

A Tribute to Shoghi Effendi

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by Amelia Collins, Hand of the Baha'i Faith in the Holy Land

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Foreword

The following address was delivered by Amelia Collins, Hand of the Cause, Haifa, Israel, at the Intercontinental Baha'i Conference held in Frankfurt/Main, Germany, July 25-29, 1958, which she attended as the chosen representative of Shoghi Effendi, late Guardian of the Baha'i Faith.

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A Tribute To Shoghi Effendi

HOW CAN I ever find words to bring you what is in my heart about our beloved Guardian! I feel we must each so fill ourselves at this time with his spirit and his wishes that it will carry us through the next five years of the glorious Crusade he initiated and enable us to consummate his every hope and wish. This, the fulfillment of his own Plan, is the living memorial we must build in his memory.

When I first heard of the passing of 'Abdu'l-Baha, I was a very young believer and after the provisions of His will became known, my whole heart and soul turned to that youthful Branch, appointed by Him to watch over and guide the Faith of Baha'u'llah. How I prayed that God would help me to make him happy!

In 1923 I first met our beloved Guardian in Haifa. He was just a young man then, full of determination to carry forward the great work entrusted to his care. He was so spontaneous, so trusting and loving and outgoing in the buoyancy of his beautiful heart. Through the years we all watched with wonder and ever-deepening devotion to him and appreciation of his God-given gifts, the unfoldment of Baha'u'llah's Divine Order which he built up so patiently and <p2> wisely all over the world. But, oh friends, at what great cost to himself!

In 1951, when the beloved Guardian called some of the friends to serve in

Haifa, I began to learn of what he had passed through. His face was sad, one could see his very spirit had been heavily oppressed by the agony he went through for years during the period when the family pursued their own desires and finally abandoned the work of the Faith and their Guardian to go their own way. I can truthfully say that for a number of years we who served him at the World Center seldom saw him smile, and very often he poured out to us his woes and confided some of the things he had passed through. I do not know in any great detail the day to day afflictions of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, but Sometimes I wonder if they could have been any more heartbreaking than those of our beloved Shoghi Effendi.

The Guardian had a profound and innate humility. Whenever the Faith was involved, he was fiery in its defense, king-like in the loftiness of his bearing, the authority with which he spoke. But as a human being he was self-effacing, would brush aside our adulation and praise, turn everything we wished to shower on him towards the central figures of our Faith. We all know this characteristic of his how he would never allow any photographs to be <p3> taken of himself, or give any of himself, but invariably encouraged the friends to place the Master's picture in their rooms; how he would not allow anyone to have his clothes or personal things lest they be regarded as relics; how he disliked any signs of personal worship -- though he could never control what was in our hearts for him!

The Master said: "O ye the faithful loved ones of 'Abdu'l-Baha! It is incumbent upon you to hue the greatest care of Shoghi Effendi, . . . that no dust of despondent and sorrow may stain his radiant nature . . ." Neither his family, nor the people of the world, nor I am afraid we Baha'is, protected that radiant heart of Shoghi Effendi.

After the years of sorrow and trial he went through with the family, after his final separation from them, there came a new joy and hope to our beloved Guardian. The rapid progress made in the attainment of so many of the goals of the World Crusade lifted him up. How can I ever describe to you his eyes when he would come over to the Pilgrim House and announce to us a new achievement; they sparkled with light and enthusiasm and his beautiful face would be all smiles. Often he would send over one of his maps and when it was spread out on the dining table, his finger, full of infinite strength, insistence and determination, <p4> would point out the new territory opened, the new Haziratu'l-Quds purchased, the new language translated, as the case might be. I feel it would be no exaggeration to say that it was the progress of the Ten Year Plan that gave him the encouragement to go on working so hard, for he was very tired. More than once he said during the last year of his life, that his ministry had lasted longer than that of either Baha'u'llah or 'Abdu'l-Baha, and complained of the crushing burden, but none of us could foresee it presaged his release, that he was burned out with thirty-six years of struggle, of constant work, of sorrow and self-sacrifice.

His conscientiousness was like a fire burning in him; from his earliest childhood he showed the sensitive, noble, painstaking qualities that

characterized him, and grew stronger as he matured and throughout his Guardianship.

The friends should realize that Shoghi Effendi had no foreknowledge that he would be appointed the Successor of 'Abdu'l-Baha. The shock of the Master's passing was followed by an even more terrible one -- the shock of his own appointment as the "Sign of God." He grew in this supreme office, which we know was under the direct guidance of the Twin Manifestations of God, even as a tree grows to full maturity and bears goodly fruits, but <p5> at such a cost to himself of sacrifice that no one will ever properly estimate.

Let us review for a moment, however briefly, some of thy services Shoghi Effendi rendered the Faith of Baha'u'llah.

When 'Abdu'l-Baha passed away, the Shrine of the Bab consisted of six rooms surrounded by a small piece of land. The Mansion of Bahji and most of its lands were in the hands of the Covenant-breakers or their friends, except for the Holy Tomb itself, which covers a very small area, and two pilgrim houses, one rented. The Master Himself, though so widely loved and respected, was not known as the Head of an independent religion, but rather regarded as a Moslem notable and Holy Man. The young Guardian, freed by his very youthfulness, armed with the power conferred on him by his Grandfather, cut with one stroke the bonds still holding in appearance the Baha'is to Islam -- he refused to go to the Mosque. Tender, sensitive, crushed with grief, fighting his own inner battle to be reconciled to the glory of the station so suddenly revealed to him, Shoghi Effendi began to do all the Master had hoped to accomplish and to carry into effect His Words when He hinted that after Him the veils would be rent asunder. The Perfect Exemplar, the loving and forgiving Father, had passed away <p6> and the Order of Baha'u'llah was now to take shape under the guidance of the Champion of Divine Justice.

With wistful eyes the blessed Master had gazed up at the Shrine of the Bab and said that it was not possible to build the Shrine of the Bab, but God willing, it would be done. The Guardian first added three rooms during the early years of his ministry to make the building a nine-roomed edifice. In 1944, the model of the completed Shrine was unveiled on the occasion of the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Bab's Declaration; it had an arcade and a dome, both of which the Master had stated it should have. By 1953 it was all built. Year after year the Guardian increased the size of the Shrine gardens, himself laying out the design in its minutes detail. Patiently, persistently, he had the lands about it bought, designating each area, supervising each transaction, overcoming every obstacle. He got the Mansion of Baha'u'llah away from the arch Covenant-breaker, Muhammad Ali, and turned it into a Museum and Holy Place; he had all the Baha'i properties exempted from government and municipal taxes; he had the Baha'i marriage recognized as legally binding; he secured first the British and later, in a much stronger form, from the new State of Israel, recognition of the fact that this is a World <p7> Religion, whose Holy Places and whose World Center are in Haifa and Acca, and that he as the Head of this Faith had a higher position than any other religious dignitary in the land.

He chose the design himself and erected the monuments over the resting places of the Greatest Holy Leaf, her mother and brother, and the wife of 'Abdu'l-Baha. He likewise specified the International Archives building should be of the type and proportions which it is, approving himself every detail and often changing details until he got them the way he wanted them. He located its exact position on the ground, the size of its walls and stairs, the garden surrounding it. This building will house precious Baha'i relics such as no previous religion has ever possessed. Shoghi Effendi, appealing direct to high government officials, secured Mazra'ih as a Holy Place for the Baha'i pilgrims to visit, after it had been promised to other institutions when the Jewish State was formed. It was at his decision that the beautiful Temple site on Mt. Carmel was purchased, in the spot 'Abdu'l-Baha had wished; and from the World Center streamed out the translations, the letters, the writings of the Guardian in a mighty flow, in exquisite language, full of power, accurate, profound, inspired.

The hand of the Guardian was a motivating force. <p8> Let there be no mistake that any glove ever did the work of that hand. The gloves were poor and unworthy instruments for the most part, well nigh useless judged by human standards. It was his hand in everything, from the littlest to the biggest thing, that grasped every work, initiated every enterprise, never relaxed, never relinquished its grip until the task was done. Many gloves frayed out on that powerful hand, fell apart, were of necessity cast aside, but the work of the Cause went on uninterrupted until the last night of his life!

The Administrative Order of the Faith, the provisions for which were laid down by Baha'u'llah Himself and amplified by 'Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi set out to build. When the Master passed away, there were few Spiritual Assemblies in the world, and only one national body functioning in a very rudimentary manner. The builder, however, had been provided by God; the Great Administrator, with an almost unique capacity for organization, with a wisdom vouchsafed from on High, with a world-encompassing vision, set about his task. Patiently, persistently, painstakingly, Shoghi Effendi reared strong national bodies. He brought into being the International Baha'i Council -- the embryonic Universal House of Justice. He kept the balance, the perfect balance, between a thing too loosely knit, <p9> too individualistic to function efficiently, and too much efficiency, too many rules and regulations, too much running into endless and unnecessary detail which is one of the great afflictions of present day civilization. When he had created the system and reared the machinery of the Baha'i Administrative Order, he suddenly shifted the whole mechanism into gear; he called for the first Seven-Year Plan, the first step in the Promulgation of 'Abdu'l-Baha's Divine Plan, which is the instrument for the spiritual conquest of the entire globe. Plan followed plan. The scattered diversified followers of the Faith began to take shape as the army of Baha'u'llah; guided by the National Spiritual Assemblies. The pioneers, the vanguard as he called them of this great host, began to march out and over the world until, at the half-way point of the mighty Crusade he had launched, Shoghi Effendi could look upon a united, strong, enthusiastic, world-wide community of believers, who had

already achieved the major part of the tasks he had set for them.

What gifts he had, what gifts he gave: Gleanings From the Writings of Baha'u'llah, The Dawn-Breakers -- Nabil's Narrative, The Kitab-i-Iqan, The Hidden Words, and the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, translations of superlative style and power, making available the essence of Baha'u'llah's Message <p10> to the western world. What life he breathed into us through his own writings, beginning with his World Order letters -- the Goal of a New World Order, the Dispensation of Baha'u'llah, followed by the Unfoldment of World Civilization, (now The World Order of Baha'u'llah), The Advent of Divine Justice, The Promised Day is Come, works which were supplemented by dynamic cables and special messages. To such a long list of distinguished works was added the finest flower of his mind, his masterful review of the first one hundred years of the greatest Dispensation vouchsafed by God to man on this planet -- God Passes By.

His was the vision which looked at the Cause as a whole, saw present and future as part of one mighty panorama. He not only collated the teachings, but, with a strong sense of history, assembled the most precious relics in the Baha'i world into a religious archives such as no previous Faith has ever possessed. He saw to it that all the precious sites associated with the Bab and Baha'u'llah and the heroes and martyrs of this Cause were, whenever possible, purchased: the House where Baha'u'llah was born in Teheran, His father's house in Takur, the Siyah-Chal, where the first rays of His Divine Mission fell upon Him in the blackness of a dungeon, the House He occupied in Constantinople, and <p11> one of the Houses He occupied in Adrianople; the bleak fortress of Mah-Ku, where the Bab revealed the Bayan, His shop in Bushihr, and many other sites associated with Him and His companions. At Shoghi Effendi's instructions an exhaustive photographic record was made of hundreds of these spots associated with the Heroic Age of the Faith.

He encouraged the Persian believers to compile the histories of the early days of the Cause in their provinces, and laid upon the Persian National Spiritual Assembly the great responsibility of collecting and transcribing the Tablets of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, thus preserving for posterity a truly priceless heritage.

He was truly the builder by nature; he completed the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkar in America, the great Mother Temple of the West, unique in having had its foundation stone laid by 'Abdu'l-Baha Himself. He initiated, chose the designs, and set in motion the plans for the erection of the African, the European, the Australasian, the Teheran and the Holy Land Temples. He specified the sites for the National Haziratu'l-Quds and the national endowments. He named the languages into which the literature of the Faith was to be translated, and personally encouraged the pioneers to go forth and fulfill 'Abdu'l-Baha's plan. <p12>

Ah, but he did more than this! He made each believer feel that over him watched a just mind and a loving heart; that he had a part to play, was precious to the

Faith, had duties to discharge, enjoyed privileges infinitely precious because he was a member of the Community of the Most Great Name. Let us never forget this, never lose sight of this! This oneness he made a reality, this staunch loyalty to our Faith he implanted in our hearts. His work in this world is done. Ours is not.

We are all, in a way, Shoghi Effendi's heirs. We have inherited his work. His plan is completely laid out. Ours is the task to fulfill it. We must, each of us, complete our share of the World Crusade. This is the memorial we must build to our beloved Shoghi Effendi.

Let us love him more now than ever before, and through the power of our love attract his love to us, and bring his blessing on our labors.

Let us not fail him, for he never failed us. Let us never forget him, for he never forgot us.

[End.]

— A Tribute to Shoghi Effendi