Shoghi Effendi

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Marcus Bach
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1.

There was also Shoghi Effendi.

A cable addressed to me at Geneva and forwarded to me in the Holy Land, said, "Shoghi Effendi will see you. Advise him time of your arrival."

He was in the north, in Haifa, Israel. I was in the south, in Jerusalem, Jordan. Between us was the Mandelbaum Gate, the only corridor between Arab countries and Israel and it was open, as far as Jordan was concerned, to one-way passage exclusively. "If a traveler goes to Israel, let him stay there or go on his way to a neutral country." This was Jordanian policy and there were few exceptions. Mine was one.

When I walked through the Gate, that barren 300-foot stretch of No Man's Land, I remembered the kindness of the officials on both sides who had opened this barbed wire barricade for me, and I wished I had the magic and the wisdom to unite Arab and Jew. Behind me, members of the Arab Legion stood guard; in front of me, the Israeli border patrol kept watch. On one side Arab children played; on the other, Jewish. For Jordanian and Israeli there was no crossing of the line for fear of reprisal, no invasion of a single square foot of this divided Holy Land on fear of death.

I walked, briefcase in hand, wishing for the formula

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that could restore to each side a will to believe in the man across the line; and, wishing, I thought of Shoghi Effendi. Did he have the magic word? Could the cause to which he was giving his life, the movement of which he was the supreme head, hold the secret? The word he proclaimed was Bahá'í, and in the tense air of silence and suspicion that made this darkening February afternoon more ominous, I found new meaning in the term. Perhaps Bahá'í was more than a

tag put on a new religion, more than just another promotional movement. The English equivalent of the Persian word Baha means light. Shoghi Effendi maintained that it meant light in the sense of knowledge, in the sense of truth, and in the sense of justice. It also meant faith: faith that where God is, there is unity; and God is everywhere.

Bahá'í meant a child of light, a follower of Bahá'u'lláh, the Persian Seer who, in 1863, proclaimed himself the reincarnation of the spirit of Christ. The man I was to see, Shoghi Effendi, was a lineal descendant of Bahá'u'lláh, and the present Bahá'í leader. The million Bahá'ís in the world affectionately called him the Guardian of their Cause. They were asking Christians to believe that Bahá'u'lláh was the Comforter whom Jesus had promised to send. They were telling Jews that this new prophet was the one destined to rule upon the throne of David. They were alerting Moslems to the fact that Bahá'u'lláh had come to quicken and purify their faith. To Zoroastrians they were saying, "He is the Incomparable Friend for whom your people are waiting," and to every great world religion, Bahá'ís were proclaiming that

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Bahá'u'lláh was the "Lord of Names," the focal point of unity and peace. Bahá'u'lláh had told the nations, "The earth is one country, and mankind its citizens."

The words seemed incongruous as I walked through the February cold. Heavy hopelessness and bloodshed lay over the land; guards stood on the bombed-out buildings, guns in hand; opposing camps were poised for combat at the slightest border incident. Baha — Light — seemed an impossible, unworkable ideal.

Yet, I could not help saying to myself as I thought of Arab and Jew, of East and West, and of nations, races and creeds all over the globe, "Surely there is a belief we hold in common. There is a truth from which we cannot hide. Whatever made us is the divine source of every life. In Him we all are one. And if, during this brief and mortal life, we war with one another, we are warring with ourselves and with Him. Light is what we need."

I did not know whether the Arabs behind me, or the Jews toward whom I was making my way, had ever heard about the Bahá'ís, or whether they knew Shoghi Effendi. And what could I say to them, and to what effect? Could mere words of mine or a Bahá'í ideal offer the basis for a practical peace? Two nights ago there had been gunfire. A week ago there had been a border clash and casualties. This was a business of life and death, not a matter of dreams and speculation. What was it the Arab Legionnaire had said at the Jordan border a moment ago when he brought his rubber stamp down on my special papers? "Remember we are at war. You must be back in a week."

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"Friday, the thirteenth," I promised.

"Between three and five o'clock," he instructed. "Goodbye and good luck to

you."

Then, with his two companions, armed, colorful in their red headgear, he had walked with me to the edge of his side of the barbed wire. He had stood there as if envying me my freedom to go — and to return.

Now I was nearing the little shack which served as a shelter for the border patrol of the Israeli government. A young man, bespectacled, stern and strong, leaned out of the shelter and asked me where I was going.

I told him, "Mt. Carmel."

"How do you expect to get by here?" he wanted to know.

I handed him my credentials. He looked them over, then glanced sharply at me, "This doesn't say where you are going."

I said, "I'm on my way to Mt. Carmel."

"And what do you expect to see at Mt. Carmel?"

"Religious shrines."

"Whose shrines?"

"The shrines of many faiths," I told him.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "and what kinds of religions are you interested in?"

"All kinds," I said.

"That's interesting," he replied. "That happens to be my interest, too."

Suddenly he became friendly. He then passed the documents I had given him through a slot in the wall, where a hand took them.

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We talked about religion. He told me much about the old faiths, and I told him about the new. And, in passing, I mentioned the Bahá'ís.

"Ah, you have Bahá'ís in America?" he asked, and from his tone I was not sure of his attitude, or whether he had more, or less, information about them than I had.

"They have their world-famous temple near Chicago," I informed him. "They call it the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar. It's a great attraction, a new type of architecture. It cost two million dollars. We Americans always like to know what things cost. The temple's nine pylons curve over an alabaster dome. The pylons fuse into one main pinnacle — to show that many paths may lead to God."

When I told him this, he talked about other symbolism: the symbolism of the cabala and also that of Philo of Alexander, the Jewish philosopher, and how, in Philo's hands, Bible characters became dissolved of flesh and blood and took on allegorical meaning.

All this while, I had almost forgotten the papers I had given him, so struck

was I by the fact that between us there had grown up a sense of camaraderie. I had never met him before. He had never met me. But we had a common interest: man's eternal quest.

I couldn't help but look back across the desolate stretch of land over which I had come and I think he read my thoughts. But neither of us said anything about that. And finally the hand pushed my papers back through the narrow slot.

The Israeli guard took them. Then he took a rubber stamp in his hand while two men, armed, stood near him, peering over his shoulders.

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"Yes," he verified, "everything seems to be in order, though this isn't the way these things are usually done." He brought the stamp down with a bang.

He handed the papers back to me, glanced through my briefcase and added, "We'll expect you back in a week. The gate will be open. It will be open for you between three and five."

I looked toward New Jerusalem, then at him, and reached out my hand to thank him.

He took it and asked, "Are you walking in — all the way?"

"Yes, I guess so. I'm going to the Y. M. C. A. How far is it?"

"Ah, that," he mused, "is a little piece. Maybe I can get you a cab. Would that help you?"

"Yes," I said, "that would be fine."

He took the field telephone and asked that a taxi be sent to take a friend, whom he had just met, into town.

Such kindness had not been shown me — well, not for a while at least — not since I had left the Jordan side.

2.

New Jerusalem, Jaffa, Tel Aviv — cities of the little state of Israel — were teeming with activity and ideas. This new state was like an eager child, trying to absorb everything at once: a way of life in its co-operative ventures, the Kibbutzim; global knowledge in its schools and universities; commerce for world markets in its industries; creative expression in its art and music and manifold

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manual skills; new agricultural principles in its waterways and irrigation; and a new government spun from the heart of its varied peoples.

Israel was fighting for its life. But on the other side, Jordan was fighting for its life, too. Israel needed food. Jordan had it. Israel had the creative touch; Jordan needed it. Israel wanted to be independent and free. So did

Jordan. So did every people. In every country it was always easier to consecrate the fighting spirit than to curb it. It was only a small step from the defense of what was right to the attack of what was wrong. Everywhere in Israel I felt a question, though I did not hear it spoken, "Are you ready to die for your country?" But I was on my way to see Shoghi Effendi who is neither Jew nor Jordanian. He is Persian. He is Bahá'í.

I went by way of Akká, for it was in this harbor city that Bahá'u'lláh, banished from Baghdad, spent his years of exile. Here to this desolate place, where St. Francis of Assisi once walked, Bahá'u'lláh came in chains in 1865.

I went into what is called the "Most Great Prison" where Bahá'u'lláh was held captive for twenty-five years, and where his son, Abdul Baha, was a prisoner for forty years. And when I poked around behind these old walls and looked into the dungeons the Bahá'í story came to life. Bahá'u'lláh, like Jesus, had a forerunner who called himself the Bab, which means "the Gate." In the midst of the religious and political squabbles of Moslem, Christian, and Jew the Bab said, in effect, "A plague on all your houses. You have all lost sight of your common origin." He preached that God is the Father of all men

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and the Founder of all faiths and that the time had come when God would personify this truth. Like John the Baptist, the voice in the wilderness, the Bab announced the coming of another Messiah, Bahá'u'lláh.

Shoghi Effendi, whom I was to meet, was the eldest son of the eldest daughter of Abdul Baha and a distant relative of the Bab. Abdul Baha had decreed in his will and testament that Shoghi Effendi should carry on the work. At the time of his grandfather's death in 1921, Shoghi was twenty-five and a student at Balliol College, Oxford. He returned at once to Haifa and was enjoined to "live in detachment from all worldly things, be the essence of purity and show in thyself the fear of God, knowledge, wisdom and learning." I was told that all this, too, was contained in the terms of the will.

Long ago in Wilmette, at the door of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar on Sheridan Road, a woman said to me, "I was in Haifa and saw His Eminence! I have never looked into such eyes in all my life. To obey him is to obey God, and to turn away from him is to turn away from God."

In Chicago, the man who first introduced me to the writings of Shoghi Effendi had said, "Everyone who meets the Guardian is deeply impressed. We are admonished by the will of Abdul Baha to take the greatest possible care of Shoghi Effendi so that 'no dust of despondency and sorrow will stain his radiant nature, and that he may become a fruitful branch on the tree of holiness.'"

In Havana, a Cuban Bahá'í told me she believed Shoghi Effendi to be a greater man than Elijah, who

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vanquished the priests of Baal on the summit of Mt. Carmel.

A professor at the University of Beirut described the Guardian as an artist and a genius; and a Bahá'í in Geneva urged me to return that way so that she might "shake the hand that shook the hand of Shoghi Effendi."

From Akka I went to Bahji, some six kilometers inland. Here is the Sheik's mansion where Bahá'u'lláh lived like a prince following his prison release, and here he died in 1892. Here is the holy spot where Christians, Jews, Moslems, Zoroastrians, and Buddhists came to "lament the loss and magnify the greatness of this herald of God." Bahá'ís even now do not speak of the death of Bahá'u'lláh, but, rather, of his ascension.

The taxi driver who took me to this sacred spot let me out at the lane close by an olive grove which might have been another Gethsemane. But on one side were warning signs advising that the Israeli Army had a firing range close by and a camp to which admittance was barred.

I walked through the lane to the big house. In the magnificently landscaped grounds, men were working. They did not look up, so intent were they in making beautiful these gardens of Bahji. I was met by a young man, a Bahá'í, who consented to take me into the mansion. He was not interested in my name or nationality. It was enough that I was "seeking", and he concluded in his quiet way that "if one is interested in many religions he cannot help but find his way to the right one."

We took off our shoes at the door which leads to the solemn and beautiful room where Bahá'u'lláh lies en-

shrined. For a long while we knelt beside the bier. My companion prayed and I fell to wondering at how many other shrines were worshipers saying their prayers at this very moment. In every country, no matter how torn by war, or how divided by man hating man, voices were being raised to heaven by way of prophets and messiahs. In caves and cathedrals, in tombs and temples, these everlasting chants were going on and just how or when this cacophony concerning the Fatherhood of God could ever be transposed into the harmony of the Brotherhood of Man was a mystery. It was a mystery for me, but not for the Bahá'ís. They simply said that this question had been answered when Bahá'u'lláh came into the world, and would be fulfilled when the world came to Bahá'u'lláh.

So I walked through the majestic rooms with my guide who regarded with reverence every book and tablet, every picture and place with which the Splendor of God had once been associated. In a large, rectangular parlor, along one side of which ran a low divan and where prayer rugs were now in evidence, I was reminded that it was here the noted Cambridge University Orientalist, Professor Edward G. Browne, visited Bahá'u'lláh. His impressions were widely quoted, and a commentary, known from memory by every ardent Bahá'í, reported, "The face of him on whom I gazed I can never forget, though I cannot describe

it. Those piercing eyes seemed to read one's very soul; power and authority sat on that ample brow; while the deep lines on the forehead and face implied an age which the jet-black hair and beard, flowing

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down in indistinguishable luxuriance almost to his waist, seemed to belie. No need to ask in whose presence I stood, as I bowed myself before One who is the object of a devotion and love which kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain!"

This, many Bahá'ís had warned me, was only a foreshadowing of what I would say when I met the present leader, Shoghi Effendi.

"Do you want to see him?" my guide whispered.

"Who?"

"The Guardian? Shoghi Effendi? He is here on the grounds. Come here to the window. Ah, you cannot see him because he is surrounded by the workmen out there."

"I am meeting him tonight," I stated.

The Bahá'í turned to me as if he must have misunderstood.

"I beg your pardon?" he managed to say.

"I have an appointment with him tonight at Haifa."

"You mean — personally?" He looked me over as if for the first time. "He is expecting you?"

"Yes. Those are the arrangements."

"He seldom grants interviews." His voice was still suspicious. "He has never been to America. He writes as Bahá'u'lláh writes, to draw men to God. He plans as Abdul Baha planned, for world citizenship. He works so that God's kingdom should come on earth as it is in heaven."

With these prophetic words ringing in my ears I returned to the lane close by the olive trees, made my way on foot back to Akka, and there caught a bus for Haifa.

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3.

The Guardian's home is under the watchful shadow of Mt. Carmel. On this green and holy hill, which Isaiah compared to the beauty of the Kingdom of God, Elijah taught his disciples. Here Pythagoras came to meditate; here Napoleon founded a hospital; and saints and martyrs built their grottos and chose their graves. And here Bahá'u'lláh made his retreats and proclaimed that Haifa should be the fountainhead of the Bahá'í Cause.

The Bahá'í shrine on Mt. Carmel has the jewel-like perfection of the Taj

Mahal. Its great pillars face Haifa harbor, as if Bahá'u'lláh's prophecy was being forced to come true; "A person standing on the summit of Mt. Carmel, and the passengers on the steamers coming to it, will look upon the most sublime and majestic spectacle of the whole world." Inside the granite walls of this "Blessed Tomb" lie the remains of the Bab and the body of Abdul Baha.

When I arrived at 10 Persian Street, the quiet thoroughfare that leads up to the sacred mount, I was welcomed into a pleasant room in Pilgrim House, just across from the Guardian's residence, by Ethel Revell, a secretary on the Bahá'í international staff.

"His Eminence will be with us for dinner," she said, and looked at me as if trying to determine whether or not I realized what an honor was being accorded me.

Ethel Revell was typically a Bahá'í, full of enthusiasm, tireless in her desire to talk about the Guardian, and

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leaving no doubt that she had at last found the faith to which she could unselfishly devote her life. But I was wrong in my impression that she was in her "first love" or that she was a recent convert to the cause. Her identity with the movement went back to her girlhood in Philadelphia forty years ago when her mother had introduced her to Abdul Baha, then touring the United States. The bearded white patriarch took her in his arms and prophesied that she would one day be close to the heart of the work.

She and her sister, Jessie, had come to Haifa in 1945 to work as zealots in the Guardian's community, asking no financial compensation and having no desire for any earthly acclaim. After eight years in this service, they still found that nothing had grown commonplace. Haifa was still the most vibrant spot on earth, because the Guardian was here. The work was the most satisfying in all the world, because his spirit made it so. The privilege of service was a cherished one, because any of the one million Bahá'ís in the Cause would count it an honor to be close to the "source of Light."

"You are highly favored," she reminded me. "After you have seen the Guardian you will never be the same."

The words had a familiar ring.

Whatever kind of man he was, he had drawn together into one procession many races, creeds, and minds. Great people and little people were marching with him toward the citadel of a united world. Rich and poor were finding a common ground, in sentiment, at least. Strong and

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weak were joining hands and hearts in an ideal. His Eminence was leading them onward to what he called a "world-girding mission" and they knew what this meant.

It meant that the temple at Ishquabad behind the Iron Curtain was a symbol of free men in a faithless land. It meant that the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar at Wilmette enunciated the spirit of the Bahá'í community in the Western Hemisphere. It meant that the missionary activity in Africa, India, and Asia was conducted not by a paid clergy, but by volunteers who unselfishly gave their time and fortunes to the Cause. It meant shrines at Akka and Bahji and Mt. Carmel. It meant the hour had come for the fulfillment of the beatitude of Bahá'u'lláh, "Blessed are they who shall proclaim the doctrine of spiritual brotherhood, for they shall be called the Children of Light!"

While I was visualizing these things and while Miss Reveil was telling me how marvelously the Bahá'í faith recommended itself for our time, the door opened and a trim, attractive woman entered, suddenly and unannounced. She had a dog on a leash, a fur stole around her neck, and she walked like a Persian queen. Only she was American, at least I thought she was, and the piquancy with which she came in must have pleased or shocked the spirits of the old prophets who haunted the mansion room.

She made herself comfortable in a chair and said, "So. Tell me about yourself. You are interested in religions.

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What have you found in all this searching?"

This was a surprise approach. Most Bahá'ís started out by telling me what they had found. Generally their aim was to convince me at once of the worth of the Cause. What kind of a zealot was this who invited me to present my case?

I reviewed the list of groups that had come under my study and when I explained that there always seemed to me to be a greater common ground for understanding than for differences, she voiced her agreement.

"Religions," she said, "are not parallel lines. They are bound to meet. Each is the expression of something vital that people have found in their search."

As she went on in this vein, she still made no mention of the Bahá'ís or of Bahá'u'lláh or of the Guardian. Who was this woman, and why did not Miss Revell introduce me? Perhaps she didn't have a chance, for the stranger was weaving a mood that did not admit of any rude intrusion.

"Each faith draws upon the inner well of experience," she mused. "In each there is something beautiful and disciplined and prophetic. The great religions are leaves of the same tree. The thinking person can and must find harmony among all true prophets and unity in all true scriptures."

She talked as though time and conversation were intended for the deepening of knowledge and faith. And I noticed another thing: she spoke in the lyrical, poetic style of Bahá'u'lláh himself, and it was difficult to tell

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which thoughts were hers and which were his. It was Bahá'í philosophy to be

sure, but it was presented as though it were her own.

"You know," she was saying, "a believer in the Unity of God must recognize in every created thing the evidence of the revelation of God. The creature is not indistinguishable from the Creator. Those who recognize the Unity of God are the primary revealers of God."

How we got so swiftly from my research into her discovery, I never quite knew. I think it must have been the fault of the dog. He was a shaggy, loveable fellow and somewhere along the way I commented on him. I think it was then she said something about feeling and sensitivity being the hallmarks of living matter and how much higher these qualities should be in human beings than in dogs. The greater the person, the more he should realize that he does not stand alone; that he draws upon the hidden resources of the spirit.

At some length she expounded the benefits to be derived by people who face the burdens and blows of life, for these can change weaklings into persons of strength. She believed, also, that this principle of rigorous discipline applies in the animal world. Her dog, now, she was sure, would be much better behaved had she been less lenient in her training of him.

Then she spoke of life's joy and triumphs, and of what happens to the individual when God becomes real to him, and he enters the orb of spiritual experience. The quest kindles the fire; faith lights it.

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She touched on many other things of a similar nature, such as sorrow and suffering, which seemed to her to be part of the spiritual process. Of suffering she said, "I do not know the why of it, but I know that every time I have suffered I have grown in spirit and felt refined."

It was during one of these rapidly paced impressions, when I felt the spirits of the prophets had turned the tables on me and were using her as their mouthpiece, that I said, "I hope I'm not being too inquisitive, but with whom do I have the honor of visiting?"

"Oh," she said with a slight laugh, while her hand gently stroked the dog's head, "my history is brief. I was born in Canada. My people were Bahá'ís and a few years ago it was my great privilege to become the wife of the Guardian."

I was frankly surprised and felt moved to exclaim, I didn't know the Guardian was married. How does all his reputed greatness seem to you, his wife? Why is it that in Bahá'í circles we do not hear more about you? Instead, I merely said, "I am very happy to meet you."

"Thank you," was the gracious reply. "We shall be together at dinner in a little while."

Then she went out, taking the dog with her for a walk.

4.

Shoghi Effendi did not come for the evening meal. He telephoned his regrets, explaining that he had been

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delayed at Bahji. He assured me that immediately after dinner he would meet me in his home, but his absence from our little gathering was the cause of keen disappointment for the five guests and for Madame Rabbani, as the wife of the Guardian is known.

"He works tirelessly," she said.

"He will be with us in spirit," said one of the women.

So we went into the pleasant basement dining room at Pilgrim House. Madame Rabbani sat at one end of the large table and I at the other. At her right was Dr. Lotfullah S. Hakim, an elderly Persian physician and close personal friend of the Guardian. Next to him was Mrs. Amelia Collins, a prominent American Bahá'í. At my right were the Revell sisters and Mrs. Sylvia Ioas, wife of the secretary of the Bahá'í Spiritual Assembly.

As a maid and helper in Pilgrim House came in with a tray of food, Madame Rabbani asked me to speak a word of prayer. The tempting aroma of Persian cooking persuaded me to thank the Lord for the universality of food as well as faith. I expressed gratitude, too, for the spirit of the Bahá'í Cause and for every attempt that aids man in his search for truth and peace.

No doubt a menu of curried chicken, rice pilaf, chutney, oven roasted peanuts, and fried bananas would put anyone in a receptive mood for almost any kind of table talk. But as the meal progressed, I found more convincing answers to my questions about the Bahá'í movement than any previously supplied. For one thing, I learned through Madame Rabbani and Dr. Hakim, that prayer

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and the earnest practice of the presence of God are basic in the faith. I was informed that a Bahá'í is not a true Bahá'í unless a consciousness of God is effected within him by the age-old formula, known to every seeker as "waiting upon God." This meant meditation, contemplation, reflection.

I was sure that many people in the traditional churches were of the opinion that Bahá'ísm was more sociological than spiritual. Most of my Protestant and Catholic friends considered it a glorified fraternal order with a Utopian dream about making the whole world one native land. Here in the heart of Haifa, at this pleasant table, I came to realize that the religion of Bahá'u'lláh is interested in an inner personal development as well as in a global plan, and I concluded the latter would be unrealizable unless the former were first attained.

"You cannot change the world without first changing the individual," was the formula, and never before had this point been driven home despite my many meetings with Bahá'ís in other lands.

It became clear to me, as I was sure it must have been to other pilgrims whose paths have led them to 10 Persian Street, that a true Bahá'í should live the life of a contemplative and should seek, as the wife of the Guardian earnestly declared, "that unity and peace in his own life which he hopes to see manifested in the world."

To the serene and quiet-spoken Dr. Hakim, Shoghi Effendi was an object of veneration. He had a fatherly affection for the Bahá'í leader and a watchfulness that

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seemed commissioned to guard not only his health but his spirit. It was Shoghi Effendi who had persuaded the doctor that: "there are two ways of healing the sick: material means and spiritual means. The first is through material remedies. The second is through praying to God and turning to Him."

The prayers the doctor prayed were also those of the Guardian: O God! Thy nearness is my hope,
And to commune with Thee, my joy;
Thy love is my comfort
And Thy Name, my prayer. My estimate of Shoghi Effendi grew because of the words and devotion of Mirza Hakim. It was he who assured me that this holy man of Haifa had outlined the plan for the Bahá'í commonwealth and had given the world the widest and most comprehensive idea of the heroism of faith. It was he who was teaching men how to live in truth and righteousness and in harmony with the Spirit of God.

To Dr. Hakim and to the pilgrims on Persian Street, Shoghi Effendi was a prophet. Their continual references to his work, his writings, and his power made me impatient for my meeting with him.

5.

It was nine o'clock when I walked with Madame Rabbani to the Guardian's home. Lights had appeared on

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Mt. Carmel and a path of lights led up to the sacred shrine. The air was crisp and fragrant. Silence hung over the city and far in the distance the beacon from a signal tower flashed and faded in its circular flight, bringing to mind the Bahá'í symbol of the reappearance of light in prophetic cycles.

Madame Rabbani ushered me into a large, sparsely furnished room. She said she would see whether His Eminence was now ready to see me. Would I mind waiting?

The room was filled with haunting sensations: the fragrance of incense; a sense of something mysterious; the peaceful lingering of the night outside the open door, in sharp contrast with the unrest and fear that everywhere seemed to brood over Palestine.

Through an inner door which stood open, I could see a spacious adjoining room,

also meagerly furnished but majestic. Near me on the wall was a framed page from the writings of Abdul Baha. This, aside from an Oriental wall hanging, was the only decoration.

I walked the heavily carpeted floor with a sudden rush of questions. Why, I asked myself, accept a new prophet when we have not yet lived the principles and teachings of the old? Had not Jesus beleaguered us with more challenges for life than we could ever satisfactorily meet? Had He not already told us to love our fellowmen and our neighbors as ourselves? And we had not yet come around to that. How, then, could we possibly create a new world order?

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This new religion was also asking us to accept Bahá'u'lláh before we had made our peace with Krishna and Zoroaster and Mohammed and the Divine Manifestations of other faiths. Would not every organized religious movement see in Bahá'u'lláh a threat its own messiah, rather than a blessing to all mankind?

I wondered, too, while waiting for Shoghi Effendi, whether we could ever accept all Scriptures as holy, as the Bahá'ís requested. We Christians were still arguing about the Bible. We were still buying Bibles without reading them and reading them without knowing what was meant. We were even re-translating our Holy Book, deleting passages here and there and changing the meaning of basic texts! Were we ready, then, to accept the Scripture of Bahá'u'lláh?

But I kept thinking, What must it be like to find a faith that answers all one's questions; to discover one single, satisfying institutionalized expression and to say, "Now I need search no longer. Here is everything I have been looking for!"

How could this ever be possible? What would happen to the individual then? What would happen to me if I were suddenly to say, "This is it! My search is over! Here in the Bahá'í mecca, I have found the Pearl of Great Price!"

Madame Rabbani was standing, tall and poised, in the doorway.

"He will be here in a moment," she announced. "I am sure you are going to enjoy your visit with him very much."

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There was no doubting her sincerity or her enthusiasm. In a glance, warm and friendly, she seemed to be saying, "There was a time when I was seeking just as you are. I was looking for something, too, something to which I could really consecrate my life."

Then I saw coming through the adjoining room a small, dark-complexioned man, dressed in Western attire but wearing a fez. His clean-shaven face and slender figure registered indomitable strength. He walked with head up as though an entourage of the faithful might be following him. He strode in, bowed to me with an almost imperceptible nod, and held out his hand. As we exchanged greetings there was a smile on his lips, though this did not entirely destroy

my impression of a certain aloofness in his bearing. He welcomed me with a sensitivity that seemed to feel, rather than hear my words.

The expression of his dark eyes, too, gave a hint of inner judgment based not on what was said but, rather, on what was sensed. He was self-possessed, self-sufficient, purposeful. I had been told he was a man of fifty-seven, but, judging from his unlined, youthful face, he might have been only forty. And though I stood head and shoulders above him, I felt diminutive. I envied him the sense of security and holy mission in life that filled his whole soul with confidence, beyond doubt and beyond question.

He looked at me steadily for a moment as if to determine whether I was truly a pilgrim or whether I had dropped around for sensational information about what I might lightly consider the rise and romance of another

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sect. Apparently satisfying himself that he would never have been led to keep this interview unless God had sent me, he directed me with a nod and a gesture to a chair. He took his place on a divan and as he put into words the thoughts I had already divined, he smiled knowingly. Had I come all this distance only to ask the general run of questions? What was the purpose of my visit?

My first few words, "an interest in religion that has deepened into a quest," brought a quick nod of understanding. It was almost as if I had made an electrical contact. His eyes flashed. Ah, yes, he knew what I meant. A man could not seek long in the jungle of religions without wanting to find a good trail, a way out, a way toward the light. Light was what men needed. How restless the world! How caught in its many complexities! How desperately men needed the new message, the good message that the kingdoms of the earth are passing away and the kingdom of God is in the making.

Quietly he took me at once into the heart of the Bahá'í Cause and though I had heard much of this before from members of the faith, it was a new experience for me to meet a religious leader who was not defending one Book, but, rather, Books; who had no argument for one Messiah, but for Messiahs; who was not pointing out one way, but ways, to God.

"The faith identified with the name of Bahá'u'lláh disclaims any intent to belittle any of the Prophets gone before Him, to whittle down any of their teachings, to obscure, however slightly, the radiance of their revela-

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tions or oust them from the hearts of their followers, to abrogate the fundamentals of their doctrines, to discard any of their revealed Books, or to suppress the legitimate aspirations of their adherents.

"Repudiating the claim of any religion to be the final revelation of God to man, thus disclaiming finality for his own revelation, Bahá'u'lláh inculcates the basic principle of the relativity of religious truth, the oneness of Divine Revelation, and religious experience. His aim is to widen the basis of all

revealed religions and to unravel the mysteries of their scriptures. . . . He separates the God-given truths from the priest-prompted superstitions, and on this basis proclaims the possibility, and prophesies the inevitability, of their unification and the consummation of their highest hopes."

This is how he described the Bahá'í Cause and how he presented it to me. This was "the continuity of revelation" and he was an instrument in the process. Bahá'u'lláh had brought the message. He, the Guardian, was implementing it into the unification of all mankind.

6.

This, then, was the man I had come to see, a beardless prophet, one who might have been a successful businessman, artist, or teacher; an intense and vital man, whose all-seeing eyes always read my thoughts in advance, whose sharp mind had a ready answer the moment my questions were asked.

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"Is the Bahá'í faith really making an impact upon the world?" I asked.

"Religious revolution, social evolution stand at the door of our age," he proclaimed. "The dynasties of institutionalized religion and centralized political power are confounded by the Light of the Cause. A new world civilization is being born, a new day is dawning."

"But do you think the world is really more religious than it has been? Is it more spiritually inclined . . . ?"

"Man has let go of God but God will not let go of man. Religions must face each other honestly. Let them recognize the Faith and the Prophet that can unite them. Men have been so absorbed in the study of theology that they have neglected the study of life."

His words were sparks thrown from the anvil of the Bab — rays of light from the torch of Bahá'u'lláh. These masters had dared accuse kings and priests of wresting power from God. They had foretold the fearful penalties of such ambition, and the Guardian described what these penalties were: the collapse of organized religion, the crumbling of ecclesiasticism, strife within Christendom, the disintegration of world powers, the rise of "the triple false gods of Nationalism, Racialism and Communism."

Had I not read about the fate of empires which had rejected the counsel of Bahá'u'lláh? Shrunken and extinguished they had become! He had written about this in The Promised Day is Come. He had stated the facts for all the world to see.

"Consider the fate of the Napoleonic, the Romanov,

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the Hohenzollren, the Hapsburg empires, which, together with the sovereign occupant of the Papal throne, were individually addressed by Bahá'u'lláh!

What of France whose emperor flung away Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet? What of the fate that has overtaken the Chinese Empire, the Portuguese and Spanish monarchies? What of England? Did not Queen Victoria, upon reading the Tablet sent to her, remark, If this is of God, it will endure; if not, it can do no harm?' What of Russia which Bahá'u'lláh had warned never to turn from the face of God? What of the Holy Roman Empire?" Bahá'u'lláh had written his warning and it was unheeded. Then, in his lifetime the virtual extinction of the temporal sovereignty of the Supreme Pontiff was held up for all the world to see.

He spoke like that, in words tinged with poetry and power. He spoke in melodious, faultless English, with a firm and stanch authority as if what he had to say was said by divine right. He blended the vast run of world events for the past century into the hub of the 1863 proclamation that Bahá'u'lláh had come to do God's work and will.

I was assured that a blueprint for global unity existed in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and Abdul Baha, that every emergence of a plan for universal order, from the League of Nations to the United Nations, had received its inspiration from this source; and that these were rays of light emanating from the brilliance that came from the Bahá'í world.

"But how," I asked, "do you account for the fact that

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the faith has not grown more rapidly than it has? There are not more than ten or twelve thousand Bahá'ís in the United States."

"Our influence cannot be counted in numbers," he declared. "But the Bahá'í world population is very large and very strong."

"Christian Science," I made bold to say, "which also goes back to approximately 1863, has at least half a million members in America. The Adventists, who go back about a hundred years, number some 300,000. Jehovah's Witnesses have about 500,000. These groups have all sprung up during the past century."

"The trouble with these new religions," came his considered reply, "is that they are always offering the people something. People too often join a new religion, or even an old one, because they expect to get something out of it. Bahá'ís believe they have something to give."

He contended that the westernization of the Christian faith tended to make it opportunistic. "The western concept is, 'What can I get out of religion? What is in it for me?' The Bahá'í religion asks, 'What am I willing to give?' What did the first followers of Jesus expect to get out of the Christian faith? A cross."

I had no doubt that he, too, would be willing to carry a cross for his belief. He had no other purpose than to see his mission accomplished. Build the faith! Complete the shrines! Guard and guide the people! Resist the enemies of the Cause! Trust in God! The divan on which he sat might have been a throne; his

words, the words of a king.

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But the thing that struck me most as our meeting progressed was his unquestioned devotion to the Galilean. He was fully as faithful to Jesus as he was to Bahá'u'lláh. Any basis for understanding the Bahá'í concept would have to start with the premise that Shoghi Effendi was a thorough-going Christian in the philosophical, if not in the theological, sense. In fact, the true Bahá'í had to be as much or more of a Christian than the Christian himself. This new faith was no less than a fulfillment of the promise given by Christ that the kingdom He had prayed for was now being established. It was Jesus, not Bahá'u'lláh or, perhaps, Jesus incarnated in Bahá'u'lláh who claimed first attention in the Cause — and also in this interview which was continued far into the night.

The knowledge, love, and commitment which Shoghi Effendi held for Jesus were a startling revelation. Through Him he had become the recipient of a religious stability and power that put me to shame. Jesus was surely, truly, undebatably, the Chosen of God. What would happen if we would really follow Him? The sword would be put away. The guns would be silenced. Men would be kind and humble in spirit, mighty in purpose.

To the Guardian the relationship between Jesus and Bahá'u'lláh was consistently unvarying. The world, he recalled, had rejected the Christ. It was again seeking to reject the Splendor of God. But as the Prophet of Nazareth seized and conquered the minds of men, so the Prophet of Teheran was conquering, too. As the Prince of Peace shook and terrified the kingdoms of selfish individuals, so the Prince of Unity was even now begin-

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ning to shatter the kingdoms of selfish systems. Jesus and Bahá'u'lláh were Divine Manifestations, whole and inseparable.

And so I learned that while a fearful condemnation hung over those who rejected and persecuted the Christ, an equally terrible judgment rested upon those who would reject and deny the Persian Seer.

Speaking of life and work, the Guardian said, "The individual has two wings: knowledge and faith. When these are in perfect co-ordination, the soul rises to divine perfection."

Concerning the relationship between science and religion, he observed, "Religion has erred in that it has made an adversary of science. True religion and true science are not natural enemies; rather, they are partners in revealing the presence of God."

Evil, he called a lack of good; darkness, an absence of light; and both, veils which hide the truth from men who seek it. Why men love evil more than good, and why they seek darkness rather than light, are among life's mysteries. There are other mysteries: the reason for suffering and the end of God's plan for the

earth.

But why, Shoghi Effendi wondered, should the individual ever feel impatient or driven, or why should he lose his sense of balance? Such conditions are attributable only to a lack of faith and trust. Let those who love the Light never be shaken by these circumstances. Let them never be blinded. Let them remember that civilization is like a growing person and that distresses, disturbances,

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and tensions are factors in the upward climb. Human life is very young. Civilization is an adolescent — a delinquent adolescent at that — but it is God's child and God will see that it reaches the full stature of man.

He spoke of life after death. Bahá'u'lláh's teachings in this respect were worthy of being stated as a fundamental creed: "Know of a truth that the soul, after its separation from the body, will continue to progress until it attains the presence of God, in a state and condition which neither the revolution of ages and centuries, nor the changes and chances of this world can alter."

The greatest forces in the world, he assured me, are the prophets of God. Through them God makes Himself known and carries civilization forward. They are His messengers. They live, and it is God living among men. They speak, and it is God's word. They suffer, and it is God bearing the pain and the sin of the world. They take upon themselves disdain and persecution, and it is God bowing His head and baring His shoulders to the whips and scourges of his children. They die, and it is God who weeps. They ascend, and it is God in His glory who again shows man His true estate.

The moments went by. The hour grew late. I had a notebook in my pocket but I did not open it that night. It might have helped me to remember his words, but not his faith. That was something to be felt and cherished. His awareness of God was paramount. With him, all is God's will and the Prophets have so revealed it. All is God's work and that is what the Prophets have

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proclaimed. Everything is God. Everything is known to God, whether it be a nation that disappears or a sparrow that falls.

7.

It was near midnight when the Guardian rose to his feet. He extended his hand, and expressed the hope that we would meet again. Then he turned and walked to the door, through the adjoining room, and out of sight as if the retinue of followers marched in triumphal procession behind him.

Out in the moonlit street I gazed up at the silhouetted shrine on the green hill that is Mt. Carmel. Catholicism has Rome. Islam has Mecca. Protestantism has it claim on Bethlehem. The Jew has Jerusalem. The Bahá'í has his holy hill in Haifa. Here is the focal point. Here, in the making, is an amalgam of

religions based upon blending the divine pronouncements of all traditional religions into an administrative order vested in the Guardian. Could Mt. Carmel, God's throne, make the world its footstool?

In my room in Pilgrim House a bowl of fruit had been set on the table, together with several books on philosophy and religion. There were also Shoghi Effendi's English translations of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and a recently published volume, Prescription for Living, by Madame Rabbani. Its theme was a dramatic reminder of her conviction that the fate of tomorrow's world is

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dependent upon the disposition we make of the new world faith today.

This book's theme and the Guardian's pronouncements had charge of my thoughts for most of the following days, especially on that Friday, the thirteenth, when, between the hours of three and five, I was back in Jerusalem and at the Mandelbaum Gate. Could the spiritual light which Shoghi Effendi kept burning ever unite Arab and Jew? Could it bring peace to the divided Holy Land or to any land where armies stood along disputed borders? Adolescent the world might now be; but would it ever be mature enough to agree that God's chosen people include all mankind?

I thought about Shoghi Effendi. In a divided world his voice rose with great conviction: there can be no peace until force gives way to faith and terrorism to trust; there can be no unity until individuals make the words of Bahá'u'lláh the law of the land, "Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country, let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind."

There was no mystery or question about the source of the Guardian's strength. The reason for his influence was clear. There was a time when his path crossed the path of the Man from Nazareth. And when these paths crossed, he made a disposition of the Nazarene. He made of Him a Prophet — a Prophet with honor in Palestine, a Prophet with honor throughout the world.

That was it. He was part of the circle of faith. His arc was the arc of prophecy. I remembered how, on the day

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following our interview, we walked the sacred Bahá'í grounds on Mt. Carmel. I would always remember how he pointed out the yet unfinished plan for building, how he emphasized that "This must be because it is so ordered" and that "Here it is ordained that this should be completed." There is always One standing with him. It is the spirit of the Prophet.

Had Shoghi Effendi lived at the time of Jesus he would have read a prophetic meaning into all of the Master's words. In each beatitude he would have found a hidden implication, in each injunction a foreshadowing of event following upon event, in each intimate conversation a hint of things to come. He would have been the first among the disciples to recognize Jesus as God's Prophet and not merely as a prophet of God.

Christ, for Shoghi Effendi, is "all Prophet." Had Shoghi lived in the time of Jesus this recognition would have ruled and guided his life then, as it rules and guides his life today. Without this awareness, he could not have believed in Bahá'u'lláh. With it, his life, his fate, his will are bound up with his implicit trust in the prophetic elements of the Messianic concept.

In the heat of theological speculation that seeks to divide Jesus into a thousand parts and even divides Him against Himself, Shoghi Effendi stands secure and unshaken in what he considers his divine impression. His path crossed the path of Jesus and he made of Him a Prophet. Is it right? Is it wrong? Is it swindle or miracle, false or true?

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It is simply the instinctive response of a distinctive nature, the concentration of the entire devotion on the Absolute Godhead and the assurance that at times this Godhead descends into human form. His path crossed the path of Jesus and he made of Him a Prophet.

He has that type of mind.

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