

# Twenty-five Years of the Guardianship

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Twenty-five Years of the Guardianship  
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## TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF THE GUARDIANSHIP

TWENTY-FIVE years ago the Baha'i world was shaken by a great earthquake, 'Abdu'l-Baha, the Center of the Covenant, the greatest Mystery of God, had suddenly passed away, with no premonitory illness to prepare His friends and followers for this tragic shock. Stunned, the Baha'is of East and West tried to rally their faculties. We knew great tasks lay ahead of us; we believed in this new Faith and in its Manifestation and in the World Order that He had come to establish, but we felt terribly alone and the responsibility for the future lay heavily upon our already grief-filled hearts. Where was the shepherd? The familiar voice, that had spoken with an authority vested in it by the Prophet of God Himself, was stilled. We had the teachings; like a wonderful laboratory, equipped for every purpose, they were there -- our priceless treasure. But where was the alchemist who transmuted base metals into gold? Where was the listener who answered our questions and guided us in the use of all that great laboratory possessed?

Then came the reading of the Master's Will, and with an infinite sense of relief we realized that, though the seas of tribulation and separation had risen about us, 'Abdu'l-Baha had not left us alone. He had given us the mighty Ark of His own Covenant which we could enter into in peace secure. With what grateful hearts we turned to the youthful figure that had suddenly been revealed to us in that Will as, our priceless legacy, described by 'Abdu'l-Baha

as the fruit of the Twin Lote Trees, the pearl of the Twin Surging Seas, <p4> this new creation, vested with a unique function, the hereditary office of Interpreter and Protector of the Faith and life head of the International House of Justice. In many ways the Will of the Master completes and supplements the Aqdas; in it 'Abdu'l-Baha lays down in considerable detail the manner of election and function of the International House of Justice, its powers and jurisdiction; He also fills in a remarkable gap in that mighty book of laws and one which any intelligent commentator on that document must be immediately struck by. Baha'u'llah established in His Most Holy Book a very unique voluntary form of tax, a source of revenue, the great importance of which He adequately defines by giving it the exalted title of "The Right of God" (Huququ'llah) but He never states to whom this revenue is payable, and in view of the fact that the revenues of the International House of Justice are clearly stipulated and this Huququ'llah is not included among them, the question naturally occurs -- what person or institution is to receive it? 'Abdu'l-Baha's Will elucidates this riddle and fills in the conspicuous blank left by Baha'u'llah.

It is also interesting to realize that the provisions of the Will and Testament were not only contemplated by 'Abdu'l-Baha long prior to His ascension, but also carried out. The Will is comprised of three separate documents, written at different times and all sealed and signed by the Master. In perhaps the most dangerous and difficult years of His ministry in 'Akka, when Shoghi Effendi was only a young boy, he was already appointed as the Successor of 'Abdu'l-Baha in the first Will. This decision was later reaffirmed in the third Will, or part of the Will, whichever we choose to call it, and in even stronger terms if possible than before. It was also during practically the babyhood of our first Guardian that the Master revealed that highly significant Tablet about <p5> a child having been born who would do great things in the future. When asked by His secretary, Dr. Yunis Khan, whether by this was meant a living child or if it was a symbolical expression, the Master explained a real child was meant and that it would raise the Cause of God to great heights. So we see, that when 'Abdu'l-Baha left us a quarter of a century ago we were not unprovided for. His plans for the Guardianship -- the fruition of Baha'u'llah's own scheme -- had been made at a very early date, but from the depths of His bitter experience over a period of sixty years, He kept His precious secret carefully guarded, even from His intended successor, and it was not until after His ascension that we began to appreciate the perfection of the system God has, in this most great cycle, given to mankind; a system which has the hand of God constantly laid on it from above in the form of a divinely-guarded Guardianship directly descended from and related to the two Founders of the Faith and, at the same time, exalts the role of Man to a new height in that the freely-elected members of the International House of Justice are, when functioning as a body, promised the inspiration and protection of God upon their deliberations and decisions.

Let us go back for a moment and recall what we were and what Shoghi Effendi was when he first assumed his function as Guardian. Those who remember the passing of the Master and the terrible blow it was to them, the intense unbearable

grief it caused them, can best grasp what his feelings were. At that time he was twenty-four years of age, studying at Oxford University in England in order to better prepare himself to serve 'Abdu'l-Baha as an interpreter, and to translate some of the Baha'i literature into English, when news of the ascension reached him. Broken-hearted, so weak from suffering he had to be practically lifted from the train, he <p6> returned to Haifa. Then the second blow, as unexpected and in many ways more cruel than the first, fell upon him. The Will and Testament of His Grandfather was read to him and for the first time in his life he became apprised of the Master's great and well-guarded secret: that he, Shoghi Effendi, the beloved, eldest grandson, was His successor and First Guardian of the Cause of God. Saddled with this great weight, crushed by this great blow, he turned his eyes to the Baha'i world. He beheld a widely diversified, loosely organized community, scattered in various parts of the globe, and with members in about twenty countries. These people, loyal, devoted and sincere though they were, were still, to a great extent living in their parent religion's house, so to speak; there were Christian Baha'is, Jewish Baha'is, Muhammadan Baha'is and so on. They believed in the Baha'i Faith but were intimately connected with their former churches. Like fruit on a tree, they were a new crop but still stuck to the old branch. This was true East and West alike. That was the point to which the Faith had evolved at the time of the Master's ascension.

We, on our part, beheld a young man of only twenty-four standing at the helm of the Cause and some of the friends felt impelled to advise him about what it would be wise for him to do next. It was then that we began to know not only the nature of our first Guardian but the nature of the entire Institution of Guardianship, for we quickly discovered that Shoghi Effendi was "unreachable." Neither relatives, old Baha'is or new Baha'is, well-wishers or ill-wishers could sway his judgment or influence his decisions. We quickly came to realize that he was not only divinely guided but had been endowed by God with just those characteristics needed to build up the Administrative Order, unite the believers in common endeavor, and coordinate their world-wide activities. <p7> Shoghi Effendi immediately began to display a genius for organization, for the analysis of problems, for reducing a situation to its component parts and then giving a just and wise solution. He acted vigorously, with unflinching determination, and unbounded zeal. Those who were privileged to meet him were immediately captivated by his eager, frank and cordial attitude, by his consideration, his innate modesty, his spontaneous kindness and charm. The wheels of the Cause which had momentarily stood still at the Master's passing, began to revolve again and at a higher tempo than ever before. Our Father, so patient, so constantly forgiving, whom we had tired and perhaps worried far more than we dreamed of, was gone, and in His stead stood our "true brother," young, determined to see we at last got down to accomplishing the tasks set us by Baha'u'llah and the Master, and not willing to lose any time at all.

With the reading of the Will and the establishment of the Guardianship, came quite naturally and organically a new phase in the development of the Faith. This was typified by one of the first acts of the Guardian: Shoghi Effendi

never set foot in the Mosque, whereas 'Abdu'l-Baha had attended it until the last Friday of His life. What local people had suspected -- that the Baha'i Cause was really something quite different -- became blatantly clear; that which it would have been almost impossible for the Master to do, namely, to sever the intimate bonds which had bound him for so long to the Arab community, particularly the Muhammadan community, of Palestine during many years when it was forbidden to even mention the name Baha'i, the Guardian now did overnight and began to encourage the Baha'is to likewise do in different parts of the world.

There were two major tasks that the Guardian set himself to accomplish immediately after the Master's passing: one was to steer the believers all over the world into working through properly organized administrative channels, as indicated by Baha'u'llah and defined by 'Abdu'l-Baha, and the other was to see that year by year they became more emancipated from the bonds of the past, whether those bonds were close identification with their former religious doctrines and organizations, or the following of the outworn and corrupt patterns of conduct current in the society of their various nations and alien to the new standards of conduct laid down by the Manifestation of God for the world in this new age.

Between 1923 and 1934, the Guardian, aided by the devoted response of the various Baha'i communities, succeeded in establishing six new National Spiritual Assemblies with all their attendant funds, committees and institutions. Whereas, in the lifetime of 'Abdu'l-Baha, only Persia and America had possessed such bodies and these had, for the most part, functioned more as central Committees, coordinating somewhat the national affairs of the Cause and, in the United States, convening the annual Convention and taking preliminary steps for the erection of the Mashriqu'l- Adhkar, these new National Assemblies, one for the British Isles, one for Germany and 'Iraq respectively, one for Egypt and the Sudan, and one for Australia and New Zealand, now emerged on a sound footing and began, under the constant and direct tutelage of the Guardian, to vigorously administer the affairs of their ever-growing communities.

What the Guardian possesses to an outstanding degree (and no doubt is divinely endowed with) is the vision of the Cause. That which might seem essential to us he would see as a purely secondary issue and what might appear in our eyes as a trivial matter might to him be the pivot of far greater decisions. He is the balance of the Cause; he weighs and classifies the problems, the requirements, the tasks of the hour, and keeps the entire Faith in every part of the world functioning as efficiently and as satisfactorily as our individual frailties and deficiencies will permit.

From the very beginning of his Ministry the Guardian began to correspond at length with the American National Spiritual Assembly as regards the handling of the affairs of the Cause of God in that country. These highly instructive letters were later published under the title of "Baha'i Administration" and formed the directive for all bodies administering the work of the Cause,

whether in the East or in the West. He, in conjunction with this process of training us in how to function as a group and as individuals in a coordinated Baha'i Society, also educated us in a concept of the Faith which was the logical conclusion to be drawn from not only statements made by the Bab and Baha'u'llah, but from the Tablets of the Divine Plan revealed for the American Baha'is by the Master; namely, that whereas Persia cradled this new world religion in the 13th Century, North America was to cradle the Administrative Order which in turn would be the precursor of the new World Commonwealth. Patiently, untiringly, year after year, Shoghi Effendi has labored on the rearing of the Administrative Order, using the American Baha'i Community as the arch pattern to be followed by all other Baha'i Communities. While the American believers struggled to learn what it really means to function as a member of an Order that has rules to be lived up to and not merely read about; while they tried to really submit their wills and conduct to the guidance of bodies conducting their affairs according to the will of the majority, the Guardian never for a moment lost sight of the purpose of his endless insistence on our following the Administrative Principles of our Faith; namely, to produce an instrument strong enough to enable us to fulfill one of the <p10> primary obligations of every believer -- to teach the cause of God.

For sixteen years Shoghi Effendi never ceased to broaden our horizons and train us in Baha'i Administration, whether local or National. After that, he suddenly opened a new door. He told us, so to speak, that we were now trained enough to use our laboriously erected Administrative System for a great joint effort, an effort to carry into effect the first stages of the Divine Plan. Prior to 1937 he had already been trying our metal to some extent, and disciplining us as good soldiers, through his repeated insistent appeals for the work of constructing our first Baha'i Temple. This great enterprise we had ourselves inaugurated, encouraged by 'Abdu'l-Baha, Who by His own hand, laid its dedication stone in 1912. But in spite of our good intentions, we had by 1921, only succeeded in producing something that resembled a subdued black oil tank, one story high, on the Temple grounds, and which looked so unprepossessing that the town authorities protested against it. Through the repeated appeals, the stimulation and encouragement of the Guardian and the sacrifice of the Baha'is, and after ten years during which we had been soundly berated for its appearance, we at last completed its superstructure and succeeded in silencing our critics. When the first Seven-Year Plan was given us in 1937 by the Guardian, in it was included, as one of our major tasks, the completing of the exterior ornamentation of the building which comprised the main story and steps, the rest having been laboriously carried out from 1931 to 1935.

In 1919, at the Annual Baha'i Convention in New York, the Tablets revealed by 'Abdu'l-Baha at a time when He was in great danger during the First World War and which have come to be known as the "Vehicles of the Divine Plan" and the "Spiritual Mandate," conferred by Him on the North <p11> American Community of Believers, were unveiled. We American Baha'is are all familiar with their remarkable and stirring contents. We were all immensely proud to receive them. No one, however, except Martha Root and a few other venturesome souls, felt

moved to do anything drastic about carrying out the instructions contained in them prior to 1936-37. It was then that Shoghi Effendi's teaching, inspiration and advice began to pour into the minds and hearts of the American Baha'is like an incoming tide. He called us to action. For eighteen years, we had basked happily and complacently in the praises and promises 'Abdu'l-Baha had showered upon us in those Tablets, and in many other writings and statements. The Guardian, however, his fingers on our pulse, knew that we were now able to arise for pioneer work, and through the instruments of the Administration he had so carefully assisted us in evolving, carry forward the frontiers of our achievements. He was, thank God, not mistaken in the confidence and trust he reposed in us. He called and America responded. People from every walk of life, business men, stenographers, old ladies, young ladies, people with families, people often frail in health but iron in spirit, began to arise, and what may in future well be viewed as one of the greatest spiritual sagas of the American nation, began to take place. They were called pioneers, and into new cities, into the virgin States of the United States and the virgin Provinces of Canada -- virgin as yet to Baha'u'llah's light -- these people began to move, at the cost of great personal sacrifice and inconvenience, inspired by nothing but faith and devotion and love for their fellow men, they started to lay the foundations for new Baha'i communities by establishing new Spiritual Assemblies as a result of their teaching activities. <p12>

Perhaps one of the most wonderful aspects of this first Seven-Year Plan was the way Baha'is responded to the Guardian's hope that centers would be established, 'Erie its termination, in every single Latin American Republic. The Guardian, always walking on before a few steps and then calling us over his shoulder to hurry up and follow, led us Seven Years down that mighty pioneer trail which wound over North America, into Alaska, down to Panama, all over Central and South America, across the Andes, and into the West Indies. And wherever his voice called, the Baha'is followed. The first Seven-Year Plan is a very wonderful thing to contemplate. It was the first joint activity on a large scale, nationally organized and flowing into an international field, that the followers of Baha'u'llah had ever undertaken anywhere in the world. Truly formidable obstacles were overcome -- obstacles of relatively small numbers of believers to draw upon; a community of very restricted financial means to back such activities (more especially so as the expensive work of completing the Temple ornamentation was steadily going on at the same time); a terrible, unprecedented World War, suddenly engulfing humanity with all its dangers, obligations and restrictions after only two and a half years of the Seven-Year Plan had run their course. But all these barriers were hurdled or thrown down, for we had a prize dear to our hearts just in view, and we were determined to win it. The prize was to succeed in accomplishing all that the Guardian asked of us by May 23, 1944, at which time we were to celebrate our first Baha'i Centennial.

At the Centenary Convention the Baha'is met, radiant with such victories as these: having completed the contracts for the exterior ornamentation of the Temple eighteen months ahead of time; having established Spiritual Assemblies

<p13> in every single state and province of North America -- thus doubling the number in seven years and bringing it up to 136; having not only brought into being a nucleus of the Faith in every Latin American Republic but of having established already in most of them flourishing Spiritual Assemblies and of having the joy of seeing many delegates from these Central and South American countries present at the first great All-America Convention. Beneath the dome of their great Mother Temple of the West, now complete except for its interior ornamentation, they tasted the sweetness of the good pleasure of God, for priceless gifts were given them on that occasion by the Guardian: a beautifully framed copy of the portrait of the Bab and a lock of His hair. So precious and well guarded is this likeness of Him that even the House in Shiraz, one of the two centers of pilgrimage established by Baha'u'llah, does not possess a copy.

Nor should we forget for a moment, in counting our achievements and our blessings, the recent inauguration of the second Seven-Year Plan which has already been enthusiastically embarked upon by the American Baha'is and which, in addition to increasing the number of National Spiritual Assemblies by three -- one to be formed in Canada in 1948, and one for Central and one for South America in 1950 -- is aimed at carrying the Faith to the European Continent, as part of an organized activity, for the first time. The vision of the future which Shoghi Effendi has revealed to us in his recent communications, is simply stupendous. Beyond each goal stretches another goal, tapering off into an era when we know the Faith will be emancipated and come into its own in the eyes of the whole world. Not only do our teaching activities during the next seven years carry us all over Northern, Western and Southern Europe, but <p14> we are given the challenging task of completing, at long last, the interior of our Temple, and of thus setting it before the eyes of men as the first and greatest Baha'i House of Worship in the West.

While the American Baha'is have been absorbed in the two-fold task of learning to understand the purpose of the Baha'i administration, the way it functions and the uses to which it could be put, and in embarking on the first stages of the Divine Plan, their co-workers in other parts of the world were not idle. The progress achieved in the United States was outstanding, but not unique. The work of the Cause went ahead at a rapid pace in other countries in which the Baha'is labored, but under far greater handicaps; in Persia, where the government is the traditional enemy of the Faith; in Egypt, where the Sunni religious doctors have consistently opposed us, cast us out of their ranks and incited the populace against us; in Iraq where the Baha'i Community was small and the native people fanatical and reactionary; in Germany, where the Nazi regime consistently frowned upon us from the hour of its rise to power until it finally officially banned the Faith in 1937, confiscated its literature and archives and in a number of cases tried or persecuted its followers; in England, where the believers were few and scattered in an intensely conservative land of strong traditions; in India, where the relatively large Baha'i community struggled against the multiplicity of prejudices and creeds-in all these lands where National Assemblies, firmly founded and buttressed by active committees and national funds, watched over the interests of the

believers and worked under the constant guidance of the Guardian, the affairs of the Cause, far from declining, prospered as never before. This was also true of Australasia, which in its freedom from traditional forms and its tolerance, most closely resembles conditions found in North America.

It is hard to know what achievements to cite, so many spring to mind as one casts one's eye over the scene: the emancipation of the Cause from Islam in Egypt, formally and forcibly pronounced a non-Muhammadan independent faith by the ecclesiastical authorities there, which in its turn greatly strengthened the Baha'i claim to official recognition as a new and independent world religion in other lands, including the United States; the tremendous increase of Baha'i properties the world over, including not only six National Headquarters but innumerable local headquarters, meeting halls, guest houses and even burial grounds, stretching from Persia through India, Iraq, the Holy Land, Egypt, across the seas to North and South America, and back across the Pacific to Australia, but also including the purchase, in the land of Baha'u'llah's birth, of most of the sacred and historic sites associated with the rise of the Faith there, as well as an extensive and beautiful property destined to be the site of the future Baha'i Temple in that country; the increase in the number of Baha'i summer schools, well organized and operating in Germany, India, Persia, England, Egypt, Argentina, New Zealand, Australia and four states of North America -- namely, Maine, Michigan, Colorado and California; the rise of Baha'i young people the world over to positions of importance in the Cause, as teachers, writers, administrators and pioneers, with well organized activities which include the training of children and adolescents; the truly remarkable output of Baha'i literature with titles published in the United States alone running well over fifty, with a Publishing Trust established in England which gets out many volumes not only for use in the British Isles but also for export to other Baha'i communities; the prewar publishing activities of the German believers who were very active in translating literature from the English, and also in issuing works written by Baha'i authors in their own language; the role which India -- mother land of so many hundreds of tongues and dialects -- has played in this field and which has obliged her to already print editions in about fourteen native languages; the issuance of Baha'i literature in many other countries, such as Switzerland, Argentina, Egypt, and so on; and the important fact that our Baha'i text book "Baha'u'llah and The New Era" has now been printed in about forty-five languages; the legal incorporation of over sixty-five national and local Baha'i Assemblies in countries all over the world; and, first and foremost, the most impressive and significant accomplishment of all, that whereas in the days of 'Abdu'l-Baha the Faith had only spread to about 20 countries, its message has now been taken to over 70, and in the majority of these an administrative foundation of the Cause has already been firmly laid.

No appraisal of the wonderful work achieved by the Baha'i the world over during this period would be complete without mention of what the Guardian himself, singlehanded, has done at the world center of the Faith in Palestine. Aside from his constant and very heavy correspondence, with not only national and

local Assemblies but with groups and individuals as well, aside from his cables and directives addressed to the Baha'i in different parts of the world, aside from the books he writes and the Baha'i literature he translates so painstakingly and beautifully, he has aided the believers financially in all of their major undertakings, in the East or the West. Whether it was to assist the Baha'i refugees from Russia, or those who had suffered local persecution in Persia, or to help build the various <p17> national Administrative Headquarters or to finance the publication of many editions of the Esslemont book in foreign languages, or to contribute generously to the Temple construction work in America and to the support of pioneers active in the seven-year plans, or whether it was to build the graves of notable servants of the Cause, his hand has usually been the first one outstretched to give valuable aid. In Haifa and 'Akka, he has not only succeeded in having all the Baha'i Shrines, Pilgrim Houses and lands pertaining to them exempted from both government and municipal taxes, but has also vastly increased the area of these endowments which now are valued at more than two and a half million dollars, and include properties in the Jordan Valley. He has added, year by year, to the beautiful gardens surrounding the tomb of the Bab on Mount Carmel, and also succeeded in burying The Greatest Holy Leaf in one of the most exclusive residential areas of Haifa, and later in transferring the remains of her mother and brother to the same spot -- where 'Abdu'l-Baha's wife is now also entombed -- and making of it a unique and exquisite garden surrounding the four white marble temples that mark the resting places of these members of the Master's family. These two gardens, on opposite sides of one of Haifa's main roads, and open to the public, are now mentioned in all up-to-date Palestine guides as sights not to be missed by visitors to the Holy Land. The purchase of Baha'u'llah's mansion at Bahji the defeat of the constant machinations of the Covenant- breakers, the establishment of two archives filled with material of great sacred and historic importance, collected, verified and label led by him, the building up of the great reservoir of Baha'i literature of well over 5,000 volumes in libraries in Haifa and 'Akka, are but the highlights of his <p18> accomplishments at this world center of our Faith, to which flow pilgrims and guests from every land.

When we consider such facts as these, we begin to appreciate the nature and magnitude of the work which has been accomplished since 'Abdu'l-Baha passed away, under the direct aegis of Shoghi Effendi. To his inspiration and perseverance we owe it that our Faith -- once so obscure, so unknown except to a few students of modern Persia-has already boasted a Queen as ardent convert, and moreover a Queen of the ability and fame possessed by Marie of Rumania; that the appreciations, by non-Baha'is of outstanding position and ability, of the founders of our Faith, their teachings and the work accomplished by their followers, has already run into a small volume; that the Faith has exhibited its persistent vitality during these twenty-five years by producing Saints, Martyrs, great administrators and even Hands of the Cause; that it has become sufficiently strong and well known in the Western world for the government of a great nation like prewar Germany, to ban it and persecute its followers for their beliefs; that the case the Baha'is had against the Shi'ih clergy of

Baghdad for the possession of The Most Great House, went before the permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations, and was not only decided in favor of the Baha'is but was the subject of much discussion and unfulfilled assurances on the part of King Faisal of 'Iraq and his Ministers.

All these things, and many other points far too numerous to be mentioned here, indicate that the Cause, far from sustaining a paralyzing blow through the death of 'Abdu'l-Baha, went ahead in channels prepared for its development by Him in His Will, and prospered and grew as it never had before. How immature and naive was our conception of the World Order at the time of the Master's passing! <p19> With what paternal complacency some of the old and devoted Baha'is informed the Guardian that his next and wisest step would be to establish the International House of Justice! On what? He knew so well the long and thorough measures that must first be taken: Here was this great edifice, this world order, reared in the laws of Baha'u'llah, and its dome, the apogee, the crown, the uniting element, was the International House of Justice. Could it be hung on air? First must come the foundation, and that must be composed of not only the smallest units, the local Assemblies, but these units themselves must be made of educated material; the little cells, the individual Baha'is had first to understand their task and build themselves into a strong cohesive mass, capable of forming, as local Assemblies, the broad national foundation upon which the mighty pillars in turn could be reared, becoming the bones of the structure holding up the dome.

A stranger might be tempted to ask: granted these organized activities of the Baha'is had expanded and multiplied, covered new territory, and entered new fields, what had happened to the Cause's inner life? Had outward progress and accomplishment weakened the internal spiritual solidarity of the followers of Baha'u'llah? We can, after a quarter of a century's experience, answer that question with a sincere and hearty No! The institution of Guardianship -- tied into the fabric of the Faith by 'Abdu'l-Baha through His Will in a knot no amount of perseverance and ingenuity can undo -- has, as it was destined to do, effectively prevented any division or schism in the Baha'i ranks. We can now state this, not only with assurance born of faith, but with experience, for it has been tried and failed. Envy, jealousy, hatred, ambition -- all the demoniacal forces which the ego of man can give rise to and which have so unrelentingly <p20> been ranged throughout history, against every reformer, every Prophet, and enlightened leader -- have raised, in the hearts of more than one person, their ugly heads. Both Shoghi Effendi, as Guardian, and the Faith as such, have been violently attacked.

As was to be expected, the very first charge came from the Covenant-breakers: Muhammad 'Ali, who had tried in vain to discredit 'Abdu'l-Baha, disaffect the believers, corrupt certain writings of Baha'u'llah, and even had on more than one occasion sought to have the Master's life taken, revived his faded hopes when he beheld such a (as he thought) defenseless youth placed at the helm. His attack was disturbing, if somewhat ludicrous, for he chose to have one of his henchmen seize the sacred shrine of his Father, Baha'u'llah, and rob the Baha'i

Keeper of the keys. Distressing though the incident was, the case of the successor of 'Abdu'l-Baha was so clear in the eyes of the British authorities, that in a short time he was obliged to return the keys to Shoghi Effendi's representative. This was the first, so to speak, crossing of swords with our appointed Guardian, and both the Baha'is and local observers, friend and foe alike, learned through it that we had an active and skilled Defender of the Faith!

In Egypt, a proud Armenian, blinded by vanity and ambition, waved his own little flag of rebellion and succeeded in drawing away from the Baha'i community (at that time in the early stages of its own development) a number of his compatriots and other misguided souls. But the hand that waved the flag soon got tired as it became aware of the futility of trying to coax people out of such a watertight ark as 'Abdu'l-Baha's Covenant has proven itself to be. Gradually, over the years, those who after such a disillusioning and spiritually unhealthy experience, still possessed <p21> any vital spark of faith, returned to knock on the door they had left and were, whenever the sincerity of their intentions was proven, welcomed back into the now actively working and expanding Egyptian Baha'i community.

An American woman, Mrs. Ruth White, suffering from a truly remarkable form of delusion -- namely, that the Will and Testament of the Master is a forgery--expended a great deal of time, money and energy on expounding her views. The document in question, its handwriting, text and style, seals and history is so obviously protected from this accusation that her violent agitation had no effect on the body of the Baha'is, with the exception of a few simple souls in Germany. Most of these (who remained devoted to the Faith but confused on this point) have now expressed their deep remorse over these deluded and wasted years they spent outside the Baha'i community, and have reentered it in Germany and are among its most active workers.

In Persia, Avarih, at one time a very active Baha'i teacher, developed what must seem to any sane person, a sort of spiritual hydrophobia. He not only attacked the Guardian exhaustively and fantastically in about ten volumes, but turned against both Baha'u'llah and the Master as well. His statements, unbalanced, compounded of such a high percentage of lies that even an intelligent and sincere enemy of the Faith would recognize them as such, have poured forth in the cheap press of Persia for practically decades. But the results have been very disheartening from his standpoint, for he neither gathered unto himself a following, nor has he been able to disrupt the affairs of the large, devoted and loyal community of believers in Baha'u'llah's native land. <p22> Ahmad Sohrab, a former secretary of 'Abdu'l-Baha, largely thanks to the generous support given him by a deluded woman, has been able to expend all his gifts of perversion on his favorite theme -- a prolonged and windy attack on the Administrative Order of the Faith as it exists at present, with Shoghi Effendi as its head, and soundly organized Assemblies cooperating with him throughout the world in spreading Baha'u'llah's message and building up His divinely ordained institutions. He holds the honor of being undoubtedly the

most mischievous of the trouble makers the Cause has raised up during this quarter of a century. Yes, the Cause of God has raised him up! For what beauty does not produce envy, and what purity does not produce slander, and what goodness does not challenge the evil hidden in an envious heart? This man, who received as charity -- as we all do -- some drops of God's overflowing bounty, could have done much to assist the Baha'is in carrying out the wishes of 'Abdu'l-Baha, and the plans of Baha'u'llah. But ambition proved too strong. In our Faith we must submit to having our personal desires and plans integrated into the plans for the whole, for unity is our watchword and we are not only propagating a new Faith with its new principles, but are building a divinely laid down system into society, and this requires the discipline of the personal ego to some extent, and the integration of all members of the community into a coherent pattern. To this Ahmad Sohrab would not submit, for it did not allow him the personal prominence he craved. The hot wind of his slander has blown upon us for some time now, and though it troubled and disaffected a few hearts, to the vast majority of believers it proved an irritating Stimulant, which not only made them cherish more dearly the Master's Will and its provisions, but spurred them on to greater endeavor. <p23>

We Baha'is are neither afraid to, nor ashamed of, men toning the names of these prominent backsliders. On the contrary, they represent to us what a soldier's ribbons do to him: they are the campaigns we have successfully fought and every one of them is dear to our hearts. The storms they have loosed upon us have not only driven the roots of our Faith in Baha'u'llah's system deeper, but have demonstrated to us that, for the first time in history, a religion has been given to men which cannot be split up into sects, for the two Wills -- those of Baha'u'llah and the Master -- are so strongly constructed and so authentic beyond a shadow of a doubt, that it is impossible to divorce the body of the teachings from their provisions. The principle of successor ship, endowed with the right of Divine interpretation, is the very hub of the Cause into which its Doctrines and Laws fit like the spokes of a wheel -- tear out the hub and you have to throw away the whole thing. This is why our enemies, for a hundred years, failed to establish anything outside the Faith which could thrive or prosper.

As we look back over these twenty-five years, it is with feelings of profound contentment. We Baha'is have matured greatly. The little tragedies, the hot discussions, the rocking of the boat by various enemies, seem all far behind us now. We have grown up in the Will. We have stood close to that tree which overshadowed all mankind, and come to realize how live and great it is, how dense its foliage, how heavy its yield of fruits -- the tree of our first Guardian, our Shoghi Effendi. Where first we looked to him with affection and I much pity for his youthfulness and the greatness of the task laid upon him, now we look to him eagerly, waiting each fresh counsel of his wise, and so well proven, leadership. With deep love and pride the Baha'is labor under his guidance, thanking God not only for this wonderful <p24> Divinely inspired institution of Guardianship, but also for this particular Guardian, who has steered the ship of the Cause through so many shoals and whose sure and patient

hand is guiding it on to the great victories promised by Baha'u'llah for his Faith in this Century.

Shoghi Effendi's services to the Cause of God are not yet known. How can they be? There is not yet the required perspective. Only gradually have we been grasping just Who and What the Bab and Baha'u'llah were; out of the mists of contemporary events they are now rising like giants on the horizon of Their Own Revelation. "God Passes By" has been the greatest single factor in our beginning to truly appreciate Their significance and station. But it is too early, and he is too close, for us to begin to properly evaluate our first Guardian. We can, however -- always remembering he in his great modesty would wish us to -- that he is guided by God, weigh up a little of what he has done. Let us begin with his presents to us, the dearest gifts he could make us, the translations: The Iqan, the Epistle to The Son of The Wolf, The Prayers and Meditations, The Gleanings, The Hidden Words, The Dawn-Breakers, and innumerable gems quoted in his own writings. What would our understanding of and love for the Cause be today without these glorious books? Then let us take his own works: The Baha'i Administration, the wonderful World Order Letters, The Dispensation of Baha'u'llah, The Advent of Divine Justice, The Promised Day Is Come, the ten volumes of The Baha'i World -- child of his vision of the Cause and untiring perseverance and most valuable of all, God Passes By, that unique exhaustive and marvelous review of the highlights of 100 years of Baha'i history, in which every factor receives its due importance in relation to every other, a labor no one but the Guardian could ever be qualified to do. To <p25> the above must of course be added many important communications addressed to the Persian Baha'is in their own tongue.

Not one of our achievements during this quarter of a century and briefly touched upon here, could have been made were it not for the untiring labor and patience of Shoghi Effendi. He has encouraged us when we were down-hearted, spurred us on when we decided to take a little inopportune rest, foreseen our needs and supplied us with the plans, the counsel, the passages from the writings, the answers to the questions, which we needed. How well we realize today what a sad state our Cause would have been in without him! So often we have seen his healing touch laid on dissensions, on hurt feelings or wounded pride, always fertile sources of trouble in any community. So often his explanation and interpretation has made the way clear and once again gathered us in deep unity to serve our beloved Faith.

But we can be sure of one thing -- all these services rendered us by the first Guardian have not been without cost. A loving and sensitive nature, openhearted and filled with a wonderful eagerness in his desire to serve the Master, and carry out His wishes, he has been assailed most viciously, most unjustly, most pitilessly by enemies both within and without. From the world, any righteous man expects little understanding and acclaim during his lifetime, but from those near in ties of friendship or of blood, he hopes for and expects to receive more. We might have thought that the great tidal waves of distress and calumny, the violent attacks, had subsided with the end of the Heroic Age of

the Faith. But this evidently has not been the plan of God. Now we see our Guardian strong, wise, mature, stretching about us his iron arms to protect us in the sanctuary <p26> of the Divine Cause, but he himself is much scarred by the blows he has received these twenty-five years, more scarred than the Master surely ever dreamed he could be when he wrote "that no dust of despondency may stain his radiant nature," indeed, snowed under sometimes with the problems this ever-expanding world Faith engenders in its forward march, and with the many cares and blows that have been his portion.

That which sustains the Guardian, now left so alone amidst his great responsibilities, is the work of the Cause. Good news is like the breath of life to him, and whenever some new goal is achieved, some problem solved, some new enterprise undertaken, his spirit is lightened, his mind freed for some new creative effort, his heart gladdened. So we see that just as we Baha'is the world over are his responsibility, given to him by Almighty God, so is he our responsibility, likewise given us by Almighty God. Let us not take it lightly! In gratitude for both this mighty institution of Guardianship in which mankind has found a sure refuge in this new age, and in gratitude for this particular first Guardian, this Shoghi Effendi, let us resolve to rise to a truly higher plane of endeavor, and above all a higher plane of spiritual awareness, during these coming years. We must always remember that the only real limitations we suffer, are those within ourselves. Rallied closely about the center of the Cause, loving him and, in him, each other, we can, during the next quarter of a century double our record of achievement.

Every truth, every fact, has so many meanings and aspects. It may take a thousand years to correctly appraise the implications of 'Abdu'l-Baha's Will and Testament, but we -- the first recipients of it -- can, if we will, leave behind us the record of being the generation who made the <p27> greatest advances in understanding it and first helped release its wonderful powers upon the world, in history's

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[Scanned in and corrected by a Vineyard worker, 5/7/95.]