. It was confusion worse confounded! The poor Frenchman at the window, sweltering in the heat, mopped his dripping brow, frantically expostulating to the indignant crowd that he could serve but one at a time. This acted only as a spur, for they continued to push only the more desperately until they came to blows and imprecations of an assorted variety.

It was past midnight when I finally carried our passports, duly viséd, in triumph to the Guarantee Officer, leaving many waiting ones behind. This triumph had been won by a little ruse which I

felt to be justifiable. I was tired and almost fainting, and a happy thought was expressed in the following: "*O Monsieur, s'il vous plait voici une dame très malade: veuillez l'assister!*" This brought the desired result, for the French are ever ready to assist a lady in distress. The business was at once dispatched, and very soon thereafter Jenáb-i-Fadil and myself were conducted to our train.

It was extremely hot, as the thermometer had registered 120 degrees throughout the day, but now a furtive breeze relieved the heat from time to time. My companion was placed at one end of the car and I at the other. We said "Good Night," although it was morning, but this was only in keeping with many other paradoxical experiences of the journey. Now I found myself in a very comfortable compartment with an excellent berth and every convenience. It is due to the French, who are in occupation here, that much has been done for the comfort of the traveller.

I was somewhat dismayed as I read a notice by which one was warned not to leave the window open as one's baggage might disappear. Too tired to care very much, my bump of caution, however, causing me to lock my valise in the closet, I murmured a sleepy "Alláh-u-Abhá" and was soon beyond the pale of mortal disturbances. Sleep was interrupted by a medley of jolts, bells and bellowings until, consulting my watch, I found it was five a.m. and the first flush of dawn was tinting the horizon. The train was speeding rapidly along; the landscape was uninteresting, a flat desert-like waste, not a bush nor a habitation to be seen. But for the lovely tints in the sky everything was barren and dreary.

We were now in Palestine, though the mountains were not yet in sight. I gazed out of the window dreamily for an hour, then arose, made a hasty toilet, and went out in search of my travelling companion. I found him waiting with a huge bunch of luscious grapes, which we enjoyed, as they furnished both food and drink. Much refreshed, we sat silent for a long time, realizing we were coming nearer and nearer to the most sacred spot in the world!

We could see now the glorious mountains in the distance. Egypt was far behind, and the scenery of Palestine was more animated, if still quite monotonous. A camel, a donkey, some cows in a seemingly bare pasture, an Arab now and then striding along, dotted

the roadside which was bordered with immense cactus trees loaded with large purple thistles, the fruit of which was adorned by prickly thorns. I asked one of the guards on the train whether Palestine used this fruit for fodder as in California where the science of Burbank has made this possible. The guard stared at me, exclaiming "Mon Dieu, Madame!" and then at length explained that it was not used for cattle, but that the natives used it as a staple food, and sometimes during the war period it was all they had. The outer layer of the fruit was stripped off, the spikes with it, leaving the solid part and the juice. I found it cool and refreshing later when some was procured. I learned too that the juice is boiled and made into an excellent syrup not unlike our maple syrup.

My heart-beats increased perceptibly as Jenáb-i-Fadil announced that we were now less than an hour from Haifa; indeed, my heart galloped as though trying to reach there before the rest of me!

"Haifè, Haifè, all out for Haifè!" cried the guard, and everybody scrambled, collecting baggage, and endeavoring to get a carriage. We were fortunate in securing a vehicle and, our baggage beside us, we proceeded on our way through the narrow streets and stony road leading to the House of the Master, 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

What strange sights greeted our eyes! The people seemed clothed in fantastic garb, and every color of the rainbow was flaunted before one; a red fez, a purple scarf, a green head-shawl, a yellow sash, a white or creamy coat, and a gunny-sack on the form of a black boy mingled in kaleidoscopic fashion among the chattering throng. And quaintly worded signs fastened on doors and window blinds—these also varied in color from gaudy pink to cerulean blue and saucy reds and henna, with old grey weatherboards showing here and there.

Advertising in western fashion was attempted heroically. Here was the "new" struggling with the "old." In bold black lettering in English the advantages of the "Hotel Jerusalem" were announced. The hotel was an old stone house with a narrow, arched door, before which stood a donkey laden with formidable sacks, containing, no doubt, the provender for this hotel; patiently it waited to be relieved of its burden, meanwhile flicking off the troublesome flies buzzing about it. In front of the hotel small tables were arranged at which men were seated, laughing and talking in loud voices, and

drinking thick, black coffee from tiny cups, eating and smoking between times, and clapping their hands when anything was to be replenished.

Our carriage wound its way slowly in and out of the mêlée of animals, carts and human beings on the main street until at last we turned the corner, and this varied picture, like a "movie screen," vanished from sight. The sun, the brightest and hottest we had ever known, greeted us with an intensity characteristic of the East, making us burn with impatience to get to our journey's end. Five minutes more and we were at the Master's House. Being informed that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was not in just then, we went with Dr. Lotfullah to the Pilgrim House across the way. Here we found Fugeta in charge. We were greeted most heartily and shown to our rooms, where we removed the dust of travel, and after changing our garments, we joined the friends in the dining-room where we were refreshed with tea. A general talk ensued. Jenáb-i-Fadil was the centre of attraction. He had been absent for more than two years.

Among the guests was a young Egyptian who was visiting the Master for a few days before returning to Paris for further study, having met the Master there twelve years before. An Arabian government official, who, among other duties, viséd passports and who came to dinner by invitation of the Master whenever his train stopped at Haifa, was also there. He was handsome, of powerful physique and his twinkling eyes and ready smile showed the good humour behind a rather stern mien in repose. He was a Muḥammadan and loved the Master.

In the midst of our chatting and tea drinking Fugeta announced, "The Master is coming!" Another moment and His resonant voice was calling to us: "*Bismillah! Bismillah!*" Welcome! Welcome! Taking us each by the hand He exclaimed: "We have been looking for you for some days. You should have wired us of your arrival and we would have sent our carriage to the station for you." Turning to me He said: "You must rest; you are very tired. Now you are at home. This is your home. Here you must rest and be very happy. *Bismillah! Bismillah!*" and the Presence, like a tonic breeze, vanished. I retired and rested for an hour. What heavenly peace!—a tender vibration, soft, silent, blissful! My soul was steeped in it.

"Praise be to God!" sang my heart. "May I become worthy of this bounty!"

Every evening at eight o'clock the Master holds a meeting lasting an hour or more, during which He discourses upon intricate problems concerning the Cause. The Master is seated upon the large porch in front of the house, to which ten white stone steps lead from the broad gravel path. A white stone coping borders the path on each side, providing seating space for fifty or more people who constitute the audience.

View with me that majestic Figure in white flowing garments seated before us, a white turban crowning the wonderful head with its long silvery locks lifted gently by the breeze; the beautifully moulded hands emphasizing the discourse with impressive gesture. After the address a Russian refugee Bahá'í teacher chants in exquisitely modulated tones, the prayers of Bahá'u'lláh. It is impossible adequately to describe this scene. The writer became conscious of new emotions, the awakening of something so subtle, so elusive, that one could not capture it, yet so impressive that everything was cast into oblivion except the immediate present. The fragrance from the gardens on either side wafted a different scent on each breath of the night air. Roses, orange blossoms, lemon buds, tuberoses, jasmine, honeysuckle,—each in turn left its definite sweetness as a fresh odour entranced one and vanished.

O that I might impress this scene upon the heart of the world! To me it is as though all eternity could not efface it;—that majestic white Figure seated on the broad stone platform like a king enthroned, the setting of natural beauty so befitting His spiritual station,—the gardens, the sea, the starry heavens, and the millions of gleaming points of light reflected below. Shadows deepen under the trees, while at their tops the leaves glisten and glimmer like sparkling gems. The murmur of the sea is just beyond, the waves in ever repeating undulations, coming nearer and nearer to caress the shore. The melodious chanting, the deep silences, the seated figures with bowed heads and devoted hearts.

The chant ends. In a few moments the Master rises and goes into the house. Everyone rises also and salutes in the beautiful eastern

fashion, hand touching the forehead and then the heart. The spell is broken!

Then again the Master comes, descends the steps, finds me, and motions that I precede Him into the dining-room, an addition built recently for the entertainment of guests. This is a large room having a very high ceiling, as have all the rooms in the East, and there are seven large windows. Everything is white. A long table is in the centre of the room laid for fifty or more people. The Master placed me at the head of the table on the right, and thus He placed me throughout my visit. He always inquired in English after my health and would urge me to eat more, saying again and again: "Too little, much too little," when I assured Him I had eaten abundantly.

On several occasions my replies to the Master's loving solicitations in English were in Persian, a few sentences, but He was pleased and amused, I think, judging by the merry light in His eyes. He said to the big Arabian official, who spoke only Arabic: "See, here is an American lady who speaks correct Persian. You say you cannot learn it and you hear it every day. She does not hear it often but she has learned." The Master would ask, "What is this? What is that?" indicating things on the table, and say approvingly, "Brava, Brava! You know everything that is useful to know. That is very good." The big man eyed me with astonishment at what seemed to him a wonderful performance, but he was not aware of my limitations, nor of the fact that in asking His questions the Master chose only such things on the table, the names of which I knew in Persian! Indeed, this did not dawn upon me until afterward and I felt quite proud of my accomplishment. How tenderly the Master seeks to have one feel of some account in the world, and of course one longs in return to become as dust beneath His Blessed Feet!

On the first Sunday in Haifa I was told to be ready at 5 p.m. as the Master was to take me to the Holy Tomb of the Báb, situated about half-way up Mt. Carmel, the Mountain of God, as the Hebrews call it. The Master placed me at His side in the automobile, Jenáb-i-Fadil and several of the small grandchildren making the driving party. The other men pilgrims walked. When all had arrived and were seated fronting the Tomb,—there were over fifty in

number,—we were served with tea, after which we sat in profound silence.

The scene here also was most impressive. The sun was travelling toward the west, tinting the clouds with gold and mauve. "See the sea!" said the Master. "So is the bounty of God to-day flowing like the waves of this sea. We must try to appreciate His Goodness, His Power and Glory." His beautiful voice echoed vibrantly through space, giving clear-cut teachings as He sat there on the mountain. "Take prejudice, how it grows. First a few people say something disparaging about a person, and, generally there is a fragment of truth in what they say. The story grows, is spread, the circle widens, discussions are indulged in, inharmony results, schism takes place, what a waste of precious time that could and should be used for constructive work!"

Then He spoke of sincerity. "There are degrees always in everything. Until a man is freed from ego he may be positive and certain about many things *that are not so*. He spoke of tests. "Tests are not sent as punishment, but to reveal the soul to itself. Suffering unfolds both the strength and the weakness. Tests are sometimes creative of grateful surprise also; for in the midst of our trials we are amazed at the fulness of our strength and our resources, and so the heavy discipline is creative of assurance; the trial becomes the source of greater confidence, faith and trust. It strengthens and confirms."

'Abdu'l-Bahá has a teaching, an apt illustration for every phase of life; a guidance for every issue and crisis, a solution for every problem and an answer to every question voiced or silent.

Tea was served, and the "Tablet of Visitation" was chanted by a sweet-voiced worshipper whose name I cannot recall but whose soul was revealed to me in the ardour of that heavenly chanting. How long we knelt there I do not know, but when I raised myself I was alone in the Sacred Tomb. A moment after someone touched me on the shoulder and beckoned, and silently I followed him out of the shrine.

Of this wonderful experience I almost hesitate to speak. I had been lost in deepest contemplation and prayer. It seemed to me that all the souls that had ever worshipped here, together with all the

"Friends of God" I had ever known, were congregated in this holy spot. A wonderful Company! Faces known and unknown rose before my inner vision, and as my soul breathed a supplicating thought for loved ones far or near, the faces would appear, just in a flash, radiant and wreathed in smiles. The *meaning* of the *reality* of "Oneness" dawned upon my consciousness, never again to be forgotten! This inner consciousness was unfolded later in relation to a subsequent experience.

The Master had been waiting for me. As I hastened to the automobile in which He was seated and took my place beside Him, He said: "I shall take you to the summit of the Mountain of God." I could not speak, and the Blessed One said nothing more, but in the silence we drove on and on, and I knew the Master read my heart,—its longing to reach the summit of consciousness in service to the Cause.

Every afternoon from four to seven during my stay, I visited the ladies of the "Holy Household." On Wednesday afternoons a "Woman's Meeting" is held in the large central room, secluded from the masculine gaze of the many visitors the Master receives at all hours of the day. Bahá'í women living outside also attend these gatherings, where one of the Master's daughters reads or chants the prayers and tablets of Bahá'u'lláh.

Tea is always served with Persian cookies and grapes. The Master, if He can spare the time, generally looks in to greet the assembly, say a few words and make them all happy.

The Master's household numbers more than a hundred persons, not counting the children of the believers and His own grandchildren. How wonderfully significant, as an example to the world, is this living service so cheerfully given by each member of the family! There is such harmony and unity in this household, where all the machinery of every-day life is carried on without a break. Every emergency is provided for; unexpected visitors are always entertained with a composure and sincerity unbelievable unless witnessed day after day as I saw it. Where in this wide world could a parallel be found, even approximate to this? No complaint, no friction amidst a variety of temperaments and of different stations in life. It is a garden of variegated flowers growing in the utmost

loveliness! The contrast to family life in the outside world is so great that the observer marvels, and the conviction deepens that here is a miracle of miracles that only love, spiritual love, could make possible. What models to the world these holy women are, can be known only to those who witness their lives of sacrifice and service,—second only to the life of the Exemplar, their Teacher and Educator, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Master, the Possessor of all perfections, the embodiment of all virtues, the helper of the poor and needy, the Counsellor of the afflicted and sorrowful,—He who is God's Covenant to the people of the world!

How can my feeble pen worthily record such a life of untiring service and devotion as that of "The Greatest Holy Leaf," sister of 'Abdu'l-Bahá?

From early morning till very late at night she is in demand, and with the assistance of the Master's daughters, she carries out every detail of this formidable household.

The women of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's family are the precious flowering of the spiritual civilization inaugurated at the dawn of the New Age, where every faculty of the mind and heart has been quickened by the Divine Breath of the Gardener, who has nourished and sustained them through all the vicissitudes that result from such heroic living. No complaint is ever audible, and yet I read in the depths of their wonderful eyes a real tragedy, and this is unconsciously voiced in their desire for their children; they long for nothing for themselves, but yearn to give the children the advantages of modern knowledge and education, of which they, through long years of exile and confinement behind prison walls, have been deprived. "For ourselves," they say, "we ask nothing; we are grateful for the wonderful spiritual bounties we have had, for we have learned the meaning of *sacrifice*, which is not to do without things, but if, for some reason, one is deprived, then to accept willingly and uncomplainingly; but for our children we do desire and pray for education that they may be of greater service to humanity, and open the way to self-support for the women of the East."

Someone has said of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "He is the practical mystic," and certain it is that in the teachings of Baha'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-

Bahá the unity of all life is constantly emphasized. "The law of human life is unceasing interaction between mind and body.

"In accidents a surgeon is called to adjust injured members as nearly as possible to the original pattern by scientific means. Nature, in obedience to a spiritual principle, inherent in every living thing, brings into operation the healing power to the lacerated parts. This is true co-operation between organic and spiritual forces. Life's healing power is spiritual, but its operation in behalf of an organic body is by adjustment to the workings of organic law. Waste of vital and nervous forces through working at cross-purposes with law,—the failure to recognize the oneness of life in every phase, physical, mental, moral and spiritual, is largely the cause of the world's suffering and inefficiency."

The Master's daughters, so imbued with these principles, naturally desire the education of their children in the balanced ratio, so that one set of faculties may not be exalted above others. The Bahá'í teachings recognize that all faculties are expressed in the same organism and so are inter-dependent for the ill or good of humanity. "Nothing is true education that does not fit the human being for constructive living. For twenty centuries men have clothed a spiritual ideal in the garment of ecclesiastical pomp and ceremony, and have preached an established form of traditional and superimposed authority. But of the daily living of the ideal of the spirit of Christ there is but little evidence save among a few choice souls. Of an inner consecration to justice, to right, to moral initiative, to equity in practical affairs, altruistic conduct toward humanity *en masse*, the spiritual dynamics of the life of Reality,—the world has had slight evidence. But now, Praise be to God, in this century of Light the practical advantages of social, ethical, and industrial relationships based upon other ideals are beginning to be recognized and dealt with accordingly. Statesmen are glimpsing the fact that the world must be reconstructed in the new spirit of understanding commensurate with this advantage." Such were the conversations with the daughters of the Master during this memorable visit.

O women of the West! I beg of God that your hearts may be touched and stirred as was my heart by the hunger-cry of these Eastern mothers, representing as they do thousands who are yet

hopelessly in the grasp of the ancient fanatical ideas and customs from which the woman of the West has been emancipated to a large degree and is still pressing forward! We cannot, nay we dare not let the wail of our Eastern sisters remain unheeded. In that blessed shrine, the holy Tomb of Bahá'u'lláh, the most earnest supplication of my soul was that my Western sisters might respond and assist the womanhood of the East, that we might co-operate in the building of a school for girls at Haifa, and equip it with volunteer teachers.

Now I must refer to a personal matter in order that my story may be intelligible to the reader, a matter which concerns my having been called * by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the Holy Land. Briefly there had been some misunderstanding as to the interpretation of certain Bahá'í teachings. Some of the friends understood them in one way and some in another. This had created confusion and I became very ill. In this crisis I was called to make the visit to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and just before leaving the United States a goodly number of the friends,—some of one opinion and some of another,—called upon me and I was requested to bring back something *very definite* from the Master.

It was the custom of 'Abdu'l-Bahá each morning at about ten o'clock to visit the Pilgrim House and talk to me, Mírzá Bahadur usually interpreting. The Master would begin with "How is your health?"—which of course refers to the spiritual condition; and then, "Are you happy?" then "Perfectly happy?" Now I knew I was not "perfectly happy" so long as He had not given me the definite instructions which the friends had desired me to bring back. After a most heavenly day with the Master and His Household, I would see the faces of the friends before me at night and they seemed to look sternly expectant. He had given ample illustrations and examples that should have satisfied one not under the spell of acting as ambassador for a group of people and who felt the responsibility. Finally one morning, in answer to the question "Are you perfectly happy?" I said, "Yes, dear Master, I am perfectly happy

* Mrs. Parsons of Washington, D. C., received the following cablegram from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, dated Haifa, Palestine, April 27, 1921: "Send immediately Mrs. Watson in utmost comfort to Holy Land."

but for one little thing that remains in my consciousness; not for myself do I desire something definite, but for others," and then I proceeded to give some details. But the Blessed One ignored it as before, and calling my attention to some clouds above our heads, He said, "You must be like these swift-moving, luminous clouds. They move, nothing hinders them. I shall pray for you that you will be like these clouds. Let *nothing* hinder you. Speak always of the Love of God. Teach the people what the Love of God is. Give them the Glad Tidings. Let nothing hinder thee; let nothing touch thy spirit which is not in conformity with the teachings of the Blessed Beauty. Be ever engaged in the service of the Kingdom. Do not let the unpleasant things annoy you. You must be as far removed from them as these clouds are above us. The important thing is to spread the Teachings, to show love and compassion, to be kind to all, and not wound the feelings of others. If we do not like to associate with some people, very well, it is not compulsory. We can let them alone and become so busy with constructive work, that there is no time to waste upon such matters. We do not waste our time in discussing non-essentials. Neither must you do this. Forget every unpleasantness of the past; speak only of constructive work, of the Love of God, of the compassion and mercy of God. *Seek to make others happy.*" And so would end the teaching of one day, perfect, except for the one little thought which I deemed so important! "O God, help us to be severed from all but Thee!"

It is an amazing experience when one first meets 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Many have tried to express it; many have partially expressed it. Some, though feeling deeply, cannot express it at all. What the Master says so simply,—seemingly, as it strikes the ear, if it reaches the inner being, contains ever-deepening truths. One marvels at the beauty and wisdom, and at the dulness of the surface consciousness of the merely human.

The first meeting with 'Abdu'l-Bahá never startles. It thrills one with a new sense of vitality. It quickens. It is healing. It recalls: "He cometh with healing in His wings." It is penetrative. One cannot possibly remain the same as before the meeting, because the Divine Ray has touched the creature and somehow, somewhere, some time, the creature will know.

In this day electricity is the agent used to restore weakened vitality and most successful are some results reported. To my spirit 'Abdu'l-Bahá is a new discovery in Spiritual Science. He is pure Radium. His Spirit is the Spirit of Light, of life in the highest degree. It is *creative*. A new energy radiates from Him to the recipient and makes him vital and alive. Blessed is the one who has been treated with this Divine Current.

"The age of miracles is past." Often we hear this statement from the press, the people, and even from the pulpit. The Higher Criticism interprets the miracles of the ancients as symbols and symbols only. It is true that many instances recorded in the Holy Books are symbols of spiritual conditions, truths and universal principles, but that is not to deny the performance of miracles, even literally upon this plane, by the Manifestations of God. What significance is there in the fact that the prophecies of the ancients are daily fulfilled, at this time in a literal sense? "Greater things than these shall ye do" was uttered by the Christ nineteen centuries ago, referring to the miracles of this age. Greater miracles are performed in this Day of God, because: "It is the Day of Maturity for the sons of men." Miracles upon all the planes of life are performed because a New Spirit adorns the world of mankind. Blessed are they who have eyes to see and ears to hear! How kind is the Compassionate Lord to His creatures!

In the year 1890 I was a victim of a car accident in the city of Washington, D. C. The injury was so severe that life was thought to be extinct for several hours. The spinal column was twisted and pushed out of alignment to such a degree that a portion of the vertebræ lay upon the left ribs, forming a protrusion the size of an infant's head. The right ribs were crushed and splinters of bone were removed. The right hip was out of the socket, not perceived at first by the doctors, and the left arm could only be partially raised. I lay unconscious at the hospital for many days, taking no nourishment whatever, not even water, and undoubtedly would have been buried, had the period lengthened, but for the fact that some friends informed the physicians that in childhood I had also been "in a trance" for nineteen days, so the interment was postponed.

During this unconscious period, that is to say unconscious to all

earthly surroundings, my soul was very much alive on inner subjective planes. In these experiences I met with a Wonderful Being,—whom I afterwards learned was 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who gave me spiritual instructions and taught me the mysteries of life, saying: "Many of these things thou dost comprehend only in part, for thou must *live* them and then teach the people of the world. This is for future harvesting." (From "The Two Paths.")

For thirty years this crippled body suffered untold agony. For years I had tried to live according to the Divine Teachings of the Bahá'í Revelation, before coming, on the outer plane of life, into the knowledge of the actual embodiment of my Lord and Master, 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In 1901 He accepted me as a servant in His Holy Vineyard, and from that time my humble services and my life have been dedicated to Him for His Cause.

Now it is opportune to relate the remarkable experience after my visit to the Holy Tomb of Bahá'u'lláh. It was on August the ninth, 1921, that seven pilgrims started for 'Akká to visit the Holy Shrine. Jenáb-i-Fadil Mázandarání and myself were of the party. The Master's carriage conveyed us to the station of Haifa, where we took the train to 'Akká, waited there for an hour, had some refreshments, and another vehicle was secured from a Bahá'í friend to finish the journey. It was late when we reached the house of the caretaker of the Holy Tomb. The moon had risen and was shining above the mountains, pillowed on a vast bed of fleecy clouds, whose silvery edges appeared as an immense etching against the midnight depths of marvellous blue. Earth and sky literally "embraced like two lovers."

Again we were refreshed by tea, and when we gathered on the front piazza built of the white stone that is so much used in this part of the country, another marvellous scene was presented to our view. At our feet lay the sea, or more accurately perhaps, the Bay of 'Akká. The Tomb on the right and the Holy Mountain of Carmel loomed like Giant Hands upholding in majesty the Cause of God. What an atmosphere! O the calm of that Holy Place! Night had flung her jewelled stars most lavishly abroad. The whole was of magic splendour. The heart was entranced by such concentrated beauty. No one spoke above a whisper lest a harsher note disturb

the celestial vibration. As the night was far spent the seven pilgrims silently proceeded through the garden laden with the sweet breath of flowers richer for the dews of night.

We entered in single file that Holy of Holies, and each pilgrim knelt in adoration. When we emerged it seemed that hours had rolled on toward eternity! It was long past midnight. We supped lightly and retired. Sleep did not come. The few hours were spent in communion, potent and exhilarating yet conducive to self-examination and repentance. Tears flowed freely as we supplicated for the "cleansing of the sanctuary" within the self, and many of the beloved friends were remembered in the supplications poured forth that night in the Holy Shrine.

At dawn the seven pilgrims again made the blessed visit to the Holy Tomb of Him whom God made manifest. Seven pilgrims, each from a different part of the world, strangers before, now bound by the firm rope of Bahá'í love and friendship, realizing their kinship and unity as the children of the Household of Faith in the Revelation of God in this Great Day! Strange paradox! We came to the Tomb for Life! "There is no death" has now a new meaning. We realized it as we came forth, clothed with the garment of Reality. And now to complete the pilgrimage we were to visit the Ridván, or Garden of God, about two and a half miles from the Tomb of Bahá'u'lláh.

It was early morning. We had breakfast and at six o'clock we were ready to start; but to our dismay, no vehicle was to be found. The man who had conveyed us from the station could not come; he had been called away and had gone to Haifa. What were we to do? The men could walk, but it was difficult even for them in the heat and the dusty road. The caretaker, after a thoughtful moment, came to our rescue. He proposed that I ride the Master's white donkey. It was pure white, handsome, and full of life. As I surveyed the locomotive power before me I had some misgivings as to the success of the venture. The pilgrims seemed to sense my hesitation and asked: "What do you think of it? Will you ride him?" "I have never mounted anything more lively than a wooden hobby-horse in childhood" was my answer, "but as there is no other way, I shall have to attempt it, for I must go to the Ridván with you." An im-

provised saddle was brought, depriving the house of a solid pillow of generous dimensions. This was held in place by a rope passed around the body of the donkey, who protested quite vigorously at the unusual equipment. Although the caretaker assured me that he was very gentle, I confess the prospect did not appear alluring. However, I mustered up courage, and as a chair was brought to assist me to mount, I was finally seated sidewise and the reins were placed in my hands. The donkey was led by the caretaker's son, a kindly youth who cast sympathetic glances at my "perch."

The procession started quite briskly. I braced up as best I could for I did not wish to spoil the trip for the men-pilgrims by my timidity; but oh, the road was so stony, the pillow was slipping and I was doubling up on one side! The donkey went swiftly along, kicking every now and then to rid himself of the flies, while I trembled within, fearing every moment that he would get rid of me too. I prayed, "O God! help me to keep on," for now there were strange snappings and crackings in my back, sides and shoulders. Pain, sharp pain, racked my whole body. It was growing unbearable and I was inwardly groaning with every forward step of the donkey, as it stumbled over stones and I grasped its mane. One of the pilgrims approached me and said: "Wouldn't it be better to rest a while? You are suffering, I see, and we have quite a long distance yet." I declined, trying to smile, and said: "I think it is best to go on, it would be too difficult to mount again." "Well, promise that when it becomes too hard for you, you will call and we will help you down to rest." He adjusted the pillow as best he could and I promised to call for help if needed. We started again. The heat was intense yet I felt cold, every nerve quivering with pain, and there was more snapping and tearing. What was going on, I wondered, in my spine and shoulder-blades? I felt as though I were being dismembered. Did it mean my death? The X-ray photograph of my body came vividly before me and the words of the surgeon were in my ears,—"Nothing can be done. If force is applied the bones will snap. Death will be the result." "Well," I thought at last, "what more beautiful could happen,—to die in the Holy Land, to be released from pain and suffering? Evidently my work was finished on this plane. For twenty years my humble service had

been given to the Cause, more dear than life and now the Blessed One had sent for me to come to the Land of Desire; I had visited the Holy Shrines and now I would enter the Ridván, the Garden of God," so ran my thoughts.

I felt strangely relieved and calm. I could see the tree quite near that marked the entrance to the garden. The Doctor again approached with Jenáb-i-Fadil and they said: "We will help you down to rest before going in." A few minutes more and I stood on my feet, but *not as formerly!* I could breathe deeply, which had not been possible for thirty years. My hip, somehow, was in place, the projecting bow on the left side of my spine had disappeared. In a flash this was all realized. I threw up *both* arms and cried out: "O God, my God! This is a miracle that God hath wrought! Yá-Bahá'u'l-Abhá!" The other pilgrims were no less astonished than I, and joined me in fervent prayer and thanksgiving at what had been so strangely accomplished by the ride on the Master's white donkey.

I mounted again with ease and sat as straight as a major on dress parade on the back of this white "surgeon" who was utterly unconscious of the aid he had given me, and of the feeling I entertained for him as I reverently kissed his nose.

The Doctor photographed our little group and then we proceeded into the Ridván, and came to the blessed spot where stand the two mulberry trees so loved by Bahá'u'lláh, and in this vine-covered bower of beauty where He used to sit, we tarried, and here refreshment was brought us by the caretaker, who said: "Oh, you should have seen it before the war! It was the most beautiful spot in the whole world,—so travellers used to tell us. The Master will now have it restored to its former loveliness."

At the end of the Garden on one side stands the little house containing the "treasures" of the time of Bahá'u'lláh; the wonderful table with lids holding in its depths many articles used by him. The precious chair in which He sat is preserved in a separate chest. Another photograph of us was taken at this historic spot, and all the while I seemed treading upon air, and would ask myself: "Can it be true? Is this really I, who can breathe and walk without pain, so freed? O God, wonderful are Thy ways!" And there in that garden, hallowed by the footsteps of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá,

we lingered until it was time to leave for the train that was to carry us back to Haifa.

Everyone on the train seemed to stare at me. Was it because I was a stranger, or was it that they read the overwhelming joy of my spirit? I felt so elated, so buoyant, so intensely happy, I could only with difficulty control myself in silence. I longed to shout: "Glory to God! O people, if you could know the wonderful thing that has happened to me since yesterday you too would shout." My left arm was now entirely free and, again and again, I raised it above my head in sheer joy and wonder.

That night I lived over again the remarkable occurrences of the last twenty-four hours. The experience at the Holy Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh whither 'Abdu'l-Bahá had sent me and the various phases connected with the "visit."

I did not sleep nor even try to. I realized a change *in my consciousness*, a marked change of attitude in my mind and heart toward former matters. I shouted in the stillness of my being at the glorious realization; I knew that the physical healing was the outer symbol of the emancipation of my soul. I was free not only in body, but what was far more important, I was free in soul, in mind and spirit. O Compassionate God! What a revelation came to my soul! I realized the darkened state of human consciousness,—of even such as believe themselves of the enlightened and faithful servants of God! I thought with pity of the former "foolishness,"—wanting something definite to take home to the friends. *Wanting something which the Master had ignored.* "The wisdom of man is foolishness unto God" was truly proved. Fervently came the prayer: "O Lord! Heed us not in our foolish requests. Sever us from our limitations. Bestow upon us the Light of Thy Wisdom so that we may become conscious of Thy Will!"

The joy, the happiness, the bliss, the peace now experienced cannot be conveyed. Rapture enveloped my whole being; for now I knew the meaning of the "Most Great Bounty" and the "Mystery of God." The love of the Master in which all humanity is embraced had so surrounded and penetrated my being that the Light of His Wisdom had transformed my view into a vision of Reality. So are we "changed in the twinkling of an eye."

The next morning I arose at six,—another, a different person. Fugeta, that most devoted and selfless servant who sees to the needs and comforts of every pilgrim, was setting the table for breakfast. "You must have slept soundly. I never saw you looking so well although it was an awfully hot night," was his greeting to me. "No, I did not sleep at all, but it was not the heat that prevented me," and then I told him of the wonderful change that had come over me during the night, and that now I was perfectly happy as the Master had wished;—that I saw everything from an entirely different angle. God had opened my eyes; with His healing He had given me insight; I was no longer "blind"; I did not want the Master to give me anything definite for myself nor for anyone else!

The friends joined me at the breakfast table and rejoiced with me, for they had heard of my experience. All had remarked: "How well you are looking!" Doctor Lotfullah, who is of such valuable service to every visitor as well as to the blessed Household, and Mírzá Bahadur, that sweetly dignified and serious young man who has spent twelve years with the Master, is a linguist and most efficient in interpreting and translating, and that blessed soul, Jenáb-i-Fadil Mázandarání. In the midst of these never-to-be-forgotten companions breakfast was eaten and before we dispersed I said: "Please, Mírzá Bahadur, when the Master comes this morning, tell Him the substance of what you have heard, and say that I am perfectly contented and happy now, that I do not desire anything definite for myself nor for anyone."

The Master did not visit us as usual that morning, but He had luncheon with us. He greeted us all in His ineffable way, paying no special attention to me. I was so happy and I wanted Him to know it. The meal would be over and soon He would be gone. "Please, Mírzá Bahadur," I said: "Do tell the Master what I requested of you." But before he could do so, the Master, in a voice thrillingly vibrant, said, as He turned to me: "Brava! Brava! Ah, now you are another Mrs. Watson! Now you are *perfectly happy*. Now you have something most definite to take home with you to the friends." Tenderly His gaze rested upon me, radiating such love that I could scarcely bear it. Fervently I thanked God that I was able to register

in my soul a portion of this Divine Elixir so potently and lavishly bestowed by this perfect Christ-type man, the Master of Haifa.

Seventeen more golden days were spent with the Master and His holy family. Only too swiftly did they fly. Every day, two or three times as the occasion permitted, I saw the Blessed One. Now that I did not clamour for it, every explanation was given and made clear. Is it a wonder that my consciousness expanded far beyond the boundaries of my former limitations and that I utterly forgot them in the dazzling splendour of illumination from the Sun of Truth, the sign of which is 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Centre of the Covenant of God?

Mírzá Sayyid Mustapha, from India, an old Bahá'í and a great worker in the Cause, was a guest of the Master and had been in the household for several months to recuperate after most arduous labours, having formed an Indian Bahá'í colony of about 150 souls. He was one of the pilgrims to the Tomb of Bahá'u'lláh and a witness to my healing. His wish was that I might go to his colony and teach his people. He asked if I would go, and I said: "Yes, most willingly, if the Master permits." Then he said, "The Master loves you, will you not ask Him?" Again my answer was, "Yes, most gladly." Several times Mírzá Sayyid Mustapha talked with me about the colony, the work I could do there, and how happy it would make him to have me go. A few days after, I did ask 'Abdu'l-Bahá and He said: "I have already told Sayyid Mustapha that if I should send you to India now, you would ascend in a short time to the Kingdom of Abhá. No, your body is not strong enough to stand the hardships such a trip and work would entail. I wish you to go back to America and give the Glad Tidings. Take to them the 'definite' things I have given you. You are a living sign of the Love of God." A few minutes later I told Sayyid Mustapha, and he said: "The Master told me yesterday. He knows best. I did not realize that you are not strong in body, your spirit is so alive." We both realized that the Master had answered his question before I had asked Him,—another proof of His power to read the heart's desires.

A few days after this incident Fugeta came to my room and said: "The Master is coming to see you." It was not the usual hour. I was

finishing some notes, and hastily putting down my work, I arose just as the Master came in. Behold Him with me. There He stands, this wonderful Being, His countenance radiating every phase of graciousness, love, beauty, sweetness and grandeur that the soul can conceive! He bore in His hands a silver salver covered with white jasmine. After greeting me He said: "I come to bring you my farewell gift, these fragrant blossoms. May your deeds fill the world with like fragrance!" His "farewell gift"! I placed it on the table with a tumultuous heart. The Master continued: "In a few days you will leave us. Other guests are coming and it is my wish that you visit as many of the friends in Alexandria, Port Said and Cairo as possible. You will refresh them and they will welcome you with genuine Bahá'í love."

Left alone, I wept. A thousand memories of His wondrous kindness rushed upon my soul and made real to me the divine outpouring of Love which the Christ manifested in the former time, but which the earthly consciousness of men has so obscured that scarcely a trace is visible in the majority of mankind to-day. Now in the dawn of this great cycle, the outlook is hopeful and inspiring, for the Christ Spirit has revealed a new Heaven of spiritual understanding, bringing about the union of minds and hearts in thousands of ready souls, and a realization that this Christ Love must be applied in the life of the individual.

The miracles performed daily by 'Abdu'l-Bahá could not be recorded by human pen; the healing of the soul's blindness, restoring the crippled in consciousness and the resurrection of the "dead" to spiritual reality. These are indeed miracles that the people of every nation, and every religion have seen demonstrated in this Day, as well as the wonders of physical healing. Bahá'ís do not make physical healing of paramount importance. "If, merely, the physical sight is restored the person will, in due time, pass out of the body, and no permanent benefit is gained." Yet to me He said: "The adjustment of thy body is proof of the Love of God, and thou must be ever grateful for this bounty."

That afternoon, meeting with the Ladies of the Household, my eyes showed traces of weeping, and in answer to their solicitous inquiries, I told them of the Master's wish that I should leave in a

few days, and tears again came to my eyes. The ladies embraced me with the utmost affection, saying: "Dear sister, do not weep, your sadness makes us very sad too. We will ask the Master not to send you away. We all love you and wish you could remain here always. We will ask the Master to let you stay. You could teach us many things." I was about to ask them not to speak to the Master, when He came in upon us unawares. We were standing in a group with locked arms and tear-stained faces, and endeavoured to separate, but He said, pushing us together again: "Nah, nah, this is good, very good." Gazing with wondrous love upon us, before anyone had time to ask, He said: "No, she must go, she is too useful in the outside world to remain longer. She must go forth, spread the Glad Tidings, teach the people, demonstrate to them the Love of God." "See," He continued, pointing to the little group which now the younger grandchildren had joined, "See how they love you. We all love you. This is your home, but now you must go away from home. Thou hast eaten with us, not only material food, thou hast eaten with us spiritual food. The Heavenly Food consists of the Love of God, the knowledge of God, the bestowal of divine gifts. Thou must be very grateful for this wonderful bounty to thee and become radiantly happy." After this I shed no more tears!

The last day, August 27th, 1921, had arrived. Alláh-u-Abhás and good-byes had been repeated many times by the beloved friends, friends newly made, but eternal in realized consciousness. I did not see the Master that day in the Pilgrim House owing to His many visitors, but in His own house at dinner He was most kind and regretted that He had not been able to see me before. At the table He did not refer to my going away. But after dinner He beckoned to me and led me out on the broad stone parapet and had two chairs placed there. He motioned to me to be seated and gave me some instructions as to His wishes regarding my work in the future. Finally He arose and said: "As you leave at three in the morning, I will not see you again. This is my last farewell to you. I send you forth under the protection of Bahá'u'lláh, the Blessed Beauty. Be filled with His Love to overflowing. We shall pray for you always. Do not forget this." He summoned Soheil to take me to the Pilgrim House and without another word, but with a strong

pressure of His hand we parted. Silently I said: "Good-bye," and going down the stone steps for the last time, I gazed upward, and, seeing the Master standing above, I seemed to feel and hear His benediction.

Later I slipped over to the Master's House to see the ladies once more as I had promised. The Greatest Holy Leaf gave me a rosary of lovely blue beads divided by exquisite blue pendants. She said: "I have strung these myself for you, and have prayed that you may be restored to perfect health and grow strong so that you may work many years for the Master."

It was past midnight when, with many tender farewells, we parted. That last hour is engraved eternally upon my memory as a sacred ending of my visit of pilgrimage to the "Land of Desire."