

(the) South American campaign, derive fresh impetus (from the) example (of) her glorious sacrifice. Southern outpost (of) Faith greatly enriched through association (with) her historic resting-place destined remain (a) poignant reminder (of the) resistless march (of the) triumphant army (of) Bahá'u'lláh. Advise believers (of) both Americas (to) hold befitting memorial gathering."

I.

She was born in Englewood, New Jersey, on January 14, 1870, the daughter of John B. Bolles and Mary Martin Bolles, in descent American through many generations. Her early years were spent in the Englewood home of her maternal grandfather, a man distinguished in New York's banking world. She had one brother, Randolph, whom she loved deeply and whose attraction to the Bahá'í Faith, as evidenced in the last year before his death in 1939 (by his translation into English of the French footnotes of Nabil), gave her supreme content.

Even as a girl her priceless qualities adorned her—a capacity for affectionate and enduring ties; an eagerness for truth which led her down many paths, laying the basis for an all-encompassing sympathy; and an independent, original nature, alive to the "susceptibilities of the Kingdom." After fourteen years she accepted no formal schooling: "I felt very distinctly there was another way of acquiring knowledge."

Paris was early a pivot in her life's destiny, its French "a lyric, plastic tongue" in which she often thought and felt. Two visits as a child, including a period in a Convent school, were followed by a residence of some eleven years, undertaken for Randolph's architectural studies at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. It was 1898 of this sojourn that became forever memorable.

[Page 517 contains a photograph of May Maxwell.]

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[Top of page contains photograph of friends who gathered for May Maxwell's burial service.]

The first foreshadowing reached her when, at eleven years of age, she experienced in her sleep a sunlight so brilliant that for one day her eyes were blinded. Again she dreamed that angels carried her through space. Seeing light, she found it was the earth, and the earth was marked with seals, and one word was on the earth. Of this she could read only the B and the H, but she knew then that these letters would transform her life. The Master Himself came to her in vision, a majestic figure in Eastern garb, beckoning her from across the Mediterranean with characteristic gesture. She thought He was Jesus but two years later when Lua heard, "This is 'Abdu'l-Bahá," she said.

Despite the beauty and comfort of her surroundings, and the warmth of her relation with mother and brother—these three were one heart, one soul, with a multitude of friends because of it"[1]—the Paris years were not altogether easy ones. Ill health then as always tested her, to which her husband has borne

sufficient witness: "May had courage and her sublime faith inspired her to carry on, very frequently under a handicap of health that would have daunted others." This weakness chained her to her bed for two years before Lua's coming, and if later she recalled those months as preparation, the Master's words to her make clear the reason: ". . . The heart is made ready by all experience for the seed of life. . . . Now your troubles are ended and you must wipe away your tears"

On its face, it was not unusual that Mrs. Phoebe Hearst, close family friend, should in November, 1898, bring her party of American tourists to her apartment on the Quai d'Orsay, then occupied by Mrs. Bolles, her son and daughter, and Mrs. Hearst's two nieces whom she chaperoned. The party was going up the Nile; its startling mission went undisclosed. Only May sensed in Lua Getsinger a hidden fire, sought it out, believed, and through her passionate desire won the invitation of Mrs. Hearst to join this pilgrimage.

They were the first Americans to go. Because of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's imprisonment they traveled to Haifa in small groups, of which one included May Bolles, Mrs. Thornburgh, Anne Apperson, Miss Pearson, and Robert Turner. She reached her Lord on February 17, 1899; her own words record that imperishable story.[2]

"Of that first meeting I can remember neither joy nor pain nor anything that I can name. I had been carried suddenly to too great a height; my soul had come in contact with the Divine Spirit; and this force

1 Louise Bosch.

2 An Early Pilgrimage (note corrected date), published in 1917.

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so pure, so holy, so mighty had overwhelmed me. . . . And when He arose and suddenly left us we came back with a start to life: but never again, oh! never again, thank God, to the same life on this earth! ... As we gazed on Him I realized that we could in no way comprehend Him; we could only love Him, follow Him, obey Him and thereby draw nearer to His beauty. . . . When He had finished speaking we were led gently away ... and for a moment it seemed that we were dying . . . until, as we drove away ... suddenly His spirit came to us, a great strength and tranquillity filled our souls. . . . We had left our Beloved in His glorious prison that we might go forth and serve Him; that we might spread His Cause and deliver His Truth to the world; and already His words were fulfilled—"The time has come when we must part, but the separation is only of our bodies; in spirit we are united forever."

How truthful her record! How immeasurable the alteration of her life! None knew this better than 'Abdu'l-Bahá for, as He adjured her mother, "she was in a certain condition and now she is in another. Yea, she has been human, but now she is divine; earthly, but now heavenly; mundane, but belonging now to the Kingdom of God!" 'Ali-Kuli Khan has recalled that when, visiting 'Akka in 1900, he was told of the American pilgrims, "the

highest praise given by the Master . . . always centered upon May Bolles."

Certain it is that "her inertness (was) replaced by activity, . . . her muteness by wonderful speech, and that upon returning to Paris she began quietly with friends to convey her overwhelming experience. Her fellow-believers had by now gone on to America, leaving her alone. "I say alone!" Mason Remey has exclaimed. "May Bolles stood alone as a Bahá'í, one frail woman in that vast metropolis, the heart of Continental culture. . . .Her task was to establish there a Divine Cause!"

Merely to register the names of those who, from 1899 to 1902, were drawn by—her "personal fascination . . . so fragile, so luminous . . . and the most delicate, perfect beauty, flower-like and star-like;"[3] and who, through this spell, attained to its origin in her rapturous love for 'Abdu'l-Bahá—is to compel astonishment. The first to believe was Edith MacKaye, and by the New Year of 1900, Charles Mason Remey and Herbert Hopper were next to follow. Then came Marie Squires (Hopper), Helen Ellis Cole, Laura Barney, Mine. Jackson, Agnes Alexander, Thomas Breakwell, Edith Sanderson, and Hippolyte Dreyfus, the first French Bahi'í. Emogene Hoagg and Mrs. Conner had come to Paris in 1900 from America, Sigurd Russell at fifteen returned from 'Akka a believer, and in 1901, the group was further reinforced by Juliet Thompson, Lillian James, and "the frequent passing through Paris of pilgrims from America going to the Master . . . and then again returning from the Holy Land." These are but a few, for "in 1901 and 1902 the Paris group of Bahi'is numbered between twenty-five and thirty people with May Bolles as spiritual guide and teacher."[4]

Nor let us forget that this superlative achievement was won without literature, almost without knowledge. Only a few prayers and the Hidden Words, and the heart's attachment to the Supreme Beloved, nourished and protected her teaching. What a bounty, then, to receive in 1901 the extended visit of Mirzi 'Abu'l Fadl, sent by the Master to strengthen His Western children. For perhaps a month he taught them almost daily, through the translations of Anton Haddad and 'Ali-Kuli Khan. Of those memorable hours Agnes Alexander has written: "An atmosphere of pure light pervaded the Paris meetings, so much so that one was transported, as it were, from the world of man to that of God;" to which Juliet Thompson's testimony is added: "That Paris group was so deeply united in love and faith; May, Lua, Laura and Khan, these four especially so inspired, so carried away, so intoxicated with love for the beloved Master; our great teacher, Mirzi 'Abu'l-Fadl, so heavenly wise—that those days were the days of miracle, of all but incredible confirmations."

We can but imagine the special joy which Lua's frequent presence must have brought, for May's devotion to her "precious mother" was constant to the last. Hers was the

3. Juliet Thompson

4. Mason Remey

uncommon gift of discernment, beneath every veil of flesh, of the soul's hidden virtue, and her words written upon the news of Lua's death in 1916 bear eloquent witness to this power: "Great and wonderful were her qualities-in her own person she bore the sins and weaknesses of us all, and redeeming herself she redeemed us. She broke the path through the untrod forest; she cast her soul and body into the stream and perished making the bridge by which we cross. . . . The passion of Divine love that consumed her heart shall light the hearts of mankind forever and forever."

Perhaps the most wondrous event of this fecund time was the confirmation of that brightest of spirits, Thomas Breakwell. Asked by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to remain in Paris in the summer of 1901, despite her family's displeasure May obeyed; only thus could she respond when a friend brought to her door "this youth of medium height, slender, erect and graceful, with intense eyes and an indescribable charm." Although on their first meeting she did not mention her Faith, he returned the next day in great agitation, having experienced a vision of Christ's presence on this earth. "He was like a blazing light. Such was his capacity that he received the Message in all its fullness and all its strength and beauty within three days, and on the third day he wrote his supplication to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, which in its force and simplicity I have never seen equalled: 'My Lord, I believe; forgive me. Thy servant, Thomas Breakwell.' That evening I went to the rue du Bac to get my mail ... and there lay a little blue cablegram from 'Abdu'l-Bahá. With what wonder and awe I read His words. 'You may leave Paris at any time!'"[5]

Yet even as we are touched by this account and by the remembrance of one whom the Master could so address: "O my beloved, O Breakwell! Thou hast become a star in the most exalted horizon; . . ." must we not also perceive the responsiveness of that instrument through whom He obtained His will!

She was obedient not only in matters affecting her Faith. Her whole being, every attachment and every goal, she placed with tender confidence at His disposal. "I have not two lives but one," she wrote in 1934, "the inner life of the Cause to which every outer thing and circumstance must adjust itself." So with her marriage, she delayed and consummated it at His desire.

William Sutherland Maxwell, Scotch-Canadian of an old and established family of Montreal, and young student of architecture in the Ecole des Beaux Arts, met May Bolles through her brother, not long after his arrival in October, 1899. He was not a Bahá'í; indeed he attended no meetings until 1902. After seventeen months he returned to Montreal to enter his profession, engaged to be married, but waiting upon the news of her readiness. This came at last; they were wed in London on May 8, 1902. And his patience, he himself has said, had an enduring recompense.

O Paris, crossroads of the world, when has your history unfolded such mysterious tales! What mighty power caused this "spot, . . . heedless of the praise of God," to grow a fertile garden! See once the seeds of spring rooted in gifted hearts; see then these hearts, bearing sweet fruits, dispersed to

fecundate for never-ending harvests the countless nations. And were they not the choicest spirits, flung by our generous Lord across His darkened planet, so to bestow upon all unregenerate, unlovely things the fragrance of attraction? O Paris, after forty years we do affirm the Master's prayer went not unanswered! "Fill their breasts with the boundless joy that blows as a breeze from Thy Kingdom of Abha, that they may be the miracles of Thine Appearance from the Highest Horizon."

II.

She was then thirty-two years old when, her fame hastening before, she returned to America. How can we at this distance penetrate the dislocation of her ways, uprooted from dearest companions, from the Paris she adored, to come a bride to a far and alien land? "Thou wert as pure gold," the Master wrote her, "and didst enter the fire of test . . . Gird up thy loins, fortify thy back,

5 See accounts in *BAHA'I WORLD*, Vol. VII., pp. 707-711; and in *Star of the West*, Vol. V., pp. 297-298.

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arise, and with the strength of thy heart Promote the Word of God ... in that remote region.

Yet she was ever a rootless creature, and for her neither time nor space nor the plans of men held real authority—a tendency much strengthened by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's instruction. "Time is a gross deception," she said, "the measuring rod of our present captivity. . . ." And again, "The mortal cage is nothing; the soul's motion in relation to the Beloved is the unfolding of all the meaning of life." Often in 1902 she reminded herself of that French heroine who, finding how unsubstantial was existence, had all her handkerchiefs embroidered, "A quoi bon!" And Louise Bosch has vividly remembered: "As often as I looked upon her, and contemplated her attitude to life and her disposition of it, I would distinctly feel that she was only visiting here. . . ."

"Ephemeral"—this was her own term, but without struggle and without reproach. She knew well that "the soul only grows and expands in an atmosphere of joy," and while this world seemed a fleeting shadow, yet it was irradiated with the splendor of her true, her heavenly home.

This unquenchable joy she carried to Montreal and planted as well in her earthly home. Though she departed a hundred times (her letters are dated from Edgartown, Rye, Boston, New York, Arverne), her heart turned always back with yearning renewed in poignant memories. And with what wealth the years endowed these two! Montreal, mother-city of Canada; the Maxwell home, center "not only of the Bahá'í friends . . . but of all the pilgrims who travelled that way during all . . . their blessed lives together!"⁶ Louise Bosch, 'Ali-Kuli Khan and Mme. Khan, Lua Getsinger, Agnes Alexander, Zia Bagdadi and Zeenat Khanum (sent by 'Abdu'l-Bahá for their marriage in April, 1914), Mason Remey and George Latimer, William H. Randall, Elizabeth Greenleaf, Jinab-i-Fadil, Mother Beecher, Keith Ransom-Kehler, Ruhi Effendi, Martha Root, Emogene Hoagg, Mabel

Ives—illustrious names in our Faith, all these and a host more were guests of Mr. and Mrs. Maxwell. Small wonder then that even from Bahji she should write: "I still long for you all who so live in my heart and eagerly look forward to the hour when I shall meet you again, when we shall be together 'in a meeting of pure love and unity in the room where our beloved Lord sat with us, where His blessed name has been mentioned, and His wonderful words have been read for so many years."

One thing is clear, that wherever she travelled, the spirit of 'Abdu'l-Bahá went there too. So potent was the force of His attraction on her heart that she in turn became "a magnet of love drawing everyone to God." This alone was her method of teaching, the hidden source of an inimitable effect. The following passage comes from a letter of 1915: "We must first touch the heart to awaken it; if it opens and responds we must sow the priceless seed. . . .Prepare the soil with the warmth of your love just as the sun prepares the soil in the spring or the seed would not grow. Remove the stones and weeds . . . that is to say, in a kind way try to remove prejudices. . . . Uproot narrow superstitions by suggesting broader, deeper ideas. Never oppose people's ideas and statements, but give them a little nobler way of seeing life. Such words and thoughts will take effect because they come from a Bahá'í whose life flows from the Source of all life on earth today. . . . My great and wise teacher, Mirza 'Abu'l-Fadl, laid down these divine principles of teaching in my soul ... and they have changed all my attitude. He showed me that it is the Spirit of God that is doing the work; we must wait upon the Spirit and do Its bidding only."

So in this way the Faith was sown in Montreal. By 1903 Sutherland Maxwell had become the first Canadian Bahá'í, and shortly after, his cousin Martha MacBean followed him. Group meetings were then started and later regularly established. Soon Mary Corristine, Rose Henderson, and others unrecorded had been won.

At the same time, through wide and active civic interests, the name of Mrs. Maxwell came to be distinguished among her fellow citizens. Prior to 1912 she supported a Children's Court for Montreal, and her efforts were chief in maintaining the Colborne Street Milk Station. Later about 1914 she brought from New York a Montessori

6 Elizabeth Greenleaf.

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teacher, starting "the first school of this type in Canada in our own home. . . . it was through all this that I became interested in the movement for Progressive Education, of which I was practically a charter member. . . ." Such sympathies were a solid basis for the Master's triumphant welcome in 1912, for He found "no antagonist and no adversary."

But before this consummation there came a bounty which must always be associated with the pilgrimage of February, 1909. Not for ten years had she visited 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and though her name was often on His tongue-at this

time, Mirza Moneer affirmed, she was renowned in the East through His frequent mentions in Tablets—great was the pleasure in 'Akka on her return. That meeting with the Master and the ladies of His house Louise Bosch has described, and from her, too, the tender greeting of the Holy Mother: "First as a young girl, now with your husband; on your next visit, you will come with your child!"

Blessed indeed were those six days. To them 'Abdu'l-Bahá referred in 1911 and 1913: "Thy utmost desire was to have a child for whom thou hast prayed and supplicated while in 'Akka. Praise be to God that the prayer is answered and thy desire realized. In the garden of existence a rose has blossomed with the utmost freshness, fragrance, and beauty.... I beg of God that this little child may become great and wonderful in the Divine Kingdom."

III.

"Now He is coming and will be here about the middle of next week, and I hope that nothing in this world will prevent your being here! The months I spent near 'Abdu'l-Bahá in New York have done more for the education and enlightenment of my heart and conscience than all my life's experience. . . ."

After five months in the United States the Master was coming to Montreal! He had accepted their invitation, despite His friends' forebodings, and late on the night of August 30, 1912, the Maxwells and Louise Bosch met His train from Boston. He went directly to her home, for four days lavishing His presence before moving to the Hotel Windsor. The columns of the Montreal Daily Star had for a week been heralding this great event, and during those memorable days the best publicity of His American stay, He said, ensured a permanent record of His words. In hours of grave concern to Canada, of threatening conflict and burdensome armaments, the predictions of this "Apostle of Peace . . . (of) An Appalling War" were headlined to the city.

Besides daily interviews with groups and individuals, 'Abdu'l-Bahá made seven public lectures. His first was for morning service at the Church of the Messiah (Unitarian) on September 1st. On the 3rd He outlined for five hundred Socialists at Coronation Hall—vividly, completely—Bahá'í principles for The Economic Happiness of the Human Race. His last address drew twelve hundred listeners to St. James Methodist Church on September 5th. Four talks were given in the Maxwell home, and many who there heard Him were believers, while others became so.

Her share was strenuous in this historic sojourn, for she made the major part of His arrangements. But He accorded her immortal praise in the Tablet to Canada. And "the results in the future are inexhaustible!"

IV.

'Abdu'l-Bahá touched no other point in Canada; rather He hoped that His time in Montreal might so stir that city "that the melody of the Kingdom may travel to all parts of the world." "Do ye not look upon the smallness of your numbers," He forbade them. "One pearl is better than a thousand wildernesses of sand, especially this pearl of great price, which is endowed with divine

blessing." And to May Maxwell He gave a special charge, sending in her care His two mighty Tablets to this nation.

The first was received in the fall of 1916 and she, together with the four who stood in like relation to the other regions of America, was henceforth known to the American Bahá'ís as a "center" for the spread of the Divine Plan. How mysterious is the Cause! The secret energies released by these mother words seem to have enveloped the Eighth Convention (April, 1916). With a sublime intuition, in the very month of the Master's enunciation— "the banner of oneness must

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unfurled in those states"-she "voiced the oneness of the world of humanity in so wonderful a way that one might well have thought our beloved 'Abdu'l-Bahá was using her) to convey a message to the Convention." [7]

It was not the first nor the last time that her searching spirit, restless and "ablaze with the fire of the love of God," resuscitated the delegates in their sessions. She attended a majority of Conventions, often as Montreal's representative, and although on too many occasions her health's debility restrained her, she would appear, as Mabel Ives has said, "at occasional moments on the floor of the Convention . . . raising such a lofty call that a new and high level was set of understanding and devotion. . . ."

Does this amaze us? No, rather we should recall the Master's characterization! "May Maxwell is really a Bahá'í She breathed no breath and uttered no word save aw [what word is this? -ed] service to the Cause of God Whoso ever meets her feels from her association the susceptibilities of the Kingdom. Her company uplifts and develops the soul. . . ."

For her gift, her most exceptional gift was teaching. Every activity emanated from this source and every new heart roused to life owed, with what inexpressible gratitude, its very being to her touch. It was not always her role to instruct the inquirer; this she could do with matchless charm. Rather, for countless Bahá'ís she unlocked a hidden treasure for which they long had searched.

"Pray for me, May," wrote Keith in 1923. "It is my only refuge. . . . Through this bitter storm of trial in which every attribute of light is obscure or withdrawn, you still stand, a dazzling presence on the further shore toward which I struggle, a gift and evidence lent me by the Master. . . ." And Keith, like others, acknowledged that such bestowal was spiritual motherhood."

This "priceless and overflowing quality of the heart," in Rowland Estall's words, was by no means specialized to her contemporaries. She was captured by "the mystery of the eternal stream of Life, flowing through the generations." Whether in Montreal, New York, Green Acre, California, Portland, Vancouver, Stuttgart, Paris, or Lyon, her perception of "the pure, fragrant, living force of the rising generation under the shadow of Shoghi Effendi" drew to her many youthful spirits. For she was irresistible in a way most vividly portrayed by

her own daughter: "Many people inspire more or less love in others, but I don't think I ever knew anyone who inspired the love Mother did—so that it was like an event when one was going to see her. And this I felt all my life, day in day out, and it never became commonplace!"

The Montreal Youth Group, so justly celebrated since 1927, profited immeasurably by her support. As Mr. Estall has said, "every one of the young Bahá'ís either sought out her company to receive the benefit of her wise counsel and mature knowledge . . . or were befriended by her and experienced the privilege of her loving friendship and generosity." Nor was this of small import, since she influenced from the inception of that Group such ones as George Spendlove, Rowland Estall, Emeric and Rosemary Sala, Teddy Edwards Alizade, Norman McGregor, Judie Russell Blakely, Dorothy and Glen Wade, Edward Dewing, Gerrard Sluter, David Hofman, Rena Gordon, naming only some—each to become in turn an instrument of potent teaching.

Indeed, her sympathies recognized no bounds. "Oh, there is no separateness—it is the only sin!" And again, "If we knew the reality, the mystery of oneness, we should be standing in the full light of God . . . and we should all be to each other an inexhaustible source of life, strength, healing, joy, and blessedness." This theme she did not speak idly; around it all her actions flowed with a fullness tenderly remembered by friends of every kind and background. Generous beyond any record, she gave unstintingly "to the Temple and to the furtherance of teaching work; for charity; for relieving sorrow and distress." Generous too in courage and beyond assault, how keenly she championed the neglected cause, or labored to reinforce the underprivileged race.

Through all the years of an undeviating

7 *Star of the West*, Vol. VII., p. 54. 'Keith Ransom-Kehler, first American martyr and Hand of the Cause, who died and is now interred at Isfahan—met Mrs. Maxwell at the Convention of 1921.

9 Mariam Haney.

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service to the Faith on the North American continent, from 1902 until 1940—years which only to some future biographer shall yield the vast, heroic scope of her effort[10]—she bore to her fellow-believers, whether in local or national community, a unique, a spiritual relationship. "Mother of the Latin races," she has been titled; no, so much more, mother of yearning hearts in every spot she ever visited!

And this relation was hers in special measure to Canada. The Tablets of the Divine Plan released in her an impetus which never faltered. In 1916 she journeyed with Grace Ober to the "far Northeast." She taught also with Marion Jack and, after 1920, with Elizabeth Greenleaf. St. John's, Brockville, Ottawa, Toronto, Calgary, and Vancouver—all were cities in which "like unto a gardener," she brought forth "growth through the outpourings of the cloud of

Guidance . . . heaping up piles of crops and harvests." The Spiritual Assembly of Vancouver was the direct result of her stay in July, 1926; "it would take an Angel Gabriel to blare forth her work!"[11]

Yet she was never content for a moment. . . The merciful God alone can estimate our failure," she wrote. But only He could estimate, as well, the triumph of her dauntless spirit over every handicap. Of all the tributes, the Master's pierces us with sweetest emphasis: ". . . Thy Lord shall strengthen thee in a matter, whereby the Queens of the world will envy thy happy state, throughout all times and ages. Because, verily, the Love of God is as a glorious Crown upon thy head, the brilliant jewels of which are glittering forth unto all horizons. Its brilliancy, transparency and effulgence shall appear in future centuries when the signs of God will be spread and the Word of God will encompass the heart of all the people of the earth!"

V.

The current of her existence knew no ebb, but mounted strongly from the first vital contact with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, through all the years of His world-creating Mission, beneath the pain and oppression of His passing, into the full tide of the Guardianship." And for almost two decades she was to serve Shoghi Effendi with that same eager, steadfast concentration which always singled her out above her generation. "Nothing is too great to suffer for him, no daily discipline, no effort or sacrifice, no surrender of all that is upon this earth. . . ."

So in August, 1935, arrested by his appeal to the American believers to turn toward Europe, and preceded by her daughter and dear relatives, Ruhanguiz and Jeanne Bolles she with her husband left America. It was to be a brief visit. In reality, she did not return for two years; she did not return until her prayer, uttered in 1934—"there has revived in me life's deepest yearning, to 'tread that Path white with the bones of the slain!'"—had found a burning answer.

No faintest suspicion, however, of Ruhiyyih Khanum's destiny, nor of that "sacred tie" which was to crown her "signal services," interrupted the vigor with which she pressed her teaching in Germany, Belgium, and France. Already to her eyes the Old World had become a veritable graveyard. "It is appalling to be among so many dead, 'moving dust,' we see them here. . . ."

The mental, moral, and spiritual atmospheric pressure is stifling . . . for the dark forces completely envelop the world, seeking to enter every mind and cloud or crush it.... Coming over here and working in Europe is like being borne along on a stream, almost without volition, entirely without plan.

10 National Offices: Member of the Executive Board of Bahá'í Temple Unity for three years, 1918-20, and of the National Spiritual Assembly for three years 1924, 1927, and 1928, also serving as alternate member in 1925. Chairman, 1927, and Secretary, 1929 and 1929, of the National Teaching Committee; and officer or member for Canada of the National and or Regional Teaching

Committees

from the first organization in 1920 through 1930, as well as 1932 and 1937.

Member

of Star of the West Foundations. 1919, 1920; contributing editor for Bahá'í Magazine 1932-34. Green Acre Program Committee, 1925, 1932. History of the Cause in America Committee 1925, 1933-1935. Member of Unity Band prior to 1910 (to correspond with Persian Bahá'ís). Donor of Tarbiyat School scholarship for several years from 1910. Committee for "Compilation on Most Great Peace," 1918.

Montreal (incomplete): Member of Local Spiritual Assembly from formation in 1922

to November, 1939. On Teaching and Publicity Committees for many years. Active supporter of Youth and Racial Amity work. (Honorary president of Negro Club of Montreal, 1927).

11 Evelyn Kemp.

12 See her poem, Orientation, for a proof of the transition achieved in her seven-months' pilgrimage of 1923-1924. Star of the West, Vol. XV., p. 101.

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through the directing hand of the Guardian. . . .How he is combing the world for his jewels— before the end!"

Sometimes alone, sometimes with others of her family, she pursued this goal, seeking to recognize and free, from a besetting lethargy, those hearts known only to Bahá'u'lláh. She taught first in certain German centers, acquiring in Munich and Stuttgart an admiration for this "profoundly interesting country," and its people which was to be immensely strengthened when, in August, 1936, she returned for the Esslingen Summer School and to make, at Shoghi Effendi's request, a "grand tour" of the German Bahá'í communities. Thus she was part of that thrilling final session at Esslingen: "all International barriers were broken down and there was a oneness of spirit, a joyous companionship . . . which reached a climax with the reading of the Guardian's cablegram containing his passionate appeal to America. . . ."

She worked intensively in Brussels, too, from October, 1935, until in the following April she visited Lyon to assist Mirza Ezzatollah Zabih, "the Persian Bahá'í in whose home our beloved Keith passed from this world."

Characteristically, she had left Brussels for a few days at Christmas to attend the Sixth Annual Conference of Bahá'í Students in Paris, "because they gave me the opportunity to speak on the activities of the young American Bahá'ís. . . ." For France she still retained that heavenly gift with which the Master had endowed her; as in the immortal early years, again for several months in 1909, so now during this and later sojourns, "elle fortifiait les Bahá'ís en leur croyance et attirait d'autres imes a la Cause par le dynamisme de sa foi, par la clarte de son esprit.""

Yet brilliantly as she shone in every field, all was eclipsed the spring of

1936, April to June, in the city of Lyon. The outer facts are recorded with surpassing modesty: 'Meetings held every Thursday for a group of ten or fifteen; a special meeting begun for the study of Bahá'í Administration, for which "Lyon was virgin soil;" the first Nineteen Day Feast, "perhaps ever held in France; a study group initiated for young people;

and through the medium of the Law of God for this age, their understanding and faith grew stronger and deeper Thus she wrote of Lyon; but what, on the other hand, did Lyon write of her?

"Un simple regard de May Maxwell et toute son âme apparaissait dans sa beauté limpide, sa pureté, son amour. De ce premier regard découla la force neuve et vive qui éveilla Lyon au grand Message. . . . Elle pouvait parler des heures-mais on désirait l'entendre pendant des années; car le visage de son enseignement sacré était une joie perpétuelle pour le cœur, un souffle vivifiant pour l'esprit, un repos, un allègement! Douée du don céleste le plus rare au monde, le diapason de son âme vibrât harmonieusement avec les âmes qu'elle touchait même pour la première fois. Sa fraîcheur et sa jeunesse lui faisaient manifester des joies avec la spontanéité d'un enfant. Se trouvant un jour ~ mon laboratoire, je lui montrai des animaux au microscope, ces animaux unicellulaires les plus simples de la création. Elle s'écria avec ravissement: 'oh! que je suis contente! j'ai vu les deux extrémités de la création: le Maître, et puis le premier échelon de la vie animée.' . . . La conséquence de son influence historique sur la France . . . fut la création du groupe lyonnais en 1936; guidée par elle, ce dernier son tour, fonda celui d'Organs en 1938, puis d'Hyères en 1939. . . . Car Madame M. Maxwell ne vit pas dans le cœur de ses enfants autre que simplement de souvenir, de pensée ou de sentiment; elle vit à l'état actif par eux. . . . Ses paroles, les années venant rendre témoignage exact et équitable de la portée profonde et durable de son œuvre spirituelle."

What more could the pen speak? Such praise bears an eternal witness, distilling to future centuries the fragrance of her deeds. And this treasure, too, she raised up in Lyon! "Such thrilling reports I have from Lucienne would compensate a thousand woes! ... With all her learning, she understands the language of the heart and spirit, and is the first of her generation among the French thus to respond with her whole being to the Blessed Beauty!"

VI.

She prayed for martyrdom in the Holy Shrines, and her Lord in His mercy gave her

13 Laura Dreyfus-Barney.

14 Lucienne Migette.

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two replies, and her feet walked no other path from the day of her daughter's marriage. Sublime, unguessed event! How far our empty concepts are surpassed;

her sensibilities escape us; the winging gratitude, the pain, its surcease, the heart's ineffable and boundless joy! Should we say only this—her home was Haifa? She never greeted Ruhyyih Khanum again, from May of 1937; nor did she again experience, after five months of blessed visit, the Guardian's immediate, revitalizing force. Yet in a deeper sense she lived there, hour by hour to her last day.

"There was a time that I agonized with a mother's weakness and instinctive protection over the terrific deprivation in all her outer human ways, and the austere discipline of the life of my child. It is she herself (combined with a ray of common sense of my own), who taught me the spartan spirit of that Persian mother who threw back the head of her martyred son to his executioner. . . . And as I have witnessed, from year to year, the profound and mystic change in Ruhyyih Khanum.... I have marvelled at the grace of God and His delicate and perfect handiwork. . . ."

The depths of consciousness to which her life, "so rich, eventful, incomparably blessed," had gradually accustomed her, came to exert upon her American friends, from the first moment of return in September, 1937, an elusive, all-compelling, wonderful effect. She moved among us then, a spirit of purest light, a symbol of faithfulness, a fountain of celestial power. "Her wisdom and devotion were like newly-discovered springs of sweet water." [15] To be near her was to have one's soul forever altered.

In December and January, 1940, she travelled and taught with Mr. Maxwell in New York, Englewood, Washington, and Philadelphia. On New Year's Eve with Mason Remey, they celebrated together his confirmation in Paris, forty years before. Her earthly book approached its close; there remained but one brief, triumphant chapter.

South America had grown real to her in 1928 through Frances Stewart, whom she tenderly regarded as its "soul," and for twelve years these two nourished a relation which strengthened each in service to this vast continent. She did not think to go there, however, until the Guardian's dynamic call had stirred the American community to settle its countries with pioneers, and attract its nationals at home through brilliant teaching. She was immediately captivated. "Her constant topic of conversation was the Cause in South America. Her questions to me were inexhaustible. . . . Never can I forget the light that illumined her face as I told her stories of the individual friends. . . . Her spirit was that of a 'little child' in her enthusiasm, and South America gradually grew to be to her a 'field, white with the harvest.' [16] . . . This she mentioned to her daughter. "You can well imagine my astonishment when a cable instantly came back in which the Guardian said he 'heartily approved winter visit to Buenos Aires.'"

She lost no time; securing the consent of her husband and physician, she sailed January 24, 1940, on the S.S. Brazil with her "precious niece," Jeanne Bolles. The voyage, the climate, the splendid personal contacts the new and handsome cities of Rio de Janeiro, Montevideo, and Buenos Aires—all these elated her.

She was able to teach "one lovely woman on the boat, the wife of a distinguished army man." In Rio de Janeiro, with the aid of Leonora Holsapple who had come from Bahia, she arranged two teas at her hotel, the Gloria, one for nineteen guests, while a third meeting was held at the of Mr. and Mrs. Lee Worley. She spoke also, to the president of the Homeopathic College. Yet despite these two weeks of exhilarating success, she was eager to reach Buenos Aires; "she seemed to press forward every minutes of the way from Rio. . . ."[17]

They arrived on February 27th, after one day stops in Santos and Montevideo. "I am thrilled to be here in Buenos Aires," she wrote, "a strong, beautiful modern city and an interesting combination of North and South America, with an enchanting climate and delightful people. . . ." "As we drove through the streets, precious Aunt May was like a girl of sixteen in her joyous

15 Elizabeth Greenleaf.

16 Frances Stewart.

17 Jeanne Bolles.

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enthusiasm. . . . She leaned out of the taxi and exclaimed words of delight. . . ."
."18

On the night of February 29th they dined alone in her room at City Hotel, in thought transported to Haifa through Ruhyyih Khanum's poignant account of the burial on Mt. Carmel of the Master's illustrious mother and brother. And she received by telephone the first Bahá'í welcome to Buenos Aires; her mood was radiant. But the next morning a terrible pain came high in her breast, and though the doctor reassured them both, by afternoon "the Will of God took her from our midst. . . ."[18]

It was a long vigil which Jeanne kept, "like an angel from Heaven," without replies to her cables from Friday to Sunday. But she was not alone, for the Kevorklans and Arsen Poghaharion, Syrian Bahá'ís, were in Buenos Aires, and they were soon joined by Elizabeth Nourse, Wilfrid Barton, and Simon Rosenzweig from Montevideo. Together on March 3rd they gave her temporary rest in the English cemetery. "Simon writes that it was an experience to wrench any heart when all the conditions were considered, and a great mystery"

"Priceless honor (of a martyr's death!)" Such was the Guardian's imperishable tribute, and to Mr. Maxwell he cabled, "Her tomb designed by yourself, erected by me, (on) spot she fought, fell gloriously, will become historic centre pioneer Bahá'í activity."

They buried her then at Quilmes, a "befitting spot" discovered by patient search of Jeanne and Wilfrid Barton. At noon of March 13th, sped by the prayers of eleven believers of Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Colombia, Syria, and the United States; and by the Master's thrilling chant, recorded so long ago and now first voiced in South America for His own "beloved handmaid"—her precious

form sought its eternal resting-place. While in her home in Montreal at the same hour, a memorial was held by cherished friends.

Yet May Maxwell lives—adorable, rarest spirit! And her children around the world have given up their weeping, to follow her in the "resistless march."

* * *

From some rampart of heaven three heroines look down—Martha, May, and Keith!
Their shining traces will cheer us through whatever trials may come; the
promise of their aid stands guard above our destinies.

MARION HOLLEY May 9, 1940.

NOTE: Words italicized in the body of this account are 'Abdu'l-Bahá's, referring directly to Mrs. Maxwell or addressed to her, except for four fragments from the Tablet to Canada in which she is also mentioned. All quoted words not otherwise identified are from her own letters. Deepest gratitude goes to her family and friends for instant and unstinting help: Ruhyyih Khanum, Ruhanquiz Bolles, Sutherland Maxwell, Agnes Alexander, Kathrine Baldwin, Helen Bishop, Louise Bosch, Ella Cooper, Laura Dreyfus-Barney, Rowland Estall, Nellie S. French, Marzieh Gail, Elizabeth Greenleaf, Mariam Haney, Ernest Harrison, Emogene Hoagg, Horace Holley, Marie Hopper, Mabel Ives, Evelyn Kemp, Ali-Kuli Khan, Edward and Carrie Kinney, Margery McCormick, Carrie Marsh, Lucienne Migette, Julia Ransom Miller, Montreal Spiritual Assembly and Alberta Sims, Hamideh Nabil, Harlan Ober, Edwinna Powell, Charles Mason Remey, Sigurd Russell, Anne Savage, Philip Sprague, Frances Benedict Stewart, Juliet Thompson, and Muriel Warnicker. MARION HOLLEY (VIII, 631-42)

A TRIBUTE TO LUA GETSINGER Montreal, Canada. May 25, 1916.

"Lua has ascended to the Supreme Concourse"— those are the words I heard. For hours I have seen Lua, the woman, the child, all love and tenderness, dying far away alone. Far from the land where she sowed the seed from the Atlantic to the Pacific from the land where she arose like the dawning star heralding the light of Bahá'u'lláh in those days when the Occident lay frozen in the grasp of materialism-and far from all those who should have loved her and cherished her as a priceless gift from God. I could only see her frail form, her lovely, sensitive face, her pleading child's eyes. I

18 Jeanne Bolles.

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could only hear the cry of her soul, her yearning for sacrifice in the Path of God. Without home, money, or any earthly hope or refuge after her years of suffering, service and sacrifice she attained her supreme desire and lay, at last, a martyr!

Then I saw no longer the bruised and broken reed trodden and crushed to earth, whose fragrance shall perfume all regions. I saw the victorious Lua, majestic in her death—the Lua who shall live through all ages—who shall shine from the

horizon of eternity upon the world when all the veils which have hidden her today from mortal eyes have been burned away. As Kurat-ul Ayn was the Trumpet of the Dawn in the Orient in the Day of Bahá'u'lláh, so Lua Aurora shall wave forever and ever the Banner of the Dawn in the Day of the Covenant. Even as her age and generation knew her not, seeing only her mortal frailties—so future ages and cycles will love her-adore her—venerate her blessed name—and strive to walk in the path of her utter servitude, severance, and sacrifice. The passion of Divine love that consumed her heart shall light the hearts of mankind forever and forever.

Great and wonderful were her qualities in her own person she bore the sins and weaknesses of us all, and redeeming herself she redeemed us. She broke the path through the untrod forest: like the grasshoppers, she cast her soul and body into the stream and perished making the bridge by which we cross: she was a Niobe all her days, washing our sins in her tears: she was burned to cauterize our wounds. 'Abdu'l-Bahá said that when one soul should arise and become severed from all else save God, that soul would open the way for all to attain. I believe that the last time Lua left her Beloved 'Abdu'l-Bahá she died to all save God and took the "step of the soul" by which the spirit of truth and reality dawned in the Cause in America. In fulfillment of His Holy Words, the light broke forth in Boston in the autumn of 1915: its rays were reflected in some souls ' throughout America and other parts of the Occident, so that at that time the believers began to enter on a new era of spiritual consciousness, and here and there the fire of Divine Love and the reality of unity became manifest. The outcome was the bursting into the realm of possibility the building of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, the outer sign of the appearance of the inner spiritual temple.

Those who were present at the Holy Convention realized that the reality of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh had at last appeared in America, and on that day when the Divine Outpourings reached their height, many realized that the Spiritual Temple had come into being. Is it possible that on that day Lua attained the utmost longing of her soul? That in the laying of that first stone the mystery of sacrifice became revealed and her death was the consummation of her life?

MAY MAXWELL. (VIII, 642-3)

?

Thomas
Breakwell

?

May
Ellis
Bolles
1901

Paris Bahá'í Group Photograph scanned from an original print in Hawaii's National Bahá'í Archives by Duane Troxel.

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