

version 1. - most preferred -  
interesting - never before published (I think) photo of  
Gertrude

# GERTRUDE BELL

Q\_225.jpg (640x419)



## AND THE BABI AND BAHAI FAITH



## GERTRUDE BELL ARCHIVE

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## Album Q (1911)

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Assur [General view of excavation site and workmen, unidentified German archaeologist in foreground]

[Q\\_222 - Ashur \(April 1911\)](#)

Parthian capital, Assur [Detail of fallen capital]

[Q\\_223 - Ashur \(April 1911\)](#)

Assur [(Possibly) Dr Jordan (seated to right) and another German archaeologist (probably either Maresch or Preusser) at table paying workers]

[Q\\_224 - Ashur \(April 1911\)](#)

Assur [(Possibly) Dr Jordan (seated to right) and another German archaeologist (probably either Maresch or Preusser) at table paying workers]

[Q\\_225 - Ashur \(April 1911\)](#)

Assur [Gertrude Bell and German archaeologists at dinner table. From left to right - Bachmann, either Maresch or Preusser, Gertrude Bell, Andrae, either Maresch or Preusser]

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## Chapter 1

### QAJAR PERSIA

On 9 December, 1828, Alexander Griboyedov, the newly-appointed Russian Minister to the court of Fath-Ali Shah, the Qajar monarch of Persia<sup>1</sup>, set out on a fateful journey from Tabriz for Tehran, to present his credentials to the Shah. Griboyedov was just 34. Married three months earlier to the 16-year old Princess Nina Chavchavadze, daughter of Prince Chavchavadze, the Russian commander of the provinces of Erivan and Nakhichevan, Griboyedov's advancement as a diplomat had been rapid.

An aristocrat and literary figure, whose satirical play "Woe from Wit"<sup>2</sup> had placed him in the forefront of contemporary Russian literary circles, Griboyedov had, in 1818, spent two years in Tabriz, the diplomatic capital of Persia,<sup>3</sup> as an attache to the first permanent Russian mission to Persia at the court of Prince Abbas, the Shah's eldest son. The mission's task was to promote Russian interests, counter-acting British influence and settling some of the issues left undecided by the Treaty of Gulestan.<sup>4</sup> A 10-year war with Russia beginning in 1804 had concluded with the occupation of most of Transcaucasia (Southern Caucasus) by occupying Russian forces. Persia had been forced by the Treaty of Gulestan to cede its vassal khanates north of the Aras river, except Erivan and Nakhjevan, and to give up all claims to Georgia, which Russia had annexed in 1801.

From his posting in Tabriz, Griboyedov had been transferred to Tiflis, the capital of Georgia, as diplomatic secretary to General Yermolov, the Governor of Georgia and the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian forces in the newly conquered territories in the Caucasus. Yermolov, like his predecessor before him, followed a harsh policy of subduing by force the local populations who resisted Russian rule: 'I desire that the terror of my name should guard our frontiers more potently than any fortress'<sup>5</sup> he asserted. His uncompromising attitude, which reflected the general policy of Russia towards its Eastern conquests, caused great resentment.<sup>6</sup> Inevitably, this resentment had acquired a religious dimension leading to revolts and uprisings in the name of *jihad*.<sup>7</sup>

In 1826, Crown Prince Abbas, who effectively conducted Persia's foreign policy,<sup>8</sup> driven by Yermolov's intransigency over ceding disputed border areas and urged on by a pro-war faction,<sup>9</sup> resumed Persia's fight with Russia. This war, known as the second Russo-Persian war, was to last only 15 months.<sup>10</sup> Yermolov who proved surprisingly ineffective in responding to the attack by the Crown Prince,<sup>11</sup> was replaced by the Tsar with his own favourite, General Paskievich, a cousin by marriage of Griboyedov. Laurence Kelly, a biographer of Griboyedov, describes the effect of bringing in Paskievich:

The departure of Yermolov meant that a whole range of his hard-line policies could be reversed. Peaceful intervention and respect for Muslim laws and institutions could replace his tactics of scorched earth and terror: local potentates could be wooed into becoming allies rather than beaten into submission.<sup>12</sup>

Griboyedov, with his knowledge of local conditions and local languages was constantly at the General's side: 'What he says becomes holy writ' one of his friends wrote of him.<sup>13</sup>



Paskievich, through a combination of military force and strategic negotiations with local leaders, advanced into Erivan and Nakhjevan, and eventually overran Tabriz, the Crown Prince's capital. The Crown Prince was forced to negotiate an armistice. The final result was the Treaty of Turkmenchai which required Persia to cede Nakhjevan (present day Nakhjevan Autonomous republic of Azerbaijan) and Erivan (most of present day Armenia) to Russia. Russia won the exclusive right to navigate the Caspian, and reparations of 20 Million roubles (ten kurors) were exacted.<sup>14</sup> A commercial protocol to the treaty permitted Russia to set up consulates, and Russians merchants to trade freely in Persia. A capitulatory regime was put in place.<sup>15</sup>

Griboyedov played an active role in the negotiations over the treaty and was responsible for drafting its terms. After it had been signed, Griboyedov was deputed to bring the Treaty back to St. Petersburg for ratification by the Tsar. He was welcomed as a hero. Nesselrode, the Tsar's foreign minister, wrote to Paskievich in Tiflis, praising 'the scrupulous exactitude' of the treaty, and averring that 'this young man will be invaluable in our future relations with Persia.'<sup>16</sup> The 'young man' was, in fact, appointed the new Minister Plenipotentiary to the Persian Court, with responsibility for restoring Russian diplomatic relations with Persia and enforcing the terms of the Treaty. He accepted the post with some misgivings: 'There was nothing for it, to turn this down after so many imperial favours would have appeared as the blackest ingratitude. I can foresee I shall not return alive from Persia' he wrote to a friend. And later he confided in the same friend that the Persians now considered him their enemy.<sup>17</sup>

Assembling the members of his new mission he set off from St. Petersburg in June 1828. He stopped long enough in Tiflis to marry Nina Chavchavadze, and by September he was on his way to Tabriz with his new bride, accompanied by a Cossack guard and 110 pack horses.<sup>18</sup> In Tabriz, he delayed, insisting upon full payment of the balance of the indemnity owing under the Treaty.<sup>19</sup> By December, he was ready to proceed to Tehran to present his credentials. He did not expect to be gone long, and Nina, now pregnant, remained behind in Tabriz in the care of Sir John Macdonald the head of the British mission at Tabriz, and his wife.

He set out for Tehran on December 20-21.<sup>20</sup> Other accounts set the date as Dec. 9, 1828.<sup>21</sup> This discrepancy is probably due to difficulties in converting into the Gregorian calendar the Persian dates appearing in a key eye-witness account of the events that ensued - that of the scribe to the Mehmandar<sup>22</sup> appointed by Abbas Mirza to accompany the mission on its journey to Tehran ('the Persian account'). The Persian account - the '*Narrative of the proceedings of the Russian mission from its departure from Tabreez on 14<sup>th</sup> Jummade until its Destruction on Wednesday the 6<sup>th</sup> of Sha'ban*' was published in 1830 in Blackwood's Magazine.<sup>23</sup> In the Persian account, the scribe reports that Griboyedov, on the journey from Tabriz to Tehran, did not subject the servants of the mission to sufficient discipline, and that they were 'unruly and disorderly...especially the Georgians and Armenians, whose conduct gave rise to many complaints from my countrymen.'<sup>24</sup> Their headman, a Georgian called Rustem-Bek, extorted supplies and money from the villages along the route, and Griboyedov, himself, earned the nickname 'Sakht-Tir', which he translated as 'un coeur dur' in seeking out slaves who could claim their freedom and the right to repatriation in Russian territory under the terms of the Treaty. Griboyedov wrote to his wife 'The Prisoners [he meant the candidates for repatriation] have driven me mad. Some will not give themselves up, others will not return of their own desire.'<sup>25</sup>

By mid-January he arrived in Tehran.<sup>26</sup> Kelly, drawing from Russian author, Iurri Tynianov,<sup>27</sup> says that Griboyedov entered Tehran during the annual commemoration of the



martyrdom of the holy Imam Husayn, killed by the army of Yazid, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Caliph. In the procession of mourning, Yazid is represented mounted on a coal black stallion. Griboyedov too was mounted on a black stallion and 'greeted by ominous cries of 'Ya Hasan! Ya Husayn!''<sup>28</sup>

His first audience with the Shah seemed to go well - though, the scribe of the Persian account says he lingered too long: 'it was indeed whispered that M. Grebayedoff remained too long seated in the presence, in the chair placed for his accommodation. The Shah had on his crown and was arrayed in his finest jewelry; their weight was so oppressive, that after the envoy retired, his majesty was obliged speedily to cast off these ensigns of royalty'<sup>29</sup>

The second audience was, according to the Persian account, more problematic. Greboyedov delivered a ratified copy of the Treaty to the Shah, and there may have been some discussion about the harshness of its terms.<sup>30</sup> Griboyedov may not have been sufficiently respectful '...the envoy's prolonged use of the chair was again noticed' and again appears to have overstayed his welcome, and the Shah had to pointedly tell him that he could absent himself: '...the word '*Murakhas*' (depart), used toward the envoy by the Shah when his Majesty considered the audience had been of sufficient duration gave deep offence.'<sup>31</sup> However, the reports of First Secretary Maltsev, the sole survivor of the Russian mission, to General Paskievich<sup>32</sup> ('the Russian account') make no mention of ill feeling until the eve of Griboyedov's departure, when the Shah's chief eunuch, Mirza Yaq'ub [Jacob] Makarian, an Armenian, came to the Russian legation and claimed sanctuary and the right to repatriation to his native Erivan under the terms of the Treaty.<sup>33</sup>

Kelly describes Mirza Yak'ub as the Shah's personal treasurer, in charge of his harem's jewelry and accounts.<sup>34</sup> D.P. Costello, a scholar of Slavonic studies, in an article examining different conspiracy theories surrounding the murder of Griboyedov, elevates his status and says Mirza Yaq'ub '... devised an accounting system for the State revenue and expenditure, and came to occupy a prominent position at the court of the Shah.'<sup>35</sup>

Upon hearing of the defection, Costello writes: '...The Shah was furious; the whole court set up a howl, as though what had taken place was a national disaster of the first importance.'<sup>36</sup> The Persian account was more sympathetic: '...by no arguments could we... suppose that the pride of the King of Kings...would permit his majesty patiently to submit to a circumstance so completely at variance with his sentiments of propriety and so liable to debase him in the eyes of his subjects.'<sup>37</sup>

Matters were made worse by the Russians persisting efforts to seek out Russian subjects for repatriation. Their search focused on two Armenian women in the household of the Shah's son-in-law, the former military governor of Tabriz, described by Macdonald, the British Minister, as 'The most powerful nobleman in the Kingdom'<sup>38</sup> and also the leader of the anti-Russian faction at court. The women were brought into the Russian Legation quarters and questioned by Griboyedov. The Russian account states that 'they declared their wish to depart to their country'.<sup>39</sup> The Persian account, in contrast, states that 'The females, on being questioned by M. Grebayedoff, explicitly mentioned that they were not solicitous to leave Tehran, but..' it continues '...in an evil moment, he listened to the suggestion of Rustum [Rustum Beg, the headsman] to detain them for a day or two, when relieved from awe and apprehension, the love of their primitive faith and attachment to their native country, would predominate in their minds over every other consideration.'<sup>40</sup>

Rumors spread through the city that the women were being held by force, and being made to abjure their faith and that Mirza Ya'kub was betraying Islam.<sup>41</sup> On February 11, the scribe



reports ‘...I was informed of the assemblage of people at the principal mosque, where the priests had again held council. They ordered the closure of all shops in the bazar, and then enjoined their congregation to proceed to the Russian quarters to demand the delivery of, or obtain by force, the person of Meerza Yakoob and the two women.’<sup>42</sup> A crowd of about 400 or 500 men armed with swords and clubs marched to the Russian residence and forced their way through to the courtyard where Mirza Ya’qub was lodged and he was dragged away and killed. A short while later, a larger mob assembled in front of the legation. Kelly writes that for a short while, the mullahs held them back from attacking, but when a young boy was shot by a cossack from the roof, his body was taken to the mosque, where the mullahs pronounced a *jihad* against the Russian mission, whereupon a full scale attack against the residence ensued, resulting in the massacre of the entire legation.<sup>43</sup> Only the scribe, and First Secretary Maltsov escaped.

In the aftermath of the massacre, it took four days for the government to restore order to the city.<sup>44</sup> Maltsov publicly absolved the Persian government of blame. Privately, he was convinced that the Shah intended to destroy Mirza Yakub at all costs.<sup>45</sup> Other theories pointed to the involvement of the British.<sup>46</sup> Some blamed Griboyedov himself for carrying out his duties with excessive zeal. However, Kelly points out the difficulty of the task that had been assigned to him:

In retrospect, it is clear the Griboyedov had been given an impossible remit by his masters in St. Petersburg, or set himself an unrealistic set of aims. The harshness of the terms he had to impose made him a hated figure from the start. He had been given no leeway in negotiating the payment of the indemnity, or in dealing with the demands for repatriation of those who claimed to be Russian subjects.<sup>47</sup>

And what of the role of the ulama? Hamid Algar, a leading Islamist scholar, characterises the role of the Muslim clergy in the Griboyedov affair as a precursor to their later involvement in affairs of state as ‘inspirers and leaders of popular feeling and defenders of the national honor’<sup>48</sup>:

The closing of the bazaar, the gathering in the Masjid-i-Shah, the use of martyrs corpses to inspire violent anger, the fury of the people when threatened with removal of their leaders - all these are elements of Iranian history which recur in later, more serious situations... The events connected with the murder of Griboyedov were without immediate consequences of any importance; but they gave a foreboding of many later developments.<sup>49</sup>

### The Tobacco Concession

More than a half century later, the role foreshadowed by the ulama in the Griboyedov affair, was given full expression in the events leading up to the repeal of a tobacco concession granted by Nasir-al Din Shah to Major G.F. Talbot, a British national, in March of 1890.<sup>50</sup>

Nikki Keddie<sup>51</sup> in her book on the Tobacco Regie, *Religion and Rebellion In Iran*, characterises the system of granting concessions as being, in general, ‘a game of speculators and adventurers, out for quick profits...’<sup>52</sup> However, she adds:

...many Britishers, notably Sir Henry Drummond Wolff [British Resident in Tehran from 1887-1890<sup>53</sup>] had a naive Victorian confidence that opening up Iran to foreign commerce and industry would automatically bring progress and reform, and favored concessions on



these grounds.’<sup>54</sup>

One of the concessions granted during 1888-1889, under Drummond Wolff’s watch, was a 60- year concession granted to Baron Julius de Reuter, giving him exclusive rights to issue bank notes. The Imperial Bank of Persia was created, and became ‘the most influential and enduring enterprise granted to foreigners in the Nasiri period and, in the history of modern Iran, second in importance only to the oil concession of 1901.’<sup>55</sup> Another major concession granted round the same time, was a concession granted to Lynch Brothers, a British firm, to navigate steamships along the Karun river, providing access to the interior of Iran by inland navigation.

A notice announcing the grant of the Tobacco Concession and inviting subscriptions in the share capital of the Imperial Tobacco Corporation of Persia appeared in the November 4 issue of *The Daily Graphic*, a London newspaper. It stated that the Imperial Tobacco Corporation of Persia had been incorporated under the Companies Act, with a capital of 850,000 pounds, consisting of 64,740 ordinary shares of 10,000 pounds each and 2,000 Founders shares of 1 pound each. The Founders shares were to be issued to the Vendor Company or its shareholders as fully paid up. A further 21,580 ordinary shares had been subscribed for by the vendor company shareholders (the largest amount permitted by the rules of the London Stock Exchange the notice advised). Prospective purchasers were invited to take up the balance of the shares on offer. The ordinary shares were to receive dividends preferentially over the Founder shares. An abridged prospectus was appended.<sup>56</sup> The prospectus published alongside the notice read:

The Imperial Tobacco Corporation of Persia Limited has been formed for the purpose of acquiring and working the important concession granted by his Imperial Majesty the Shah of Persia for the monopoly of the purchase, sale and manufacture, in Persia, of the whole of the tobacco produced in the Persian Empire.

The Concession grants the sole and exclusive right for the term of fifty years of purchasing, selling and manufacturing tobacco of all kinds grown in Persia and provides that an annual rent of 15,000 pounds and one fourth of the annual profits, after payment of all expenses of working the undertaking and of five percent upon the capital employed, shall be paid to the Persian Government.

The Concession was granted by his Majesty the Shah and the Imperial Government of Persia on the 8<sup>th</sup> March, 1890, and registered at the British legation at Teheran on the 9<sup>th</sup> May, 1890.

The cultivation of Tobacco forms an important branch of industry and trade in the Persian Empire. Tobacco in Persia is regarded almost as a necessity of life, and as such is used by both sexes of all classes....

In framing the concession advantage was taken of the experience gained in the working and administration of the Turkish Tobacco Regie...The Corporation is thus protected against difficulties which the Turkish Tobacco Regie had to contend with when first established, and inasmuch as the rent payable by them is only 15,000 pounds per annum, as against 630,000 pounds per annum payable by the Turkish Regie and the term of their Concession is for 50 years as against the term of only 30 years in the case of the Turkish Concession, their business will be entered on under much more favourable conditions.

[Gross receipts and net profits based on published accounts earned by the Turkish Regie are quoted]...Assuming these figures to be correct, and that the

Persians smoke per head only as much as the Turks, the net profits to be derived from the working of the Persian Concession...should be 658,000 pounds.

Taking the net profits, however, at 500,000 pounds per annum, the following would be the result....

Applications for Shares should be made on the form accompanying the Prospectus and forwarded to the Company's Bankers, Messrs. Glyn, Mills, Currie, and Co, 07 Lombard Street, London.

3<sup>RD</sup> NOVEMBER, 1890<sup>57</sup>

Within days, *Akhtar*, a liberal Persian-language paper published in Istanbul, <sup>58</sup> attacked the news of the tobacco concession, noting that the concessionaires would be making a profit of 500,000 pounds, and comparing the terms of the Persian Regie unfavourably with the terms of the Turkish Regie.<sup>59</sup> Russia had already made it clear that it opposed the granting of the concession: in an interview between the newly-appointed Russian Minister to the Persian court, Butzov, and the Shah's Prime Minister in September of 1890,<sup>60</sup> the Russian Minister had protested against the grant of the tobacco monopoly. Wolff reported to the English Prime Minister, Salisbury:

At yesterday's interview with Shah H.M. said that Russian Minister is determined in his protest against the tobacco regie, & at interview with Amin-es-Sultan [the Prime Minister] at His Majesty's request which followed I was informed that Russia is bent on asserting exclusive[?influence] in Persia & is preparing to demand cancelling of all the late concessions give to the English and others, mention being made by the Russian Minister of the Karun, Bank, Mines, Road, Matches, Oil, & soap, & any others, he said, of which there was not yet knowledge.<sup>61</sup> The Russian Minister also raised the concern that the concessions were counter to the Treaty of Turkemenchai which guaranteed freedom of commerce for Russian merchants.<sup>62</sup>

In January, 1891 an anonymous letter was delivered to the Shah and a leaflet was circulated in the mosques and religious schools, declaiming the giving away of resources of the country by concessions to foreigners, including the monopoly of the tobacco trade granted to Major Talbot.<sup>63</sup> That the Regie was seen as a religious threat as much as an economic one, was made evident in the leaflet:

...your silence and endurance have caused a great surprise to the Ulema and the people. The former have always protected the religion should you show any energy they are ready to help you. If you do not fear for the destruction of the religion you may, at least, care for your worldly affairs...<sup>64</sup>

Notwithstanding the growing discontent and the Russian protest, the Shah was determined to proceed. In February of 1891, a proclamation was issued by the Shah, publicly announcing the establishment of the Tobacco Regie. Orders were issued to his provincial governors to co-operate with the Regie in enforcing its rights.<sup>65</sup> Almost immediately, opposition to the concession began to coalesce. On March 6, a number of tobacco merchants took sanctuary in the Shrine of Shah Abd al Azim, a traditional sanctuary near the capital, Tehran, and petitioned the Shah saying they would not submit to the Regie.<sup>66</sup> That same month, De Balloy, the French Minister reported that 'petitions to the Shah follow each other without interruption. A few days ago, the petitioners, led by Seyyids and mollahs, dared to go to see the King at the



moment when he returned to town from one of his excursions'.<sup>67</sup>

At this critical juncture, Drummond Wolff, who had introduced Talbot to the Shah while the latter was touring Europe in 1889, and who was a strong supporter of the Regie, was taken unexpectedly ill and was forced to return to England.<sup>68</sup> A subordinate, R.J. Kennedy was left to act as *charge d'affaires* in his absence. Wolff's departure was a set-back for the British:

...His irrepressible activity was an enormous advantage to us. The Amin-es-Sultan [the Prime Minister] is disposed to be friendly to England, with proper backing. Wolff was always at his back and behind his ear...Kennedy who became charge d'affaires, though sensible and clear-headed was not personally popular with the Persians and had not the prestige which a full-blown minister would have had.<sup>69</sup>

In April, Ornstein, the Managing Director of the Tobacco Regie, arrived in Tehran to establish the company's headquarters in the capital, and branches in Shiraz, Isfahan and Mashad. The first large-scale opposition to the Regie occurred in Shiraz that same month. A leading mulla, Sayyed Ali Akbar, began preaching against the Regie and the Shah ordered that he be expelled to Karbila. Riots ensued which had to be put down with force. Keddie writes:

.. The complaints expressed by the mollahs included the fact that the increased entry of Europeans under the concession and their constant intercourse with Persians would undermine their religion. There was also great apprehension in Shiraz as elsewhere that Iranian merchants and growers would either lose their positions completely or suffer great losses as a result of the Regie.<sup>70</sup>

The protests spread to Tabriz, a major tobacco-growing center. In July, 1891, Kennedy reported to the British Prime Minister the wording of an incendiary notice posted in Tabriz addressed to the ulama:

Ulema of the town! Law is the law of religion and not the laws of the Europeans!...Woe to anyone who may sell one muskal of Tobacco to the Europeans. Woe to the Europeans who may wish to enforce these customs of the Infidels...We will kill the Europeans first and then plunder their property. Woe to the Armenians who will be killed and will lose their property and their families. ..Curses on the father of anyone who may destroy this notice.<sup>71</sup>

By August 29, the British representative in Tabriz was reporting to Kennedy rumors of armed insurrection and complaining:

'I fear this Tobacco Concession has done much to raise a hostile feeling against the British who till recently were undoubtedly looked upon by very many here as friends of Persia and quite disinterested. Now, however...every vile epithet is used toward them.'<sup>72</sup>

And a confidential report from the British foreign office in India noted the unpopularity of the concession with nearly all classes. With some prescience, it warned '...it would... only require a little injudicious handling or a further prosecution of the same policy to provoke in many parts a general rising against the existing Government, such is the degree of unpopularity which it has attained.'<sup>73</sup>

Faced with growing opposition, the Shah attempted through subterfuge, to quiet the discontent in Tabriz by publicly announcing that he was looking for ways to end the concession, while simultaneously secretly issuing orders to move forward:

‘...the Shah being averse to the use of force except as a very last resource, a telegram *en clair* was sent to Tabriz for communication to the mob, saying that His Majesty was endeavouring to make arrangements for suppressing the Tobacco Regie. At the same time cypher messages were sent to the Heir Apparent [the Shah’s son, the Governor of Tabriz], the Governor General and the Chief Mujtahed telling them that the Regie could not and would not be abolished.... This somewhat crafty proceeding has so far proved successful that the excitement appears to be calming down...’<sup>74</sup>

Any relief obtained from this subterfuge was temporary. As soon as an attempt was made to enforce the Regie in other parts of the country, trouble flared up again.

In the meantime, the most respected of all the Shi’i clergy, Haji Mirza Hasan Shirazi, based in the Holy City of Samarra (in Iraq, then a province of the Ottoman Empire), directly intervened.<sup>75</sup> In a telegram addressed to the Shah in July of 1891,<sup>76</sup> Shirazi remonstrated against the actions of the government and declared that the granting of concessions was contrary to the Koran and God’s law:

Up to the present I have only addressed myself to His Majesty with wishes of Happiness, but because of the various news which has reached me and which is against the rights of Religion and Government I ask permission to say: The entry of foreigners into the interior affairs of the country, their relations and trade with Muslims, the concessions such as the Bank, Tobacco Regie, Railroad, and others are, for many reasons, against the exact sense of the Koran and God’s orders...<sup>77</sup>

In September, Shirazi sent a second telegram to the Shah opposing the concession. He then enlisted Mirza Hasan Ashtiani, the leading Tehran cleric ‘...to act on his behalf to combat the monopoly.’<sup>78</sup> In December, a Fatwa or religious order appeared in Tehran declaring the use of tobacco haram. The fatwa was attributed to Shirazi. The text read:

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Forgiving. Today the use of *tanbaku* and tobacco in any form is reckoned as war against the Imam of the Age (may God hasten his glad Advent!)<sup>79</sup>

The boycott of tobacco which ensued was almost universally upheld. It was reported that even the Shah’s favourite wife refused to prepare his pipe.<sup>80</sup>

In the midst of this crisis, in November of 1891, the new British Minister arrived in Tehran. Sir Frank Lascelles, a career diplomat, was transferred to Tehran from his posting as the British Minister in Romania, to take the place of Drummond Wolff.

With the boycott now in full swing, the Shah’s Prime Minister approached Lascelles suggesting that the tobacco corporation should abandon its internal monopoly. Lascelles cabled for instructions.<sup>81</sup> Salisbury seemed to accept, replying that Lascelles should support the tobacco corporation’s claims for compensation, warning however, against backing excessive demands.<sup>82</sup> Negotiations were begun with the tobacco company, but the mullas still refused to lift their boycott, uncertain whether the monopoly was truly ended, as the tobacco company continued to



maintain its operations and employees, while trying to negotiate the best terms for abandoning its monopoly.

Outraged that the boycott still remained in place, the Shah, on January 4, 1892<sup>83</sup> sent a formal letter to the leader of the Tehran ulama, Ashtiani, upbraiding him for continuing to maintain the boycott, and threatening him with banishment:

‘...Why, to use the words of the mullas, ‘there being no obstacle and the necessary conditions prevailing’, and the reason which had led to the prohibition of tobacco having been removed, did you do this?...What do you mean by all this? Do you think the time has come to deceive the people by demagoguery, or do you want by these means to give prestige to your office, and still in your assemblies to talk against the government and its officials instead of commending and praising it? What are you about? I used to consider you a humble man and a well-wishing and disinterested mulla. Now I see the contrary to be the case...A strange service you are doing to the people! Everyone who was not before a opium smoker, is now smoking opium. You have given splendid currency to the smoking of Indian hemp... Really I am amazed.’<sup>84</sup>

Ashtiani refused to relent, and prepared to leave Tehran. In response, the bazaar closed in protest and his supporters massed around the citadel where government offices and the royal residences were situated. Troops had to be called in to fire on and disperse the crowds, and at least six or seven people were killed.<sup>85</sup> Lascelles, at the urgent request of the Shah’s Prime Minister, pressed Ornstein, the head of the tobacco corporation, to announce the rescission of the tobacco concession. Ornstein reluctantly agreed, informing head office in London that he had been forced to act on Lascelles’ insistence that ‘we were in presence of revolution and that my refusal might occasion bloodshed and endanger lives of European Colony.’<sup>86</sup>

Following the tobacco corporation’s announcement, the fervour subsided, and on January 26, even before receiving Shirazi’s go-ahead from Samarra, Ashtiani withdrew the fatwa against smoking tobacco.<sup>87</sup> The agitation died down, and all that remained was the negotiation of the tobacco corporation’s compensation.

Marzieh Gail, daughter of Ali-Kuli Khan,<sup>88</sup> a Persian from a prominent family who became a Baha’i in the late 1890’s and who served first as Persia’s Consul, then *Charge d’Affaires*, in Washington, D.C. recounts in the first of her two-book memoir of her father, *Summon up Remembrance*, that her father, as a young man, was hired by the tobacco corporation as an interpreter after he had been introduced to Ornstein, the General Manager, ‘... a tall, striking Briton..’ She describes the effect it had on him when the concession was cancelled: ‘For one thing, no more funds. ..Khan looked about for some European enterprise where he could use his talents, but there were almost none in the country at that time. ..Here he was, trained, qualified, after years of struggle, educated in English and French, familiar with Western culture, and all of it suddenly useless, gone - and he trapped in a blind alley, facing a stone wall.’<sup>89</sup>

In the first week of April 1892, Lascelles’ wife, Mary Olliffe Lascelles, and their daughter Florence, set out on the long voyage from England to Tehran to join Lascelles in Tehran. They were accompanied by Mary’s niece, Gertrude, step-daughter of Mary’s sister, Florence Olliffe Bell.

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1. Fath Ali was the nephew and successor of Aqa Muhammad Khan, the first Qajar monarch of Persia who was crowned in 1795. The Qajars were a “shepherd-warrior tribe with strongholds in northern Iran”...who represented a “prominent contingent within the Qizilbash confederacy (the military elite of the Safavid era)” See Abbas Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar and the Iranian Monarchy*, I.B. Tauris, 2008 paperback reprint , p.2 and Chapter 1 for an introduction to 19<sup>th</sup> century Iran: the establishment of the Qajar dynasty, and the forces that shaped Iran as a state bounded by powerful neighbours - Imperial Russia; British India and the Ottoman Empire.

2. ‘Appearing a year before the failed Decembrist uprising of 1825, *Woe from Wit* has been taken as the manifesto of the doomed generation of liberal aristocrats to which Griboyedov belonged... . The failure of the conspiracy, ending in death or long years of exile for many of Griboyedov’s greatest friends, was undoubtedly another of the dark clouds which overshadowed his life. Arrested himself, he escaped unscathed after three months of questioning, but the fate of his friends would always haunt him, driving him on to his own very different martyrdom” Laurence Kelly “*Diplomacy and Murder in Tehran*, I.B. TAURIS, , 2002, p. 3

3. ‘...the administrative centre for foreign delegations to Persia..’ Kelly, *ibid.*, p. 61; ‘The British officers sent to Persia under the 1814 agreement (*to train the Persian army*) were based on Tabriz, capital of Azerbaijan and seat of the enlightened Crown Prince Abbas who had first set on foot the plans for modernizing the army. During his governorship the British and Russian diplomatic missions were also in Tabriz because of Abbas Mirza’s power and influence with his father, Fath Ali, whom he pre-deceased in 1833.” Sarah Searight, *The British in the Middle East*, Athenium, New York, 1970, p.107.

4. ‘As well as leaving the questions of borders undecided, the Treaty had left a number of other matters in the air...repatriation of Russian deserters..Persian protection of the Georgian pretender to the throne...’ Kelly, *Diplomacy and Murder*, p. 58

5. Kelly, *ibid.*, p. 53, quoting John Frederic Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus*, London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1908.

6. ‘From the very beginning Russian rule in the Caucasus was built on the premise that ‘fear and greed are the two mainsprings of everything that takes place here’ and that ‘these people’s (i.e the natives’) only policy is force’ ‘ Moshe Gammer *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnia and Daghestan*, Frank Cass & Company Ltd, 1994, digitally reprinted 2005, p. 35.



7. Gammer, *ibid.*, p. 36 refers to a Mulla Muhammad in Chechnia in 1824, proclaiming someone known as Avko, from the town of Germenchuk, Chechnia, as an 'Imam' and together with Avko, leading a jihad against the Russians which spread rapidly through Chechnia and Inguish. In a footnote ( Note 57, Ch. 4, p. 312) he explains: 'Here *imam* has probably a religious rather than temporal meaning. It is difficult to establish from the available sources the nature of this movement, though it seems to have contained some messianic and millenarian features. The Russian sources demonstrate complete ignorance of all such movements and call all their leaders from Shaykh Mansur to Shamil 'false prophets' [*Izheproroki*]

8. D.P.L. Costello, *The Murder of Griboyedov*, Oxford Slavonic Papers, SP, No.8 (1958), pp. 66-89. At p.71... 'At this time (1828) the day-to-day direction of Persian foreign policy was in the hand of the Prince Royal, Abbas, and his Vizier, the Qaem Magam. Tabriz, in consequence, was the diplomatic centre of Persia and the seat of both the British and the Russian legations.'; Also Ann K..S. Lambton, *Qajar Persia Eleven Studies*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1987, p.13.

9. Abbas Amanat. *Russian Intrusion into the Guarded Domain*, Journal of the American Oriental Society, Vol 113, No. 1 (Jan-Mar,.1993) pp. 35-56 at p.40. In July, 1826, a council was convened at Sultaniya attended by the Shah, the Crown Prince, British envoy Henry Willak (Willock), high ranking statesmen and prominent ulama to determine whether to resume the war with Russia. Abul-qasim Qa'im-magam, the Prime Minister to Prince Abbas Mirza sided with the pro-war faction which included the Prime Minister of the Shah, Allah-yar Khan, prominent clergy, and the frontier chiefs of Azerbaijan, who had lost their estates during the first round of the Russo-Persian war. Amanat notes (footnote 15, p.40) that two mujtahids present at the council were Shaykh Jafar Najafi and Sayyid Ali Tabataba'i, prominent mujtahids from Iraq. Qa'im-magam had, in 1818, published a compilation of two fatwas endorsing holy war written by Shaykh Jafar Najafi and Sayyid Ali Tabataba'i. In an introduction to this compilation, known as the *Jihaidiya [-yi Saghir]*, the 'lesser' book of the Holy War, Qa'im-magam referred to the Iranian homeland as 'the Guarded Domain', and pointed to 'the necessity of jihad as a collective religious duty against the 'sedition of the Russian nation within the Guarded Domain. '(p. 38) .

10. Muriel Atkins, *Russia and Iran, 1780-1828*, University of Minnesota, 1980, p.157.

11. William Monteith, *Kars and Erzeroum: With the Campaigns of Prince Paskiewitch, in 1828 and 1829*, Longman, Brown, Green and Longman 1856, p.127. See also Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus*, p.156.

12. Kelly, *Diplomacy and Murder*, p.145. On the conduct of the war see Kelly, pp.138 to 161; also Atkin, *Russia and Iran 1780-1828* pp.155-161. On Yermolov's legacy, the following summary by Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus*, pp. 161-3, is of note:

'He gained brilliant victories at slight cost and brought for a time the greater part of Daghestan under Russian dominion; he did not conquer Tchetchnia, but repeatedly and severely 'punished' its inhabitants...He absorbed the Persian and Tartar khanates, and treated Persia with astonishing arrogance. But it was these very measures and successes

that led, on the one hand, to the Persian war and the revolt of the newly acquired provinces, on the other, to that great outburst of religious and racial fanaticism which, under the banner of Muridism, welded into one powerful whole so many weak and antagonistic elements in Daghestan and Tchetchnia, thereby initiating the bloody struggle waged unceasingly during the next forty years...It is Yermoloff's supreme merit, in Russian eyes, that he recognised from the beginning the necessity of extending Russian dominion over the whole of the Caucasus, including the independent and semi-independent States and communities up to the borders of Persia proper and the northern limit of Turkey in Asia. But the means he adopted to attain this end were at least questionable. Probably Moscovite patriotism will never admit that milder and juster treatment...would have won over the fierce and lawless tribes of the Caucasus to submission and orderly conduct. It may be so; but from the Christian and moral point of view, that is no justification of such a ruthless policy as Yermoloff's, in reference to which, however, let it be emphatically repeated that, while individually any man may have the right to condemn it, collectively, as nations, it is a case of glass houses all round.'

13. Kelly, *Diplomacy and Murder*, p145.

14. Ibid, p. 159. Amanat in his article, *Russian Intrusion into the Guarded Domain*, at p.35, refers to a letter Fath Ali Shah dictated to Qa'im Maqam for his son, lamenting the state of his treasury, and the depletion of state gold reserves, in response to a request from his son, Abbas Mirza '...to pay from the royal treasury the ruinously large war reparations required by the victorious Russians..' But see Marvin Entner, *Russo-Persian Commercial Relations, 1828-1914*, University of Florida Monographs, Social Sciences, No. 28, Fall 1965, p. 6., who refers to the Russian indemnity as '...relatively small...' Kelly, *Diplomacy and Murder* p.156, comments that 'At a distance of nearly two centuries, it is not possible to get more than an approximate idea of the sums of money involved. The Russians preliminary demand was for 12 kurors, later dropped to 10; the term 'kuror'...represented about 500,000 tomans in the Persian currency, roughly 2,000,000 Russian silver roubles, or some 3,000,000 pounds sterling.' Taking as his source the Russian author, Shostakovich, *The Diplomatic Activity of A.S. Griboyedov*, Moscow, 1960, he writes that Abbas Mirza had to raise a part of the indemnity (100,000 tomans) from his personal treasury of jewels, gold plate, his golden throne, '...even his wives' rings and the jeweled buttons from their dresses'. He continues: 'It was one thing to drive a hard bargain from St. Petersburg, another to enforce it down to seizing ladies buttons on the spot. No wonder that Griboyedov's letters to Paskievich increasingly refer to the 'accursed contribution', or that his other discussions with Abbas Mirza were poisoned by the subject' pp.175-6.

15. Disputes between Russian subjects and Persian subjects were to be examined and judged only in the presence and with the agreement of a representative of the Russian Consulate.

16. Kelly, *Diplomacy and Murder*, p. 163

17. ibid, pp. 166 and 169.

18. ibid, pp. 172-173.

19. ibid., pp.175 and 177.



20. Costello, *The Murder of Griboedov*, p.72

21. Kelly, *Diplomacy and Murder*, p. 178. The accuracy of the later date adopted by Costello, seems to be corroborated by Evelyn Jasiulko Harden, in her article, *Griboedov and the Willock Affair*, Slavic Review, vol. 30, No. 1 (Mar., 1971) pp. 74-92, where she describes in a footnote on p. 76, that the later date has been confirmed by Ibrahim Pourhade, Persian Area Specialist, Library of Congress.

22. Literally, the one responsible for looking after guests.

23. Costello, *The Murder of Griboedov*, p.72.. The other eye-witness account is that of the sole survivor of the massacre of the mission on February 11, 1829, the First Secretary, Maltsev. Costello, at p. 73 questions the accuracy of the Persian account ‘...its version of the facts appears to be ‘slanted’ in such a way as to exculpate the Tehran authorities from complicity in the murders. Its author was, after all, the subject of an absolute monarch whose reputation...was at stake’. As an interesting counterpoint, Evelyn Jasiulko Harden, *Griboedov and the Willock Affair*, in a note on p.77 states: ‘Among Soviet scholars who have recently written on Griboedov, S.V. Shostakovich, ..considers it a trumped-up Anglo-Iranian document.’

24. Kelly, *Diplomacy and Murder*, p. 180.

25. Ibid. pp. 182-3.

26. Preference has been given to the chronology of Harden, *Griboedov and the Willock Affair*, p. 75.

27. Yuri Tynianov, *Death and Diplomacy in Persia*, tr. Alec Brown, (London, 1938)

28. Kelly, *Diplomacy and Murder*, p. 184. The Persian account makes no mention of this. Instead there is a description of ‘shopkeepers saluting the envoy in the Ferenghee style, by doffing their caps’ as he goes for his first audience with the Shah. Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine, vol.28, September 30, 1830, pp. 496-512, ‘Narrative of the proceedings of the Russian mission from its departure from Tabreez on 14<sup>th</sup> Jummade until its Destruction on Wednesday the 6<sup>th</sup> of Sha’ban’, p. 500.

29. ‘Narrative of the Proceedings of the Russian Mission’, p.501

30. Ibid. p. 501

31. Ibid. p. 501

32.’ *Griboedov, ego zhizn i gibel*,’ pod red. Z Davydova (Leningrad, 1929) pp. 185-98 as cited in Costello, *The Murder of Griboedov*, p.73., note 2.

33. Costello, *The Murder of Griboedov*, p. 73-4.

34. Kelly, op cit at p. 187

35. D.P. Costello, op cit. p. 74, footnote 1.
36. Ibid., p. 74.
37. “*Narrative of the Proceedings of the Russian Mission*”, op cit., p .504
38. Costello, *The Murder of Griboedov*, p. 76, footnote 2.
39. Ibid., p. 76
40. ‘*Narrative of the Proceedings of the Russian Mission*’, op cit., pp .506-7.
41. Kelly, *Diplomacy and Murder*, p. 190.
42. *Narrative of the Proceedings of the Russian Mission*, p. 508
43. Kelly, *Diplomacy and Murder*, pp. 190-193.
44. Ibid. p. 194
45. Ibid., p. 195. However, Hamid Algar points out in his doctoral thesis ‘*Religion and State in Iran, 1785-1906*’, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969, that ‘it seems highly unlikely that the loss of Mirza Ya’qub was so important as to cause the Shah to plot the death of Griboyedov’. An added deterrent would be the possibility that Russia might retaliate if provoked. p. 96
46. See Footnote 21 above
47. Kelly, *Diplomacy and Murder*, p. 196
48. Algar, op.cit., p. 99
49. Ibid., p. 99
50. Nikki R. Keddie, ‘*Religion and Rebellion In Iran: The Tobacco Protest of 1891-1892*’, Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1966, p. 35
51. ‘...professor of Eastern, Iranian, and women's history. She retired from the University of California, Los Angeles after 35 years of teaching...’ Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia downloaded April 26, 2012, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikki\\_keddie](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikki_keddie)
52. Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran*, p. 7
53. Denis Wright, *The English Amongst the Persians*, I.B. Tauris, revised paperback, 2001, p. 188
54. Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran*, p. 9

55. Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*, p. 421

56. Daily Graphic, November 4, 1890, p.2 <http://anguline.co.uk/Free/DGnov1899.pdf>

57. *ibid*, p. 2

58. Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran*, p. 63, footnote 21, cites F.O. 539/68, where reference is made to *Akhtar*: 'This paper is published weekly in Constantinople, and has a large circulation in Persia and Central Asia. In fact...it has the principal circulation, and is preferred to all other papers in Persian, whether of Tehran, Isfahan or Bombay...'

59. *ibid*, p. 44

60. *ibid.*, p.41

61. *ibid.*, p. 42

62. Lambton, *Qajar Persia*, p. 226

63. *ibid.*, p. 46

64. *ibid.*, p. 47

65. *ibid*, p.229 and Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran*, p. 65, who cites a foreign office communication of May 13, 1891 (FO 539/60) in which Kennedy, the acting British Charge d'affaires reports to Salisbury that the Shah has instructed governors to publish notices issued by the tobacco company giving a 6 month deadline for the continued sale of tobacco, save for sales by authorized distributors. Algar, *Religion and State in Iran*, p. 208. makes the case that instances of provincial governors being ordered to enforce concession terms are evidence of the encroachment by foreigners in the internal affairs of the country. He quotes Prince Abbas Mirza Mulkara: 'the English came to Iran as a conquered country. They sent their officials to every quarter...Seeing themselves unhindered, they treated Iranian subjects harshly, and nowhere paid any attention to the government. Every day orders were issued to the provincial governors that they should without fail do their utmost to promote the affairs of the company's officials.'

66. Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran*, p.52 and Lambton, *Qajar Persia*, p.229

67. Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran*, p. 52

68. Lambton, *Qajar Persia*, p. 227. Friedrich Rosen, *Oriental Memories of a German Diplomatist*, Methuen, 1930 says that Wolff suffered a mental breakdown: 'Not long after his arrival [in Tehran] his mind became seriously disturbed, and he had ultimately to be transported on a mule across the Alburz Mountains to England...' p. 125

69. George Curzon to Salisbury, Lambton, *Qajar Persia*, footnote 10, p. 227

It is curious that Wolff himself, in his memoirs, *Rambling Recollections*, Vol. II, Macmillan & Co., 1908, digitized by Google, makes no mention, whatsoever, of the Tobacco concession, nor

his role in promoting it. Chapter LXVII, which is taken up with his return to Tehran after the Shah's third visit to England in 1889, which was arranged and overseen by Wolff, gives some detail about his travel back to Iran, but of his activities on his return to his post he writes only: 'My time was principally occupied in devising some arrangement with Russia. This would naturally involve serious questions concerning not only Turkey but Afghanistan. My efforts in this direction were cut short, however, by the illness which forced me to leave Persia permanently; *ibid.*, p. 372

70. Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran*, p. 68; Alvar provides further insight for the opposition of the clergy:

'The appearance of a large number of non-Muslim foreigners, working for the tobacco corporation, was one of the most important reasons for the agitation - their dominating presence was resented, especially by the ulama. To entrust the economic affairs of the nation to foreigners endangered the existence of Iran as it was understood by the ulama: a national-religious community under their guidance.' Alvar, *Religion and State in Iran*, p.208

71. Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran*, p. 75 and p. 110, Footnote 12, F.O. 60/553, Kennedy to Salisbury, no. 180, July 27, 1891.

72. *ibid.*, p. 82 and Footnote 22, p. 111, Paton to Kennedy, Tabriz, August 29, 1891, F.O. 60/553.

73. *ibid.*, p. 78-79, and Footnote 15, p.111, citing F.O. 60/555 *Memo on position and prospects of the Imperial Tobacco Corporation of Persia* by C.E. Biddulph, Asst. Commissioner. The memo explicitly refers to the rampant corruption in the country:

[The Corporation] must divest itself of all idea that it will obtain any support from the Governing body except such as is purchased, or that the latter will be the least actuated in its demeanor towards the enterprise by any consideration of the public welfare, for a more selfish and short sighted policy than that of the Kajar Dynasty and the present *regime* in Persia, it would be difficult to imagine even in an Asiatic country. The sole object of the Monarch, as of every Prince or Official, is to accumulate as much money as possible entirely regardless of the means adopted; as for spending any sums on the erection of works for the public benefit...such an idea has never entered the head of any member of the family now reigning in Persia, and in spite of the fictitious interest supposed to be taken by the present Monarch in the development of the resources of his country there never was a period in its existence when its real interests were taken into less serious consideration. The population have fully appreciated the character of their rulers..

74. *ibid.*, p. 81-82, and Footnote 21, p. 111 citing F.O 60/553, Kennedy to Salisbury, No. 202, Sept. 3, 1891

75. Alvar, *Religion and State in Iran*, describes Mirza Hasan Shirazi as a '*marja*'-i *taqlid*', a *mujtahid* (one who may act according to his own judgement in matters relating to religious law) whose practices and pronouncements furnish a binding example for those unable to exert independent judgment in matters relating to the religious law.(Glossary, p. 263 and 264). Speaking of Mirza Hasan Shirazi he writes 'In 1870-1, on returning from the pilgrimage to Mecca, Mirza Hasan left Najaf to settle in Samarra, a town with a predominantly Sunni



population and well fitted to be a new base of clerical power. A number of pupils followed him there....Gradually Mirza Hasan's authority extended until he 'emerged' as the sole marja'-i taqlid and the successor to Shahykh Murtada Ansari'. p. 210

76. *ibid.*, p. 211

77. Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran* p. 89, translating the text of the telegram from the French, forwarded in a report to the French foreign office, by the French Minister in Tehran, de Balloy, cited in Footnote 37 on p. 111. from A.E. Perse, 1891, enclosed in No. 64 of Dec. 23, 1891.

78. Alvar, *Religion and State in Iran.*, p. 211

79. Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran*, p. 95

80. Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*, p. 437: '...abiding by the ban on the use of tobacco declared in 1891 by the chief muhtahid, Mirza Hasan Shirazi, Anis al-Dawla prohibited the smoking of the water pipe in the harem in clear defiance of the shah.'; and from an internet website posted by a group called 'Rights and Democracy for Iran', '100 years of struggle, Mashrooteh, The Iranian Peoples Struggle for Freedom, The era of constitutional revolution (Mashrooteh) by Abbas Sadeghian, Phd.: 'Naseraldin Shah was loosing [losing] control; the old dictator was not accustomed to such an unruly behavior from his subjects. His favourite wife Anisodoleh refused to prepare his pipe...'

[http://rdfi.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=683:100-years-of-struggle-mashrooteh&catid=43:articlescategory&Itemid=63](http://rdfi.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=683:100-years-of-struggle-mashrooteh&catid=43:articlescategory&Itemid=63), p. 3 of 7.

On page 2 of the article, there is a picture of Mirza Muhammad Hassan Shirazi. The text accompanying the photo begins: 'The Ayatollah was just fed up with Naseraldin Shah...'

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81. Lambton, *Qajar Persia*, p. 248

82. *ibid.*, p. 248

83. *ibid.*, p. 252

84. *ibid.*, p. 250-254, quoting excerpts of the Shah's letter drawn from a Persian language author, Kermani, *Tarikhe bidari-ye Iraniyan*, Tehran. cited in her Footnote 85, p. 254. Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran*, pp. 101-104, offers a slightly different chronology of these events. She places the letter from the Shah to Ashtiani some time in December, precipitated by the posting of notices in the bazaar in Tehran on Dec. 25, 1891, threatening holy war, jihad, if the concession was not cancelled. The Tehran riots, according to Keddie's narrative, were set off by a government demand of Ashtiani to 'either begin to smoke or leave Iran' on January 3, 1892.

85. Lambton, *Qajar Iran*, p. 254.

86. Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran*, p. 106, in footnote 69, p. 113 citing F.O. 60/554, copy of telegram from Ornstein to I.T.C.P. received Jan 6, 1892.

87. *ibid.*, p. 107. Alvar, *Religion and State in Iran*, p. 215 indicates that Shirazi ended the boycott by telegram on January 6, 1892, citing in footnote 59 a Persian author, Taymuri, *Asr-I Bikhbari ya Tarikh-I Imtiyazat dar Iran*, p.192 Tehran, 1957 and Feuvrier, the Shah's doctor, *Trois Ans a la Cour de Perse*, p. 339, Paris, 1899. Feuvrier, p. 339 however notes: '26 Janvier. - Le crieur public a enfin annoncee la levee de l'interdiction..'

88. Ali-Kuli Khan was a Persian from a prominent family, who became a Baha'i in the late 1890's, travelled to Palestine, Syria to work as a secretary and translator for Abdu'l Baha, and then was sent to the United States to help translate tablets and letters of Abdul Baha for the American Baha'i community. He was appointed Persian consul in 1908, and subsequently became Charge d'Affaires, and was a member of Persia's delegation to the peace conference at Versailles at the end of WWI. See Marzieh Gail, *Arches of the Years*, George Ronald, 1991, p. 40 on his appointment as consul, and subsequently Charge d'Affaires. *Arches of the Years* is the second of her two-book memoirs of her father, the first book being *Summon up Remembrance*, George Ronald, 1987.

89. *Summon Up Remembrance*, George Ronald 1987, p. 44-45

## Chapter 2

TEHRAN, 1892

In 1927, Florence Olliffe Bell, Gertrude's step-mother, published a selected and edited compilation of her daughter's letters, *The Letters of Gertrude Bell*.<sup>1</sup> While a few letters from Gertrude's early years were included in the compilation, there was only one from her time in Persia. Lady Bell explained that 'Her letters from Persia, of which there were a good many, are like those from Roumania unfortunately not to be found.'<sup>2</sup> Thankfully, ten years later, in 1937, after the death of Lady Bell, Gertrude's sister, Elsa Richmond, published a volume of Gertrude's earlier letters, *The Earlier Letters of Gertrude Bell*<sup>3</sup> explaining that 'After my mother's death in 1930, I found in various boxes and cupboards in my parents' house a considerable number of letters of her early years that had not come to light when my mother was preparing her book.'<sup>4</sup>

For those unfamiliar with Gertrude Bell, I will do as Elsa Richmond did in the *Earlier Letters*, and use the introduction to Gertrude written by Lady Bell for *The Letters*:

Gertrude Margaret Lowthian Bell, to give her all her names, although she rarely used the second, was born on the 14<sup>th</sup> July, 1868, at Washington Hall, Co. Durham, the residence of her grandfather, Isaac Lowthian Bell, F.R.S., afterwards Sir Lowthian Bell, Bart. Sir Lowthian, ironmaster and colliery owner in the county of Durham, was a distinguished man of science. ..Her father, now Sir Hugh Bell, was Sir Lowthian's elder son; her mother was Mary Shield...Gertrude was three years old when she lost her mother who died when Gertrude's brother, Maurice, was born...<sup>5</sup>

Her father, Hugh Bell remarried in 1876, and he and his wife, Florence Olliffe, had three more children: Hugo, Elsa and Molly. At fifteen, Gertrude was sent to Queens College in London. Her mother notes 'Gertrude's intelligence and aptitude for history impressed [the History Lecturer at Queens College] keenly, and he strongly urged us to let her go to Oxford and go in for the History School. The time had not yet come when it was a usual part of a girl's education to go to a University, and it was with some qualms that we consented. But the result justified our decision. Gertrude went to Lady Margaret Hall in 1886 just before she was eighteen, she left in June 1888 just before she was twenty, and wound up, after those two years, by taking a brilliant First Class in Modern History.'<sup>6</sup>

Gertrude spent the winter of 1888-1889 in Bucharest with her aunt, Mary Lascelles (Lady's Bell's sister), and her husband, Sir Frank Lascelles, then posted as the British Minister to Rumania. As the niece of the British Minister she took part in the busy social life of her aunt and uncle, meeting people who were already, or destined to become, prominent in affairs of state such as Prince Bulow, later Chancellor of Germany, or Count Goluchowski who became Chancellor of Austria. Other noteworthy personalities she met were Charles Hardinge, later to become Viceroy of India, who would be responsible for sending her to Iraq in 1916, according to Elsa Richmond, and Valentine Chirol, a correspondent for the *Times*, with whom she maintained a life-long friendship.<sup>7</sup> An excerpt from a letter to her cousin, Horace Marshall, will serve as an introduction to her lively, frequently droll, writing-style. It also gives an indication of the exalted social circles she moved in:

Jan. 18, British Legation, Bucarest

Cousin of My Heart ...The women are pretty but small and dark; their clothes are generally charming - what they have of them, but they save a good deal in bodices especially when they get old for they seem to grow out of their sleeves and the tops of their gowns!...Last Sunday which was their first of January there was a big ball at the Palace which was very good fun. I was presented to the King and Queen but the King was so like every other officer that I never could remember who he was and only a merciful providence prevented me from giving him a little friendly nod several times during the evening under the impression that he was one of my numerous acquaintance whom I had not yet seen. Billy and I waltzed over his toes once.’<sup>8</sup>

She returned to England, and two years later it was arranged that she would travel to Persia with her aunt to join Sir Frank who had been newly appointed as the British Resident there. During the autumn and winter of 1891 she studied Persian,<sup>9</sup> and in April of 1892, Gertrude, her Aunt Mary, and her cousin Florence, the Lascelle’s daughter, set out for Tehran.<sup>10</sup>

From her letters home, it appears that the party crossed the Channel by boat, then after spending a couple of days in Paris they boarded a train and traveled via Munich and Vienna to Constantinople.<sup>11</sup> This sounds like they took the famed *Orient Express*, which first began running in 1883.<sup>12</sup> From Constantinople, they sailed along the coast of the Black Sea to Batum, Georgia, then by train to Baku, a port city on the Caspian in Russian Azerbaijan. From there another boat took them from Baku to Enzelli (now Bandar-i-Anzali) the port of entry to Persia.<sup>13</sup> The last leg of their journey was by carriage from Resht,<sup>14</sup> a large town a few kilometers from the port, to Tehran. Elsa Richmond notes that the journey took a month.

Once in Tehran, Gertrude reported home to her mother cheerfully:

‘May 9, 1892 - We arrived on Saturday afternoon in the Garden of Eden with a very comfortable house built in the middle of it and your letter waiting for me inside. You can’t think how lovely it all is - outside trees and trees and trees making a thick shade from our house to the garden walls...Inside a big rambling house, long, long passages with liveried people in every corner who rise and bow their heads as we pass, big big rooms opening one out of the other, two dining rooms, two drawing rooms, Uncle Frank’s study and bedroom, two rooms for Auntie Mary, a billiard room and countless little sitting rooms and cupboards;...Florence and I are upstairs...’<sup>15</sup>

Then followed a description of the people living at the Residency:

‘Dr. And Mrs. Odling...Mr. Cadogan,...Mr. And Mrs. Crowe [afterwards Sir Eyre and Lady Crowe]; I don’t know what his functions are. ... Mr. Sidney Churchill, the man who brought us from Resht.. He is one of the Oriental Secretaries; the other is the Nawab, a polite person who is, I believe a Persian, dull, grey-haired, obliging; he speaks English very well.’<sup>16</sup> ‘....Auntie Mary is delighted with everything; Uncle Frank is very well and very glad to have his family with him. It is so amusing!’<sup>17</sup>

In her next letter home, she gives an account of her activities, which included viewing a parade of the Shah’s troops from the tent of the ‘Naib es Sultan, son of the Shah and Commander in Chief of the Army .. ‘:

Such troops! Ragged, stockingless... The men straggled along, dragging and dropping



out of ranks;...; sometimes the ensigns saluted to the Shah as they passed, sometimes they didn't, nobody seemed to mind... The only regiment that was in the least smart were the Cossack horsemen, splendidly mounted, officiered by Russians, who came past at a hand gallop.<sup>18</sup>

A big dinner party had also been arranged :

..There were 32 people to dinner; all the English, 5 Persians and many diplomats. The Rosens came, the Balloys, a rather nice man called Ornstein, an Englishman, who was the head of the regie and who is still busy winding up his affairs, Dr. Tholozan an old Frenchman who was for long the Shah's Doctor; Mrs. Harry Churchill is his daughter, and many more whom I have not grasped yet. I sat between Baron Heintze and a Mr. De Rosti, the Austrian minister.<sup>19</sup>

The Rosens were Friedrich Rosen, the *Charge d'Affaires* at the German Legation<sup>20</sup> and his wife, Nina Rosen.<sup>21</sup> Friedrich recorded many interesting recollections of this time in his autobiography, *Oriental Memories of a German Diplomatist*. Of Frank Lascelles, he writes:

Reviewing the lengthy list of all the many diplomats I have met during my long career, I do not find anyone who appears to me to have been a more perfect representative of his calling than Sir Frank Lascelles. His best quality was that he was a gentleman even in his profession, never false, never over-astute, always well informed, and always even-tempered, even in trying situations. He had, amongst others, one quality that cannot be sufficiently appreciated. He was supremely lazy. This may seem a paradox, but is nevertheless quite true. Nobody does more harm to international relations than the bustling diplomat, and nobody gives more scope to suspicion and ill-feeling than the inquisitive busybody who tries to glean material for his reports from every conversation and does not shrink from asking inopportune questions. Sir Frank Lascelles never seemed to do any work at all. A late riser, he would get through his Chancery business during the short interval between breakfast and lunch, spend the afternoon riding or playing tennis, and the evening at whist, a game which had not yet been displaced by the world-conquering game of bridge. He gave his staff every chance of individual activity, controlling more than directing their work. He rode his Legation, so to say, with loose reins, but he rode it well. The great struggle between English and Russian policy in Central Asia, which everybody thought must sooner or later lead to a war, had thrown its shadow on the personal relations of the Teheran representatives of those two empires, but Lascelles showed so little concern for the petty points of dispute or rivalry, that he disarmed the eagerness of his adversaries. This was not an easy task, for some of the Russians kept aloof from the rest of the European society, and their legations was in the inner town at some distance from the other diplomats residences. M. De Butzow, an elderly gentleman and father of a large family, was then Russian Minister. He was personally of a friendly disposition, but he could not swim against the current of certain tendencies which moved Russian official policy as well as private political enterprise. His two handsome daughters, Nina and Olga, were longing to play tennis with all the other young people, but the light attire of the young men...shocked *Muscovite* propriety, and the poor girls were not even allowed to look on at the immoral game.<sup>22</sup>

And he leaves this first hand account of Gertrude who even at that early age, left a strong impression upon him:

I have often wondered what it is that leaves one with a feeling of sympathy for a place one has lived in...In the case of Persia, my recollections are connected with many interesting experiences in so far as that country was the object of my studies. But, apart from this, if our memory recalls good friends whose company we have enjoyed, I think we like to look back upon those periods of our lives and on the places in which we knew them. Nowhere have I had so many good friends or known so many people worth knowing as in Persia...The person who was foremost among my friends in Persia has since attained much recognition, and her fame will outlive those who have known her. It is Gertrude Bell.

Miss Gertrude Bell came to Teheran with her uncle and aunt, Sir Frank and Lady Lascelles and their daughter Florence, who was at that time seventeen years old. Their arrival was quite an event, and brought a great change into our somewhat monotonous existence. The two girls were full of life and interest. They embodied *la joie de vivre* and imparted it to every one who came within their orbit. . Both Miss Bell and Miss Lascelles began learning to read and to write Persian, as well as to converse in that language. The studies of the secretaries of the English Legation were much stimulated by this fair competition...' <sup>23</sup>

One of the secretaries who was particularly drawn to Gertrude was Henry Cadogan. The attraction was mutual. His name crops up with regularity in Gertrude's letters:

Saturday May 14-We have been spending an amusing week exploring, so far with entire satisfaction. The people - well, the people are like most people in an out of the way part of the world: Uncle Frank is head and shoulders the best of them all...But Mr. Cadogan is the real treasure; it certainly is unexpected and undeserved to have come all the way to Tehran and to find someone so delightful at the end. Florence and I like him immensely; he rides with us, he arranges plans for us, he brings his dogs to call on us, he plays with our kittens...'; '...On Tuesday I spent the morning reading translations of Omar Khayyam which Mr. Cadogan gave me... On Thursday we spent a lazy morning among cats and roses; after tea Uncle Frank, Florence, Mr. Cadogan and I rode...' <sup>24</sup>

Dr. Rosen in his memoirs recalls a tea picnic, where Gertrude and Henry Cadogan sat apart 'to read an ode of Hafiz'<sup>25</sup>: 'They shouted to me to join them, and asked me to explain certain passages. ...It was a pleasure to see with what joy and enthusiasm they appreciated the beauty of rhyme and rhythm when once the Arabic verses were explained.'<sup>26</sup>

Gertrude also describes a picnic she attended, offered by the Nawab [Hasan Ali Khan, the Persian Oriental Secretary]:

It took place in a garden belonging to a Persian Friend of his - his title is the King of Merchants which sounds pecunious- lying up on the hills to the west of Kamranze in a place called Imam Zade Karsius...' <sup>27</sup>

Gertrude's party, consisting of Uncle Frank, Florence and herself, left Tehran early in the morning so that they could arrive at the garden before the heat of the day began:

The Nawab came down to meet us and conducted us up the path and staircases of the garden to a little Persian house standing open-windowed, blue tiled, carpeted, cushioned, to receive us. ...Kalyans were brought which Uncle Frank smoked with great

pleasure and I tried with success but not with enjoyment....I read some poems of Hafiz....till 11 when all the rest of the world began to arrive. Crowes, Secretaries, Gerald [Lascelles], Rosens.... Soon after 12 we walked through the garden past the Anderun, where the women quickly threw on their black cloaks as they saw us coming, to a second Persian House..where we found a magnificent lunch spread for us....The Malek u Tajit, the garden's owner, came in at teatime, a plump and cheerful Persian dressed in a long brown cloak...I spent the rest of the afternoon in a long and interesting talk with Mr. Cadogan...we rode back through the dusk and reached home just in time for dinner.<sup>28</sup>

In all likelihood, Sir Frank Lascelles would have known that the garden's owner, the King of Merchants (Malek ot-Tojjar) , had, only months earlier, been imprisoned by the government for his alleged role in causing a shutdown of the shops in Tehran during the height of the protests against the Tobacco Regie.<sup>29</sup>

In July, Gertrude wrote home to her parents announcing her engagement to Mr. Cadogan and asking for their blessing: 'July 30 - I am in a panic lest you should never receive the letter I wrote to Mother on the 25<sup>th</sup> telling you that I was engaged to Mr. Cadogan...'<sup>30</sup> The news was not well received and Gertrude was urged to come home to consider the proposal away from the 'glamour and romance of her surroundings.'<sup>31</sup> Elsa explained that : 'Mr Cadogan's career had not been an unchequered one; his charm and intelligence had not prevented him from getting into debt...'<sup>32</sup> Broken-hearted, Gertrude poured out her feelings in a letter to her mother: 'Yes, I care more than I can say and I'm not afraid of being poor or even of having to wait, though waiting is harder than I thought it would be at first. For one doesn't realize at first how one will long for the constant companionship and the blessed security of being married, but now that I am going away I realise it wildly....'<sup>33</sup>

Gertrude returned to England in October. Elsa wrote that she never saw Henry Cadogan again and that Cadogan died 9 months later in Persia 'after a few days illness.'<sup>34</sup> Dr. Rosen provides a few extra details. He writes that when Frank Lascelles was appointed Ambassador at St. Peterburg: '.. Cadogan happened to be on a trip to Isfahan....He at once wired Lascelles: 'Ruth I. Verse 16, Cadogan.' The passage was looked up in the Bible and read: 'Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge'<sup>35</sup> Rosen adds that 'Cadogan's wish to follow his chief to Russia was not to be fulfilled. He caught a serious chill while trout-fishing in the icy waters of the Lar River. He died in his tent within a few days, notwithstanding all Dr. Odling's efforts.'<sup>36</sup>

A short book of her travels in Persia called *Safar Nameh Persian Pictures a Book of Travel*, which was published by Bentley (1894) after she returned to England, sketched out some of Gertrude's impressions of Persia: the capital city, Tehran; a character study of her Persian teacher, Sheikh Hassan; an account of the ritual procession lamenting the martyrdom of the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, Imam Hussein, on the day of Ashura, the 10<sup>th</sup> day of Muharram; a visit to the Shah's palace to see his fabled jewel collection. There was also a chapter on the dreaded cholera, which that year swept the country.<sup>37</sup> Thirteen sketches in all, with a few additional chapters on Turkey added at the end of the book to flesh it out for publication. Gertrude herself considered the book as 'extraordinarily feeble.'<sup>38</sup> Bernard Lewis in his book, *A Middle East Mosaic*,<sup>39</sup> prefaced a section on *Travelers*, with a quote from Gobineau: 'It is not everyone who knows how to travel; nor is it everyone who knows how to love, to feel, and to understand. It is not everyone who can see beneath the surface of things...'<sup>40</sup> *Persian Pictures* was Gertrude's first attempt at trying to love, feel and understand another culture. If she at times

showed herself a little too quick to pronounce judgement - 'Oriental fatalism, which sounds fine enough in theory, breaks down woefully in practice. It is mainly based upon the helplessness of a people to whom it has never occurred to take hold of life with vigorous hands...' <sup>41</sup>; or allowed herself to get carried away by her own fanciful prose - 'Unreal-Unreal!' The fancy cannot cheat so well as she is famed to do. In vain you try to imagine yourself akin to these tented races, in vain you watch and imitate their comings and goings; the whole life is too strange, too far away. It is half vision and half nightmare; nor have you any place among dwellers in tents. Like the empty bottles and greased papers with which a troop of Bank-holiday Philistines sullies the purity of a purple moor, your presence is a blot on the wild surroundings, a hint of desecration...' <sup>42</sup>; nonetheless, she had an eye for detail and a flair for description which brings to life the Persia of 1892; the soldiers shaking down the mulberry trees : '...a foreigner would be tempted to conclude that it [the army] subsisted entirely upon white mulberries, and was reduced to a state of starvation when the summer was over. The hands of paymasters are adhesive in the East...' <sup>43</sup>; a little flower vendor: 'a solemn, long-robed child, so little that his mother's heart must have ached when she trusted the dear turbaned head out of her sight' <sup>44</sup>; the telegraph office at Menjil on the bridle path from Qazvin to Resht: '...The telegraph clerk was an agreeable Persian, who entertained us with cups of tea while we delivered our messages. His office was hung round with curtains, behind which we could hear much chattering and laughing going forward in subdued tones, and between the folds we caught from time to time glimpses of the inquisitive laughing faces of his womenkind...' <sup>45</sup> She also is aware of the tensions under the seemingly picturesque surface. In *In Praise of Gardens*, she extols the Persian garden, and yet '...These gardens..with their tall trees..are subject to the unexpected vicissitudes of Eastern fortune. The minister falls into disgrace, the rich merchant is ruined by the extractions of his sovereign; the stream is turned off,... the trees die, the flowers wither...' <sup>46</sup>

It is interesting that Gertrude makes no mention of the Babi-Baha'i Faith, either in her letters from Persia, nor in *Persian Pictures*. In 1889, Edward Granville Browne, the noted Cambridge Orientalist, who had traveled through Persia in 1887-8, gathering information on the Babi religion, had published two papers on the Babis in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, one on the history of the Babis, and the other on their literature and beliefs, <sup>47</sup> and in 1891 he had published *A Traveller's Narrative*, <sup>48</sup> a book on the Babi Faith. It is difficult to believe that Gertrude, with her intelligence, her aptitude for study, and her modern history degree, would not have had some knowledge of Professor Browne's work prior to leaving for Persia. She may also have known something of the more recent incidences of persecution of Babis taking place in Persia. The most recent had occurred in May of 1891, less than a year before Gertrude set out for Persia. Seven Babis from Yazd, a town in southern Iran, were sentenced to death by Shi'ih clerics on the grounds of apostasy, and put to death. Kennedy, the acting British *Charge d'Affaires* in Tehran had played a key part in ending further persecutions by sending a respectful admonition to the Prime Minister. <sup>49</sup> Sir Frank Lascelles would have been briefed on this distressing incident when he took over his duties as the British Resident, and he himself forwarded a memo to the British Prime Minister, Salisbury, in February of 1892, during the height of the revolt against the tobacco concession, relaying information received from the Persian Prime Minister on the distinction between Azali Babis and Baha'is: <sup>50</sup>

'The Amin-es-Sultan [the Persian Prime Minister] has been careful to explain to me that the Babis are divided into two branches, one of which, the Baha'is, are inoffensive, and abstain from any interference in the affairs of State; whereas the other branch, known as the Azelis, seek for



the destruction of all existing institutions, are similar to the Nihilists in Russia....<sup>51</sup>

If Gertrude knew anything about Babi's or Baha'is, she did not write about them. That summer, Gertrude's pre-occupation was with Cadogan. It is not too much of a stretch to imagine that her translation and publication of a selection of poems from the *Diwan of Haifz* five years later in 1897,<sup>52</sup> was not only an academic *tour de force*, but also a revisiting of her joyful days in Persia sharing Hafiz' poetry with Cadogan. The poem reprinted below chosen from the *Divan* by Lady Bell for publication in *The Letters* after her daughter's death would have had a special poignancy for Lady Bell, who had lost not only her daughter, but that same year, her only son;<sup>53</sup>

Divan of Hafiz  
XIV  
(From poem on the death of his son)

The nightingale with drops of his heart's blood  
Had nourished the red rose, then came a wind,  
And catching at the boughs in envious mood,  
A hundred thorns about his heart entwined,  
Like to the parrot crunching sugar, good  
Seemed the world to me who could not stay  
The wind of Death that swept my hopes away.

Light of mine eyes and harvest of my heart,  
And mine at least in changeless memory!  
Ah, when he found it easy to depart,  
He left the harder pilgrimage to me!  
Oh Camel-driver, though the cordage start,  
For God's sake help me lift my fallen load,  
And Pity be my comrade of the road!...<sup>54</sup>

For Gertrude too, as she translated it, the poem would have had a special meaning, given her own recent loss. Lady Bell in *The Letters* says that Gertrude was very poetic: 'The spirit of poetry coloured all her prose descriptions, all the pictures that she herself saw and succeeded in making others see. It was a strangely interesting ingredient in a character capable on occasion of very definite hardness...But in truth the real basis of Gertrude's nature was her capacity for deep emotion. Great joys came into her life, and also great sorrows...'<sup>55</sup>

But it would be wrong to dwell too much on personal matters or to exaggerate their impact. As Elsa Richmond, Gertrude's sister, points out at the conclusion of *Earlier Letters*, if the door to love and domestic felicity were to be closed to Gertrude, another was being opened:

Hope, joy, sadness; a fuller knowledge of life, learnt from that most penetrating of teachers, personal experience; but apart from all these, there had been sown in her nature a seed of another kind. In the gardens of the Legation at Tehran and beside the streams of Gulahek, she had become aware of a sympathy with the Oriental people, an understanding of them, which growing and developing as the years went by, was finally to be a factor in the history of her country.<sup>56</sup>

1. *The Letters of Gertrude Bell*, Ernest Benn, 1927. An indication of its popularity, the book was reprinted 6 times in its first year of publication.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 31

3. *The Earlier Letters of Gertrude Bell*, collected and edited by Elsa Richmond, Liveright Publishing, New York, 1937

4. *ibid.* p.1

5. *The Letters*, p.ix

6. *ibid.*, p. 19.

7. *Earlier Letters*, p. 181

8. *ibid.*, p. 194. Billy was William Lascelles, Mary and Frank Lascelle's eldest son.

9. *ibid.*, p. 244-5

10. *ibid.*, p. 252

11. The letters home on her trip contain references to Munich, Vienna, Tsaribrod, in Serbia and Sophia in Bulgaria and finally Constantinople. Elsa Richmond's identification of a letter being sent from 'Near the Syrian Frontier' (p. 253) has to be a mistake. Gertrude apparently had terrible writing. Possibly Elsa mistook Serbia for Syria, *ibid.* p. 252-254.

12. Wikipedia.

13. *Earlier Letters*, p. 255-265. Valentine Chirol, writing in 1903, comments on this part-sea and part-overland route to Persia. Batum had been ceded to the Russians by Turkey by the Treaty of Berlin [following the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-8]:

‘..At that time[referring to his first trip to Persia in 1883] the most commodious route to Northern Persia was therefore unquestionably by Constantinople and the Black Sea to Batum and thence by rail, via Tiflis to Baku...by Article 59 of the Treaty..she [Russia] had undertaken to make Batum a free port, and by way of Batum, goods for Persia and Central Asia could still be imported from Europe under a transit pass which exempted them from the payment of Russian import duties...By a mere stroke of the pen Russia freed herself...from the obligations she had contracted at Berlin. Not only has Batum ceased to be a free port, essentially commercial, but the exaction of Russian import and export duties on all goods sent through Batum for Persia or beyond has long since killed the old transit trade.’ *The Middle Eastern Question*, op..cit, p. 19-20.

Speaking of routes into Persia, Edward Granville Browne, the great orientalist, had, upon completing his studies at Cambridge in 1887, decided to spend a year in Persia and had booked passage ‘from Marseilles to Batoum at the London office of the Messageries Maritimes...intending to take the train thence to Baku, and so by the Caspian to Resht in

Persia..'(the same route as Gertrude). However, feeling that this route was too tame, he instead got off the boat at Trebizond, a Turkish port on the Black sea before Batoum, and taken the old overland caravan route south, through Erzeroum and from there to Tabriz. Edward Granville Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, first published, A & C Black Ltd., 1893, republished by Century Publishing, London, 1984, p. 20.

14. While in Resht, the party did a little sightseeing. Gertrude's description of a disappointing afternoon tea offered to her by a Reshti notable will be amusing to Persian readers:

'On Saturday we went out, F [Florence] and I, with our Mr. Churchill and kodaked the Bazaar. After lunch we rode and Auntie Mary drove to a house outside the town where some swell offered us tea. Tea indeed, very little of it and no milk; and nothing to eat but lettuces dipped in syrup; it was a repast better suited to a rabbit'. *Earlier Letters*, p.263.

15. *Earlier Letters*, p. 266

16. *ibid.*, p. 268. There is a backstory to the Navvab, the Persian Oriental secretary. Keddie says that the Navvab played a part in an apparent ruse to get the British to offer a loan through the British Imperial Bank to cover the 500,000 pound compensation that was eventually agreed to be paid to the Tobacco Regie, at 6% rather than 8%..:

On April 20, 1892, a Persian translator for the British Legation, the Navvab Hasan Ali Khan, reported [to Lascelles] on an interview with the [Prime Minister] who had said that he could put off Russian importunities to accept their loan, which was favoured by the Shah, only for one day more. If he did not receive a reply by then showing that the British would meet the Russian 6% rate he would be forced to conclude the loan with the Russians:

'..otherwise there will be a great risk for his position with the Shah and the Russians. I [the Navvab] was with him when he received an autograph from His Majesty, urging him to conclude with the Russians, and asking him why does he delay the matter. ..His Highness [the Prime Minister] said that, in fact the Shah is very keen that the Russians should pay the money, just to annoy the English who, he thinks, caused this loss on him.'

Since the Navvab was a friend of the [Prime Minister]..he was not given to questioning the [Prime Ministers] actions. Lascelles himself, however, should perhaps have been more wary, though his relatively brief experience in Iran may excuse him. In any case, the deal turned out to be a perfectly good one for the Imperial Bank.' Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran*, p. 124.

17. *Earlier Letters*, p. 269

18. *ibid.*, p. 273. It appears that the state of the troops was one of Lascelles' particular concerns. He had, in January of that year, urged the Shah to take better care of the troops. Reporting to Salisbury in January, 1892 he had written

I told his Highness [the Prime Minister] that I could not think that had the Mollahs not

been able to work upon the people's discontent they could have obtained such power...I added that if the arrears of pay were given to the troops, and care taken that the men should really get the money some good might result...His Highness owned that only 2000 men out of the 5000 on the nominal list of the garrison of Tehran were available if called upon, and that this was due to the unfortunate system by which the pay of the men was given to them, which enabled the Commander in Chief to retain more than half of the money...

Lambton, *Qajar Persia*, p. 255-6.

19. *ibid.*, p. 275.

20. Friedrich Rosen, *Oriental Memories of a German Diplomatist*, Methuen, 1930, p.158

21. Dr. Rosen and Nina Rosen were cousins. Their grandfather was Ignaz Moscheles (1794-1870), the famous composer and concert pianist. Friedrich's father was Georg Rosen (who had married one of the daughters of Ignaz Moscheles) and Friedrich passed his early childhood years in Jerusalem where his father was the Prussian Consul (Rosen, *Oriental Memories*, p.2). Nina's maiden name was Roche, and her father, M. Antonin Roche, had married another of Moscheles daughters, Emily, and Nina had been raised in London, in a house on Sloane Street opposite the house of Florence Olliffe's mother, who also lived on Sloane Street. Elsa Richmond says that she remembers the Roche house which was actually divided into two cottages, in one of which lived Monsieur Roche and his family; and in the other lived Felix Moscheles, Ignaz Moscheles only son, an artist.

Elsa Richmond writes of Monsieur Roche: '...I never went to his classes, [Antonin Roche taught French, or rather, to use Elsa's words, gave 'cours'] but as a child I used to be taken by my mother to the charming old house, where musicians and artists congregated. I can still remember the atmosphere of the place; romantic, inspiring, absolutely free.'

*Earlier Letters*, p.269.

There is an unexpected link between this cultured family, the house on Sloane Street, and the Baha'i Faith. Felix Moscheles, Ignaz Moscheles only son, lived in the other cottage next to the Roches as mentioned above. Felix was a portrait painter, a peace activist, and an advocate of Esperanto. He was the first President of the London Esperanto club.

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Felix\\_Moscheles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Felix_Moscheles), retrieved April 8, 2012.)

Lady Blomfield, who was Abdu'l Baha's hostess when he visited London in September, 1911, says that Felix and his wife hosted a meeting for Abdu'l-Baha in their studio, that same house on Sloane Street:

'Mr. and Mrs. Felix Moscheles, who were very eager to hear the Master's teaching on the imperative need for a universal language, arranged a meeting at their studio, at which many Esperantists were present: The Ranee of Sarawak, Colonel and Mrs. Seymour, Mr. Keightley, Lady Agnew, Sir Michael Sadler, Mirza Nayyir Afnan, and many, many others who came were privileged to share in the joyous atmosphere created by the presence of the Master.' *The Chosen Highway*, Baha'i Publishing Trust, reprint, 1970, p.155.

22. Rosen, *Oriental Memories*, pp. 125-6



23. *ibid.*, p. 156-7.
24. *Earlier Letters*, p. 272-4.
25. Rosen, *Oriental Memories*, p. 157
26. *ibid.*, p. 157
27. *Earlier Letters*, p. 292
28. *ibid.*, p.292-5.
29. Keddie quotes Feuvrier [the Shah's physician, from his book *Trois Ans a la Cour de Perse*, New edition, Paris, 1906]:  
    'The mollas are really the masters of the situation. It was in vain to make the head of the merchants, Hajji Mohammad Hasan, responsible for the closing of the shops, and exile him to Qazvin, everyone knows it would be necessary to strike elsewhere if one wished to cut the evil at its roots.'  
She continues:  
    The last-named individual, whose name is given in Persian sources as Kazem, not Hassan, was better known by his title Malek ot-Tojjar. He was seized by the government, who claimed that he had forged the prohibition, and kept imprisoned in Qazvin for several days, probably in the vain hope of frightening the opposition. In fact, however, the movement continued to grow... Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran*, p. 97.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 315
31. *Earlier Letters*, p. 340
32. *Earlier Letters*, p. 315
33. *ibid.*, p. 338
34. *ibid.*, p. 341.
35. Rosen, *Oriental Memories*, p. 160
36. *ibid.*, p. 160.
37. Nina Rosen was a victim of the cholera (she was weakened by catching small pox first). Fortunately she survived. Rosen, *Oriental Memories*, p. 171 , also *Earlier Letters*, p.321 'Mrs Rosen has got small pox, poor dear, but not at all badly. However, it's a great anxiety. The cholera seems to be very mild....' And p. 331 'Mrs Rosen is quite of of danger'.
38. *Letters*, p. 30

39. Bernard Lewis, *A Middle East Mosaic*, Random House, 2000
40. *ibid.*, p. 79
41. *Persian Pictures*, p. 61
42. *ibid.*, p. 76
43. *ibid.*, p. 21-2
44. *ibid.*, p. 24
45. *ibid.* p. 127
46. *ibid.*, p. 42. Early in his reign, Nasir al-din Shah had ordered the execution of his powerful Prime Minister, Amir Kabir, in the bathhouse of the famous Fin royal garden near Kashan. Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*, p. 118
47. Edward Granville Brown, *The Babis of Persia, I, Sketch of their History and Personal Experiences amongst them*, July, 1889, pp. 485- 526; and *The Babis of Persia II. Their Literature and Doctrines*, October, 1889 pp. 881-1009, Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.
48. *A Traveller's Narrative Written to Illustrate The Episode of the Bab*, a Persian manuscript by a then unknown author (later identified as Abdu'l-Baha, the son of Baha'u'llah,) edited and translated by Edward Granville Browne, with an Introduction and Explanatory Notes, first published, Cambridge University Press, 1891
49. Jelle de Vries, *The Babi Question You Mentioned... the Origins of the Baha'i Community of the Netherlands, 1844-1962*, Peeters, 2002, pp. 30 to 36, gives a full account of this incident. Cornelis Prinz, an agent in Yazd for a Dutch commercial enterprise, wrote a letter to Fritz Knobel, the Dutch General Consul in Tehran describing what occurred:

‘Yezd, May 24, 1891. Dear honorable Sir;  
 My letter of 2<sup>nd</sup> last I expect is now in your possession, and I did not anticipate having to write to you within one month with completely different news...Totally unexpectedly seven men, so called Babis, were executed here on Monday last, 18<sup>th</sup> inst. One was hanged in the presence of the Prince and six other were killed in different quarters of the town. This is the first time that Babis have been killed here and their execution caused great tumult...Almost everybody thought in the beginning that it would not go beyond the killing of these seven men, but since Tuesday last the persecutions have continued... As you know there are many Babis in Yezd...The principal merchants here are Babis and several of them are most definitely more or less in danger...The Mulahs who are the cause of the execution of these seven men and of the continuation of the persecution are:[names of the mulahs are listed] ...The names of the people killed are [names of the Babis killed are listed]....All except No. 5 are married and have, as far as I know from the Yezdees, a wife and little children. Most of them will be in a state of utmost destitution, because their property is taken from them and the Babis are at the present moment too much afraid to assist them. I have ordered one of my servants, an Armenian, to visit the

families of the victims and to see what help can be given. So far I have given them only a few toman. I shall see what more I can do for these people...'

Knobel passed this information on to Kennedy, the British *Charge d'Affaires*, who, as the persecutions escalated, brought it upon himself to address the Persian Prime Minister:

I think it right to tell You Honor that I have received reports of great persecutions of Babis at Yezd. Similar reports have reached other Europeans at Tehran. Several Babis have been put to death and their bodies mutilated..Y.H. knows of course how far these reports are true, and whether the Governor of Yezd is acting properly. I mention the subject to you, as I am as Y.H. knows a sincere friend and well wisher of Persia, and I should deeply regret if, at any time, anything should be done which may injure the reputation of the Persian Government.'

The letter seemed to have some effect, as Kennedy then reported to Knobel:

Secret. Dear Mr. Knobel. Many thanks for sending me a memo about the Babi. Two or three days ago I wrote a most confidential memo about this Yezd persecution which I asked the [prime minister] to lay before the Shah. It appears to have had some effect, as you will see by the enclosed write...

The 'enclosed write' Kennedy referred to was a telegram from the Shah to his nephew the Governor of Yazd in which it was made clear to the addressee that after the execution of 'the few Babees whose infidelity was proved to the Shara (Shari'ah]' no other people must be 'interfered with or injured' under accusation of 'Babism'.' De Vries, p. 35 .

50. The historian, Moojan Momen, who has written extensively on Bahai' history, clarifies this distinction between Babi's and Baha'is:

One point that must constantly be borne in mind when reading ...Western accounts of this period is the fact that the Baha'is were at this time known to both Persians and Europeans alike as Babis, despite the fact that it was now some thirty years that the majority had been calling themselves Baha'is or followers of Baha'u'llah. The importance of this point arises from the fact that the followers of Mirza Yahya, the Azalis, were also known as Babis - and did not hesitate to promote political agitation against the Qajar dynasty.' *The Babi and Baha'i Religions, 1844-1944, Some Contemporary Western Accounts*, George Ronald, 1981., p. 351

51. F.O. 539/56, Lascelles to Salisbury, no. 124 (35) Feb. 16, as quoted in Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran*, p. 108, and Footnote 74, p. 113.

52. *Poems from the Divan of Hafiz*, translated by Gertrude Lowthian Bell, London, William Heinemann, 1897

53. Hugh Lowthian Bell also died in 1926.

54. *ibid.*, p. 35-6

55. *Letters*, p. 36

56. *Earlier Letters*, , p. 341.

## CHAPTER 3

### “He Knows ...all about Babis”

In 1897, Gertrude published her *Poems from the Divan of Hafiz*.<sup>1</sup> Her mother proudly records in *The Letters* that her book ‘includes a life of Hafiz, which is practically a history of his times as well as a critical study of his work.’ She goes on: ‘The book on its publication was extremely well received.’<sup>2</sup>

In the years between 1892, when she returned from Persia and 1897 when the *Divan* was published, Gertrude continued to enjoy an active social life - teas, dinners, dances and other social functions,<sup>3</sup> and made several trips to the Continent, traveling with friends or family. *Safar Nameh (Persian Pictures)* was published in 1894, and between 1894 and 1897, when the *Divan* was published, Gertrude turned her attention to translating the poems of Hafiz and preparing a preface. On a holiday trip to the Alps in Switzerland with her family, Gertrude met up with the Rosens again: ‘August 16, 1894 ...Found that the Rosens had called and are in a pension quite near.. After dinner we went to call on them...We found the dear Rosens and Charlotte [Nina’s sister]...’<sup>4</sup> The two families began visiting together: ‘After lunch went with the Rosens to Schloss Ambras..’<sup>5</sup> and Gertrude was able to talk to Dr. Rosen about her book.<sup>6</sup> Being with the Rosens re-awakened memories of Cadogan: ‘I thought much last night of him and all he had been to me and is still....I went up into the wood and translated *Dard mara*.’<sup>7</sup> A few days later, she was translating ‘the first verses of *Keh ishk asan namud awwal*’<sup>8</sup> another of Hafiz’ poems. More translations followed: ‘Finished *Darin Zeman*.’<sup>9</sup> ‘Spent the morning in the wood where I translated the whole of *Delbar janan e man*.’<sup>10</sup>

In 1895 there were few letters or diary entries, but evidently she continued her translation. In a diary entry for a cloudy day in August, she complained that she had tried to ‘do some Persian’ but without much success.<sup>11</sup> By 1896 she had started working on her ‘life and times’ of Hafiz, and had taken up Arabic. In a letter she described her Arabic teacher who she refers to as her ‘Pundit’: ‘I came away rather early for I had a lesson at 5. My Pundit was extremely pleased with me, he kept congratulating me on my proficiency in the Arabic tongue!... It is quite extraordinarily interesting to read the Koran with him - and it is such a magnificent book! He has given me some Arabian Nights for the next time and I have given him some Hafiz poems to read...’<sup>12</sup> And in a following letter: ‘This morning I stayed in and read some most illuminating articles on Sufyism..’<sup>13</sup>

A glimpse of the thoroughness with which she approached her work can be gathered from a sequence of letters, written from February onwards: ‘Feb. 12, 1896 - I studied my grammar this morning and went to the London Library where I looked through volumes and volumes of Asiatic Societies...and found little to my purpose’;<sup>14</sup> ‘May, 1896 - We went back to supper with the Tyrrells and I was not in till 1.30. However I went off after breakfast to the Museum where I asked for a book they hadn’t got. It is rather funny that I should have exhausted the whole British Museum in a fortnight, but its also a bore, for I wanted a nice French translation and now I shall have to fall back on the original Persian which they have...’;<sup>15</sup> ‘Thursday, May 1896 - I went up to the museum this morning and read a Persian life of Hafiz with a Latin crib. I think I got at the meaning of it with the help of a Persian dictionary, but a Latin translation is not so clear to me as it might be..’<sup>16</sup>

Having completed her book, she then set about finding a publisher: ‘I saw Heinemann

this morning. He was extremely pleasant. I told him a lot about the book and he expressed a desire to see it. So at any rate it will have a reading...I shall send him the poems and preface from Berlin. ...<sup>17</sup>

Why Berlin? Because Gertrude was going to join Aunt Mary and Uncle Frank in Berlin, where Sir Frank Lascelles now served as Ambassador to the court of Kaiser Wilhelm II.<sup>18</sup> Her stay in Berlin would be briefer than her extended stay with the Lascelles in Tehran. She started out in January, 1897, and was back in England at the beginning of March, according to her mother. And from the few letters written home during that time, published in *The Letters*, it seems most of Gertrude's time in the Prussian capital was taken up with attending Court balls and functions.

'Berlin, Jan. 22, 1897

Dearest Elsa

I made my bow to the 'Kaiser Paar' on Wednesday. It was a very fine show. We drove to the Schloss in the glass coach and were saluted by the guard when we arrived. We felt very swell! Then we waited for a long time with all the other dups. in a room next to the throne room and at about 8 the doors were thrown open. We all hastily arranged one another's trains and marched in procession while the band played the march out of Lohengrin. The Emperor and Empress were standing on a dais at the end of the room and we walked through a sort of passage made by rows and rows of pages dressed in pink. The 'Allerhochst' looked extremely well in a red uniform - I couldn't look at the Empress much as I was so busy avoiding Aunt Mary's train. She introduced me and then stood aside while I made two curtseys. Then I wondered what the dickens I should do next, but Aunt Mary made me a little sign to go out behind her, so I 'enjambé' her train and fled!<sup>19</sup>

'Berlin, Tuesday, 1897

To Florence Bell (her mother)

....F [Florence] and I went to see

*Henry IV* last night, the Emperor having invited all the Embassy to come to the royal box. Uncle F and Aunt M. were dining with the Frederic Leopolds, so they were obliged to decline the box for themselves but the Emperor said he hoped we should go as we should be chaperoned by Countess Keller...Accordingly we went off by ourselves and sat very comfortably with Countess Keller...All the Embassy and a lot of the Court people were with us, the Emperor and Empress were in a little box at the side. The play was very well done....There was no pause till the end of the second act where there was a long entr'acte. Countess Keller bustled away and presently came hurrying back and whispered something to Knesebeck and Egloffstein, two of the Court people, and they came and told F. and me that we were sent for. So off we went rather trembling, under the escort of Countess K. and Egloffstein who conducted us into a little tiny room behind the Emperor's box where we found the 'Kaiser Paar' sitting and having tea. We made deep curtseys and kissed the Empress's hand, and then we all sat down, F. next to the Emperor and I next to the Empress and they gave us tea and cakes. It was rather formidable though they were extremely kind. ... We go again to-night to the second part...but we shall not be sent for as Uncle Frank and Aunt Mary will be there<sup>20</sup>

'Berlin, Feb. 17<sup>th</sup>, 1897

To Florence Bell



We had a most exciting evening at the play yesterday. We were all sent for in the entr'acte. We had a very agreeable tea party with the Emperor and Empress and her sister...It was like an act out of another historical drama - but a modern one. A sheaf of telegrams were handed to the Emperor as we sat at tea. He and Uncle fell into an excited conversation in low voices; we talked on to the Empress trying to pretend we heard nothing but catching scraps of the Emperor's remarks, 'Crete...Bulgaria...Servia...mobilizing' and so forth. The Empress kept looking up at him anxiously - she is terribly perturbed about it all and no wonder for he is persuaded that we are all on the brink of war...<sup>21</sup>

One month after Gertrude's return to England, Mary Lascelles died. Lady Bell writes in *The Letters*: 'Gertrude came back to England at the beginning of March. My sister Mary Lascelles died on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, after three days' illness. Her death made a terrible gap in Gertrude's life.'<sup>22</sup> Gertrude dealt with the loss with typical fortitude, writing on April 7, a few days after her Aunt's passing: 'I have been to Clarence to-day - it was no use sitting and moping so I thought I had better make myself useful if I could...'<sup>23</sup> And despite losing Aunt Mary, Gertrude and her family continued their close relationship with the Lascelles. Gertrude visited Sir Frank and Florence in May of 1899 and stayed with them at the British Embassy in Berlin: 'We had a most merry little dinner, Uncle F. and Mr. Chirol being in great spirits, and at 10 o'clock Mr. Chirol left us for England. Florence went to bed and I sat up till near one and talked to His Ex...'<sup>24</sup> A few months later, she was with them again, together with her brother Hugo, and Mr. Chirol on a visit to Bayreuth, to hear Wagner's *Parsifal* and *The Ring*.<sup>25</sup>

Sir Frank survived his wife by 20 years. He continued as Ambassador to Berlin until 1908 and died in January, 1920.<sup>26</sup> Florence Lascelles who had travelled with Gertrude to Persia in 1892, would return to Tehran in 1906 as the wife of Cecil Spring Rice, the British Envoy to the Court of Persia from 1906 to 1908.<sup>27</sup>

At the end of 1897, Gertrude and her brother Maurice, embarked on a world tour. Her mother includes very little of Gertrude's diary or letters from this tour in *The Letters*, remarking only that it would not be 'worth while reproducing all that she and Maurice saw on this well-known route..<sup>28</sup> It has to be said, that the entries in her diary and the few letters she wrote from this voyage do not reflect Gertrude at her best: (pulling out of port) 'Stood in the rain and wind and watched...the idiotic people saying good bye to each other';<sup>29</sup> (later on board to her mother) 'Dear! I wonder who all these people are. We have looked down the list and there is no one we know';<sup>30</sup> a dining companion is 'beetle browed';<sup>31</sup> a fellow traveler 'an old buffer'; and another family 'dull'. Maurice brought along a book for Gertrude 'Manners for Women' presumably knowing what he was in for.<sup>32</sup> All was not lost however. There was a Sir William Smith on board: 'We think we have spotted Sir Smith at least there's a rather nice looking old man we take to be he.'<sup>33</sup>

Their route took them westerly from Southampton, headed for the Caribbean, and they enjoyed almost two weeks at sea before reaching Barbados, the first of their stop-offs. During the two weeks at sea, Gertrude and Maurice joined in ship activities, became better acquainted with their fellow travelers, and as usual, Gertrude maintained a disciplined reading schedule.<sup>34</sup> And it is on this journey that, for the first time, Gertrude makes a specific reference to the Babi religion in her diaries. Sir W. Smith, who she was so happy to have on board, was the Chief Justice of Cyprus, appointed as Chief Justice in 1892. Prior to that he had served as a *puisne* judge on the island.<sup>35</sup> On Saturday, January 1, 1898, she notes in her diary: 'After lunch

M[Maurice] and I talked to Sir W. Smith who is going out to be a judge in Demarara [British Guiana, now Guyana] and has been for 15 years a judge in Cyprus which he is very sorry to leave. He knows Mr. Hogarth and Mr. Browne *and all about Babis...*<sup>36</sup> [italics added].

Hogarth is David Hogarth, archeologist and brother of her fellow Oxford class-mate, Janet Hogarth.<sup>37</sup> Mr. Browne was Edward Granville Browne, the noted Cambridge orientalist and author of '*A Year Amongst the Persians*'<sup>38</sup> and translator of '*The Tarikh-i-Jadid or New History of the Bab*'<sup>39</sup> At this point, we know with certainty that Gertrude was acquainted with Browne's *A Year Amongst the Persians*, because in her preface to her *Divan* on the life and times of Hafiz, which she completed in 1897, she borrowed from Browne's '*A Year Amongst the Persians*' and acknowledged her source in a footnote.<sup>40</sup>

On January 11, her ship arrived at Barbados and Sir William Smith disembarked to catch a different steamer to take him to British Guiana. Gertrude and the remaining passengers stayed on to tour Barbados. To her discredit, Gertrude's letters describing her visit to Barbados and Haiti, the next port of call, expose an unpleasantly prejudiced attitude towards the local black population.<sup>41</sup>

Continuing through the Panama Canal, up the West Coast of the United States, and crossing over past the Hawaiian islands to Japan, she refers patronisingly to the Japanese as 'little Japs.' One suspects that her mother, in recording so little of this world tour, was drawing a curtain over her daughter's shortcomings. One of her final diary entries was from Cairo: 'Hotel full of infantine middies.'<sup>42</sup>

A year later, Gertrude left England for Palestine, to visit the Rosens.

1.London, William Heinemann, 1897

2.Lady Bell, *The Letters*, p. 35.

3. Interestingly she also mentions having to attend 'a Buddhist Committee lunch' in a letter dated 1896 to her mother. Lady Bell provides no further clarification. Ibid., p. 37

4. *Diaries*, 16/08/1894, Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University Library <http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/index.php>, hereafter referred to as 'Diaries'.

5. *Diaries*, 18/08/1894

6. *Diaries*, 20/08/1894

7. *Diaries* 22/08/94. *Dard Mara* [loosely translated as Pain of my Heart] evidently the Persian title to one of Hafiz' poems.

8. *Diaries*, 28/08/1894

9. *Diaries*, 09/09/1894

10. *Diaries*, 16/09/1894. Denison Ross, in his preface to the second edition of the *Divan* says that 'Gertrude Bell unfortunately did not arrange her versions in any order, nor did she indicate the opening words or the rhyme.' *Divan*, op.cit., p. 18. However, according to Denison Ross, Edward Granville Browne did link her translations with the original German edition of the text. Ibid, p. 18.

11. *Diaries* 07/08/1895

12. *The Letters*, p. 38. The Orientalist, Edward Denison Ross [later to become a director of the School of Oriental and African Studies] writing a preface to the second edition of the *Divan* published shortly after Gertrude's death, identifies the 'Pundit' as Arthur Strong, at the time Professor of Arabic at University College, London.

13. *ibid.*, p. 38

14. *ibid.*, p. 37

15. *ibid.*, p.40

16. *ibid.*, p.40

17. *ibid.*, p. 42

18. London Gazette: no. 26679. p. 6099. 12 November, 1895 : 'Foreign Office, October 24, 1894 The Queen has been graciously pleased to appoint the Right Honourable Sir Frank Cavendish Lascelles, G.C.M.G., to be Her Majesty's Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to His Majesty The German Emperor, King of Prussia.

London Gazette citation taken from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_diplomats\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_Kingdom\\_to\\_Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_diplomats_of_the_United_Kingdom_to_Germany)

19. *The Letters*, p. 43

20. *ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

21. *ibid.*, pp.46-47

22. *ibid.*, p. 48

23. *The Letters*, p. 48. Clarence was the town of Port Clarence where the Bell Bros iron works were located (*The Letters.*, p. 22.) The Bell family home was in Redcar, an adjacent town. Gertrude frequently talks of going to 'Clarence' as if she is going to the town or the iron works to perform charitable work as in the following: 'April 2, 1890 I have just returned from Clarence where I found only a few mothers but some very agreeable ladies amongst them. I walked back with a very friendly lady - I wonder who she was. She lives in the New Cottages and only comes up to the other end of Clarence for the Mother's Meeting and for confinements!' *The Letters*, p. 25

24. *Letters*, 22/5/1899

25. *The Letters*, p. 51.

26. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank\\_Lascelles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Lascelles)

27. Denis Wright, *The English Amongst the Persians*, p. 188 regarding Cecil Spring Rice's term of office. As an interesting aside regarding Florence, Marzieh Gail recalls in her biography of her father, *Arches of the Years*, that her mother, Florence Breed, while living in Tehran with her husband, Ali Kuli Khan, became very sick. Many people showed kindness to Ali and his convalescing wife, writes Marzieh: 'The American Minister's wife brought newspapers and magazines...And one afternoon, Lady Spring-Rice, wife of the British Minister Sir Cecil, came to visit - in an open victoria, two Bengal lancers with fluttering pennants to guard it, the equipage preceded and followed by some twenty outriders, we assume turbaned Sikhs...' *Arches of the Years*, p. 30

28. *The Letters*, p. 48

29. *Diaries*, 29/12/1897

30. *Letters* 29/12/1897.

31. *Diaries* 29/12/1897

32. *Letters*, 29/12/1897

33. *Letters*, 29/12/1897

34. Sir William lends her Rose's *Greek War* to read; and she writes that she has begun to read Renans' *History of the Jews*. *Diaries*, 03 and 04/01/1898

35. As a judge and Chief Justice in Cyprus, Sir William would have been acquainted with the case of Mirza Yahya Subh-i-Azal, the half-brother of Baha'u'llah (founder of the Baha'i Faith), who had been exiled to Cyprus with his family and followers; Baha'u'llah had been sent to Acre with his family and followers. Sir William probably would have met E.G. Browne, who travelled to Famagusta, Cyprus in 1890 to meet Subh-i-Azal and then continued on to Acre in Palestine to meet Baha'u'llah. (Introduction to *A Traveller's Narrative*, p.xxi-xliii)

36. *Diaries* 01/01/1898.

37. 'Not a wild man, but *Mentor* to all of us was Hogarth, our father confessor and adviser, who brought us the parallels and lessons of history, and moderation, and courage...' T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Jonathan Cape, June 1946 edition, p.57.

38. *A Year Amongst the Persians*, is a book describing Browne's journey to Persia in 1892, motivated by his desire to learn more about Mirza Ali Muhammad the Bab and his followers.

39. *The Tarikh-i-Jadid or New History of Mirza Ali Muhammad the Bab*, Cambridge University Press, 1893

40. *Divan*, p. 47: The text in the *Divan*, which she attributes to Browne in a footnote reads: 'The Sufis had no difficulty in finding in the Koran texts in support of their teaching. When Mahommed exclaims, 'There are times when neither cherubim nor prophet are equal unto me!' the Sufis declare that he alludes to moments of ecstatic union with God; and his account of the victory of Bedr - 'Thou didnt not slay them, but God slew them, and thou didst not shoot when thou didst shoot, but God shot' - they take as a proof of the Prophet's belief in the essential oneness of God and man.'

41. Her comments have not been reproduced, but they are contained in the *Letters* published on the University of Newcastle website.

42. *Diaries*, 02/06/1898

## CHAPTER 4

### PALESTINE 1899-1900

In 1898, Kaiser Wilhelm II embarked upon an Eastern tour which took him to Jerusalem, Lebanon and Damascus as well as the Ottoman capital, Constantinople.<sup>1</sup> His most famous remark on that tour, in keeping with Germany's policy of extending its friendship to Turkey, came while he was in Damascus, his last stop, where he laid a wreath on Saladin's tomb, and at a dinner given in his honor by a leading Muslim cleric, proclaimed: 'May the Sultan and his 300 million Muslim subjects scattered across the earth, who venerate him as their Caliph, be assured that the German Kaiser will be their friend for all time.'<sup>2</sup>

His tour started in Constantinople, where he presented a special Prussian rifle to Sultan Abdul Hamid, and erected an ornate fountain as a gift to the Ottoman people.<sup>3</sup> From Constantinople he proceeded to the Holy Land. In Bethlehem, on October 30, 1898 he spoke warmly of the mission of the Evangelical church, and urged the different creeds to set aside their differences:

"The world-renewing power of the Gospel, which went forth from this place urges us to follow its teaching. It exhorts us to look up with the eye of faith to Him who died for us upon the Cross, to Christian resignation, to the practice of unselfish love for all men, and it gives us a sure promise that if we faithfully hold fast to the pure doctrine of the Gospel, even the gates of Hell shall not prevail against our dear Evangelical Church. From Jerusalem came that Light to the world, in the brightness of which our German nation grew great and glorious. The Teutonic nations became what they are under the banner of the Cross at Golgotha, the symbol of self-sacrificing love for one's neighbour....The German Empire and the German name have acquired a prestige throughout the Ottoman Empire greater than they have ever enjoyed before. It is incumbent upon us to show what the Christian religion really is, and that it is our simple duty to exercise Christian Charity even towards Mohammedans, not by means of dogma or attempts at proselytising, but merely by example.'<sup>4</sup>

The next day, in Jerusalem, he dedicated a new Protestant church, the Church of the Redeemer, built on land given to his grandfather, Wilhelm I, by Sultan Abdul-Aziz<sup>5</sup> and gave another speech. In it he quoted from a psalm from Luther '*Eine Feste Burg ist unser Gott*':

With force of arms we nothing can,  
full soon we were down-ridden;  
But for us fights the proper Man,  
Whom God Himself hath bidden.  
Ask ye, Who is this same?  
Christ Jesus is His name,  
The Lord Zebaoth's Son;  
He and no other one  
Shall conquer in the battle.<sup>6</sup>

And on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November, he visited the German colony of Templars in Jerusalem and addressed them :



“It is a great pleasure to me to see so many of my country men here, and I thank you for the splendid reception which you have given to me. I rejoice that you have recognised the necessity of affording your neighbours a good example by the lives which you lead...You are, so far as I know, for the most part Swabians. I have telegraphed to the King of Wurtemberg that I have found many of his countrymen thriving at Haifa and Jaffa...I hope that in the future, as at present, friendly relations with the Ottoman Empire, and especially the friendship which exists between his Majesty the Sultan and myself, will tend to facilitate your task. If any one of you is in need of my protection, then I am here. He may appeal to me, no matter what creed he professes. Fortunately, the German Empire is in a position to afford its subjects abroad permanent protection.’<sup>7</sup>

Two months later, in January, 1899, Friedrich Rosen, then employed at the German consulate in Tehran, received orders to return to Berlin. He was advised that the Emperor, following his trip to the Holy Land, wished to establish a new German Consul in Jerusalem, and that he, Friedrich Rosen, had been chosen to fill this post because of his familiarity with Palestine (Friedrich had been brought up in Jerusalem, where his father had been the Prussian Consul). His mandate as the German Consul would be to promote the interests and well being of the Emperor’s Catholic and Protestant subjects in the Holy Land.

Rosen met with the Kaiser in Berlin before taking up his post, and narrates in his memoirs that the Kaiser emphasized ‘the principle that each nation was to exercise protection over its own subjects and religious establishments without recognizing the right claimed by any one nation to play the part of protector over the whole of Christendom.’<sup>8</sup> Rosen clarified the Kaiser’s remark by adding: ‘France’s pretensions in this matter were very old and had been recognized by the Vatican, but were no more up to date now that every nation was in a position to look after her own subjects in the Levant.’<sup>9</sup>

Gertrude came visiting shortly after the Rosens had taken up residence in Jerusalem. Lady Bell writes: ‘In November of 1899, she starts for Jerusalem, with many hopes and plans, including learning more Arabic.’<sup>10</sup> In Jaffa, she was met by the Rosens, and they took the train to Jerusalem where she lodged in a hotel, the Hotel Jerusalem, ‘two minutes walk from the German Consulate.’<sup>11</sup> Charlotte, Nina’s sister, was also with the Rosens.

On her first day in Jerusalem, she left her card with Mrs. Dickson, the wife of the British Consul and toured through the Old City with Dr. Rosen:

One’s first impression of Jerusalem is extremely interesting, but certainly not pleasing. The walls are splendid (Saracenic on Jewish foundations) but all the holy places are terribly marred by being built over with hideous churches of all the different sects. Even the Abyssinians have their church! C’est le rendezvous de toutes les folies religieuses, says someone. And they all fight like mad dogs, so much so that Turkish soldiers have to be stationed at every sacred point to prevent the Christians from throwing stones at each other. It is a comfort to be in a cheerful irreligious family again! Dr. R. says his colony is a great trial to him. They are ultra pious, as everyone is here, and sing hymns at their tea parties...<sup>12</sup>

She soon settled into a routine, hiring a tutor - Khalil Dughan<sup>13</sup> to assist her with her Arabic, which she mostly studied in the mornings. Lunch would be with the Rosens, followed by sight-seeing on foot or on horseback to more distant points of interest, either in company with Dr. Rosen, Charlotte or Nina, or alone: ‘Rode out with Nina and Dr. R to Rachel’s Tomb seeing

Bethlehem and the Shepherd's valley and Bethphage...All lovely green and covered with Olives.<sup>14</sup> Evenings would usually be back at the German consulate for dinner with the Rosens. This routine would be interspersed with social engagements and various lunch, tea, or dinner entertainments. In this way, she gradually became acquainted with the foreign community in Jerusalem - the Russian consul and his wife, the Yacovlews: 'M. Yacovlew took us all to see the Russian pilgrim house (we had visited it last night) and found it packed with pilgrims as tight as herrings, sleeping in rows on the floor';<sup>15</sup> The Dicksons, the British consul and his wife: Yesterday, Nina gave a picnic...The Dickson family came, and Mr. Dunn, an Englishman who converts Jews..';<sup>16</sup> M. Oseppi, the French consul: 'We dined with the Yacovlews which was quite pleasant. Masses of consuls (the Frenchman Oseppi is very entertaining)'; The Turkish governor, '... a silent person in a fez.';<sup>17</sup> Mr. Macalister and Mr. Bliss, members of the Palestine Exploration Fund;<sup>18</sup> The German pastor from Bethlehem, Herr Bartcher: '... quite pleasant in spite of his cloth.';<sup>19</sup> Miss Keightly and Miss Chapman: 'Miss Keightly's business in life seems to be to succour distressed missionaries...';<sup>20</sup> and M. Jerassimo 'the head of the Credit Lyonnais and a nice little man.'<sup>21</sup>

She also began building a circle of Arab and Turkish acquaintances. Apart from her tutor, Khalil Dughan, she hired a Syrian<sup>22</sup> girl to help her with her spoken Arabic: 'I am going to try a new plan. A Syrian girl is to come and spend an hour with me 3 or 4 times a week and talk to me. I shall take her out for walks sometimes, if she is satisfactory, and converse with her.'<sup>23</sup> Some days later, she wrote her father:

My little girl, Ferideh Jamal is a great success. She talks the dialect, but that is all the better as I want to understand the people of hereabouts. I went to visit her and her family after dinner yesterday - they live quite close. It was most amusing. I found the mother, a pretty charming woman who had had 10 children and looks ridiculously young (they marry at 13), two sisters and presently a brother came in. The mother talks nothing but Arabic so the visit was conducted in that language with great success, Ferideh interpreting from time to time. I was regaled on cocoa, a very sweet Arab pastry and pistachios which I love, and shown all the photographs of all the relatives down to the last second cousin twice removed!<sup>24</sup>

She became friends with the 'Mudir', the Sultan's land agent in Jericho ('for the Sultan has great estates in these parts'), calling him a 'great ally of mine' when he helped her cross to the opposite bank of the Jordan to photograph pilgrims being baptized in the river;<sup>25</sup> Another Arab friend was M. Maroum[?]' a very nice Oriental interpreter of the German consulate.<sup>26</sup>

Through her letters and diaries, we learn about the comings and goings at the German consulate: 'Emperor's birthday. Dr. R rode off in uniform to the Russian consulate.'<sup>27</sup>; '50 German middies from a training ship. Nina asked them all to tea on the Mount of Olives.'<sup>28</sup> One of her letters illustrates, with some humour, the practical effects of the 'capitulatory' arrangements accorded to foreign consulates by Turkey:

The Rosens have got a prisoner and are much perturbed thereby. All the consulates imprison their own malefactors because the Turkish prisoner is too unspeakable and it had been Nina's profoundest hope that she would not have to turn all her boxes out of the prison to make way for a live occupant et voila - qu'un monsieur se met dan la tete to coin false beshliks...He was caught Thursday and is now established in

the basement of the consulate under lock and key...all sorts of formalities have to be gone through before he can be shipped off to Germany - a Consular Court and a trial and so forth. Meantime, he is rather a godsend to us, for according to the prison regulations he ought to be made to work 8 or 9 hours a day at his profession and as he can't be set to coin beshliks, which was his only visible means of support, he has been turned onto the garden, which he is weeding with the greatest skill..<sup>29</sup>

Throughout she maintained a frequent flow of correspondence with her family - writing detailed letters of her doings to both her mother and father, and receiving in turn letters with all their news. A growing unease with the progress of the Boer war<sup>30</sup> began to emerge in her letters. Maurice, her brother had volunteered to go to South Africa. A short diary entry on January 5, 1900 noted: 'Maurice's volunteering. Much bothered.' Then a momentary reprieve: 'I am relieved to hear that M's chances of being sent to Africa are small.' However, by January 23, it had been confirmed that Maurice was definitely going to be sent to Africa: '...at lunch a telegram telling me it was decided. Awful blow. Rode out in very bad spirits, with the Rosens..<sup>31</sup> In February this: 'My papers have begun again and I have heard by Egyptian telegrams of Buller's retreat which is most discouraging. One did hope that better times were beginning..<sup>32</sup> Then Maurice was shipped off: 'I got your telegram from Grasse yesterday. It is rather terrible to think that Maurice is off; I hoped he wouldn't leave till the end of the month. I can't read the name of his ship...you will telegraph to me his arrival, won't you..<sup>33</sup> In March there was good news, and she put pen to paper to relieve her pent up emotions:

Today came the joyful news of the relief of Ladysmith. Mr. Dunn told me - blessed be the fate of the bringers of good tidings. Dr. R. is very glum over it. I was pleased to be able to tell him that we had captured a lot of Germans with Cronje's force. May their dwelling be destroyed! as we say in Arabic... All foreigners take the view of 'hit a fellow your own size.' I should like to see them fight a skilful foe in his own difficult country, 3 weeks' sea journey from their base. Roberts and Kitchener have done marvels and I fancy we have found a very able general in French. And then these people talk, not one of whose soldiers or generals has ever been under fire....The Arabs are delighted at the war news - all their sympathies are with us, a feeling which is much enhanced by the spreading of German influence in the Levant. They one and all hate the Germans - colonists, tourists, there is no exception; and the Emperor's visit did a good deal to strengthen their hatred. The amount of ill feeling he left behind him is almost incredible, but you may begin to understand it when I tell you that he presented all the Mohammedan officials at the Haram with imitation silver medals stamped with the cross! They look upon it as an insult<sup>34 35</sup>

Notwithstanding this political rift, the personal relationship between Gertrude and the Rosens seemed to continue as warmly as before and her diary entries and letters continued with the record of her daily routine and happenings. However, her stay in Jerusalem was not to be indefinite, so she tentatively drew up plans for two excursions - one to the Moab<sup>36</sup> a mountainous strip running along the Eastern shore of the Dead Sea which she and the Rosens planned together, and a second longer trip through Jordan traveling with the Rosens part way, then continuing alone to Syria as far as Damascus, returning to Jerusalem via Beirut and Haifa by boat. She expected to be back in England in June.<sup>37</sup> Two extracts from her letters, reproduced below, highlight her planning for her first trip:

The Rosens have gone to Jaffa today for a couple of days and Charlotte and I are left to take care of each other and the little boys [the Rosen's sons, Oscar and George]. Our Moab expedition is definitely fixed for next Sunday. We have hired a cook through Ferideh's father who is a tourist agent and tents and mules from her uncle who is a dragoman, all these on the most advantageous terms on account of my friendship with the family. They are nice people. I am so glad to be able to go them instead of to Cook...<sup>38</sup>

But the Rosen's cannot join her:

Oh such a lark! I've just been interviewing the gentleman who's to be my guide in Moab - he's charming, a delightful Arab and he says there is not the slightest risk in Moab which is as well as the Rosens can't come. ...The Rosens came home in the evening from Jaffa and he found lots of work waiting for him, which is the reason he can't come. It was very merry to have them back...I went down to the Pal Ex. Fund place today after lunch and met Dr. Bliss there and got some more books, after which I interviewed my cook who is young and beautiful and I hope his cooking will be as good as his manners are...<sup>39</sup>

So, on March 20, 1900, Gertrude set off alone, on the first of her travels across the Middle East: 'Up at 5.00 and off after 6.00 ..'; her joy and exhilaration palpable: 'It was so hot and lovely it felt like an early morning ride in Persia ..the white tamarisks all in flower ..the wild crocus had blossomed like a rose..<sup>40</sup>

A short trip, she was back in Jerusalem by early April, happy to rejoin the Rosens: 'It was delightful to get back to my dear Rosens..<sup>41</sup> Stopping only a couple of weeks to take in the different Easter celebrations in Jerusalem, she and the Rosens set out on a second excursion that would take them to the Hauran, an area south of Damascus and east of the Sea of Galilee<sup>42</sup>:

Nina and Dr. R. are perfectly delightful traveling companions. We have just been agreeing that this is the only kind of real existence and all other dwelling but a tent are merely a kind of makeshift..<sup>43</sup>

After a week of traveling together, the little party broke up, and Gertrude continued on alone with her muleteers and guide, crossing the Hauran into Druze territory, then eastward to Damascus and Palmyra, arriving finally in Beirut on June 9th, tired and hot:

'...fearfully hot..I thought I seemed rather tired and was not surprised when I woke to find I had slept 12 hours..<sup>44</sup>

She was anxious to get back to Jerusalem: 'Our luggage hasn't come yet, but I think we shall go to Jaffa tomorrow as there is a boat and I am anxious to get home. But you know dearest Father, I shall be back here before long! One doesn't keep away from the East when one has got into it this far..<sup>45</sup>

While there are no further letters in June, a few diary entries note her progress back to Jerusalem:

June 11, 1900 - 'Got money and settled up with my men';

June 12, 1900 - 'Left by *Newhaven* at 1.00. On board was Dr. Cropper, Mr. Eddy, Professor Curtiss and Dr. Jely with all of whom we soon made acquaintance. ..Got to Sidon at about 4 and went ashore...Went to the English missionaries Miss Walker and Miss [space blank] who gave us a very good meal. Back to our boat about 10. I had Dr. Cropper's cabin on the bridge and was most comfy.';

June 13, 1900 - 'Got to Akka at 5.00 and went ashore with Dr. C [Cropper] The English hospital is on the opposite side of the Persian garden. Had some tea and ran through the street back. Haifa about 8 and went ashore with Khoury. Tea in a Persian café. They told us there that Abbas Effendi was in Haifa. We went off to see his house and I paid him a visit. He was most kind and gracious. We talked of Mr. Brown....'

Thus she records her first meeting with Abdu'l-Baha. The Dr. Cropper she refers to as a fellow passenger on the *Newhaven*, with whom she goes ashore at Akka, is Dr. John Cropper.<sup>46</sup> Dr Cropper was in charge of the Christian medical mission which occupied part of the mansion of Abdulla Pasha in Akka. Abdu'l-Baha occupied the other part.<sup>47</sup> We are fortunate to have a detailed description of the mansion of Abdulla Pasha around the time of Gertrude's visit from a Baha'i source. Youness Afroukhteh, a young man working as a bank clerk in Tehran, sought and received permission to travel to the Holy Land on pilgrimage in 1898. He returned a second time in 1900 to serve as a translator and secretary for Abdu'l Baha's for 9 years, and his recollections of his years in the Holy Land, compiled into a book '*Memories of Nine Years in Akka*' are an invaluable source of Baha'i history.<sup>48</sup> His description of the mansion of Abdulla Pasha comes from the time of his first pilgrimage in 1898 :

As to the residence of Abdu'l-Baha: its simplicity and spiritual atmosphere was beyond description. The building itself was old and immense, and had formerly belonged to a prominent family of Akka. One upper and one lower apartment had been leased by Abdu'l- Baha. Another apartment belonged to the Protestant missionaries who had turned the lower apartment into an infirmary for the Arabs and every morning taught the patients the principles of Christianity. The front yard, which covered an area of about 200 square meters, had been landscaped in accordance with the Master's instruction. This natural verdant garden, with beautiful flowers in bloom, two palm trees in their midst and a grape vine in one corner, filled the air with heavenly fragrance...<sup>49</sup>

Gertrude photographed this garden - it is the Persian garden of her June 13 diary entry: '*the English hospital is on the opposite side of the Persian garden.*' The photo is contained in a series of 7 photographs in the Gertrude Bell Photo Archive of the University of Newcastle - all dated June, 1900 by the Archive. Several of the photos are views of Acre - one taken from the sea, possibly as she was rowed ashore with Dr. Cropper; another of the harbour; and a third of the sea wall. One photo is described as 'Acre - The Babi House'. It is the picture of the mansion, with the two palm trees described by Dr. Afroukhteh clearly visible. A fifth picture is described as the 'Citadel - exterior walls and moat.' The Citadel was used as a prison by the Turkish authorities; Baha'u'llah had been imprisoned there in 1868. The view of the Citadel taken by Gertrude is of Baha'u'llah's prison cell, located in the upper right-hand corner. There is a photo of an unidentified man described as 'Persian man in a courtyard in Wadi Salib area of Old City.' The final photo in the series is described as a 'Portrait of an Arab man - seated.'

Though this photo is attributed to Gertrude, it is in fact not hers. It is a picture of Subh-i-Azal, Baha'u'llah's half brother, which was reproduced in *The Tarikh-i-Jadid, or New History of Mirza Ali Muhammad the Bab*, by Mirza Huseyn of Hamadan, translated by Edward Granville Browne and published by Cambridge University Press in 1893. Gertrude likely obtained it from Edward Granville Browne.

Gertrude's boat docked into Jaffa the next day, and she returned to Jerusalem, but only briefly for she returned to England shortly thereafter.

Dr. Rosen for his part grew sick of his work: 'The purely theoretical problems that had arisen during the Emperor's visit had ceased to interest My Government. There remained nothing for me to do but to listen to the petty local affairs, mostly sterile controversies between the many sects whose representatives would bring their grievances before the Consul.'<sup>50</sup>

He was rescued from this tedium by a letter from the foreign office: 'One afternoon, as I was returning to Jaffa from an excursion of several days to Haifa and Akka, where I visited the spiritual leader of the Behai branch of the Babi religion, Abbas Efendi, I saw my wife coming towards me with a sheet of paper in her hand.'<sup>51</sup> It was a telegram offering a posting in the Foreign Office in Berlin, which he gladly accepted.

He mentions Abdu'l-Baha again in the concluding chapter of his book, *Oriental Memories*, as he laments the changes taking place in the Orient with the encroachment of Western civilisation:

Types like Abbas Efendi, in the eyes of his adherents an incarnation of the Deity will soon no more delight their visitors by their deep culture and wisdom and their exquisitely agreeable conversation and manners. Dignity is being replaced by want of manners in the same way as the fez is being ousted by the bowler, and the turban by the cloth cap<sup>52</sup>

He also sounds a note of regret regarding Gertrude:

We were very sorry indeed when the time came for Miss Bell to return to Europe. Her gratitude for what we had been able to do to make her stay in Jerusalem agreeable and profitable to her, far exceeded our merits....At the same time I cannot repress the melancholy reflection that all the knowledge and experience of the East which she owed to a great extent to the aid of Germans was afterwards employed against my country. I do not blame her for this, for her motive was love of her country, and she has tried, wherever she has been able, to help those of my countrymen, mostly Orientalists and archaeologists, at a time when the hatred of everything German was, so to speak, an article of the political creed of the great majority of the English.'<sup>53</sup>

Gertrude, meanwhile, wasted no time starting off on her next venture - traveling to Switzerland for a mountain-climbing holiday. In early August she crossed the Channel, and arrived in the Hotel Couttet in Chamonix.<sup>54</sup> Her first letter from Chamonix was to her father describing how much she was looking forward to her mounting-climbing 'campaign' as she referred to it: 'I don't think there is a more delightful sensation than that of opening an Alpine campaign - meeting one's guide, talking over the great ascents that look so easy on the map, and laying out one's clean new mountain clothes.'<sup>55</sup> But from her next letter to her mother we get a hint of a project that she seems to have already set afoot :

August 6, 1900 Hotel Couttet Chamonix:

Dearest Mother, Thank you for your letters and enclosures and Elsa's. I wish you had read Mr. B's letter. He is very enthusiastic, will love to come to us, doubts if he can come before the end of Sep. and sends me some Babi autographs....<sup>56</sup>

1. Sean McKeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express*, Belknap Press, Cambridge, Mass, 2010, at p. 11.
2. *ibid.*, p. 14. Also, Valentine Chirol, *The Middle Eastern Question*, p. 196
3. 'The German Fountain' or 'Alman Cesmesi' still standing in the Hippodrome. McKeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express*, p. 12
4. *The German Emperor's Speeches*, translated by Louis Elkind, Longmans, Green, and Co, New York and Bombay, 1904, pp. 318-319
5. 'Like many other European leaders of his time, Kaiser Wilhelm II ... dreamed of transforming Jerusalem into a Christian city once again. When he paid his first visit to Jerusalem in 1898 to dedicate the imposing German Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, near the Holy Sepulchre, a gap was breached in the city walls alongside the Jaffa Gate to accommodate his entourage. He himself entered mounted on a white steed, with all the messianic associations of such an act. Wilhelm returned to Jerusalem in 1910 to inaugurate a compound on Mount Scopus, which he dedicated to his wife Augusta Victoria. During that same visit, he also consecrated the neo-Romanesque German Catholic Dormition Abbey, on Mount Zion, and the massive St. Paul's German hospice (today a girls's school) just north of the Old City.'  
Downloaded from website of Jerusalem Center for Jewish-Christian Relations, under Directory *Augusta Victoria Compound on Mount Scopus*, 10/17/2011  
[http://www.jcjr.org/index\\_item\\_view.php?iid=56](http://www.jcjr.org/index_item_view.php?iid=56)
6. *The German Emperor's Speeches*, p. 321
7. *ibid.*, pp. 321-322
8. Rosen, *Oriental Memories*, pp. 261-262
9. *ibid.*, p. 262
10. *The Letters*, p. 55
11. *Letters* 13/12/1899. In a later letter (14/06/1900), Gertrude identifies the hotel more clearly as 'Kamnitz's.' Wikipedia, in an entry on the 'Street of the Prophets' states that the Street of the Prophets was, during its heyday in the late 19th century and early 20th century, '...a favorite address for hospitals, churches, monasteries, hospices, government offices, foreign consulates,



and wealthy Christian, Jewish and Arab residents'. It identifies the Kaminitz as one of the hotels which lined this street: 'The Kaminitz Hotel, constructed in 1878, was a five-star hotel with a carriage entrance from Jaffa Road'. The article also gives some information about the German consulate occupied by the Rosens: 'The German consulate once stood beside the International Evangelical Church on the site of present-day Raoul Wallenberg Street. It was attacked by the Israeli underground when it flew a flag with a swastika in 1933, and was subsequently destroyed by the underground.' [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Street\\_of\\_the\\_Prophets](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Street_of_the_Prophets)

12. *Letters*, 13/12/1899

13. *Diaries*, 16/12/1899

14. *ibid.*

15. *Letters* 17/01/1900

16. *ibid.* 4/2/1900

17. *ibid.*, 18/12/1899

18. Palestine Exploration Fund: 'Founded in 1865 and still functioning today'  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestine\\_Exploration\\_Fund](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestine_Exploration_Fund)

19. *Letters*, 18/12/1899

20. *ibid.*, 11/02/1900

21. *ibid.*

21. Ferideh was probably not from the state known today as Syria. At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Greater Syria constituted one of the provinces of the Ottoman Empire: 'Territory of the Greater Syria under the Ottoman rule in its final historical period included modern Syria, Lebanon, Israel, the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jordan, and parts of Turkey and Iraq'  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ottoman\\_Syria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ottoman_Syria)

23. *Letters* . 28/12/1899

24. *ibid.*, 11/01/1900

25. *ibid.*, 17/01/1900.

26. *ibid.*

27. *Diaries* 18/12/1899

28. *Ibid.*, 18/12/1899

29. *Letters*, 11/02/1900

30. 'The Boer Wars (known in Afrikaans as Vryheidsoorloë (lit. "freedom wars")) were two wars fought between the British Empire and the two independent Boer republics, the Oranje Vrijstaat (Orange Free State) and the Republiek van Transvaal (Transvaal Republic). The First Anglo-Boer War (1880–1881), was a rebellion of Boers (farmers) against British rule in the Transvaal that re-established their independence... The Second War (1899–1902), by contrast, was a lengthy war—involving large numbers of troops from many British possessions, which ended with the conversion of the Boer republics into British colonies (with a promise of limited self-bestuur). These colonies later formed part of the Union of South Africa. The British fought directly against the Transvaal and the Oranje Vrijstaat, defeating their forces first in open warfare and then in a long and bitter guerrilla campaign. British losses were high due to both disease and combat. The policies of "scorched earth" and civilian internment in concentration camps (adopted by the British to prevent support for the farmers/Boer commando campaign) ravaged the civilian populations in the Transvaal and the Oranje Vrijstaat.'

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boer\\_Wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boer_Wars) downloaded April 29, 2012

See also Second Boer War, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second\\_Boer\\_War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Boer_War).

31. *Diaries* 23/1/1900

32. *Letters* 4/2/1900

33. *ibid.*, 18/2/1900

34. *ibid.*, 2/3/1900.

35. Gertrude's views reflect closely those of her friend, Valentine Chirol who she had been in contact with as recently as May and August of 1899 when visiting with Sir Frank Lascelles at the British Embassy in Berlin, and later, at Bayreuth. (see Chapter 3). Chirol, who was correspondent for *The Times* in Berlin at the time of Kaiser Wilhelm II's accession to the throne, wrote in his memoir, *Fifty Years in a Changing World*, published in 1928, that based upon some incidences which to his mind revealed the 'intemperance of character' and 'extraordinary irresponsibility' of the Kaiser, he acquired an early and 'profound distrust of the man...' He continues: 'It was not, however, a mere distrust of the Emperor's character that grew on me steadily during those first years in Berlin, but, more slowly, a deep distrust of Germany's foreign policy..' (*Fifty Years in a Changing World*, pp 272-276.) And in *The Middle Eastern Question* published in 1903, he derided Germany's policy of acting as 'the friend of Turkey' and suggested that other than by Sultan Abdul Hamid himself, the friendship was not reciprocated:

...outside the Palace her friends in Turkey are few indeed... Amongst the official classes generally and amongst the people, as far as the people count in Turkey, they are hated alike for the good and the bad qualities of the German character, for their intelligence, their pushfulness, their business-like capacity, their grasping selfishness, and their success. *The Middle Eastern Question*, pp. 198-199.

Gertrude's comments echo these sentiments. Friedrich Rosen charges Chirol with betraying an anti-German bias in his book *Fifty Years in a Changing World*: 'It shows throughout a strong bias against Germany, which sometimes has led the talented author to unjustified conclusions with regard to the motives of German politicians. In a great problem there are two sides to be considered. Sir Valentine Chirol sees only one of these. *Oriental Memories*, p. 179. Rosen also

gamely defends the Kaiser:

I must here apologize to some, maybe to many, of my English-speaking readers for not abusing the Kaiser. But it is impossible for me to do so. Apart from the indecency of publicly attacking one's Sovereign, I am restrained by a very strong feeling of personal sympathy which I felt from the first moment of my acquaintance with William II, and still feel. Neither the tragic reverses he suffered after Germany's defeat nor the thousandfold accusations hurled against him as the supposed instigator of the War, will ever change this view, which is corroborated by a careful study of the political documents hitherto published. The picture which the public has of him I know to be quite wrong; but, as a Persian poet has it, 'The paint-brush is in the hands of his enemies. *Oriental Memories*, p. 261

36. 'Moab... the historical name for a mountainous strip of land in Jordan. The land lies alongside much of the eastern shore of the Dead Sea. The existence of the Kingdom of Moab is attested to by numerous archeological findings...'. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moab> downloaded April 29, 2012

37. She had outlined this proposed trip in a letter to her father seeking his approval:

'Would you mind my being away so long? You see I am here it wd be so wonderfully interesting and what I shd particularly like is to get away for a long stretch with no one but Arab speaking people...I would get a real good servant and the only place where there is any sort of risk is the Hauran...If you don't mind, I'd rather do this than be in London..' *Letters* 11/2/1900.

38. *Letters* 11/3/1900

39. *Letters* 15/3/1900

40. *Letters* 20/3/1900

41. *Letters*, 17/4/1900

42. 'Hauran...is a volcanic plateau, a geographic area and a people located in southwestern Syria and extending into the northwestern corner of Jordan. It gets its name from the Aramaic Hawran, meaning "cave land." In geographic and geomorphic terms, its boundaries generally extends from near Damascus and Mt. Hermon in the north to the Ajloun mountains of Jordan in the south. The area includes the Golan Heights on the west...'. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hauran> downloaded April 29, 2012

43. *Letters* 25/4/1900

44. *Letters* 9/6/1900

45. *Letters* 10/6/1900

46. 'On 21st November 1916, the Royal Navy Hospital ship 'Britannic' (the sister ship of the 'Titanic') was torpedoed near the island of Kea in the Aegean Sea. Captain Dr. John Cropper, aged 52, was one of 30 people who drowned of the 1100 on board. Dr. Cropper was born in 1864, at Guisborough, England. He obtained his medical degree from Cambridge University in

1891. After his marriage to Anne Ellen Walker in 1895, the Church Missionary Society sent him on a medical mission to Palestine. Dr. Cropper stayed in Palestine for about 10 years working in Acre, Nablus, Ramallah and Jerusalem...' Abstract posted online by ResearchGate of an article by Zalman Greenberg, Public Health Laboratory, Ministry of Health, Jerusalem. Harefuah 07/2006; 145(6):457-60, 468-9.

[http://www.researchgate.net/publication/6946579\\_What\\_is\\_the\\_link\\_between\\_the\\_sister\\_of\\_the\\_Titanic\\_and\\_the\\_history\\_of\\_medicine\\_in\\_Palestine](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/6946579_What_is_the_link_between_the_sister_of_the_Titanic_and_the_history_of_medicine_in_Palestine)  
Downloaded April 29, 2012

47. Moojan Momen, *Christian Missionaries* from Studies in Babi and Baha'i History , Vol 1, edited by Moojan Momen, Kalimat Press, 1982, p.76

48. Youness Afroukhteh, *Memories of Nine Years in Akka*, translated by Riaz Masrour, George Ronald, 2003, reprinted 2005.

49. *ibid*, p. 21.

50. Rosen, *Oriental Memories*, p. 284

51. *ibid.*, p. 284

52. *ibid.*, pp. 285-286

53. *ibid.*, p. 281

54. 'the Tyrrell's say the Hotel Couttett is the best in Chamonoix so I propose to go there'  
*Letters*, 31/7/1900

55. *ibid*, 2/8/1900

56. *ibid*, 6/8/1900

## CHAPTER 5

### HAIFA

In the months following her letter of August, 1900 from the Hotel Couttet in Chamonix in which Gertrude mentioned a possible meeting with Granville Browne, no references appear either in her letters or diaries which would indicate that such a meeting took place. We are left to speculate as to the nature of the prior correspondence or communication between her and Granville Browne which had lead her to say in her letter that ‘...He is very enthusiastic.’ Could she have written to him proposing that she return to Haifa to study more about the Babi community there? Granville Browne had, in one of his articles on the history and literature of the Babi movement written for the *Journal of The Royal Asiatic Society* in 1889, expressed the hope ‘that some, who have the means and opportunities..’ would assist in the task of obtaining more information about the movement, while men were still alive who could provide reliable accounts of its history.<sup>1</sup> Whether she had contacted him to respond to this appeal is not known, but she did return to Haifa, and subsequently published an article on the Babi’s and their religion in a leading scholarly journal of the day. But it took a year and a half before she set out for Haifa.

In January of 1901, Queen Victoria died and Gertrude attended the funeral procession in London. She observed to Chirol in a letter: ‘It was wonderfully fine and simple - the blaze of colour in the midst of the black crowd, the splendid heralds, and then the low gun carriage, all red and gold with the flag and embroideries, and the crown and orb lying on it. Then the crowd of Kings, and Kings to be, King Edward very dignified, the Emperor a little behind him, very white and evidently much moved. The revulsion of popular feeling towards him is almost ridiculous...’<sup>2</sup>

The rest of 1901 was spent mostly in England, though she did travel to Switzerland in late August for more rock climbing. In January of 1902, she set off on a Mediterranean cruise with her father and brother Hugo,<sup>3</sup> stopping off at various points of interest such as Malta and Palermo, Sicily, to sightsee and call on local gentry. In Santa Flavia, Sicily, Sidney Churchill, a former oriental secretary whom she had met in Tehran, offered to act as their guide. He took them sightseeing then invited them to his villa for tea.<sup>4</sup> On February 22, Gertrude parted company with her father and brother in Naples - Hugh and Hugo returning home, while Gertrude headed eastward for Smyrna, on the western coast of Anatolia<sup>5</sup> to indulge her passion for visiting ancient archaeological sites. For the rest of February and much of March, seemingly without a fixed schedule, she traveled across the landscape of Asia Minor visiting such storied sites as Colophon, Troy, Ephesus, and Sardis.<sup>6</sup>

On March 19, she boarded the Austrian Lloyd steamer, *Cleopatra*, for Haifa, and on March 26, her boat pulled into Haifa harbour.<sup>7</sup>

Her first day can be constructed from her dairy entry of March 26 and a letter she wrote to her mother on the same day. From her diary: ‘Woke at 7 and found that we were just coming into the harbour. Fritz Unger met me and took me through the Custom House without difficulty. His brother drove me up, through the clean prosperous German Colony to Pross’s Hotel on top of the hill.’<sup>8</sup> She then came back down the hill to Haifa, to look for a teacher.

Her letter picks up the narrative:

The half wit but aimiable son of my landlord accompanied me saying he wd take me to a German who wd give me advice...So we stopped at a neat little white house in the German colony and my guide began to converse in low tones with Herr Wasserzug - such is his incredible name - through the window while I studied the motto on the door: Gott ist unser Burg, they all have verses from the Bible over their doors... He sent me off to one Abu Nimrud, a native of Nineveh, who he said was the best man he cd. recommend...On my way I called on Mr. Monaghan [the British Vice consul in Haifa]..just as odd in his own way....He offered me books and advice...*I took...a Persian history of the Babis from him* and went off hunting Abu Nimrud all over the town.<sup>9</sup>

Her diary entry then provides these final details:

I went first to his [Abu Nimrud's] house directed by the wife of the Syrian clergyman, then his daughter took me to the bazaar where I found him in his shop, a respectable old party, and we soon came to terms. *Next I went to the house of Husein Effendi, Abbas's son in law, a man with the face of all the mystics that ever were who received me most kindly. It was odd getting into the little country store and finding oneself suddenly in the heart of the Persia of dreamers and mystics.* So I rode home and got in after 6..<sup>10</sup>

[Italics have been added here and in the following pages to emphasize key passages]

Another long letter followed on March 27:

At last I found him in his shop in the bazaar [Abu Nimrud], a polite old party with whom I speedily came to terms - he agreed to come up and give me my first lesson today, but need I say he hasn't come.'... *'The next thing was to get a Persian. My old friend 'Abbas Effendi the head of the sect, is now confined to Acre; something has happened, I don't quite know what, but anyway he and his younger brother have quarreled and the brother got the Turks to forbid 'Abbas to leave Acre, though he has a house here too. I heard however that the son in law of 'Abbas, Husein Effendi, lived here and I determined to apply to him. Accordingly I made my way to his shop - a sort of little general store like the shop of a small country town - and in this unlikely setting I found a company of grave Persians, sitting round on the biscuit tins and the bags of grain, and Husein himself leaning over the counter. The typical, the unmistakable mystic, inheritor of all the centuries of Persian mysticism, he is of the pffe [unintelligible] of which martyrs and ascetics are made and he wd go to the stake with the same dreamy ecstatic smile on his long drawn face as it wore when he answered my inquiries after 'Abbas Effendi who is for him the representative of the B..b, the Prophet that ws to come. The upshot of it is that I hope I shall end by getting a Persian to come and talk to me...*

Later. But for all that I find I shall have to d,m,nager. Abu Nimrud came up this morning and gave me a long lesson, but he declared that it was too far for him to come and that he could only get me a Persian on condition that I wd come down into the town, so I rode down this afternoon and inspected the two hotels and fixed on one standing in a charming garden where I could get 2 big comfortable rooms. It has the further advantage of being kept by Syrians so that I shall hear and speak nothing but Arabic....*Husein Effendi's brother in law is going to teach me Persian. He is a cheerful young man with a round face...*The New Hotel is my address, Haifa..<sup>11</sup>

Abbas Effendi is Abdu'l-Baha, the leader of the Baha'i community who Gertrude had first met in June of 1900 when she stopped off at Haifa with Dr. Cropper on her return voyage to Jaffa from Beirut, following her overland excursion through the Hauran. The information she had learned regarding the confinement of Abdu'l-Baha to Akka was correct - he was confined to Akka due to allegations of seditious activities made against him by his half-brother, Mohammad Ali.<sup>12</sup> However he did not have a son-in-law by the name of Husein Effendi. Abdu'l-Baha had four daughters - but in 1902, only two of them - Diya'i'yyih, the eldest and Tuba, the second oldest were married. Neither son-in-law is named Husein. Diya-i'yyih, or Zia as she was sometimes called, was married to Mirza Hadi Shirazi and Tuba was married to Mirza Muhsin Afnan.<sup>13</sup> Mirza Hadi, however, did have a store. Thornton Chase, an American Baha'i from California came on pilgrimage in 1907, and in his short published account of his pilgrimage, *In Galilee*, describes arriving in Haifa and boarding at the Hotel Pross (the same hotel that Gertrude initially went to) on the top of Mount Carmel, '...where we were met by Mr. Snyder, a German minister and missionary who keeps it. Everything was thoroughly clean and comfortable. Several English and American women tourists were there, school teachers, and some missionaries returning from India....'<sup>14</sup> On his first day, he and his companion, drove down the mountain and stopped a few minutes at Cook's '...then drove down through Haifa, *halting a little at Mirza Hadi's store...*'<sup>15</sup>

Trying to pin down who the 'Husein Effendi' was that Gertrude met in the store 'the unmistakable mystic, inheritor of all the centuries of Persian mysticism..' is difficult. Did she get the name wrong? Was it Hadi Effendi? Perhaps she did meet a Husein or Husayn, but he was not the son-in-law? Youness Afroukhteh, author of *Memories of Nine Years in Akka*, on first arriving in Haifa on pilgrimage, mentions a 'Husayn Effendi' '...who was in charge of serving tea and attending to the pilgrims's needs...'<sup>16</sup> Ali Kuli Khan also mentions a Husayn who entertained the arriving pilgrims and visitors. This Husayn, according to Kuli Khan, owned a coffee shop in Haifa: '...Aqa Husayn who had the coffee shop in Haifa and received and entertained in his establishment all the new pilgrims and visitors as they came off the ship.'<sup>17</sup>

There is another, more remote possibility: Abdu'l Baha had a nephew called Hussein Afnan, the eldest son of his half-sister, Furughiyyih. Thornton Chase met him in 1907: '...Mirza Moneer and Mirza Noure-Din...and Mirza Hussein Effendi Afnan, a student at the Beirut college, all English speakers, were with us during the few minutes until the arrival of Abdu'l-Baha...'<sup>18</sup> But it is unlikely that this was the Husein she met, as Hussein Afnan would have been very young at the time, probably too young to fit the description of the man Gertrude described as the 'mystic' Husein. Whoever it was that Gertrude met, according to her letter of March 27, he had a brother-in-law who was 'a young man with a cheerful round face' who was going to teach her Persian.

On March 31, 1902 she gives the name of her Persian teacher in her diary:

Came down in the morning with Mr. M[Monaghan] and arrived at my Hotel (New H. Ibrahim Nasar) about 10. Had an Arabic lesson and wasted time waiting for my luggage. After lunch shopped in the suk and got flowers on the railway by the palm trees. Then came my luggage and at 4 Mr. M. who stayed till 6. *After dinner my Persian Mirza Abdullah who is a dear and so to bed...*<sup>19</sup>

It is difficult, again, trying to establish the identity of Mirza Abdullah. Youness



Afroukhteh, who had come on pilgrimage to Haifa in April of 1900, was told by Abdu'l Baha that he must remain in Haifa to help with translation of tablets and correspondence into English. To this end, Dr. Afroukhteh wrote, 'He summoned a person called Abdullah Bolurih from Haifa...to teach us [Dr. Afroukhteh and another person called Amin] English. 'I immediately went to Haifa where a room in the *biruni* of Abdu'l Baha's house was arranged; Abdullah Bolurih came daily and taught English to both Mirza Amin and me'. Afroukhteh unfortunately gives no further details of Abdullah Bolurih (his family connections for instance) so it is not possible to say if this is the Abdullah who taught Gertrude Persian in 1902.

Once established in her new hotel, Gertrude settled into a routine: 'This is my day: I get up at 7; at 8 Abu Nimrud comes and teaches me Arabic till 10. I go on working till 12 when I lunch. Then I write for my Persian till 1.30 or so when I ride or walk out. Come in at 5 and work till 7 when I dine. At 7.30 My Persian comes and stays till 10 and at 10.30 I go to bed...' <sup>20</sup>

As she had in Jerusalem, she gradually widened her circle of acquaintances: she called on the Christian missionaries living in Haifa - 'I have called on all the missionaries! Heaven preserve us what a set of scarecrows!...'; <sup>21</sup> the son and daughter of Abu Nimrud, Paulina and Ibrahim came to visit, <sup>22</sup> and she had tea with a Syrian family, friends of her innkeeper <sup>23</sup> whose daughter Dora Lydia was about to go off to the American college at Beirut. <sup>24</sup>

One Sunday morning, she went out on horseback the whole length of Mount Carmel and stopped off at Daliah: 'Daliah is the place where Laurence Oliphant lived. I went to see his house and drank coffee with the old Syrian who takes care of it for L.O.'s second wife, Mrs. Templeton, a mad woman now in England.' <sup>25</sup>

That same afternoon, she visited the mother and sisters of her Persian tutor: 'This afternoon I paid a long call on the mother and sister of my Persian - their house is my house you understand, and I am to go and talk Persian whenever I like' <sup>26</sup> Her diary entry for the same day adds 'After lunch went round to Mr. Gee and saw him print. Then to Mirza Abdullah where I talked with his mother and sisters in a room looking over the sea and drank tea.' <sup>27</sup>

Her diary entry of 10/04/1902 introduced a new character - Battaj, but without explanation: 'The Baxters came to see me, after which I went to the house of Battaj.' <sup>28</sup> The next day, another two characters: 'Mr. Rust and Mr. Khaddar turned up to dinner. *Long discussion on faiths with Battaj.*' <sup>29</sup>

Then followed 3 consecutive diary entries of some interest, which are set out below. In the entry of 13/04/1902 she records her second meeting with Abdu'l Baha. It is not a propitious meeting: '*He was most polite but not very cordial I thought...*':

12/04/1902 Boring afternoon. Mr. Amin abd el Nour came to tea with me. Then I went to tea with my horse dealer Marun and then to Abu Nimrud where I saw his wife, 2 sons, Ibrahim and Philip, 3 daughters Rosa, Paulina and Ferideh and a granddaughter. All very nice people. ...*The Persians here are really Behaiys not Babis. They look on the Bab merely as the gate to the Messiah who was the Beha, a sort of John the Baptist.*

13/04/1902 Rode over to Acre. Visited the mosque which is charming and went to the house of 'Abbas who was out. Got a letter to Abu Kasim his gardener at the garden by Nahr Na'man, Shahuta is its name where I lunched under the trees Abu Kasim discoursing to me the while on religion and Abbas in Persian...oriental untidy garden full of flowers. Came rain and I sat on his balcony and drank tea. Then rode off to the Bahjeh a really lovely place with a big tank and pines and cypresses. Went into the

house and talked to the women. Then on to the Bahjeh House behind where the Beha's tomb is, where the gardener gave me flowers and so back to Acre where *I succeeded in seeing 'Abbas. He was most polite but not very cordial I thought.* His servants treat him with immense respect. We spoke chiefly of the possibilities of a universal language. So home getting in at 6.45. Talked to Mr. Khaddar and Mr. Rust who left next day early.

14/04/1902 After lunch called on Amin Abd ul Nur's wife and went to Marun's where I photographed his Arab. Then to Bahaj. Felt very ill and came home to find I had fever. Had a Persian lesson in a sort of nightmare and dreamt of it all night. *2 American globe trotters, husband and wife went off today to see Abbas with Balora. Nice old things.*<sup>30</sup>

'Bahjeh' or 'Bahaj' which she visits, is the mansion of Bahji, the last residence of Baha'u'llah before he passed away. His tomb is at Bahji. When she says that Beha's tomb is at Bahjeh House - she is referring to the tomb of Baha'u'llah.<sup>31</sup> The 2 American globe trotters that she mentions in the last diary entry, who went off with 'Balora' to see Abbas, were probably American Bahai pilgrims. 'Balora' might be her phonetic spelling of Bolurih, lending some support to the supposition that her Persian teacher might have been Abdullah Bolurih.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of April, Gertrude recorded in her diary that 2 'rather nice Americans theology professors arrived, one called Professor Vance and the other Prof. Eager.' Two days later she reported that Mirza Abdullah begged her to let him talk to Prof. Eager, 'so we had a long theological conversation wh came to little.'<sup>32</sup> Her letter to her mother the next day provided more details of this theological conversation:

'I told you that there were 2 American professors of divinity in the hotel? One whose name I don't know is a particularly attractive man, oldish, very intelligent and with a sweet goodness of face and I am sure of character which is very loveable. I was telling Mirza Abdullah about him last night and he said he wd like to see him and ask him a question. So I went out and fetched my old American, telling him the sort of person he had to deal with and Mirza Abdullah (I being interpreter) asked him what he considered were the proofs of Christ's being God. The American answered in the most charming manner, but of course cd give no proofs except a personal conviction. Mirza A: said 'He speaks as a lover, but I want the answer of the learned.' I felt as I interpreted between them how much the philosophic inquiring eastern mind differed from ours. The value of my professor attached to the vivifying qualities of Christ's teaching was entirely lost on the Oriental, and on the other hand Abdullah's dialectics were incomprehensible to the western, at least the standing point was incomprehensible. They talked for about an hour and at the end Abdullah was quite as much at a loss as before to understand why the Professor accepted one prophet and rejected the others and I'm bound to say I quite sympathised with him. He said to me after the Professor had gone: 'You must reject all or accept all; but he chooses and can give no reason. He believes what his fathers have taught him' It was a very curious evening. The professor was a perfect old angel all the time. One cd not help being immensely impressed with the quality of his faith.'<sup>33</sup>

Another diary entry follows in which the names of Abdu'l Baha's half-brothers are mentioned:

23/04/ 1902 All the 4 Americans went off early to my great regret. There remain in the hotel a party of Syrians Fuad Saad and his wife and children and governess, nice people,

from Akka. *Muhammad Ali and Badi'Allah live in his house....*<sup>34</sup>

Baha'u'llah had passed away in Akka in 1892, the year Gertrude travelled to Persia. His last residence was the Mansion at Bahji. By his Will and Testament ('the Kitab-i-Ahd') he had appointed his eldest son, Abdu'l Baha as his successor.<sup>35</sup> However not all the family and followers of Baha'u'llah accepted Abdu'l-Baha's authority under the Will and Testament. Foremost amongst the opponents were Abdu'l Baha's half brothers, Mohammad-Ali and Badi'u'llah. They are referred to as Covenant Breakers by Baha'is.<sup>36</sup>

On May 2, and May 4, 1902 we find these entries:

02/05/1902 ... M. Abdullah, Atayeh Khanem, Rafi Khanum came to see me in the afternoon. Sat with Lydia most of the rest of the day.<sup>37</sup>

04/05/1902 Drove with M. Abdullah and A. and R. Khanum to Akka. Got to Baghje (?) about 11.30 where we lunched with his mother, sister and brother in law. A son of Muhammad Ali's sister was also there Shu'a Allah. Then I was taken to see the tomb set about with lamps and covered with carpets. Zitt Allah is also buried here. Then to see Fughuriyeh Khanum and her husband Sayyid Ali. Then to the greatest widow Bibi Kh or Khanumi or Hazrat Haram where there were a lot of young women probably granddaughters and a daughter I think. Samadiyah Khanum. Drove off to Akka where I called on Muhammad Ali and Badi Allah and saw the other wife Ghauhar Khanum (Abbas's Mother's name was [Arabic characters] So home getting in at 7.<sup>38</sup>

Muhammad-Ali's and Badi'u'llah's mother was Fatimeh Khanum<sup>39</sup> Gertrude meets her on this occasion, referring to her as 'the greatest widow Bibi Kh or Khanumi or Hazrat Haram'. Gertrude also meets her daughter Samadiyah, sister of Muhammad-Ali and Badi'u'llah. Samadiyah's son is Shu'a'allah who is also present. It seems from Gertrude's notes that Muhammad-Ali and Badi'u'llah were not actually living at Bahji, but in Akka at this time. (This might explain why she wrote in her diary entry of 23/04/1902 that 'Muhammad Ali and Badi'Allah live in his [Fuad Saad's] house' <sup>40</sup>). Ghauhar Khanum who Gertrude also meets with Muhammad Ali and Badi-ullah in Akka, was Baha'u'llah's third wife. Ghauhar [properly Gawhar] had one daughter, Furughieh [its misspelled as Fughuriyeh in Gertrude's diary entry]. All of them are members of Baha'u'llah's family who had risen in opposition against Abdu'l Baha.<sup>41</sup>

There are only a few more diary entries for May, the only one of relevance here being 06/05/1902: 'On Tuesday I dined with Amir Abd u Nour to meet Mr. Monahan. Badri Beg and Mr. P Abela made up the party. *After dinner they had in old Mushkin Kalam who did tricks for us.* Amin Effendi and I went to see him one afternoon this week. Very hot.'<sup>42</sup> Mishkin-Qalam was one of the elderly Baha'i residents of Haifa, much-loved by Abdu'l Baha, an outstanding calligrapher, and known for his wit.<sup>43</sup>

Her last diary entry for May is May 15, 1902 and her mother records in *The Letters* that she returned to England at the end of May.<sup>44</sup>

1. Edward Granville Browne, *Art. VI, The Babes of Persia, Part I, Sketch of their History and Personal Experiences amongst them*, July, 1889, p. 485.

2. Burgoyne, Elizabeth, *Gertrude Bell From Her Personal Papers 1889-1914*, Ernest Benn, London, 1958, p. 96

3. In the words of Lady Bell 'Gertrude, her father and Hugo *indefatigably* start for another sea voyage after the new year...' [italics mine] *The Letters*, p. 114

4. 'This morning, Mr. Churchill appeared and took us sightseeing - he called last night and made a plan with us. He's really a horrid little man, but he was most useful and took us round to places we couldn't have got into ourselves. He hasn't changed a bit since Persia and he's just as mysterious and nasty as ever. ..We are going to spend the greater part of the day with Mr. Churchill! He is to take us this afternoon to see a private collection of coins - Father and I are nuts on Greek coins.' *Letters*, 9/2/1902 'Back to Mr Churchill's to tea. His house is full of lovely things' *Diaries*, 9/2/1902

5. Izmir, Turkey

6. For much of her time, she was the guest of a family called the Van Lennep's who owned a large farm or estate called Malkajik, about an hour's distance by train from Smyrna, near the site of the ancient city of Colophon.:

'Dearest Mother. Here you might observe me established in a Turkish farm. It's too amusing. I wake up and see the camels passing up the village street, and then I go out and photograph Greeks and Turks at their cottage doors. The village belongs to the Van Lenneps. They have quite a comfortable house where they propose to entertain me as long as I care to stay. ..Yesterday we set off directly after breakfast, taking our lunch with us and rode up to the hills where we spent the whole day exploring the ruins of Colophon. It was most exciting; we traced the walls all round and made out the whole lie of the town...The town was a very early Greek settlement 1200 to 1500 BC and the town was destroyed about 300 BC to rise anew nearer the sea on a place we are going to explore if we have time. I should like to do an article for Newbolt about it when I get home. Mr. V.L. knows every inch of the grounds and showed us all over...I saw a dragoman when I was at Smyrna whom I am going to take with me on a 6 days' tour inland - Pergamos, Magnesia, Sardis are the chief point of it...On my return I come back here and go with the V.L.'s to Laodaceae and Hierapolis after which I shall continue my journey.' *Letters*, 28/2/1902

For more information on the Van Lennep and other related Levantine families, see [http://www.levantineheritage.com/pdf/Tales\\_of\\_an\\_old\\_house\\_by\\_Helena\\_van\\_der\\_Zee.pdf](http://www.levantineheritage.com/pdf/Tales_of_an_old_house_by_Helena_van_der_Zee.pdf) retrieved December 23, 2011

7. Marzieh Gail mentions that Ali-Kuli Khan, her father, who travelled to Haifa in 1899 together with 4 other pilgrims ( she identifies a woman called Ruhani and '...a prominent merchant of Jewish background, Mirza Azizullah, who made very generous contributions toward erecting in Ishqabad the world's first Baha'i House of Worship...' and a Baha'i teacher by the name of Mirza Mahmud Furughi) had to delay his journey for a week once he reached

Constantinople, at Mirza Furughi's insistence, so the pilgrims could board the Austrian steamer for Beirut and Haifa, '... because Baha'u'llah had always praised the ships of that line.' [italics added]. See *Summon Up Remembrance*, p. 105. Whether this was true or not, and many pilgrim notes cannot be authenticated, in 1868, when Baha'u'llah was banished from Adrianople to Akka, it was an Austrian-Lloyd liner which Baha'u'llah and his family boarded in Gallipoli which took them via Smyrna to Alexandria, and from there, on another steamer of the same line, to Haifa via Port Said and Jaffa. From Haifa, the exiles were taken across the bay to Akka in a sailing boat. See *God Passes By*, Shoghi Effendi, Bahai Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1970, pps. 170-182 and Hassan Balyuzi, *Baha'u'llah The King of Glory*, George Ronald, 1980, pp263-268.

8. *Diaries*, 26/03/1902. At [http://karlmay.agerth.de/wiki/index.php/Fritz\\_Unger](http://karlmay.agerth.de/wiki/index.php/Fritz_Unger), retrieved December 27, 2011, there is the following description of Fritz Unger: Fritz Unger (\* 1876; † 19. Juli 1910 in Tireh bei Haifa) betrieb das größte Transportunternehmen in Haifa. Er war der Bruder des Beiruter Hoteliers Jakob Unger.

9. *Letters*, 26/03/1902

10. *Diaries*, 26/03/1902. A delightful history of the Haifa Templar community complete with many old photographs has been posted online by The Temple Society of Australia <http://www.templers.org/>. The history is titled *Recollection of an Old Templer*, written by Gottlieb Samuel Ruff, who was born in the community in 1890. See: <http://templesociety.com/G.Ruff%20Reminiscences%20final.pdf> downloaded January 21, 2012.

11. *Letters*, 27/03/1902

12. See H. Balyuzi, *Abdu'l Baha*, p. 92. Also, Moojan Momen, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions*, lists extracts from 3 reports of the British Vice-Consul at Haifa, Monahan, making reference to the confinement of Abdu'l Baha, in Akko, p. 319

13. Adib Taherzadeh, *The Covenant of Baha'u'llah*, George Ronald, 1992, p. 358. Taherzadeh identifies the husbands of all 4 daughters: in addition to identifying the husbands of Diya'i'yyih and Tuba, he says that Ruha, the second youngest, married Mirza Jalal and Munavvar married Ahmad Yazdi [the grand-uncle of the author]. Ruha appears to have married some time between 1904, when we know she was single and corresponding with Lua Getsinger (*Lua Getsinger Herald of the Covenant*, Velda Piff Metelmann, George Ronald, 1997, pp.82-92) and 1908 when the pilgrim notes of Helen and Ella Goodall describe her as having one child in 1908 [she had 4 altogether] (*Daily Lessons Received at Akka*, January 1908, Baha'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1979).

14. Thornton Chase, *In Galilee*, Kalimat Press, Los Angeles, 1985, p.12-13.

15. *ibid*, p.19

16. Afroukhteh, *Memories*, p. 14

16. Gail, *Summon Up Remembrance*, p. 130. This Aqa Husayn, who committed suicide *ibid.*, p. 130 is not to be confused with Husayn Aschi (see Balyuzi, *Baha'u'llah*, pp. 473-4) who had a shop in Akka.

18. Chase, *In Galilee*, p. 27

19. *Diaries*, 31/03/1902

20. *Letters*, 7/4/1902

21. *Letters*, 5/4/1902

22. *Diaries* 05/04/1902

23. *Letters* 05/04/1902

24. *Diaries* 05/04/1902

25. *Letters*, 7/4/1902

26. *ibid*

27. *Diaries* 07/04/1902

28. *ibid*, 10/04/1902

29. *ibid.*, 11/04/ 1902

30. *ibid*, 12/04/1902; 13/04/1902 and 14/04/1902

31. '...This last abode of Baha'u'llah on the plain of Akka is today known as the Mansion of Bahji, and stands adjacent to the building which enshrines His mortal remains - the most sacred spot on the earth. During the years of Baha'u'llah's incarceration in Akka this mansion had been under construction, and had risen to be the most magnificent house in the whole neighbourhood. But, in the wake of a sudden epidemic, its owner left it and fled. Thus it was that Abdu'l- Baha could rent and later purchase this palace of Udi Khammar for His Father....Its original owner lies buried in a corner of the wall that surrounds the mansion.' Balyuzi, H.M., *Abdu'l-Baha*, George Ronald, 1971, p. 42

32. *ibid*, 21/04/1902

33. *Letters*, 22/4/1902

34. *Diaries*, 23/04/1902

35. 'The Kitab-i-Ahd was read ...on the ninth day after the ascension of Baha'u'llah in the presence of nine witnesses chosen from among Baha'u'llah's companions and members of His family, including Mirza Muhammad-Ali [his half brother]. On the afternoon of the same day, it was read ...in the shrine of Baha'u'llah before a large company of the friends consisting of the Aghsan , the Afnan , the pilgrims and resident believers...'

Adib Taherzadeh, *The Child of the Covenant* George Ronald, 2000, p. 134 The text of the Kitab-i-Ahd reads in part:

‘...O ye My Branches. A might force, a consummate power lieth concealed in the world of being. Fix your gaze upon it and upon its unifying influence, and not upon the differences which appear from it. The Will of the divine Testator is this: It is incumbent upon the Aghsan [descendants of Baha’u’llah’s family]; the Afnan [descendants of the Bab’s family] and my kindred to turn, one and all, their faces toward the Most Holy Branch...’ Taherzadeh, *The Covenant*, p. 143

36. To understand the meaning of the word ‘Covenant Breaker’ as used by Bahai’s, it is necessary to understand their concept of the Covenant. Hassan Balyuzi, a Baha’i author, and himself a descendant of the Holy family, wrote this about the Covenant in his history of Abdu’l-Baha:

‘That which can give concrete form to the oneness of mankind, the oneness with which God has endowed his creation, is the teaching and precept of Baha’u’llah. Nothing else can make or will make the spiritual unity of mankind a fact indisputably acknowledged and upheld by all the denizens of the earth, the prime principle operative in every sphere of human activity. This and this alone will rescue man from self-immolation. But to do this the teaching of Baha’u’llah must not suffer corruption. Otherwise it will assuredly fail. It is the Covenant of Baha’u’llah, the invincible power of which has been tested and proved time and again, that has preserved and will preserve the integrity of his teaching. The Covenant and the Covenant alone has stayed the hand of the desecrator.

Abdu’l Baha is the Centre of this Covenant. In Him and Him alone the Covenant found its expression. His alone was the authority to divide the faithful from the Faithless.’

Balyuzi, *Abdu’l Baha*, p. 50-51.

37. *Diaries* 02/05/1902

38. *ibid.*, 04/05/1902

39. ‘The second wife of Baha’u’llah, whom He married in Tihiran in 1849, was Fatimih Khanum, usually referred to as Mahd-i-Ulya. She was a cousin of Baha’u’llah, and gave birth to six children of whom four survived - one daughter, Samadiyyih, and three sons, Muhammad-Ali, Diya’u’llah and Badi’u’llah. These four along with their mother, violated the Covenant of Baha’u’llah. Mahd-i-Ulya died in 1904” Taherzadeh, *The Covenant*, p. 117

40. Kenneth Stein, *The Land Question in Palestine, 1917-1939*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1984, confirms that Fuad Saad owned substantial land parcels in the Haifa area pps. 223-224

41. The Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, Abdu’l Baha’s grandson and in turn, successor writes in *God Passes By*, a history of the Babi and Baha’i Faith that :

‘The true ground of this crisis was the burning, the uncontrollable, the soul-festering jealousy which the admitted preeminence of Abdu’l-Baha in rank, power, ability,

knowledge and virtue, above all the other members of His Fathers family, had aroused not only in Mirza Muhammad-Ali, the arch breaker of the Covenant, but in some of his closest relatives as well...Gradually and with unyielding persistence, through lies, half-truths, calumnies and gross exaggerations, this 'Prime Mover of sedition' succeeded in ranging on his side almost the entire family of Baha'u'llah, as well as a considerable number of those who had formed his immediate entourage. Baha'u'llah's two surviving wives, His two sons, the vacillating Mirza Diya'u'llah and the treacherous Badi'u'llah with their sister and half-sister and their husbands...all united in a determined effort to subvert the foundations of the Covenant which the newly proclaimed will had laid...' (God Passes By, pps. 246-8)

42. *Letters*, 06/05/1902

43. Abdu'l Baha movingly pays tribute to him in his book, *Memorials of the Faithful*:  
 '...he was at all times my close companion. He had amazing verve, intense love...a peerless companion, a wit...For the love of God, he left all good things behind; he closed his eyes to success, he wanted neither comfort nor rest, he sought no wealth...He was always smiling, effervescing...' pp.97-101

44. *The Letters*, p. 118



## CHAPTER 6

### “EX ORIENTE”

The July 1903 issue (Volume XII, no.34) of the *Monthly Review*, a prestigious publication edited by Sir Henry Newbolt,<sup>1</sup> contained many interesting articles: *Mr. Chamberlain's Proposals*, by Viscount Goschen,; *Free Trade and Preferential Tariffs* by Ralph Neville, K.C; *Recent Naval Administration*, by H. Lawrence Swinburne, to name a few. There was one other: *Ex Oriente* by Gertrude Bell.

Gertrude's letters and diary entries have to be scoured closely to catch the few hints that she was writing such an article.

After returning from Haifa she had thrown herself, with her usual energy, into planning her next trip - travelling to India to attend the Delhi Durbar of 1903, a spectacular event organized by the Viceroy, Lord Curzon to celebrate the accession of Edward the VII to the throne.

The first hint that she had written an article appeared in a letter to her mother dated August 13, 1902 where she writes: 'You corrected my proofs with great skill, thank you so very much. It's quite like a real article, isn't it!'<sup>2</sup>

A couple of months later, by now in Bombay, she mentions 'Tomorrow I'm going to call on some Babis.'<sup>3</sup> In her diary entry the next day, she records:

At 12 drove off all through the native town to Buculla to visit my Babi, Haji Sayyed Muhammad at the Naseri Printing Press. Found him asleep in his hall, woke him up and had a pleasant conversation with him but I cd see he regarded me with suspicion and he backed out when I asked him to sell me some of Beha's books...<sup>4</sup>

Then in February of 1903, there is this reference, contained in a letter from Burma to her mother, written on the train: '... (our servant is called Ah Lee, but I believe he's a Hindu; he's certainly not Chinese) we also love the cutting about your good works and Madame Brunnari[?]. Do you think she sent it to the papers? Yes indeed I know the passage about Brunetto Latini - I quoted it in my able article about the Babis, you remember. (When is the dilatory Newbolt going to publish it?).'<sup>5</sup>

The article was published in July. It is reproduced in its entirety in Appendix 1. It is of great interest, not only because it is so little known (though recently volumes of the *Monthly Review* have become available in digitized format which might increase access to it<sup>6</sup>) but also because it brings to light some of her views on the differences between the East and the West, in their approach towards religion. She provides no sources for her information on the Babi/Baha'i faith, other than her contacts in Haifa, though it is known that Granville Browne had sent her some Babi autographs, and she would have had access to his published books and articles on the Babi's, including *A Traveller's Narrative*, published in 1891 - a history of the Babi and Baha'i faiths, written by Abdu'l Baha, and translated by Granville Browne with explanatory notes.<sup>7</sup>

The device she uses to lead to the main topic of the article, the Babi faith, is a comparison of the approaches to religion between the East and West. But first, she evokes an image of

Haifa: ‘...in that little Syrian town all men were primarily occupied with the way of salvation, some were seeking it, some had found it and had closed the door to further speculation, and some, while they felt that their feet were in the right path, knew that constant search was needed to insure their continuance on it.’ There, in the East, one can ‘learn to realise the original aspect of a religion’ shorn of the overlays of doctrinal interpretation which the West has evolved: ‘It is the Christianity of the Gospels, not that of the Church Councils, which appeals to Orientals’.

Religion in the East occupies an all-important position ... ‘The Oriental is still living in the Age of Faith..’ New creeds continue to be born. Why? Her answer reveals much about her view of Orientals: ‘The mental atmosphere which surrounds him is favourable to them; no later acquired science has stepped in to divorce him from the miraculous. He has grasped few of the laws which govern natural phenomena...His ignorance, his love of speculation, his power of sustained thought, the childlike belief which is frequently to be found in him...his readiness to accept authority wherever he meets with it - all these are the same as they were when Asia put forth religion, after religion...’

However, in the Holy Land this is changing - the West is encroaching : ‘We are too all-pervading in the Wilderness of Judea to allow of the East having a free hand. We silence with our clatter the potential seers...’ Yet there are still places where people live less influenced by ‘our’ civilization where new prophets can appear. This is her cue to introduce the Babis:

*In Acre there dwells a group of noble Persians of whom the little colony which is settled round them speak respectfully as the Holy Family. They are the sons and daughters of the last incarnation of the divinity, Beha Ullah. They and their followers are known as Babis, after the title of the founder of the sect, whom they now regard as a sort of John the Baptist, but they themselves use the term Beha’i, which distinguishes them from another and less important branch of the disciples of the Bab.*

A picturesque introduction, though curious that she emphasises the ‘Holy Family’ as the leaders of the little Baha’i community living in Acre, not Abdu’l Baha. Gertrude recognized that Abdu’l Baha was the leader of the Baha’is. She had written to her mother on first arriving in Haifa ‘My old friend ‘Abbas Effendi the head of the sect, (emphasis added) is now confined to Acre...’,<sup>8</sup> so it is notable that she fails to mention Abdu’l Baha anywhere in the article. Note also that she continuously uses the word ‘sect’ in describing this new faith.

The heart of her article lies in the description of an exchange that takes place between a Baha’i and a Western scholar. But before she gets there, she gives a brief outline of the history of the religion, from the martyrdom of the Bab in Persia to the exile of Baha’ullah to Akka. There are inaccuracies, but it is not intended to take issue with every inaccuracy. There was much misinformation circulating about the religion - even amongst Baha’is. Instead, one or two passages will be selected which contain inaccuracies, but which also seem to expose an underlying attitude on Gertrude’s part - an attitude part condescension, part scepticism.

One instance is her account of Baha’u’llah’s entry to Akka. While she observes that she is only reporting what she has been told by a ‘Beha’i’, she seizes upon it because it reinforces a point she had made earlier, that followers of Eastern religions are credulous. It also allows her to suggest that Baha’is are not above manipulating events to fulfill messianic prophecies:

*Accordingly, Subh I Ezel was shipped off to Cyprus and Baha Ullah to Acre, 'And the sea by God's mercy was calmed before his Holiness' related a Behai'i, 'And when he reached Haifa he found a white ass prepared for him which had been brought from Persia for his service. No man had ridden on it before him, and upon it he entered into Acre' - clearly an attempt to bring the incidents of Beha's life into line with the story of the New Testament. This imitation is frequently to be traced in Beha'i anecdote; it corresponds to the desire of the Evangelists to draw together the Old Testament and the new: 'That the Scripture might be fulfilled..*

A truer description of Baha'u'llah's entry into Akka, *sans* white ass, was not far off. It was contained in a book, *Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi* published the same year that Gertrude's article was published, in 1903.<sup>9</sup> The introduction was written by no less an authority than Edward Granville Browne; the author was Myron Phelps, who traveled to Haifa in the company of Countess Canavarro,<sup>10</sup> a Buddhist, to learn more of the Baha'i Faith from Abdu'l Baha. The book contains a first-hand description by Bahi'yyih Khanum, Abdu'l-Baha's sister, of the suffering experienced by Baha'u'llah's family during their successive exiles from Tehran to Baghdad, Constantinople, Adrianople and finally Akka.

This is Bahi'yyih Khanum's description of Baha'u'llah's entry to Akka:

After a voyage of about two days we landed at Haifa, in Syria. All were sick, from hunger or eating improper food. I myself was a healthy woman up to the time of taking this voyage; since then I have never been well. We remained one day in the prison at Haifa, the men in chains, and were then taken in small boats to Akka (a distance of ten miles) The water was very rough, and nearly all became seasick. Akka, as we afterwards learned, was a prison to which the worst criminals were commonly sent from all parts of the Turkish Empire. It was reported to have a deadly climate. There was a saying that if a bird flew over Akka it would fall and die. At that time there was no landing for the city; it was necessary to wade ashore from the boats. The governor ordered that the women be carried on the backs of the men. My brother was not willing that this should be done and protested against it. He was one of the first to land, and procured a chair, in which with the help of one of the believers, he carried the women ashore. The Blessed Perfection was not allowed to leave his boat until all his family had landed. When he had come ashore, the family was counted and taken to the army barracks, in which we were to be imprisoned. From the terrible sufferings and privations of the journey we were nearly all sick; worst of all, perhaps, the Blessed Perfection and myself.<sup>11</sup>

Scepticism is also apparent in Gertrude's description of Baha'u'llah's seemingly comfortable living arrangements, and speculation about his sources of income:

*'Beha bought himself lands outside the town, laid out a garden a true Persian garden, on the banks of the river, and took up his abode in a large house in the corn-growing lands of Acre, for in those days, and during all his lifetime, money flowed in from Persia to support the exiles, money enough to permit of Beha's organizing an army of missionaries both in Persia and India....'*

Here Gertrude overlooks that Baha'u'llah came to Akka as a prisoner<sup>12</sup> and that for the

first two years of his arrival in Akka, he was confined to the citadel of Acre, used as a prison by the Ottoman authorities. It took a further 7 years before the strict conditions of his imprisonment relaxed sufficiently to allow him to take up residence outside of the confines of Akka. Gertrude knew this. She had taken a photo of the citadel of Akka, showing the corner where his prison room was situated, on her first trip to Akka in 1890.

As to where the Baha'is got their money from, it seems to have been a common topic for speculation in Haifa in those early days. Thornton Chase, an American Baha'i who went on pilgrimage in 1907, remembers in his book, *In Galilee*, a conversation that took place in his hotel one evening between the guests: '...one lady said she had heard that Americans sometimes came all the way there expressly to visit him [Abdu'l-Baha] and receive his teachings and she wondered how they could be such fools. She also supposed they brought much money to him...' <sup>13</sup>

On the topic of American converts, Gertrude had her own distinctive views:

*The Babis are convinced that they will eventually conquer the West also, and their belief in Babi-ism as a universal religion was strengthened a year or two ago by the conversion of a small number of Americans...It would be useless to point out to them that in a land where Mrs. Eddy and the Third Elijah flourish, the making of converts is not dependent upon the merits of the faith, and that there is a curious sentimentalism combined with a certain want of balance sometimes to be found in the complex American mind which makes it peculiarly susceptible to religious influences...*

She touches upon one of the fundamental tenets of Baha'i belief, the principle of progressive revelation - that revelation is 'an infinite, progressive process'. <sup>14</sup>

*He instructed his followers to acquire with all diligence Western science, and insisted that the sun of learning which dawned in the East is now at its zenith in Europe; but he was an Oriental wise in Oriental philosophy, and he handled the East reverently, not forgetting that he was one of the hierarchy of manifestations of the Divinity, from Zoroaster to Mahommed all Orientals, and all equally engaged in bringing revelation up to date, that is of suiting it to the developing needs of man...*

But though she concedes that Baha'u'llah did bring new doctrines and practices ('maxims' in her words) more in accord with modern times - encouraging charity, for instance 'without burdening it with an incipient communism such as would cripple the social organism' still, for her, Christianity is not lacking by comparison, because it has, throughout the centuries, modified itself to make itself a modern working creed:

*'he [Baha'u'llah] has nothing to add to those accepted modifications, exceptions or additions, by which we have tried to make Christianity a working creed.'*

And she returns to the incident in her hotel in Haifa when her tutor, Abdullah, asked to

speak to the American she identified as ‘Professor Eager’ in her diary. In the encounter between Abdullah and the professor, Abdullah eagerly asks the professor what are his proofs of Christ’s divinity. And Gertrude has to concede of the professor’s answers ‘how little fitted they were to convince the Oriental.’ The professor touches upon ‘the long hope of the Jews’ but expressly repudiates a strict Messianic interpretation of the scriptures, as well he might, considering that one of the tenets of the Baha’i religion is that Baha’u’llah represents the return of the Messiah. As Gertrude puts it in her article - ‘To the Mahommedan Beha Ullah says, ‘I am the Mahdi;’ to the Jew, ‘I am the Messiah;’ to the Christian, ‘I am the Comforter who was promised you...’<sup>15</sup>

The professor puts forward another ground for his belief - seeing Christ’s message ‘as the greatest dynamic force the world has ever experienced.’ Gertrude’s summary of Abdullah’s response to this is telling:

‘To this the Persian had no answer to give, for the phrase meant nothing to him. He set little store by dynamics; he asked of a faith that it should give him a resting-place for the contemplative mind, not that it should furnish an incentive to action...’

If that were indeed Abdullah’s response, then it would be a very poor representation of Baha’i belief. This is typical of Baha’ullah’s call to his followers, contained in the *Hidden Words*,<sup>16</sup> one of the earliest books revealed by him:

O Son of Being!  
Bring thy self to account each day,  
ere thou art summoned to a reckoning;  
for death, unheralded, shall come upon thee  
and thou shalt be called to give account  
for thy deeds.

As in the real life meeting between the professor and Abdullah, in her article the two fail to find common ground, though they part with mutual respect and esteem:

*...but with opinions as widely diverse as when they met, and the interpreter was left with the sense of one who has been cast backwards and forwards between two hemispheres, has caught a momentary glimpse of two facets of the many-sided jewel of truth, and realized for a moment that the light of knowledge rises for each of us from that undefined quarter of which Landor speaks:*

Look from your arcade, the sun rises from Busrah;  
Go thither, it rises from Ispahan.  
Alas, it rises neither from Ispahan nor Busrah,  
But from an ocean impenetrable to the diver.

Gertrude Lowthian Bell

1. Sir Henry John Newbolt was a poet and author who between 1900-1905 edited the *Monthly Review*.

2. *Letters*, 13/08/1902

3. *Letters*, 12/12/1902

4. *Diaries*, 13/12/1902

5. *Letters*, 25/02/1903

6. Copies of volumes of the *Monthly Review* are now offered for sale on Amazon produced by publishers such as Generalbooksclub.com and Nabu Press using OCR (optional character recognition) software.

7. It was originally published anonymously.

8. *Letters*, March 27, 1902

9. Myron H. Phelps, *Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi*, G.P. Putnam's sons, 1903. Years later, on the passing of Abdu'l Baha in November, 1922, Edward Granville Browne wrote an obituary for him in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, where he referred the readers of the obituary to Myron Phelps' book with the comment that it was the best account of Abdu'l Baha published in English 'chiefly from information supplied by Bahaiyya Khanam', his sister. JRAS, Jan., 1922, p. 145.

10. Youness Afroukhteh who was living in Haifa at the time of their visit, and interpreted for Mr. Phelps and the Countess provides the following description of the Countess and Mr. Phelps:

'The American Mme. De Canavarro had previously been attracted to the Buddhist faith, had become one of its ardent teachers and had spent large sums over the years in propagation of her views. Sister Sanghamitta, as she was known, was an accomplished and well-respected member of her Faith and had a long-standing acquaintance with Western philosophy and a deep knowledge of Indian mysticism. Mr. Phelps, on the other hand might be considered to be Sister Sanghamitta's spiritual brother. He professed belief in Buddhism..' *Memories*, pps.. 144/5

11. Phelps, *Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi*, pp75-76.

12. 'The farman of Sultan Abdu'l-Aziz, dated the fifth of Rabi'u'th-Thani 1285 A.H. (July 26, 1868), not only condemned them [the exiles] to perpetual banishment, but stipulated their strict incarceration, and forbade them to associate either with each other or with the local inhabitants. The text of the farman itself was read publicly, soon after the arrival of the exiles, in the principal mosque of the city as a warning to the population.' Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 186 .

13. Chase, *In Galilee*, p.13

14. 'Thus the Baha'i Faith views revelation as an infinite, progressive process and sees it as historically relative to a continually changing world. Each revelation depends on humanity's spiritual capacity, which in turn is dependent on the spiritual, cultural and social development of the peoples of that particular time. The word of God is revealed to the people of the world 'in direct proportion to their spiritual capacity, to their ability to sustain the burden of His Message.' This theme appears as a *leitmotiv* throughout the scripture of Baha'u'llah:

*All that I have revealed unto thee with the tongue of power, and have written for thee with the pen of might, hath been in accordance with thy capacity and understanding, not with My state and the melody of My voice.'*

Udo Schaefer, *Baha'i Ethics in Light of Scripture*, Vol. 1, Doctrinal Fundamentals, George Ronald, 2007, pps. 20-21.

15. 'The advent of Baha'u'llah represents the fulfilment of the messianic hopes in all religions for the coming of a saviour who, after a time of chaos and confusion, will renew the world and bring about a new age of peace and justice:

The promise is fulfilled...the Hour..hath come..the Trumpet hath been blown'

ibid, p. 82

16. *The Hidden Words of Baha'u'llah*, published, London, 1929 by authority of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, *translated by* Shoghi Effendi, *with the assistance of some English friends*. Adib Taherzadeh, a Baha'i historian, who has written a 4 volume chronological series on the writing of Baha'ullah, places *the Hidden Words* during Baha'u'llah sojourn in Baghdad: 'The *Hidden Words* was revealed by Baha'u'llah about 1858 on the banks of the Tigris...' *The Revelation of Baha'u'llah, Baghdad 1853-63* George Ronald, 1974, p.71

## CHAPTER 7

### RELIGION

Elsa Richmond, Gertrude's sister, made a note of what she thought were her sister's first comments on religion, found in a letter written to Lady Bell from Queens College, dated March 30, 1894 when Gertrude was just 16:

We were confirmed last Friday at Marylebone Church. The Bishop had been very ill and though he was well enough to officiate, he could not speak very loud; I could hear him quite well, but some of the other girls could not. He gave us two very nice addresses, but not very kind; on the whole he did not attract me much. However, the man who prepared us, Mr. Page Roberts, was so nice; Auntie Katie like him exceedingly. Dearest Mother indeed I have made many resolutions, and I do hope you will find me a better daughter and more obedient, and perhaps a little changed at any rate. It is very difficult to say this sort of thing on paper, you must know that the deeper one feels a thing the less one likes to talk about it, but you will believe that I am trying to apply the lessons I have learnt to all the bothers and worries.

Elsa adds this note: 'This is the only direct reference to Gertrude's religious beliefs that I have come across in any letter. It would seem that the impression made on her by her Confirmation was not a very lasting one.'<sup>1</sup>

Just three years later, Gertrude attended a lecture of the Bishop of Ripon while an undergraduate at Lady Margaret Hall. 'He is a very marvelous preacher. ...St. Mary's was fuller than I ever saw it before, all the Undergraduates' gallery and all the passages were packed close with men sitting and standing. I don't wonder at all!'

Elsa comments:

Then, as now, a deep spiritual hunger existed among the young as well as the old, or they would not crowd to hear a sermon; but how many of those who thronged St. Mary's had their lives vitally affected by anything they heard?

To Gertrude, deep as was her sense of duty and lofty her ideals, no religious creed in later years meant anything, and although she may still in those Oxford days have been vaguely searching for some spiritual reality, for the greater part of her life she was, or said she was, without any religion at all.<sup>2</sup>

Lady Bell, Gertrude's mother, confirms this. Commenting on one of Gertrude's letters from Jerusalem admiring some churches, Lady Bell wrote: 'Gertrude's interest in the Holy places was that of the archaeologist only, and not that of the believer.'<sup>3</sup> Gertrude's letters and diaries tell the same story. On a trip to Italy with a dear friend, Mary Talbot, in 1894, Gertrude records for two Sundays in a row: 'Mary went to Church and I to the Uffizi..';<sup>4</sup> and again: 'Mary went to church and I walked along the Lungarno in the sunshine home.'<sup>5</sup> She was not a church-goer.

Her account of meeting with a young novitiate while on holiday in Austria, also speaks of her attitude to religion:

'..We got a peasant girl to carry our packs...I had a long talk with her and found that she was being educated in a convent and intended to be a nun. She had 3 more years of



novitiate. She was going to be a Dominican nun and would never come out of her convent nor see any one except the other nuns and the children who come in to be taught. I asked her if she wouldn't mind but she said Doch Nein. She had 3 sisters in convents so it seems to run in the family. She told me all about her day in the convent, her prayers and her walks and her lessons and what she liked most - all with her head bent down and her eyes fixed on the ground and in the same mild little voice. I think she was a stupid little thing and a contented.'<sup>6</sup>

But Gertrude's letters and diaries only partially reveal her intellectual interests. She was a voracious reader. Newcastle University Library houses in their Special Collection Department, the Gertrude Bell Library. The online catalogue lists almost 900 books in the Gertrude Bell library - books in German, English, Arabic, French, on history; art; language; religion; architecture; archaeology; travelogues; Biblical exegesis; politics.<sup>7</sup> These books would have greatly contributed towards shaping her views on life and religion.

Two extracts, one from the writings of Ernst Renan, the other from Friedrich Nietzsche, are set out below. In a letter identified only as written in 1897<sup>8</sup> Gertrude mentions that she is reading Renan, though she does not say which book. Similarly, in a diary entry of May 1899<sup>9</sup> she mentions that she is reading Nietzsche, again not mentioning which book. Some liberty has been taken in selecting these particular passages from the two authors, but they have been chosen because they set out clearly the critical thinking which was current in her time that was challenging traditional religious views.

The Renan selection is from the preface to the *Life of Jesus*. An introduction to this book, taken from a university text states: 'Renan's *Life of Jesus* is one of the best known examples of the so-called historical criticism of the Bible. Renan began the project while on an archaeological mission in Syria to gather ancient Phoenician inscriptions, and the resulting book is suffused with his first-hand impressions of what he calls 'the East'...':<sup>10</sup>

...The objections made against me have come from two opposing parties. One set has been addressed to me by free-thinkers, who do not believe in the supernatural, nor, consequently, in the inspiration of the sacred books; or else by theologians of the liberal Protestant school, who have come to take such broad doctrinal views that the rationalist can readily arrive at an understanding with them. These adversaries and I find ourselves on common ground; we start with the same principles; we can discuss according to the rules followed in all questions of history, philology, and archaeology. As to the refutations of my book (and these are much the most numerous) which have been made by orthodox theologians, both Catholic and Protestant, who believe in the supernatural and in the sacred character of the books of the Old and New Testaments, they all involve a fundamental misapprehension. If the miracle has any reality, this book is but a tissue of errors. If the Gospels are inspired books, and true consequently to the letter, from beginning to end, I have been wholly in the wrong in not contenting myself with piecing together the broken fragments of the four texts, as the Harmonists do, sure of constructing thus an ensemble at once most redundant and most contradictory. If, on the contrary, miracle is a thing inadmissible, then I am right in regarding the books which contain miraculous tales as history mixed with fiction, as legends full of inaccuracies, errors, and systematic shifts. If the Gospels are like other books, I am right in treating them in the same manner as the student of Greek, Arabian or Hindoo lore treats the legendary documents which he studies. Criticism knows no infallible texts; its first principle is to admit the possibility of error in the text which it examines.

And let no one assert that to put the question in such a manner implies that we take for granted beforehand what is to be proved in detail, - namely, that the miracles related by the Gospels had no reality; that the Gospels are not books written by help of the Divinity. Those two negations do not with us result from our method of criticism; they are anterior to it. They are the outcome of an experience which has never been belied. Miracles are things which never happen. Only credulous people think they see them: you cannot cite a single one which has taken place in presence of witnesses competent to give a clear account of it. No special intervention of the Divinity, whether in the composition of a book, or in any event whatever, has been proved. In the very fact that one admits the supernatural, he is so far outside the province of science; he accepts an explanation which is non-scientific, an explanation which is set aside by the astronomer, the physicist, the chemist, the geologist, the physiologist, - one which the historian also must set aside. We reject the supernatural for the same reason that we reject the existence of centaurs and hippogriffs; and this reason is that nobody has ever seen them...<sup>11</sup>

The excerpt from Nietzsche is short:

You see what it was that really triumphed over the Christian god; Christian morality itself, the concept of truthfulness that was understood ever more rigorously, the father confessor's refinement of the Christian conscience, into intellectual cleanliness at any price. Looking at nature as if it were proof of the goodness and governance of a god; interpreting history in honor of some divine reason, as a continual testimony of a moral world order and ultimate moral purposes; interpreting one's own experiences as pious people have long enough interpreted theirs, as if everything were providential, a hint, designed and ordained for the sake of the salvation of the soul - that is *all over* now... <sup>12</sup>

It is this version of Christianity described by Nietzsche, a Christianity divorced from divinity, and constrained and modified to allow for an 'orderly' and 'practical society', which Gertrude endorses at the end of the debate between the Persian and the Christian professor in her article 'Ex Oriente'. She comes down in favour of the Professor, because for her, Christianity has been modified into 'the best possible working code':

Our wish is, roughly speaking, to arrive at the best possible working code...Further, it can scarcely be questioned that, going forward according to our lights, we have reached in practice a better idea of our duty towards our neighbour than any that is to be found in the East. We have given the matter much thought, far more than the Oriental is accustomed to devote to it, and we have considerably modified the teaching of the New Testament which has formed the basis of our system, just as in all probability we should have modified the teaching of Zoroaster. If we do not turn the other cheek, it is not only because we have found the process to be disagreeable to ourselves, but also because we consider that it rarely produces the desired result in the mind of the striker and still more rarely is advantageous to society at large, which it is our first duty to protect. For the same reasons, and not primarily because we fear starvation, we do not give all we have to the poor. But these compromises, resulting from a deep-seated regard for the individual combined with a clear conception of an orderly and practical society, seem to the Oriental illogical, and the result gained by them supremely unimportant.<sup>13</sup>

In view of the strong religious preconceptions that Gertrude brought with her to Haifa, is it possible to say that her contact with the Baha'is there changed her or affected her religious views? The answer has to be no, judging from her article. Youness Afroukhteh, who used to translate for Abdu'l-Baha when he had Western visitors, recounted that during the visit of Myron Phelps and Madame de Canavarro, the Buddhist, Abdu'l-Baha spoke of the qualities that were needed to understand the 'mysteries of the Kingdom':

Tell her that the effects and influences of the mysteries of the Kingdom are spiritual not material. Ear and tongue are material faculties. If the soul is not susceptible to receiving the divine favours, of what use are ears and tongues? These spiritual concepts are directed to your heart. I speak to you with the power of spirit and you receive these heavenly concepts with your whole being, with pure intentions and a radiant heart. The essential requirement is true, sincere and heartfelt communication...<sup>14</sup>

It would appear that Gertrude's soul was not susceptible to Abdu'l-Baha's spiritual influence. However, she did come away from Haifa with a new weapon in her anti-religious arsenal - the concept of progressive revelation, which she would use to try confound her brother Hugo's religious convictions on her tour of the world with him in 1902/1903.

Upon returning from Haifa, Gertrude set about planning her next adventure which was to attend the Delhi Durbar. As early as July, 1902 she wrote from Switzerland to her mother 'I'm delighted to hear that Mr. Chirol is coming to Delhi..'<sup>15</sup> and in August she wrote 'I had a very pleasant dinner with Domnul and tete-a-tete on Monday. We drew out maps and discussed his Persian journey and our Indian plans...we next meet in Delhi..<sup>16</sup>

Her travelling companion was to be her brother, Hugo. Hugo was Gertrude's opposite. Quiet, shy, delicate in childhood, an exceptional piano player and composer, he had graduated from Trinity College, Oxford in 1900, and formed the determination to become a pastor. Elsa Richmond, his sister remarked in a book written in tribute to Hugh after he passed away, *Hugh Lowthian Bell, 1878-1926* <sup>17</sup> the decision to have him travel with Gertrude was partly to improve his health, always delicate, and 'partly to widen his mental outlook and give him the chance of seeing something of the world before taking orders.'<sup>18</sup>

Michael Furse, a Don at Trinity College and friend of Hugo, who later became a Bishop, sent the following account to Lady Bell of a conversation he had with Gertrude, before they set out on their world tour, in which she made clear her intention of trying to shake Hugo's religious beliefs:

I remember well a walk which I took one evening on the sands at Redcar with his very remarkable and charming sister Gertrude; it was just before she and Hugo were going off round the world together. In her delightfully blunt and provocative way, she turned on me suddenly and said in a very defiant voice, "I suppose you don't approve of this plan of Hugo going round the world with me?" "Why shouldn't I", I said. "Well, you may be pretty sure he won't come back a Christian." "Why do you say that?" I asked. "Oh, because I've got a much better brain than Hugo, and a year in my company will be bound to upset his faith.."...<sup>19</sup>

Some of the exchanges on religion that took place between Hugo and Gertrude were recorded by Hugo in his diary, and were reproduced in *Hugh Lowthian Bell*, the tribute to him compiled by his family after his death. A selection from these conversations is set out below.

They probably are the clearest reflection of Gertrude's views on religion.

*Thursday, November 27, 1902*

Gertrude is an excellent person for a traveling companion, for besides the fact that she has been in the East before and takes a great interest in things oriental, she also (which is of greater interest to me) holds strong atheistic and materialistic views, the effect of which will be, as Michael Furse says, to put me on my mettle. She holds them sometimes aggressively: I, thinking that aggressiveness on her part will probably be met by aggressiveness on mine and that we shall thereupon be rude and quarrel, begged her a few weeks ago to refrain from aggressiveness. She, though she didn't think we should quarrel, agreed to this...

*December 15<sup>th</sup>, Monday - DAULATABAD, INDIA*

At dinner we talked about genius - I said I thought that personal attractiveness among other things, might be called genius. Some people had the natural gift of influencing others by their personality. I said that personal attractiveness and goodness might influence quite alien people. Gertrude said that the Chinese would be very little influenced by it. I quoted what Henry Newbolt said to me on November 12<sup>th</sup> (how long ago it seems) that if he were a missionary he would certainly go to China, as the people there were full of wonderful capacity for religion...

*Sunday, February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1903 - MUTTRA-DIG*

....Started at 1-15 to drive to Dig. On the way I mentioned some weak point of Genesis - Methuselah's age, etc. Gertrude said "Did orthodox Christians still hold the theory of verbal inspiration?" I said it had been impossible during the nineteenth century to hold that all scripture was verbally inspired. "Then what do you mean when you say inspiration?" I would confine inspiration to the things which concern human nature exclusively, not the external world of which men's views must be modified by the progress of science. Spiritual insight into human nature can, it seems to me, be given by revelation and not disproved.

"Then what about Mahomet?"

I should say he was certainly inspired - although being a man he was liable to err and misinterpret, and the revelation to him may only have been partial.

"On that supposition surely it was very deceitful of God to give one revelation at one time and 600 years later to give another which should lead men astray. And the fact that Christians take upon themselves to preach to Mahomedans must be derived from a fresh revelation, posterior to the time of Mahomet, since the Mahomedan revelation was posterior to the Christian."

The Christian revelation was itself one which could not be supplanted. It was expressly for all times - besides which it seems to be in accord with what is best in human nature.

"Then you are accommodating it to fit with your views on human nature. There is no reason why, if Christ had one revelation and Mahomet another, both being convinced that their revelation came from God, one revelation should be more valid than the other..."

Then she went on to talk about miracles... "Do the orthodox (by which she mean me!) accept them or are they not thought necessary for the Christian faith?"

I said they are not necessary, except the Resurrection, which is absolutely. I don't mind much whether I accept or reject them, but as matter of fact if you accept the Resurrection the

others follow.

She said that it is impossible to disprove the Resurrection or to say that though no other man had been know to rise from the dead, yet one man might not do so.

I said you can't disprove the Resurrection nor can you disprove the existence of God. You can neither prove nor disprove the existence of God. Personally I think the existence of God a necessary presupposition to the universe.

She said she could see no necessity for the existence of a God in the universe. When you go back to the beginning of all things you come to matter and force behind which you can't get. There may have been something behind them, but she couldn't say what it was. It was nothing.

I said if you say it was 'It' it must be something.

She said it certainly was nothing that had a name. I said you can't call it nothing, it must be something, but she disagreed.

This seems to be the ultimate first principle on which the rest of our thought is based, and on which we disagree...

#### *February 15, 1903 - DARJEELING*

In the evening, I asked Gertrude a question about the Brahmo Samaj, which led us on to the effect of the philosophy of the Hindus on their life...

I said I thought their [Hindu's] metaphysics has a very slight influence on their lives, or if they have any influence it was a bad influence.

She thought the idea of a metaphysics which should influence their life at all was alien to them. Besides, that didn't matter, as virtue and vice were quite vague terms which to her hadn't any meaning.

The great object in life is to let people go their own way, to hinder them as little as possible, for that is the way to make society go on well and, therefore to give the completest pleasure to the self. The only reasonable motive to action is the satisfaction of the self. No other motive has any place at all, and that motive is not only the only reasonable one, but the noblest and best that can possibly be.

I said, but the individual is not existence except in his relation to society and he was bound to look to the effect of his actions on society whether in his lifetime or after his death.

She said she didn't care a pin what happened after her death. She had one life to lead, and at her death should go out like a candle. What possible interest could she take in the well-being of society after her death?<sup>20</sup>

Interestingly, none of these debates were recorded by Gertrude. Her diaries and letters were instead filled with the sights and sounds of the Delhi Durbar and the wonders of the East:

#### *December 31, 1902*

In the afternoon we drove out to leave letters of introduction and write our names of [sic] governors and generals and viceroys. You can't think what the camp is like, an immense town of tents stretching for miles on all sides of Delhi, with streets and roads and dairies and hospitals. And I'm told that Lord Curzon had arranged that if a single case of plague appeared in Delhi, the whole thing was to have been removed bodily to Agra where the ground has been surveyed and mapped out for it. Perhaps if the Moguls had been doing it they would have built a whole city of red sandstone and marble for the fortnight's festivities but even they could not have lighted it with electric light and filled it with

every kind of civilization which has existed from 2000 BC until now. On the whole I expect this is the finest show that has ever been known. There is an American in our hotel who said to me after the Entry on Monday "We can't do this in Boston." Need I say more!<sup>21</sup>

Then there is this description of the Durbar horseshoe:

*January 1, 1903*

We put on our best clothes and started off at 9 for a 4 miles drive to the Durbar horseshoe. The road was packed with people of every kind, but we managed to reach our destination about 10.30. Then we had a most amusing party, walking round and talking to the people and looking at the Rajas as they arrived. I wonder how many millions' worth of jewels that place held! It was shaped like this [sketch of horseshoe] but colossally large. ...The function began with the entrance of the Delhi siege Veterans - this was a great moment of all, a body of old men, white and native, and every soul in that great arena rose and cheered. At the end came some 20 or 30 Gurkhas, little old men in bottle green, some bent double with years, some lame and stumbling with Mutiny wounds. And last of all came an old blind man in a white turban, leaning on a stick. As he passed us, he turned his blind eyes towards the shouting and raised a trembling hand to salute the unseen thousands of the race to which he had stood true.<sup>22</sup>

She then has a laugh at her own expense, suffering an uncomfortable morning walk at a hill station in Rajasthan:

I left H. sleeping and went out soon after sunrise to the top of the highest hill to see the view, which was most beautiful. I got up in 40 minutes and was too proud to come down the same way with the result that I presently found myself in the thickets of cactus jasmine and prickles through which I struggled for an hour and a half and reached the road looking like a porcupine with my clothes quite full of thorns and sharp grass seeds. Muhammad and another man spent nearly an hour taking them out, but that gown remained a kind of Iron Maiden for the rest of the day and I find some prickles in it still...<sup>23</sup>

Domnul too suffered a misadventure:

'Mr. Chirol has not been able to come with us. His sad story is this - but don't make it public for he may not wish it known -: As he was coming from Peshawar last month, he passed, at dead of a cold night, a place called Saharanpur. Domnul was asleep and was much disgusted when a Babu opened the window, put his head in and shouted 'Saharanpur!' Domnul shut the window again and composed himself to sleep. In a minute the Babu came back, opened the window again and shouted very loud and clear in Domnul's ear 'Saharanpur!' This was more than Domnul cd. stand and he pushed the man away with his hand. Whereat the man came in by the door, very angry and said 'I am medical man, very high offeecial!' and accused Domnul of having assaulted him evidently wanting 10 rupees. Mr. Chirol refused to make any apology but gave his name and address, and when he got to Calcutta and told Walter Lawrence the tale as a joke, and W.L. said 'Tell the Viceoy-it'll please him!' But the Viceroy's only comment was to say grimly 'Yes, it doesn't do to wake up an Englishman at 2AM!' And last week Domnul received a summons and is now, I expect, answering a charge of assault at

Saharanpur! He says he begins to realize the results of the Viceroy's policy and Arthur is delighted and says it couldn't have happened to a better person. Meantime (we must never say it!) we are rather comfy without him and 2 is far the best party for Indian travel.<sup>'24</sup>

And travel they did - through Peshawar, the gateway to the Khyber Pass : '.. at once you know that Peshawar is like no other town in India. The tall bearded Pathans stalk the streets and don't trouble much to get out of your way, nor does your driver hustle them for that might mean a row and knives out;...Kabulis from the forbidden land across the border swagger along, fully conscious that wherever they may find themselves there is no arbiter but the Afghan knife...'<sup>25</sup>; through Bengal, visiting Calcutta, and Darjeeling, then on to Rangoon, Burma where they stop to visit the Schwedagon pagoda : 'The reason why the Shway Dagon is so holy is because it is built over relics of the 3 Buddhas and there is a 5<sup>th</sup> coming before the end of our era- you may say roughly within the next 50 billion million of years. No 'urry, no 'urry!'<sup>'26</sup>

So they continued, arriving in Canada in June: '... we got to Victoria at 10 this morning, a lovely hilly country covered with immemorial forest..the wide channels between Victoria and Vancouver are most beautiful; wooded bays, forest slopes and behind all, great snowy peaks. A surprisingly narrow channel leads into Vancouver harbour. As you approach you see a somewhat gaunt business town stretched along the edge of the exquisite bay and behind the broken uneven lines of its houses, some one storey high and some ten, and behind them the naked trunks of huge burnt pines standing up against the sky, the ousted and...protesting forest.'

They were back in England by July. Hugh was ordained in 1908, notwithstanding Gertrude's efforts.

1.*Earlier Letters*, p. 20

2.*ibid*, pps. 132-133

3.*The Letters*, p. 56

4.*Diaries* 07/02/1894

5.*ibid.*, 14/02/1894

6.*Diaries*, 20/08/1895

7. Abdu'l Baha's *A Traveller's Narriative* is listed, as is Granville Browne's *A Literary History of Persia* .

8.*Letters*, -/-/1897. This reference to Renan is not to be confused with her diary entry of 04/01/1898 when she mention that she has started reading Renan's *History of the Jews*. The 1897 letter written on the train from York to London states 'I am reading the Renan book and am fascinated with it. It is really a beautiful book...'

9.*Diaries*, 18/05/1899

10. *Readings in Western Civilization, 8 Nineteenth-Century Europe; Liberalism and Its Critics.*, edited by Jan Goldstein and John Boyer, the University of Chicago Press, 1988, pp.337.

11. *ibid.*, pps. 338-339.

12. *ibid.*, p. 407-408.

13. Integral to this view is an assumption of the superiority of the West. See also Rosamund Dale Owen, aka Rosamond Templeton, the second Mrs. Laurence Oliphant, whose house on Mt. Carmel Gertrude had visited. [*Letters*, 7/4/1902]. She lived for many years in Haifa, and wrote, *My Perilous Life in Palestine*, her autobiography with recollections of her years in Haifa. This is an excerpt from her book, in which she sets out straightforwardly her grounds for rejecting the Baha'i Faith, or any Eastern religion - her belief in the cultural and moral superiority of the West :

‘...but I can affirm, because of my long experience in this land, that when a Christian asserts that he may look to an Oriental to find a fresh impetus Christ-ward, it is like saying that the sun must seek fresh light from the lamp of an automobile. The lamp may serve a use which the sun does not serve, and the Orient may teach us some lessons, but those lessons are few and limited. It is we, supplying the Orient with almost all that it needs, who are the teachers; and not they, receiving the fruits of our multifarious energies, who must instruct us.

We, the Christian nations, build the schools, the hospitals, the missions, the railways, the bridges, the roads, so far as my observation goes. We discover new inventions, and put them into use; we teach the arts and sciences; we heal and help and energize the non-Christians everywhere; then why, doing the brunt of the work, should we come to nations for instruction who do little of it, but who, depending helplessly upon us, ask for everything and give almost nothing...’ *My Perilous Life In Palestine*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1928, p. 237.

14. Afroukhteh, *Memories*, p. 146-7

15. *Letters*, 21/7/1902

16. *Letter*, 13/8/1902

17. *Hugh Lowthian Bell, 1878-1926, A Record and Some Impressions*, printed for private circulation, Middlesbrough, 1928

18. *ibid.*, p. 109.

19. *The Letters*, p. 131

20. *Hugh Lowthian Bell*, pps. 110-1149

21. *Letters*, 31/12/1902

22. *Letters*, 1/1/1903



23. ibid, 22/12/1902

24. ibid, 18/1/1903

25. ibid, 23/1/1903

26. ibid, 25/2/1903

## CHAPTER 8

### WORLD WAR I AND BAGHDAD

We have suggested that Gertrude's visit to Haifa in 1902 was to study the Baha'i community and to record her findings, which she did in the article *Ex Oriente*, published in the *Monthly Review* in 1903. Twenty years later, she would again be studying and reporting on the activities of the Baha'i community, this time in an official capacity as Oriental Secretary to the British High Commissioner in a post-WWI Iraq.

A span of 12 years intervened between her return from her round-the-world tour with her brother Hugh in 1902-1903, and the start of World War 1. These were years of extensive travel and exploration in the Middle East. A glance at the catalogue of archeological and travel photographs in the Gertrude Bell Archive, an archive of some 7,000 photographs listed in chronological order and posted online by the University of Newcastle, School of Historical Studies<sup>1</sup>, shows the extent of her travels: 1905 - Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Syria, Turkey; 1907 - Turkey; 1909 - Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Iraq; 1911 - Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Iran; 1913-1914 - Syria, Jordan, Saudia Arabia, Iraq.

Her travel exploits have been well chronicled in biographies, so only extracts from her letters and diaries from these years, and from her book, *The Desert and the Sown*, which have some Baha'i reference, will be briefly referred to here. In *The Desert and the Sown*, published by Heinemann in 1907,<sup>2</sup> a book written about her 1905 travels in Syria and the Levant, she recounts meeting in Damascus, 'the most famous scribe in all the city, Mustafa el Asba'i'.<sup>3</sup> He showed her his collection of calligraphy, 'among which' she writes 'I recognised that of my friend Muhammad' Ali, son of Beha Ullah, the Persian prophet,' adding knowingly 'to my mind the most skilful penman of our day, though Oriental preference goes out to another Persian of the same religious sect, Mushkin Kalam, and him also I count among my friends...'<sup>4</sup> A photo of Mushkin Kalam holding a sample of his calligraphy accompanies this text.<sup>5</sup>

A couple of pages further on, she tells of an encounter with a 'red-bearded Persian,' who kept a tea shop in the corn market in Damascus, also a Baha'i: 'As I sat drinking glasses of delicious Persian tea at his table, I greeted him in his own tongue and whispered: 'I have been much honoured by the Holy Family at Acre'<sup>6</sup> an indication that possibly the man was a supporter of Muhammad Ali. Just how much she had fallen in with the 'Holy Family' is made clear from two diary entries from January, 1905.

At the start of her voyage to Syria, she decided to ride on horseback from Beirut to Jerusalem. In a letter home she describes stopping off on the way, to visit some Persians, as she passed through Acre:

'Two miles out of Acre I stopped at the house of some Persians who are friends of mine - the daughter of the late prophet and her husband and mother. They greeted me with enthusiasm and gave me delicious Persian tea and I sat talking with them for a long time.'<sup>7</sup>

Her diary entries reveal more:

*January 23, 1905*

Began the day by chasing a thief...Got off at 8.15. Very delightful day, cold but sunny...The road lay over two great headlands, Ras el Abyad and Ras en Nakurah, very splendid with the sea beating up against them. Then a long plain past Zin and the orange gardens of the Akka plain. Just before I reached the Bagheheh my horse fell dead lame and I had to change with Sim'an. At the Bagheheh Sayyid Ali Effendi made me most welcome and his wife and mother in law fell on my neck and gave me good Persian tea. Stayed talking with them over an hour. Badi'Allah has joined Abbas Effendi but Muhammad Ali is irreconcilable. They loaded me with flowers and I rode off in the dusk. Went to see Miss Ramsay...'8

*January 24, 1905*

(One of Sayyid 'Ali's sons is at school in the Lebanon and he thinks of sending him to the Colliyah or to America) Breakfasted with the Ramsays. I sent Abbas Effendi a message through Dr. Gould asking if he would like to see me and received the answer that he wd prefer not. I think he is afraid of me because I know too much of the ikhtilaf. The stream of Americans has begun again and the money flows in. Miss Ramsay says that Abbas is very much on his guard against her and she no longer teaches the girls English. Perhaps what Ba Hajj says is true that the Americans have taught Abbas [Abdu'l-Baha] that he is the Messiah...'9

Gertrude's remarks reflect the rancour of her hosts. Youness Afroukhteh, author of *Memories of Nine Years in Akka*, who we met in an earlier chapter, mentions a Mrs. Ramsey, a Protestant missionary, who he says 'was consumed with the fire of religious prejudice..' He adds that the Covenant Breakers had fanned the flames of her rancour 'until she became a true enemy of the Faith.'<sup>10</sup> The allegation that Abdu'l Baha was holding himself out as the 'Messiah' was unjust. Abdu'l Baha went to great lengths to educate the growing Baha'i community, East and West, regarding his station. He wrote this to the American believers in 1907 (his title Abdu'l-Baha means servant of Baha) :

'My Name is 'Abdu'l-Bahá. My Reality is 'Abdu'l-Bahá: and Service to all the human race is my perpetual Religion.... 'Abdu'l-Bahá is the Banner of the Most Great Peace ...The Herald of the Kingdom is he, so that he may awaken the people of the East and the West. The Voice of Friendship, of Truth, and of Reconciliation is he, quickening all regions. No name, no title will he ever have, except 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This is my longing. This is my Supreme height. O ye friends of God! 'Abdu'l-Bahá is the manifestation of Service, and not Christ. The Servant of humanity is he, and not a chief. Summon ye the people to the station of Service of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and not his Christhood.'<sup>11</sup>

There is another very brief reference to Baha'is, contained in a series of 3 letters written to her mother from Cairo in January, 1907. She runs across some Persians in the Bazaar who turn out to be Baha'is. This leads to a large number of Persians visiting her : ' After tea I was flooded out with Persians! They were all Beha'is who came to see me thinking I was a believer! I had to tell them at once I wasn't, however they have asked me to tea undaunted.' She does go to tea and writes '...I paid a visit on a lot of Persians today; most delightful it was. They are Beha'is of course, nice people...'12

Of Abdu'l Baha's visit to London in September 1911, following his release as a political

prisoner in 1908,<sup>13</sup> and where he gave a number of public addresses - there is no mention, though Gertrude was in England at the time. We do know that she was aware of his visit, because in a much later letter (October 10, 1920) written to her parents from Baghdad, she makes reference to it :

‘I had my usual group of colleagues, Major Yetts, Capt. Clayton and Major Murray to dine last week and with them Saiyid Husain Afnan... he is the grandson through his mother of Baha Ullah, the Persian reformer (*father of Abbas Effendi whom Lisa met in London*) (italics added).<sup>14</sup>

‘Lisa’ was Elizabeth Robins, a famous actress, feminist, and close friend of Lady Bell.<sup>15</sup>

The outbreak of World War 1 found Gertrude volunteering with the Red Cross, but in November, 1915, she was summoned to intelligence headquarters in Cairo.

Lady Bell explains:

Dr. David Hogarth, then in close connection with Col. T.E. Lawrence who was later to take an active part in the Revolt in the Desert, felt that Gertrude’s knowledge of the tribes of Northern Arabia would be invaluable. Through his intervention therefore and that of Capt. Hall (now Vice-Admiral Sir Reginald Hall) in London, it was proposed to Gertrude that she should go to Cairo at once. She went there in November 1915.<sup>16</sup>

Gertrude herself was not sure what she would be doing: ‘I’m off on Friday morning but I think it more than likely that when I reach Egypt I shall find they have no job that will occupy me more than a fortnight, and I may be back before Xmas. It’s all vaguer than words can say....’<sup>17</sup> Upon arrival in Cairo, however, she was at once set to work and found herself enjoying her new life immensely: ‘For the moment I am helping Mr. Hogarth to fill in the intelligence files with information as to tribes and sheikhs. It’s great fun and delightful to be working with him. Our chief is Col Clayton whom I like very much but did not know before...Mr. Hogarth and Mr. Lawrence (you don’t know him, he is also of Carchemish, exceedingly intelligent) met me and brought me to this hotel where they are both staying. ...Mr. Hogarth, Mr. Lawrence and I all dine and lunch together..’<sup>18</sup>

And a week later: ‘...The I.D. [Intelligence dept] has shifted to headquarters where I have a charming little room of my own. The whole W.O. (and I with it) is lodged in the Savoy Hotel. There I sit and work very happily all day long. There’s no doubt it’s amusing’<sup>19</sup>

She proved useful in other ways. In January of 1916 she travelled to Delhi, at the invitation of the Viceroy of India, Charles Hardinge (who she had met as a young woman in Rumania while visiting the Lascelles) to look for ways of improving communication between the intelligence bureaucracies of India and Egypt: ‘There is a great deal of friction between India and Egypt over the Arab question which entails a serious want of cooperation between the Intel. Deps. of the two countries. ...its absurd of course; we are all well meaning people trying to do our best, but they don’t realize what Arabia looks like from the West and I daresay we don’t realize how it looks from the East.’<sup>20</sup>

From India, she was sent on to Basra: ‘...The V is anxious that I should stay at Basrah and lend a hand with the Intell. Dept. there...’<sup>21</sup> British troops had been sent into Basra to secure oil interests in the Gulf in November, 1914, after Turkey had entered the war on Germany’s side.<sup>22</sup> At the time Gertrude was sent to Basra in March, 1916, a British India force had been sent up

the Tigris to capture Baghdad, but its advance had stalled at Kut and it was then under heavy siege by Turkish troops. A month after her arrival in Basra, Kut would fall.<sup>23</sup>

For Gertrude, returning to Iraq felt like a homecoming:

‘March 3, 1916 - Dearest Father, we are within half an hour of Basrah...We have been steaming up the river all the morning, through a familiar landscape of palm groves and Arab huts with apricot trees blooming here and there in untidy mud and walled gardens - I’m so glad to see it all again and I feel as if I were in my own country once more, and welcome it, ugly though it is. Now it remains to be seen whether they find a job for me or send me away without delay.’<sup>24</sup>

There was work, classifying tribal material in the files of the Intelligence department, redrawing maps, and contributing to a handbook on Arabia being compiled by India, called the *Gazetteer of Arabia*<sup>25</sup>: ‘I can’t tell you how wonderful it is to be in at the birth, so to speak, of a new administration..The whole of Basrah is packed full, as you may understand when it has had suddenly to expand into the base of a large army...would you ask Callaghan to send me a pair of eyeglasses and a pair of spectacles slightly stronger than those I’m using. ...I am forever doing fine map work which is very tiring to the eyes.’<sup>26</sup>

A year later, in March, 1917, British troops under General Sir Frederick Stanley Maude captured Baghdad, and the civil administration was moved from Basrah to Baghdad under Percy Cox, soon to be elevated to the position of Civil Commissioner.<sup>27</sup> Gertrude was transferred to Baghdad to assist Cox. Cox described her duties at that time in *The Letters*:

‘All sheikhly visitors from the country-side had to be interviewed, entertained, given small presents and sent back to their homes with injunctions to keep the peace and get busy with their agriculture; so that a great proportion of my time during daylight was spent in these interviews and Miss Bell acted as the strainer through which the individual filtered through to me... I was thus saved endless time in getting to the point.’<sup>28</sup>

In September, 1918, Sir Percy was temporarily transferred to Persia<sup>29</sup> and Arnold Wilson, his principal assistant, took over as acting Civil Commissioner.

The war was drawing to a close. On October 30, 1918, Turkey entered into a cease-fire with the Allies (‘Today war has ceased here - the official announcement of the Turkish armistice has reached us. It’s almost more than one can believe’);<sup>30</sup> then on November 11, 1918, Germany followed suit (‘At Basrah we shall hear the terms of the German armistice: we know that the Emperor has fled. What a drama, good Heavens!’).<sup>31</sup> A few days before the announcement of the German armistice, France and Britain, taking their lead from Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points<sup>32</sup> issued an Anglo-French declaration on November 7, 1918,<sup>33</sup> which seemed to offer the hope of self-determination to territories formerly under Ottoman rule.<sup>34</sup> Gertrude’s comment: ‘The Franco-British Declaration (published I think somewhat prematurely) has thrown the whole town into a ferment. It doesn’t happen often that people are told that their future as a State is in their hands and asked what they would like’.<sup>35</sup> Weighing the options, she continued: ‘Most of the town people want an Arab Amir but they can’t fix upon the individual. My belief is (but I don’t know) that the tribal people in the rural districts will not want any Amir so long as they can have Sir Percy...’<sup>36</sup> A survey was carried out to try to determine the will of the people.<sup>37</sup> The results were published in a memorandum prepared by Gertrude completed on February 22, 1919

entitled '*Self Determination in Mesopotamia*'.<sup>38</sup> Arnold Wilson summarized its conclusions: 'The upshot of these inquiries was the majority desired no change of regime, a large minority favoured an Arab Amir under British guidance and control, and that no name that we could suggest commanded the acceptance of even a small minority...' Wilson himself was in favour of a period of continued British administration.<sup>39</sup>

These conflicting views were aired at the Paris Peace Conference which was convened in January, 1919, to settle the terms of peace after the war. Gertrude attended, arriving in March:

'March 7, 1919 *Hotel Majestic*, Paris. You must have been surprised at not hearing from me before, but the truth is I've dropped into a world so amazing that up to now I've done nothing but gape at it without being able to put a word onto paper. I'm not going even now to tell you what it's like - partly because I can't - - but it is clearing up a little. Our Eastern Affairs are complex beyond all words and until I came there was no one to put the Mesopotamian side of the question at first hand..<sup>40</sup>

Stephen Bonsal who was an aide to Colonel House, President Woodrow Wilson's right-hand man, wrote a book about the proceedings of the conference. Entitled *Suitors and Suppliants, The Little Nations at Versailles*,<sup>41</sup> he devoted one chapter to Emir Feisal's claim that an independent Arab state be established in Syria.<sup>42</sup>

In this chapter he mentions attending a luncheon with Gertrude and Lawrence (Feisal's interpreter at the conference), no doubt arranged to press their political views. In a note sent to Bonsal after the luncheon, Gertrude touched on a few points they must have discussed. She also took the opportunity of enclosing 'an account of our self-determination inquiries' - probably her memorandum *Self-Determination in Mesopotamia*, with the comment that: 'If you have time to glance through it you will notice that the salient characteristic of my people is that they have no settled conviction as to what they want.'<sup>43</sup>

This small interaction elicited a moving and perceptive tribute to Gertrude from Bonsal:

The Arabs had many friends at the Conference, but none more unswerving in allegiance to their just cause than this honest, gray-eyed North Country English girl... In a sense, as is so often the case, her letter, if read without due attention to the circumstances existing at the time it was written, is misleading. She did not mean to say that the Arabs did not know what they wanted; they wanted an independent state and they did not want the French to stay in Syria. But as between a mandate by Britain, with her special imperial interests in the Near and Middle East, and that of far-away America, they were in doubt, and no one knew it better than Gertrude Bell..<sup>44</sup>

Coincidentally, the day before Gertrude's letter of March 7 from the *Hotel Majestic*, ('I've dropped into a world so amazing that up to now I've done nothing but gape at it'), Ali Kuli Khan, (he was the young Persian Baha'i who we met in Chapter 1)<sup>45</sup> a member of the Persian delegation to the conference, together with his American wife, Florence Breed, hosted a dinner at the *Ritz Hotel* for the American delegation, on behalf of the Persian Mission.

The event was reported the next day, March 7, 1919 in the *Paris Herald*:

'The dinner was served with great style and being the first of its kind given for the

Americans of the Diplomatic Corps, it seemed that Washington had been transferred to Paris; and with an orchestra playing throughout the evening, it recalled the pre-war days at the Ritz.’<sup>46</sup>

The guest list included Robert Lansing [Secretary of State], General John Pershing, General Tasker Bliss, and Colonel and Mrs. E.M. House.<sup>47</sup> As an attendee at the peace conference, very possibly Gertrude would have heard or read about this banquet given in honour of the American delegation. She would not have known, however, that there was a connection between the hosts of the dinner, Ali Kuli Khan and Florence Breed, and Abdu’l Baha. Abdu’l Baha wrote a tablet to the couple, blessing their efforts at the conference [Khan had also been able to arrange for an interview with President Wilson for the Persian delegation shortly before the President left Paris, no mean feat, considering the number of suppliants<sup>48</sup>]:

To His Excellency Alikuli Khan and his honorable wife, upon them be  
Baha’ullahul-abha

He is God

O ye two blessed and respected souls! Your letters were both received and their contents brought radiance and joy, for praise be God, ye are the manifestors of divine bounty and the objects of confirmation from the Kingdom of Abha. Consider what means have been brought about! The conference of Universal Peace which was set down by the Pen of His Holiness Baha’u’llah fifty years ago, which was considered by all the wise men of the world as impracticable, as impossible to achieve - hath now been organized through the tracings of the Supreme Pen, and His Excellency Khan is Persia’s foremost delegate thereto, and enjoys acquaintanceship with and privileges from His Honor the President of the American Republic. So likewise is he connected with America’s Secretary of State. From every direction, confirmation hath surrounded you. Therefore offer ye thanks, and know ye that this confirmation is due to the pervasive power of the Word of God...The entertainment which ye gave in Paris was highly suitable and opportune. Such entertainments are conducive to the promotion of affairs. As regards a meeting with Lord Harding, there is no harm in this, rather, it may be useful.<sup>49</sup>

Gertrude left the conference in April with the question of what to do with the former Ottoman territories still up in the air. The solution that was ultimately settled upon was the creation of a system of mandates under the Covenant of the League of Nations, which formed part of the *Treaty of Versailles*, the peace treaty containing the terms of peace with Germany which was signed by a reluctant German delegation in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles on June 28, 1919.<sup>50</sup> Article 22 of the Covenant provided for a system of ‘tutelage’ by advanced nations of those colonies and territories formerly under the sovereignty of states who governed them, but inhabited by peoples ‘not yet able to stand by themselves.’ ‘... *there should be applied the principle that the well-being and development of such peoples forms a sacred trust of civilization...*’<sup>51</sup>

It would take more than a year before Britain was awarded the mandate for Iraq, as negotiations with Turkey on peace terms, a prerequisite for the parceling out of former Ottoman territories, proved difficult. During this period of suspense, unrest increased in Iraq:

‘As 1919 advanced, signs were not lacking that opposition to Government in its present form, so unsatisfying to nationalist aspirations, was on the increase.. Iraqi visitors from

the West reported a 'colonial' attitude in Wilson's Administration, which seemed to belittle or ignore Iraqi abilities. Rumours grew in Baghdad of the proposed Mandate over Iraq, soon to be allotted by the Supreme Council of the Peace Conference. British women and children were reported as pouring into the country as into a British colony, and in fact over 500 so entered late in 1919. The work and plans of the British civil departments seemed to suggest permanence of occupation.. With the autumn the results of political preaching emanating from Syria, from Baghdad, and with increasing violence from Najf and Karbala, became more obvious among the Euphrates tribes; and in Baghdad, where secret meetings and societies began to be reported, new and significant contacts were observed between the Sunni and Shi'i communities...So passed the winter of 1919.'<sup>52</sup>

Gertrude who had returned to Iraq, was noting with concern the deteriorating situation :

20/12/1919

Dearest father. There has been no mail this week so I haven't any kind letters to answer. It has also been rather a trying week for A.T. [Wilson] has been overworked - a chronic state - and in a condition where he ought not to be working, which results in making him savagely cross and all of our lives rather a burden in consequence. He looked better today and was friendly again so I hope the crisis of his malady is over. Also the Dair [Dayr az Zar] business [<sup>53</sup>] is settling down. Feisal has telegraphed a most handsome repudiation of the whole affair and the local tribes have refused to take any hand in it - one up to us!...If only H.M.G.[His Majesty's Government] would make up their mind that since America has dropped out - the curse of God on her - we and the French had better get on with the peace with Turkey as best we may. There's nothing else for it and we are in need so urgently of a civil govt. here which we can't have till peace is concluded...'<sup>54</sup>

Nationalist fervour was on the increase. On March 10, 1920, in Damascus a congress of Syrian nationalists declared Syria an independent state and King Feisal its head of state.<sup>55</sup> This precipitated the hasty convocation of the Allied Supreme Council at San Remo, Italy, on April 28, which resolved to 'provisionally' recognize Syria and Iraq as independent states, 'subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone'. Britain was assigned the mandate for Iraq; France the mandate for Syria.<sup>56</sup> By July, the French had driven Feisal out of Syria.<sup>57</sup>

With the collapse of hopes for an independent Arab state, outright insurrection broke out in Iraq which was only suppressed at great expense and with loss of life. British public opinion grew critical. Colonel Lawrence writing in a letter to the *London Times*, criticized British policy:

'The Arabs rebelled against the Turks during the war not because the Turkish government was notably bad, but because they wanted independence. They did not risk their lives in battle to change masters, to become British subjects, or French citizens but to win a show of their own...It is not astonishing that their patience has broken down after two years. The government we have set up is English in fashion, and is conducted in the English language. So it has 450 British executive officers running it, and not a single responsible Mesopotamian. In Turkish days 70 percent of the executive civil service was local. Our eighty thousand troops there are occupied in police duties, not in



guarding the frontier. They hold down the people. ...It is true we have increased prosperity - but who cares for that when liberty is in the other scale.'<sup>58</sup>

Gertrude was living through these turbulent times, and sending back descriptions of events as they unfolded to her family. In June, 1920, she sent this letter to her father describing a disturbance which had taken place after a 'young hot head' had been arrested making 'wild speeches':

'...next evening- last Sunday- there was a great meeting in the big mosque with the blue dome in New St., a crowd which he [Frank Balfour, Military Governor of Baghdad<sup>59</sup>] thought dangerous. , and he sent out 2 armoured cars to patrol the street. One of the drivers had a brick thrown at him, drew back, and the mob made a rush at him. He fired a few shots over the heads of the people, a man was run over and the whole crowd ran like hares.....He sent for some of the responsible people and said we intended to keep order in the town, that they might have religious meetings as much as they liked but that they weren't the place for politics. The result was that that night at the big meeting the leading Arab judge - in whose mosque the meeting was being held - got up and said that no politics were to be talked. And all went well....'

She then threw in an observation about Islam:

'I've been talking a great deal of Islam. I'll tell you a tale which shows how heavy its yoke is. There came into my office last week Husain Afnan - you remember he is the partner of Mahmud Shabandar and talks excellent English. He came with a message from Mahmud Shabandar, anxiously assuring me that he had nothing to do with the disturbances. I knew that without the message. Husain Afnan is a free thinker of an advanced type so I said 'I suppose you're not fasting - will you have some coffee?' He replied 'Well, I am fasting - yes, I know it will surprise you, but I must either fast or tell such an intolerable amount of lies that I would rather fast.'<sup>60</sup>

Husain Afnan was the oldest son of her friends from Acre, the family she had stopped off to visit at Bahji in 1905 en route from Damascus to Jerusalem, Siyyid Ali Afnan and his wife, Furughiyyih, daughter of Baha'u'llah through Baha'u'llah's third wife, Gawhar. Gertrude did not link Husain with his family in this letter, but with Mahmud Shabandar, a wealthy businessman.<sup>61</sup> When she wrote 'you remember he is the partner of Mahmud Shabandar' it lets us know that her father had met him (her father had come out for a short visit in March, 1920). It also appears that Saiyid Husain was not identifying himself as a Baha'i, a follower of his grandfather, but rather as a 'free thinker.'<sup>62</sup>

Two months later, she reported that conditions in the country were improving :

On the whole the political situation is improving..The military position is also growing more stable with the arrival of fresh troops from India. The Euphrates tribes are still in full rebellion but they have had one or two nasty knocks and they are said to be getting a little tired of Jihad. If only they would throw their hands in before we are in a position to take extreme measures [aerial bombardment], it would be an immense relief. Order must be restored but it's a very doubtful triumph to restore it at the expense of many Arab lives.

She then added another note about Saiyid Husayn:

‘I had a very pleasant dinner last night with the Nortons, to meet Rauf Chadirji, whom I’ve often told you about - he speaks quite good English - and Saiyid Husain Afnan. You may remember the latter - he was in partnership with Mahmud Shabandar and he talks admirable English. He is now going to start a newspaper, in the interests of the moderate party which S.T [Saiyid Talib] is forming. He will often appear in these pages, for he is a great friend of mine. He is as clever as he can be and I do hope his paper will be a success.’<sup>63</sup>

It is clear that Saiyid Husein was becoming increasingly active in Iraqi politics, a course of conduct which was not only proscribed for followers of Baha’u’llah,<sup>64</sup> but one which could potentially cause grave harm to the Baha’i community. Given his status as the nephew of Abdu’l Baha and the grandson of Baha’u’llah, Saiyid Husain’s actions almost inevitably would have repercussions for the Baha’is.

In October, Gertrude again mentioned Saiyid Husain, referring to him once more as ‘a great friend’ and this time providing a fuller description of his background and re-iterating that he was a ‘free-thinker’:

‘I had my usual group of colleagues, Major Yetts, Capt. Clayton and Major Murray to dine last week and with them Saiyid Husain Afnan, the editor of one of the vernacular papers and a great friend of Capt. Clayton and me. His remarkable career is as follows: he is the grandson through his mother of Baha Ullah, the Persian reformer (father of ‘Abbas Effendi whom Lisa met in London) who was exiled by the Shah and allowed by the Sultan to live at Acre. There Saiyid Husain was born - a direct descendant of the Prophet through Husain who was killed at Karbala. He was educated at the Quaker school at Brumana in the Lebanon, graduated at the American college at Beyrut and at Cambridge. During the war he was in charge of a prisoner’s camp in India. You saw him here - he was then in business with Mahmud Shabandar. He is a free thinker, talks English as well as I do, almost, is bi-lingual as far as Persian and Arabic are concerned and has a profound knowledge of the near East coupled with a complete understanding of the European point of view and a great sympathy with it. I think he is one of the most interesting people I know...’<sup>65</sup>

That same month, Percy Cox returned to Baghdad as High Commissioner, replacing Arnold Wilson. His task was, in his own words, to inaugurate a policy which involved ‘a complete and necessarily rapid transformation of the facade of the existing administration from British to Arab,’<sup>66</sup> a difficult task made easier by the assistance of sympathetic staff members, such as Gertrude, now officially his ‘Oriental Secretary’ and St. John Philby.<sup>67</sup> As a first step, a provisional government was established. As Cox explained: ‘...it did not take me long after my arrival at Bagdad to realize that I was being confronted at every turn with questions of policy affecting the future of Iraq which I did not feel justified in disposing of myself without consultation with the representatives of the people.’<sup>68</sup>

On November 15, 1920, in the first of Gertrude’s official Intelligence Reports - reports which were to be published fortnightly thereafter by the Office of the High Commissioner, Baghdad, and distributed to the British advisers of the different Iraqi ministries as well as to the India office, and High Commissioners in neighboring countries such as Cairo, Jerusalem,

and Constantinople - the make-up of the new provisional Council of State was announced. The President was to be the Naqib of Baghdad; the Minister of the Interior - Saiyid Talib; Justice - Hasan Effendi Pachahji; Finance - Sasun Effendi Haskail; Education - Ezzat Pasha; Defence - Jafar Pasha al'Askari; Commerce - Abdul Latiff Pasha Mandil; and Auqaf - Mustafa Effendi Alusi.<sup>69</sup>

Fifteen days later, on November 30, a collection of documents - proclamations, press communiques, and letters dealing with the establishment of the Council of State for Iraq, was issued by the office of the High Commissioner. The Council's purpose was set out:

...to carry on the administration of the country under the High Commissioner's control pending the convocation of a representative National Assembly to decide upon the future constitution of the State and to frame an organic law in connection therewith.

The names of the Ministers were listed as were their British Advisers; and the name of the person appointed as the Secretary to the Council was announced:

'As regards Para.7 His Excellency the High Commissioner is pleased to approve the appointment of 'Sayid Husain Effendi al Afnan as Secretary to the Council...'<sup>70</sup>

Can there be any question that Saiyid Husain's close relationship with Gertrude was responsible for this appointment? What would be the *quid pro quo*? As the evocative title of Arnold Wilson's book, *Mesopotamia, A Clash of Loyalties*, suggests - Saiyid Husain would have to pay a price for Gertrude's kindness and patronage, and loyalty would be the currency.

We can trace Saiyid Husain's shift in loyalty towards Gertrude by noting the change in his relationship with his friend, Saiyid Talib, an Iraqi nationalist, and son of the Naqib of Basra.<sup>71</sup>

It will be recalled that in August of 1920, Gertrude had written to her father saying that Saiyid Husain was going to start a newspaper in support of Saiyid Talib's Moderate party (see above). Three short months later, in November, Saiyid Husain, in all probability acting on the instructions of Gertrude, was 'warning Talib not to talk politics' at a dinner party:

'Saiyid Talib's pranks are the chief interest. I told you about his resignation and its withdrawal. Its sole object was to curry favour with the nationalists...He is a rogue, Talib. If they elect him Amir all I can say is they've got what they deserve. But they won't....Saiyid Husain Afnan, who is now secretary to the Council, shakes his head and says that Talib has spent 30 years outwitting the astutest Turkish officials and he knows every turn of the game.. Meantime the Cabinet crisis being happily terminated...we all dined with Talib last Tuesday, the Coxes, Sir Edgar, the Philbys, Mr. Garbett, Ja'far, Sasun...and I. It was extremely pleasant. I sat on Talib's left with Muhi al Din, whom I like very much next me, and Ja'far opposite. *Talib had been warned by Husain Afnan (who was also there) not to talk politics...*'<sup>72</sup> [italics added].

The shift in loyalty seemed complete some months later, when Saiyid Husain informed Gertrude of a purportedly treasonous speech given by Talib, which formed the basis of a report Gertrude submitted to Cox, which resulted in Saiyid Talib's deportation from Iraq.

The incident has given rise to some controversy due to the summary nature of the deportation - Cox arrested Talib and sent him away without giving Talib the opportunity to

defend himself.

Gertrude described the events leading up to the deportation in a letter to her father dated April 17, 1921. She had just returned from the Cairo Conference, a conference called by Winston Churchill, then Colonial Secretary, to settle some of the outstanding issues to do with Iraq and Transjordan.<sup>73</sup> One decision that was taken was to invite Feisal to Iraq, to offer himself as King to the Iraqi people. A general election would determine the national will. Not all were in favour of importing Feisal. In her letter, she describes a visit to the Naqib who voiced his opposition to bringing in Feisal as King:

‘he is irrevocably opposed to the candidature of a son of the Sharif and declared that he would welcome a labourer born in the Iraq rather than a stranger. There was a rumor-possibly put about by S. Talib - that on the way down to Basrah, when we went away, I had said to persons not named that the object of the Conference was to declare Feisal king....’

She continues:

‘Talib is in the worst of tempers - not to me, we preserve an unbroken surface. But he gave himself away at a dinner party in his own house this week. It was in honour of Mr. Landon who is here as a correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*. The Tods were there, a few other English people and two important Arabs, the Amir al Rabi’ah and Sh. Salim al Khaiyun of Chabaish - near the Hammar lake. Talib addressed Mr. Landon after the dinner in a speech evidently carefully prepared. He declared himself wholly satisfied with the High Commissioner and the attitude of H.M.G. but there were British officials in H.E.’S entourage who were known to be partisans and who were exercising undue influence - did Mr. Landon advise him to appeal to King George or to Sir Percy to have them removed? Mr. Landon replied cleverly that there were certainly British officials who were known to favour the other side - did Talib want them all removed? *Saiyid Husain Afnan who was translating, [italics added]* whispered in Talib’s ears ‘He has got us’ and Talib after a little bluster dropped the matter. But he went on, if any attempt is made to influence the elections here is the Amir al Rabi’ah with 30,000 rifles to know the reason why, and the Shaikh of Chaith with all his men...And, he continued, the Naqib will appeal to Islam, to India, Egypt, Constantinople and Paris. *It was an incitement to rebellion as bad as anything which was said by the men who roused the country last year, and not far from a declaration of Jihad. [italics added]*’..

She then excitedly adds some late-breaking news:

‘As I write, Capt. Clayton comes in with an immense piece of news. Talib has been arrested and sent off to Fao. Sir Percy has pricked the bubble and the pin he has used, I make no doubt, was the report of Talib’s speech which I handed in yesterday morning...Lord! How glad I am that I gave in a careful report of that speech. I got it first from Mr. Tod and then from Mr. Landon and collated the two account so as to have it absolutely right....’ She adds ‘...The French Consul and the Persian Consul General were both present and the speech was delivered to the correspondent of a London paper - you can’t ask for greater publicity. ... Your very affectionate daughter Gertrude’<sup>74</sup>

Note that for her report to Cox she states that she has relied on the accounts of Tod and

Landon (two Europeans whose testimony would bear more weight than Saiyid Husain's). But we know that she received a report, probably immediately after the dinner party, from Saiyid Husain. If there is any doubt about that, one need only ask how she knew what it was that Saiyid Husain whispered into Talib's ear? In her letter to her father she had written 'Saiyid Husain Afnan who was translating, whispered in Talib's ears 'He has got us'. She could only have got this from Saiyid Husain himself.<sup>75</sup>

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that Saiyid Husain acted as an informant for Gertrude, betraying into the bargain his former patron and friend, Saiyid Talib.

The incident appeared in Gertrude's Intelligence Report no. 12, dated May 1, 1921, with much of the same information as had been in her letter to her father, with one exception: the official report included a sour note raised by the French Consul, also present at the dinner, who claimed that Saiyid Talib's talk had been misinterpreted:

'the one discordant note has been struck in a quarter from which it might have been expected, namely by the French Consul, who maintains that Saiyid Talib's utterances were misinterpreted. He is not, however, a reliable witness since his competence both in English and Arabic is moderate.'<sup>76</sup>

1.<http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/photos.php>

2.Gertrude Bell, *The Desert and the Sown*, William Heinemann, London, 1907

3.Ibid., p. 148.

4.Ibid., p. 148

5.Ibid., p. 149

6.Ibid., p. 150

7.*Letters*, 23/1/1905

8. *Diaries* 23/01/1905

9. *Ibid*, 24/01/1905.

10. Afroukhteh, *Memories*, p. 305

11. From a letter sent to the friends in New York, January 1st, 1907 reproduced in *Abdu'l Baha in London*, U.K. Baha'i Publishing Trust, reprint, 1982, p. 109 available online at <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/ABL/>

12. *Letters*, 8/1/1907; 10/1/1907 and 18/1/1907

13. Abdu'l Baha, in a talk given in London, gave the following account of the events leading up to his release from imprisonment:

‘One year before ‘Abdu’l-Hamid was dethroned, he sent an extremely overbearing, treacherous and insulting committee of investigation...The committee twice sent for me to hear what I had to say in my own defense and twice I sent back word: ‘I know your purpose, I have nothing to say. ‘This so infuriated Arif Bey [the Chairman of the Committee] that he declared he would return to Constantinople and bring back an order from the Sultán to have me hanged at the gate of ‘Akká. He and his committee set sail with their report containing the following accusations:—‘Abdu’l-Bahá is establishing a new nation of which he is to be the king; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is uplifting the banner of a new religion; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has built or caused to be built fortifications in Haifa, a neighboring village, and is buying up all the surrounding lands’...It was while the Sultán’s committee of investigation was homeward bound that the first shell was dropped into ‘Abdu’l-Hamid’s camp and the first gun of freedom was fired into the home of despotism. That was God’s gun,’ said ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, with one of his wonderful smiles. ‘When the committee reached the Turkish capital, they had more urgent things to think of. The city was in a state of uproar and rebellion, and the committee, as members of the government staff, were delegated to investigate the insurrection. Meanwhile the people were establishing a constitutional government and ‘Abdu’l-Hamid was given no chance to act...With the advent of the Young Turks’ supremacy, realized through the Society of Union and Progress, all the political prisoners of the Ottoman Empire were set free. Events took the chains from my neck and placed them about Hamid’s; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá came out of prison and ‘Abdu’l-Hamid went in!’ *Abdu'l Baha in London*, p.118-119.

14. *Letters*, 10/10/1920

15. In the September, 1923 edition of *Star of the West*, a Baha'i Magazine published in the United States, an account was published of an encounter of Abdu'l Baha, with an actress in London, in 1913. There is nothing to indicate that this actress was Lisa Robins - but it well might have been. The article is entitled ‘*The Heavenly Artists*’:

When Abdu'l Baha was in London, in 1913, among his many callers was an actress who spoke to him of the theater and her work. ‘We also have a theater,’ said Abdu'l Baha. The actress immediately became all interest and enthusiasm. ‘Yes, where is it?’ She said. ‘I should love to see it. Can I play in it?’

‘Our theater,’ ‘Abdu’l- Baha answered smiling, ‘is built in a country where there is eternal springtime. The streets of that city are as clean as the surface of a mirror. The lights of that playhouse are the rays of the Sun of Reality, the actors of our drama are the Holy Manifestations of God, the audience is composed of pure and sanctified souls. They play their parts with the most delicate art. They deliver their words with power and potency. The stage of our theater is the arena upon which is played the sublimest tragedy, the most terrible drama, the most thrilling and heart-moving events of life.

‘Come and join our company. You have acted all your life upon the material stage. Your fellow actors will assist you, will coach you in your part and, step by step, you will become a star shining in the galaxy of those heavenly inspired dramatists.’

*Star of the West*, 1922-1924, p.176

16. *The Letters*, p. 295.

17. *Letters*, 16/11/1915

18. *Letters*, 30/11/1915 . ‘...In Cairo, Colonel Gilbert Clayton headed Murray’s intelligence network until early 1916 when Thomas Holdich, Director for Military Intelligence for General Murray succeeded him. Clayton then devoted himself to political intelligence and the operation of the Arab Bureau..’ Bruce Westrate, *The Arab Bureau*, Penn State University Press, 1992: p. 23-24

19. *Letters*, 14/12/1915

20. *Letters*., 24/1/1916. See also *Kingmakers, The Invention of the Modern Middle East*, Karl Meyer and Sharren Brysac, WWW Norton & Company, 2008, p.134-135:

British India not only furnished boots on the ground for the Allies - as many as 1.2 million troops from 1914 to 1918, half of them serving in the Middle East, and most of the rest in France’s trenches- but also paid ‘the ordinary charges’ for those sent overseas, to which India added an outright gift of 100 million pounds to the Allied cause. By war’s end, more than 250,000 Anglo-Indian troops were still on active service in the Mesopotamian command...Given this contribution, India’s British rulers understandably assumed they deserved at least an equal seat at the high table in framing Middle East strategy.

21. *Letters*, 18/2/1916.

22. ‘By November 24, three Indian brigades had been sent to secure Basra, near the mouth of Shatt al-Arab, the port closest to the APOC’s [Anglo-Persian Oil Company] vulnerable pipelines and refineries. The invaders then occupied Qurna at the head of the delta, insuring British mastery of the Persian Gulf. Thereafter until war’s end, the ‘Mesopot’ theater consisted of two acts, military and civil. The actors in each veered from excessive optimism to deepening gloom, usually followed by crisis and renewal, complicated by a struggle among officials in New Delhi, their counterparts in London, and the agents of the soon-to-be established Arab Bureau in Cairo....’  
*Kingmakers*, p.135.

23. ‘In London, a month after the final evacuation from Gallipoli, a flustered Asquith approved an advance on Baghdad even though Major General Charles V.F. Townshend’s

army was undermanned and its supply lines stretched thin. In September 1915, an Anglo-Indian force of twenty thousand proceeded upriver to within sixteen miles of Baghdad. At Ctesiphon, the Turks struck back lethally, their spirit and numbers fortified by reinforcements from Gallipoli.

On December 3, 1915, General Townshend 'retired' (the official euphemism) downstream to Kut, an Arab town of some six thousand souls. His now-reduced force, with its thirty-nine guns, dug in for an epic siege...He waited in vain for a relief expedition. In April 1916, having held out for 147 days, Townshend surrendered. The Turks took as prisoners 277 British officers, 204 Indian officers, 9,580 mostly Indian enlisted men, and 3,248 noncombatants. The officers for the most part fared well..Most of the nearly thirteen thousand POW's perished of disease and hunger - a decimation bitterly remembered by the Indian military.'

*Kingmakers*, p. 136-137

24. *Letters*, 3/3/1916

25. *Letters*, 26/2/1916 '...I'm now enrolled as one of the editors of the Gazetteer of Arabia which is being compiled at Simla...' and 4/3/1916 'I am to be billeted at Headquarters in a day or two when there's a room to spare and to be given every facility for going on with the work for the Gazetteer.'

26. *Letters*, 9/3/16

27. *The Letters*, p. 418 'H.M.'S Government came to the conclusion that some development of my status as Chief Political Officer to the G.O.C. -in-Chief was now called for. Accordingly, from the beginning of July 1917, my designation was altered to that of 'Civil Commissioner'..I was given the right henceforth of direct communication with the Secretary of State for India..'

28. *The Letters*, p. 417. Gertrude herself gave higher priority to her intelligence gathering work, while conceding that acting as a go-between for tribal shaikhs, or discussing relief schemes for Armenian ladies were important components of her work . But she adds 'behind all this there's my real job, the gathering and sorting of information.' *Letters* 27/4/1917

29. Sir Percy Cox gave an account of the immediate reasons for his call to Persia in *The Letters*:

'...His Majesty's Minister at Teheran, Sir Charles Marling, who for months past had been having an extremely harassing time in the endeavour to combat Turko-German activities in Persia...had been ordered home on sick leave and that it was desired that I should relieve him...the question of Persia's entry into the War against us was hanging by the slenderest of threads....I even received a telegram at Hamadan, en route, suggesting that I was too late for the fair and had better not come further, but we pushed on without incident and I relieved Sir Charling Marling on the 15<sup>th</sup> September 1918...' *The Letters*, p. 422.

30. *Letters*, 1/11/1918

31. *Letters*, 28/11/1918



32. A speech given to Congress on January 8, 1918 by President Woodrow Wilson setting out America's expectations for peace negotiations when war ended:

...he came before Congress to give the most detailed exposition to date of the United States' war aims and his vision for the postwar world. The address, which quickly became famous worldwide as the Fourteen Points, enumerated fourteen planks on which peace must be based. These included the general principles of open diplomacy rather than secret treaties, freedom of the seas and of trade, the reduction of armaments and the establishment of an 'association of nations' that would guarantee the 'political independence and territorial integrity of 'great and small states alike'.

Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment, Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*, Oxford University Press, 2007, p.40. With specific reference to Ottoman territories, point 12 provided that '...other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development' [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fourteen\\_Points](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fourteen_Points) 3/8/2012

33. Henry Foster, *The Making of Modern Iraq*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1935, p.67

34. 'The end aimed at by France and Great Britain...is the complete and final enfranchisement of the peoples so long oppressed by the Turks, and the establishment of national governments and administrations, drawing their authority from the initiative and free choice of the native populations.' *The Making of Modern Iraq*, p.68

35. *Letters*, 28/11/1918

36. *Letters*, 28/11/1918

37. The three questions posed were: are you in favour of a single Arab State under British guidance (which would include the vilayets of Basra, Baghdad and Mosul)?; If so, should the new state be placed under an Arab Amir?; and if so, who? Percy Cox, from *The Letters*, p. 424-425

38. Arnold T. Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917-1920 A Clash of Loyalties*, Oxford University Press, 1931, Appendix III, p. 330-336.

39. 'There is no doubt in my mind that had I been able to announce the alternative scheme put forward...for a British High Commissioner for five years, with Arab Ministers backed by British Advisers, it would have been very widely accepted, and might have paved the way for an Arab Amir or King at a later stage.' Wilson, *Mesopotamia, A Clash of Loyalties*, p.114

40. *Letters*, 7/3/1919

41. Stephen Bonsal, *Suitors and Suppliants, The Little Nations at Versailles*, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1946

42. Faisal was established as the head of the administration set up in Damascus after British and Arab troops had taken Syria: 'There an Arab Government assisted by several British advisers had been set up, from Aleppo to Damascus, immediately after General Allenby's entry in October 1918. At its head was the Amir Faisal, and it was practically independent as far as

administration was concerned, though under the supreme control of the British Commander-in-Chief and upheld by the presence of his troops.' Cox describing the situation in Syria at the opening of the Peace Conference. *The Letters*, p. 425

43. Bonsal, *Suitors and Suppliants*, p. 47

44. Bonsal, *Suitors and Suppliants*, p. 48

45. We met Ali Kuli Khan in Chapter 1 - the young Persian Baha'i from a prominent family whose employment hopes had been crushed with the collapse of the Tobacco Regie, and who went on to become Persia's *Charge d'Affaires* in Washington, D.C.

46. Marzieh Gail, *Arches of the Years*, p. 160.

47. *ibid.*, p. 160.

48. *ibid.* pp. 158-159. The official status of the Persian delegation at the Peace Conference is not clear. We can infer from Avery(*Modern Iran*), that the British were opposed to their admission, because Britain wanted to enter into a unilateral agreement with Persia - the *Anglo Iranian Treaty* (which Percy Cox had been sent from Baghdad to Persia to negotiate): 'Mr. Lloyd George said he understood that Mr. Balfour was opposed to Persia's admission to the Peace Conference but did not know the reasons... President Wilson was much exercised. The United States press was highly critical...' *Modern Iran*, p. 202. *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, an online encyclopedia, under the heading for Ali-Qoli Khan Ansari, Mosawer Al Mamalek, the head of the delegation, supports this: 'He led the Persian delegation sent to the peace conference at Versailles but the Delegation was excluded from the Conference due to the lack of proper support from the government in Tehran, which under the premiership of Mirza Hasan Khan...was then negotiating the Anglo Persian Agreement of 1919 with the British...'

<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/search/keywords:paris%20peace%20conference>, downloaded 26/03/2012. On the other hand, Marzieh Gail indicates that the Persian delegation was formally admitted: 'It was by sufferance of the British that Persia would attend the Peace Conference at Versailles. On December 21, 1918, the U.S. Acting Secretary of State, Frank L. Polk, acknowledged Khan's note [Marzieh's father] of three days earlier, stating 'that the British Legation at Teheran has informed the Persian Minister of Foreign Affairs that the British Government is willing that a delegation from the Persian Government be admitted to the Peace Conference and that...your Government has instructed you to request the United States to assist Persia on this occasion' . *Arches of the Years*, p. 154

49. The full text of this tablet is to be found in *Arches of the Years*, p. 161-163.

50. Malcolm Magee, *What the World Should Be - Woodrow Wilson and Crafting of a Faith-Based Foreign Policy*, 2008, Baylor University Press,, p.100.

51. Covenant of the League of Nations, Article 22, Magee, *What the World Should be*, Appendix III, p. 138.

52. Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *Iraq 1900 to 1950, A Political and Economic History*, Oxford University Press, 1968 reprint, pps.118-119

53. ‘..in mid-December 1919 Dayr al-Zur was occupied by excited Syrian tribesmen escorting a Sharifian ‘Governor of the Euphrates’. A critical and humiliating situation in the town, where the Assistant Political Officer was held prisoner, ended only on Christmas Day by an arrangement between representatives of the Civil Commissioner and those of Ja’far Pasha al-‘Askari, Governor of Aleppo, whereby Dayr was abandoned by the British. It became a centre for propaganda, for raids, and for loud threats to annex Mosul itself...How far the Amir [Faysal] was aware of his too zealous supporters’ activities in Iraq can never be known; his own attitude was correct.’ Longrigg, *Iraq, 1900-1950*, p. 119-120

54.*Letters*, 20/12/1919

55.*The Making of Modern Iraq*, p.77; also Longrigg, *Iraq 1900-1950*, p. 120

56.[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanremo\\_conference](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanremo_conference) retrieved 3/11/2012; also *The Making of Modern Iraq*, p. 76-77.

57.*The Making of Modern Iraq*, p. 77

58.*The Making of Modern Iraq*, pps. 84-85, quoting from *London Times*, July 23, 1920, p. 15

59.*Letters* 3/1/19 ‘..Frank Balfour is now Governor of Baghdad; it’s a great joy having him for a colleague...’

60.*Letters*, 1/6/1920

61. ‘The richest merchants in Iraq were agents of British firms. To this last class belonged Mahmud al-Shabandar, who was the agent of the British firm Allan Brothers of Aberdeen’ *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, edited by Rashid Khalidi et al, Columbia University Press, 1991, p.124

62. In the excerpt from Renan quoted in Chapter 7, Renan had described ‘free thinkers’ as people ‘.. who do not believe in the supernatural, nor, consequently, in the inspiration of the sacred books.’ If Saiyid Husain was holding himself out as a ‘free thinker’ in this sense, it would mean that he did not consider himself a believer in a God, nor in the divine mission of Baha’u’llah.

63.*Letters*, 8/8/1920

64. In ‘*The Tablet of the World*’ (*Lawh-i-Dunya*) Baha’u’llah had exhorted his followers to avoid activities that could lead to conflict:

‘Whatsoever hath led the children of men to shun one another, and hath caused dissensions and divisions amongst them, hath, through the revelation of these words, been nullified and abolished.....This Wronged One hath forbidden the people of God to engage in contention or conflict..’ *Tablets of Baha’u’llah*, Baha’i World Centre,

Haifa, 1978, pps. 87-88

65. *Letters*, 10/10/1920

66. *The Letters*, p.428

67. Harry St. John Bridger Philby, father of Kim Philby.

68. *The Letters*, p.429

69. *Political Diaries of the Arab World, Iraq*, Volume 1: 1920-1921, editor Robert L. Jarman, Archive Editions, 1998, pp. 3-23

70. *Political Diaries of the Arab World, Iraq* pp. 25-33.

71. See Elizabeth Tauber, *Sayyid Talib and the Young Turks in Basra*, Middle Eastern Studies, Vo. 25, No. 1 (Jan., 1989) pp. 3-22 for a history of Sayyid Talib as the 'strong man of Basra' in the years leading up to the Great War. Gertrude first met him in Cairo in September, 1919: 'Saiyd Talib with his two younger sons Ali and Ahmad, came to see me at 9.p.m. and stayed till 11. He is younger than I expected, thin, with an eager expression, not the least a swash buckler in appearance, cunning rather than dissipated' *Letters*, 29/09/19 Talib had been very open with Gertrude that he wished to be considered as Amir of Iraq: 'Today, Sunday, Talib sent me a message at lunchtime saying he wanted to come and have a heart to heart talk. He came at 4 and stayed till 6 and I must confess that he made a very favourable impression on me. He told me frankly that he wished to be Amir of the Iraq..' *Letters*, 18/12/1920. Gertrude gives him her stock answer that it would be up to the Iraqis to choose their Amir, but she confesses a day later to her father 'I feel quite clear in my own mind that there is only one workable solution, a son of the Sharif and for choice Faisal; very very much the first choice. But I can't well say that, or at least not all of it, because it would be necessary to square the French and that could only be done by the people at home. There are, I secretly fancy, indications that they are considering it. Something about conferences with Faisal appeared in the Times..' *Letters*, 25/12/1920

72. *Letters*, 4/12/1920.

73. 'It met on 12 March, 1921, attended by the highest Service personalities, Foreign Office and Treasury experts, Churchill's Eastern advisers including Lawrence, and from Iraq, Sir Percy Cox accompanied by General Haldane, Ja'far Al-Askari, Sasun Hasqayl, Gertrude Bell, and two of the ministerial Advisers. The agenda, as far as concerned Iraq included the selection of a ruler, the treatment of the Iraqi Kurds, the early reduction of British expenditure, and the composition of the forces designed to secure the defence of Iraq after the withdrawal of British garrisons...' Longrigg, *Iraq, 1900-1950*, p. 130

74. *Letters*, 17/4/1921

75. We know from later letters that Saiyid Husain would call Gertrude in person or by phone to give her breaking news. e.g. 'Stop Press news. 8.p.m. Saiyid Husain Afnan, Sec. Of the Council, has just been in to tell me of the debate. It has resulted in nothing....' *Letters*,

22/6/1922; and this letter: '10p.m. I've just heard by telephone from Saiyid Husain Afnan, Secretary to the Council, that the ministers passed the treaty at this afternoon's meeting...' *Letters*, 17/7/1922

76. *Political Diaries*, vol. 1, p. 289. While Gertrude's report may have been the precipitate reason for Saiyid Talib's deportation, Cox would probably have not acted with such decisiveness, if he had not already made up his mind that Saiyid Talib should be removed from the political scene. Foster, *The Making of Modern Iraq*, gives the following account of the deportation of Saiyid Talib, based upon the report of the High Commissioner's 1920-22, Parl. Debates, 1921, vol. 145, col. 663 : 'Upon Cox's return to Bagdad [from the Cairo Conference] after a six weeks' absence, he found that Saiyid Talib Pasha had toured the country south of Bagdad in an extensive propagandist campaign, ostensibly in favor of the candidature of the naqib of Bagdad, but really for his own elevation to the throne. The upshot of this was that Saiyid Talib Pasha was deported.' *The Making of Modern Iraq*, pp 94-95. In view of Gertrude's letter, Cox's official explanation seems ingenuous.

## CHAPTER 9

### ‘THE MOST GREAT HOUSE’

*“In 1844, a young Persian merchant named Siyyid ‘Ali-Muhammad declared himself to be the Promised Qa’im awaited by Shia Muslims. He adopted the title “the Bab”, which means “the Gate”, and His teachings quickly attracted a large following. Alarmed by the growing numbers of “Babis,” as His followers were known, the Muslim clergy allied themselves with ministers of the Shah in an effort to destroy the infant Faith. Several thousand Babis were persecuted, tortured and killed in the following years, but the growth of the new religion continued even after the Bab Himself was imprisoned and later executed in July 1850. The horrific treatment of the Babis at the hands of the secular and religious authorities was recorded by a number of Western diplomats, scholars, and travelers, who expressed their admiration for the character and fortitude of the victims. The Babi religion sprang from Islam in much the same manner that Christianity sprang from Judaism or Buddhism did from Hinduism. That is to say, it was apparent early in the Bab’s ministry that the religion established by Him was not merely a sect or a movement within Islam but an independent Faith. Furthermore, one of the main tenets of Babi belief was the Bab’s statement that He had been sent by God to prepare the way for One greater than Himself, who would inaugurate an era of peace and righteousness throughout the world, representing the culmination of all past religious dispensations. Mirza Husayn-Ali was one of the leading adherents of the Babi Faith Who was arrested and imprisoned during the tumultuous years of the Bab’s brief ministry. Because of pressure on the Persian Shah from European diplomats, He was spared from execution but was banished from Persia to Baghdad, Constantinople, Adrianople and finally the penal colony of Acre in Palestine. Thus, the Persian government, which had secured the support of the rulers of the rival Ottoman Empire in suppressing the new movement, expected that His sphere of influence would be severely limited.*

*During His initial imprisonment, Mirza Husayn-Ali had received the first divine intimation that He was the Promised One of Whom the Bab had spoken. He adopted the title “Baha’u’llah, which means “Glory of God”, and publicly declared His mission on the eve of His exile from Baghdad, in April 1863...”*

*- Baha’i World, 2001-2002 <sup>1</sup>*

When Baha’u’llah was exiled to Baghdad in 1853, he initially established his residence in Kazimayn a city just north of Baghdad, held holy by Shi’ah Moslems where the seventh and the ninth Imams are buried. This is Gertrude’s description, in 1920, of Kazimayn and its clergy:

*It’s a problem here how to get into touch with the Shi’ahs, not the tribal people in the country; we’re on intimate terms with all of them; but the grimly devout citizens of the holy towns and more especially the leaders of religious opinion, the mujtahids, who can loose and bind with a word by authority which rests on*

an intimate acquaintance with accumulated knowledge entirely irrelevant to human affairs and worthless in any branch of human activity. There they sit in an atmosphere which reeks of antiquity and is so thick with the dust of ages that you can't see through it - nor can they... There's a group of these worthies in Kadhimain, the holy city 8 miles from Baghdad, bitterly pan-Islamic, anti-British et tout le bataclan. Chief among these are a family called Sadr...<sup>2</sup>

From Kazimayn, Baha'u'llah transferred his residence to the old quarter of Baghdad for a little under a year, then following a 2 year retreat to the mountains of Kurdistan, he returned and took up residence in the house of Sulayman-i-Ghannam, 'an extremely modest residence, situated in the Karkh quarter, in the neighborhood of the western bank of the river...' <sup>3</sup> a house designated as the Bayt-i-Azam ('the Most Great House').

We have this description of the house from Shoghi Effendi, the great-grandson of Baha'ullah, in *God Passes By*, a history of the first 100 years of the Babi and Baha'i Faith:

The room of the Most Great House, that same chronicler has recorded, "set apart for the reception of Baha'ullah's visitors, though dilapidated, and having long since outgrown its usefulness, vied, through having been trodden by the blessed footsteps of the Well Beloved, with the Most Exalted Paradise. Low-roofed, it yet seemed to reach to the stars, and though it boasted but a single couch, fashioned from the branches of palms, whereon He who is the King of Names was wont to sit, it drew to itself, even as a loadstone, the hearts of the princes"

It was this same reception room which, in spite of its rude simplicity, had so charmed the Shuja'u'd-dawlih that he had expressed to his fellow-princes his intention of building a duplicate of it in his home in Kazimayn. "*He may well succeed,*" Baha'u'llah is reported to have smilingly remarked when apprized of this intention, "*in reproducing outwardly the exact counterpart of this low-roofed room made of mud and straw with its diminutive garden. What of his ability to open onto it the spiritual doors leading to the hidden worlds of God?*"<sup>4</sup>

Gertrude mentions the Karkh quarter in a letter to her father dated October 3, 1920:

There's one other party I didn't tell you about. Capt. Clayton and I went to tea with Sulaiman Dakhil who is one of the leading 'Aqail of Baghdad. The 'Aqail are nearly all central Arabians; they invariably speak of themselves as subjects of Ibn Sa'ud. They are the merchants and caravan leaders of the desert - I had an 'Aqali with me when I went to Hail. They live in the right bank part of Baghdad - Karkh is its name - and they have a famous coffee shop of their own, Qahwat al 'Aqail. I'm in intimate relations with them for they are the people from whom I get news. I do them a good turn whenever I can and they respond by coming in to see me whenever they return from Syria or Arabia and telling me what they've heard and seen. Qahwat al 'Aqail is a truly remarkable place - we passed it on our way to Sulaiman's house. It was crowded with unmistakable Najdis, their lean, hawk-like faces of a type quite different from the Baghdadi. They're the pure Arab stock, Semitic but not Jewish; quite unlike the Jew. The tea party was delightful...<sup>5</sup>

A number of the most significant books and tablets of the Baha'i Revelation were revealed from Baha'u'llah's house in Baghdad - *The Book of Certitude* (the *Kitab-i-Iqan*), the *Hidden Words* and the *Four Valleys*<sup>6</sup>. It is for this reason, Adib Taherzadeh, a former member of the Universal House of Justice explains in his 4-volume series on the writings of Baha'u'llah, that the House was designated by Baha'u'llah as a place of pilgrimage:

Baha'u'llah has designated this house as the 'House of God', the 'Most Great House', and ordained it to be a centre of pilgrimage. Within its walls innumerable Tablets were revealed and the verses of God were sent down in great profusion for many years... This House and the House of the Bab in Shiraz are, next to the Holy Shrines in Akka and Haifa where the earthly remains of Baha'u'llah and the Bab are interred, regarded by Baha'is as the holiest places on earth. Pilgrimage to the House of Baha'ullah in Baghdad and that of the Bab in Shiraz is one of the holy observances of the Faith ordained in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book).<sup>7</sup>

There were houses adjacent to the 'Most Great House' which were occupied by Baha'u'llah's followers. One was known as the house of Nabuki, 'situated in the same street as His own house, but on the opposite side. A number of the companions, including Nabil [a chronicler of Babi history], lived in this house. Aqa Muhammad-Zaman, a merchant of Shiraz, and Ustad ali Akbar-i-Najjar... also lived there. Shatir-Rida... and his brother had a house in the same street, and had set up a grinding-mill and a bakery. Baha'u'llah owned this bakery, which supplied all the companions, without charge, with the bread they required. The father of the two bakers, the ninety-year old Aqa Muhammad Sadiq, came to Baghdad from Ardakan, near Yazd. He had many stories to tell of the behaviour of the ecclesiastics, and of his own conversion to the Faith of the Bab, which, Nabil says, evoked smiles from Baha'u'llah...'<sup>8</sup>

Baha'u'llah's house had been in the possession of the Baha'is ever since Baha'ullah's departure from Baghdad in 1863, though held in the name of trusted intermediaries to avoid drawing the enmity of a hostile Shi'ih clergy.<sup>9</sup> With the grant of the mandate to the British following the war, Abdu'l-Baha gave instructions to begin the task of restoring the 'Most Great House' which had fallen into a state of disrepair.

A delightful account of the activities of the Baghdad Baha'i community and the restoration of the 'Most Great House', written by the Secretary of the Spiritual Assembly of Baghdad, appears in the March, 1923 issue of *Star of the West*,<sup>10</sup> a Baha'i magazine published in the United States [there was often a time lag between the date an article or letter was written, and when it was finally published in *Star of the West*. This letter, from its contents, appears to have been written in early 1922 though it was published in 1923]:

Baghdad, the capital of Irak, Mesopotamia, and now under the occupation of the British Government has a population of nearly two hundred thousand souls of different religions, chief of which are the Moslem - Sunnites and Sheites, Jewish, Christian and Sabeite, named in order according to their numerical following. Amid them all there live many scores of Bahais whose only aim and purpose is the welfare of the whole world of humanity. To spread the great Cause there come from time to time teachers from Persia. The Spiritual Assembly of Bagdad meets regularly once a week, led by Haji Gahmood



Ghassabchi, the firm friend who has already spent hundreds of thousands of rupees upon the repairing of the Baitollah, the house in which His Holiness Baha'Ullah lived during his residence in Bagdad, and who purposes to to give as the need arises. This weekly meeting is held on Sunday nights in the house of Dr. Nourollah, a Persian friend. On Thursday nights, also, a public meeting is held at which scores of Bahais gather to listen to the chanting of the holy Tablets and to receive the news which has arrived from Haifa..

As regards communication with the Holy Land the Bagdad friends have been more favored than many other countries for there is a regular air mail service between Haifa and Bagdad by means of which letters mailed one day will reach Haifa in two days, and scarcely a fortnight passes but we receive an answer.

The Bagdad friends rejoiced to hear the news of the unity of the American friends and all together offer their best Abha greetings to all the American friends.

(Signed) Hedayatullah, L.L., Secretary of the Spiritual Assembly of Bagdad<sup>11</sup>

In February of 1922, Gertrude sent off her usual fortnightly letter to her father containing the news of the previous two weeks. She was in a good mood. A.T. Wilson, her nemesis, was visiting Iraq, as head of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. Oil and kerosene prices were high, and APOC was being blamed. After an interview with Wilson, Feisal, who was now King,<sup>12</sup> was not impressed, she reported happily: 'Oh my sister!' said he 'A perfect thief!' She maintained her rivalry with AT - or was it the other way around: 'AT is extremely affable to me and publishes laudatory appreciations of the Arab Govt. in the papers, but in private I hear he says that he gives it 18 months' life.' The King had given a dinner party to which she had been invited, and she had taken the King out to her favourite garden belonging to her old friend, Haji Naji. She carried on in this vein, then turned to a new news item:

'I ended the day with a dinner party in my own house to which came Mr. Cooke, Saiyid Muhi al Din (the second, and far the cleverest, son of the Naqib) the Governor of Baghdad (Taufiq Khalidi) Hikmat Sulaiman, an able cynical man - his brother was a famous War Minister under the Turks - and Abdul Latif Nuri, a member of the Iraq Army General Staff. Muhi al Din, Taufiq and Hikmat are all men of singular breadth of mind. People who think that the East has a wholly different mentality from the West should hear men of this kind when they are talking freely together as I think they do in my house. The real difference is in character; they are very reluctant to give themselves away in public - the weight of popular ignorance and superstition bears too heavily upon them. These three were discussing that night an episode which may possibly give the Iraq Govt some trouble. There's a house in Baghdad which belonged to Baha Ullah, the Persian founder of a reformed sect of Islam. The Bahais regard it with great reverence because BahaUllah lived there for a time after he was exiled from Persia, some 60 years ago. The Shi'ahs, always the most fanatical and conservative element, treat the Bahais as schismatics, and are protesting against their retention of this house on the ground that it is a nest of heretics. The King and the Naqib are equally indignant at the agitation. The Naqib loathes the superstition of the Shi'ahs and to hear the King, in his more expansive moments, on the Shi'ah divines - well, it's a privilege. My Sunni guests, all of them really free-thinkers, were equally outspoken, and I can't help hoping that in this matter of the Bahai house the mujtahids - damnation to all of them - may find that they have embarked on a pretty tough proposition.'<sup>13</sup>

Her official Intelligence Report that followed, Report No. 5, March 1, 1922, also picked up this story. (Her reports were distributed widely: ‘... It goes to all our provincial officers as well as to India, Egypt, Aden, Jaffa, Constantinople, Jerusalem and London. Also Tehran. If they don’t know everything they ought to know about us, it’s not my fault.’)<sup>14</sup>

Item 3 of the *Summary* to her March 1, report declared:

‘3. The Shi’ah Ulama have inaugurated an agitation against the Bahai sect which numbers some 5,000 families in the Iraq (Para 190);  
then under the heading, *Notes on Public Opinion and Affairs in Baghdad*, Para.190 sets out the details:

190. A controversy which threatens difficulties has arisen over a house in Karkh (Baghdad West) in which Baha Ullah, the head of the Bahai sect lived when he was exiled from Persia to Baghdad. The house was presented to him by one of his followers but registered in the name of his wakil who was subsequently exiled to Diyarbakr and died there. No tapu documents are in existence and the house was assumed to be the property of this man’s son-in-law who bore the same name as the deceased. The Shi’ahs, bitterly hostile to the Bahais, who held the house in great reverence, brought up the question of ownership in the Shi’ah religious court where judgment was given against the Bahais. On this judgment being quashed in the civil courts the Shi’ahs brought up their claim again in a different form. The case has been referred to a higher court. There was some agitation in Karbala and Najaf and letters on the subject were received by the High Commissioner.

Opportunity was taken by the appearance in the *Lisan al Arab* of a harmless article describing the position of the Bahais in Acre after the death of Abbas Eff (see its issue of February 16) to bring Shi’ah vindictiveness to a head. The editor of *Lisan al Arab*, Ibrahim Hilmi, is universally disliked and mistrusted, not unjustly, for his lack of political principles. Representatives of the Ma’hud al ‘Ilmi took the occasion thus presented to wreck what credit remain to him, by begging Shaikh Mahdi al Khalisi to pronounce a fetwah against the paper on the ground that it supported the heretical Bahai sect. Shaikh Mahdi complied and a Fetwah forbidding Moslems to buy or read the *Lisan al Arab* was posted in the Kadhimain shrine. Ibrahim Hilmi in the hope of regaining grace, thereupon wrote a savage article against the Bahais in his issue of February 17. These incidents have set the Shi’ah world buzzing like a wasp’s nest. A strong anti-Bahai movement is being inaugurated in Najaf with the object of guarding the soil of the Iraq from the pollution of a heretical place of worship i.e. the house in Karkh. Incidentally there is a strong desire to oust Saiyid Husain Afnan, Secretary of the Council of Ministers, who is a nephew of the late Abbas Eff. and of course a Bahai. Both the King and the Naqib are greatly annoyed by this exhibition of ignorant fanaticism which Sunnis in general qualify as characteristic of the mentality of the Shi’ah sect.

In the *Press Supplement* both articles from *Lisan Al Arab* were reproduced:

*Lisan al Arab* No. 171, February 17

Disputes among the Baha’is - 40 days after the death of Abdu’l Baha some of the Bahais invited the inhabitants of Haifa and Acre to attend a mourning ceremony. Saiyid Husain

Ruhi al Bahai delivered a speech in praise of Abbas Eff. and said that he made a name even in Acre which is well known for its ignorance. He said Saiyid Shauki,[Shoghi Effendi] the grandson of Abbas Eff. would succeed him. The sons and brothers of Baha Ullajh had not been invited because of a difference of opinion which had lasted since his death. The fact that the name of a successor was mentioned at the ceremony was a mistake. It is said that Saiyid Muhammad Ali's feelings were wounded, for it is rumoured that Abbas Eff. nominated Mhd. Ali in his will. The people of Acre also took exception to Saiyid Husain's words (Copied from the Karmal)

*Lisan al Arab* No. 173, February 19

Some readers thought from what we published about the Bahais that we admit their doctrine as a faith. But in fact we published nothing but quotations from Syrian papers on the occasion of the death of Abbas al Bahai. We had no other purpose but that of quoting news. The Bahai doctrine in our opinion is nothing but forbidden heresy, and is so regarded by the Angh-t Shar'ahs [? ]. We take no interest in this doctrine any more than in any other heresy in China, America or elsewhere. The opinion of the editor, writers and all concerned with this paper regarding the Baha'i doctrine is that it is heresy contrary to the spirit of Islam. We believe that the duty of every Moslem is to resist it. Any one who spreads it is a heretic. We are innocent of any relations with it. This is our opinion and God help us to serve the nation and fight the microbes with which some try to poison it...'

Besides *Lisan al Arab*, Gertrude included a clipping from one other newspaper - a paper called *Dijlah* [the scope of her press reviews was impressive - in this one fortnightly report, Gertrude reviewed 38 newspapers, albeit many of them different editions of the same newspapers]:

*Dijlah*. No. 100 March 2

Many know the Bahais of Karkh violently occupied a place in Karkh and began to build a Qiblih. The heir of the property brought an action against them and the case is still under consideration. The Bahais claim that this property belong to them but Tapu shows that it is registered in the name of a Moslem who died leaving no heir. So the Shiah Sharah Court found. The Minister of Finance has now taken charge of the property and is considering whether they should escheat it or restore it to an heir who has lately turned up.<sup>15</sup>

Abdu'l Baha had passed away on November 28, 1921. His will named Shoghi Effendi, his grandson, as his successor.<sup>16</sup> Shoghi Effendi, who was only 24 at the time, and who had to break off his studies at Oxford to return to Palestine, was immediately faced with two crisis - one in Palestine, and the other in Baghdad.

The first crisis came about as a result of the claim by Mohammad Ali, Abdu'l Baha's half-brother, to custodianship of the tomb of Baha'u'llah at Bahji, near Acre, after Abdu'l-Baha's passing.<sup>17</sup> For almost a year, the keys to the tomb were withheld by the authorities, but, by unceasing effort on the part of Shoghi Effendi, 'backed by insistent pressure from Baha'is all over the world'<sup>18</sup> according to Ruhiyyih Khanum, Shoghi Effendi's wife, by February, 1923, Shoghi Effendi was able to convince the British authorities that the keys should be returned to him.<sup>19</sup>

The second crisis facing the young leader of the Faith proved more intractable - the

confiscation of the 'Most Great House' in Baghdad. Gertrude's private letter to her father and her official fortnightly report quoted above had reported the beginnings of this crisis: '...*The Shi'ahs, bitterly hostile to the Bahais...*', '... *A strong anti-Bahai movement...*'; and the corollary to this, the reluctance of politicians to stand up for their principles: '...they are very reluctant to give themselves away in public - the weight of popular ignorance and superstition bears too heavily upon them.'

The report confirms that there was antagonism being directed towards Saiyid Husayn as the secretary of the Council of Ministers, and associated this antagonism with his being a Baha'i;

'... there is a strong desire to oust Saiyid Husain Afnan, Secretary of the Council of Ministers, who is a nephew of the late Abbas Eff. *and of course a Bahai..*'

The association was inevitable, given Saiyid Husain's prominence as the grandson of Baha'u'llah, even though, ironically, his political activities were in violation of Baha'i principles. One of the first letters Shoghi Effendi had written as the new head of the Faith in 1922, was to reiterate categorically the principle that Baha'is should not engage in politics.<sup>20</sup>

Gertrude's complaint that the leading Iraqi politicians were reluctant to stand up for their principles when these ran counter to popular religious sentiment, was borne out by the commentary in her next fortnightly report, Report no. 6, issued March 15, 1922. Under the heading '*Notes on Public Opinion and Affairs in Baghdad*' appeared this lead item regarding the Naqib:

237. The *Istiqlal* paper has been the cause of a slight flutter in the dovescotes. Nuri Pasha produced a somewhat feeble apology for its first efforts (see Para 193 above), alleging that he had been unable to supervise it properly, and calling attention to the need of a Press Bureau responsible for newspapers as a whole. On March 5, the paper published a letter from him stating that the Naqib had learnt, that the editor intended to publish the fatwah of Shaikh Mahdi al Khalisi against the Baha'is (see Para 190 above) and requested that he should refrain from doing so. The circumstances remain obscure. The Naqib denies that he gave expression to a request of this nature; in any case it may be taken for granted that he did not intend his name to be mentioned. Nuri Pasha committed a grave indiscretion in writing an official letter in which the protest of the Naqib, real or imaginary was alluded to even if he wrote it under the understanding, as he states, that it should not be published.<sup>21</sup>

The Naqib was not the only one who was concerned about speaking out publicly. The King, too, seemed to be guilty of saying one thing and doing another. Even as Gertrude was writing these laudatory words in praise of the King and the Naqib to her father in her February letter: '...the Naqib loathes the superstition of the Shi'ahs and to hear the King, in his more expansive moments, on the Sh'ah divines - well, it's a privilege',<sup>22</sup> the King was giving orders to the Governor of Baghdad to turn out the Baha'is from the Holy House.<sup>23</sup> It is probable that Gertrude was not aware of the King's intervention at the time of her March 1 report. But the Press Supplement attached to her March 15 report does include a news item from *Al Iraq*, (No. 546, March 7), noting a visit by the King to Kazimayn to meet with the Mujtahids. This could indicate that Gertrude considered the meeting suspicious. She had obviously gone to the trouble of finding out who exactly was in attendance at the meeting:

1. H.M the King visited Kadhimiyyah and gave the Mujtahids a private interview. Shaikh Mahdi al Khalsi and others.

*N.B.* - Shaikh Mahdi al Sadr was the only other person present<sup>24</sup>

A year later, the Baha'is were still trying to obtain legal redress. In July of 1923, they filed an action in the Peace Court against the Governor of Baghdad for repossession of the property, and on December 20, 1923 the Peace Court decided in their favour.<sup>25</sup> The decision provoked a swift, hostile reaction. On January 9, 1924, Gertrude recounted to her father an encounter involving her old friend, Haji Naji, who was approached by petitioners demanding the return of the Holy House (note: at this stage, Gertrude personalised these attacks and saw them as primarily directed against Saiyid Husain):

9/1/24 Dearest Father...It has been a very busy week in the office - I don't know why particularly, but I seem to have had a great number of notes and despatches to draft. On Friday afternoon I went to see some Point to Point races to which I had been specially invited. The King and Sir Henry were there [Percy Cox has by now been replaced as High Commissioner by Henry Dobbs]...On Saturday afternoon I rode down to see Haji Naji. He really is a wonderful old thing. His natural good sense and breadth of view are surprising. There has been a silly fuss made by some extreme Shi'ahs, confound their politics, about a house in Kadhimain [this should be Khargh] belonging to the Bahais, indeed to members of Saiyid Husain Afnan's family. It is all because they're jealous of him, poor dear, but they put it on religious grounds - confound religion - an infidel house in a sacred city and so forth. A deputation came to Haji Naji to ask him to sign a petition in this sense. Said he, relating the episode: 'I like Saiyid Husain; he is a good young man... So I said: Look you at India. There are people who worship stones and those who worship men and idols and trees and bits of rags. What do the English? They pay no attention. And why should we trouble to what others worship...' <sup>26</sup>

The affair grew more complex, as the King once again prepared to intervene and countermand the order of the Peace Court. The Intelligence Report for February 7, 1924 reported on the political *impasse* that followed:

Intelligence report No. 3, Baghdad, February 7, 1924

*Proceedings of the Council of Ministers:*

76. At a meeting on January 16, the Council considered a letter from the Ministry of Interior relating to the dispute between the Shi'ahs and the Bahais about some houses at Kadhimain [this should be Karkh] belonging to the latter (see Report No. 5 of 1922, para. 190). The Shi'ahs having obtained from their Shi'ah Court a decree in their own favour, lodged a suit in the Peace Court for an order of ejectment against the Bahais. The case caused much excitement, especially in the U.S.A. and Canada where there is a large Bahai Community, and during its hearing the Muhafidh of Baghdad, *acting on the King's orders*, [italics added] turned the Bahais out and took possession of the keys, leaving the houses empty. It was alleged that the reason for this action was that feeling between the Shi'ahs and the Bahais ran so high as to threaten serious disturbance. After waiting some time, the Bahais sued the Amin al Asima, successor to the Muhfidh, for possession of the houses and obtained a favourable judgment. The Ministry of Interior now propose that the keys should be left in the possession of the Mutasarrif and the Council agreed.

*H.E the High Commissioner has written to His Majesty asking him to withhold his consent to the resolution and pointing out that if the executive authorities are permitted to override the order of a regular judicial court, foreign Powers will certainly refuse to abolish the Capitulations and declare that they must establish their own courts in the country to secure their subjects from injustice. [italics added]*<sup>27</sup>

The High Commissioner, very properly, as para. 76 of this report indicates, took exception to the proposed exercise by the Council of Ministers of an executive authority to retain possession of the House, which would effectively have over-ridden the order of a judicial court.<sup>28</sup>

Gertrude fleshes out this report in a letter to her father :

February 13, 1924...Darling father. I thought of you a great deal on your birthday, and your being 80, and my wish is that you may enjoy another 80 happy years...Now for Iraq. On Friday, I had a dinner party composed of Abdul Muhsin Beg (late Prime Minister), Sasun Eff., Naji Beg (late Minister of Justice) and Nigel. I hadn't meant it to be all ex-Exs...It was a very pleasant evening and we talked of antiquities and agriculture, not politics, but after dinner, while I was talking to the two others, Sasun told Nigel that the King was interfering far too much in the business of the ministries and gave him some flaming examples...

But how to prevent the King from interfering in administration - that's the problem. There has been a terrific affair today. (This is all secret.) It arose out of an order given by H.M. which quashed a decision of the Court of First Instance, confirmed by the Court of Appeal. It's a complicated case, a Shi'ah suit against the Bahais for the possession of a house; religious fanaticism lies at the bottom of it and H.M. who is playing up to the Shi'ahs, backed them. The Council backed H.M., Ja'far [the current Primi Minister] not being one who would ever go against him. It was a clear case of the executive overruling the judicial and Sir Henry took an absolutely firm stand. He pointed out that if such things occurred the Courts would lose all credit and the abrogation of capitulations would become impossible. He insisted on the King's withdrawing his order and the King has undertaken to do so- I've not yet heard the details of the conversation which took place between H.M. and Ken this morning [Ken Cornwallis, the British adviser to the the King] (poor Ken was of course the person who had to represent H.E.'s views to H.M.!) but I saw the King this afternoon at the Arab polo. He was all smiles, I'm bound to say; he was dressed in his most beautiful Arab clothes and he was playing the part of King of the Arabs in his finest manner...<sup>29</sup>

Gertrude is clear here about the causes of the persistent efforts to expropriate the Baha'i property: '*religious fanaticism lies at the bottom of it.*'

She was to write one more letter about the 'Most Holy House' a week later. The occasion was a bird-shooting party, attended by the King:

'...I sat most of the time with the King (who is no duck shooter) and between drives he chatted most pleasantly on all subject, including his fearful row with H.E. over the Bahai house, about which I think I told you in my last letter. *I offered some good advice!*<sup>30</sup>

The Most Holy House was never returned to the Baha'is. A bewildering drama of actions and cross-actions, of court houses filled with hostile onlookers, and of intimidated

counsel withdrawing from representation, ensued, until the Court of Appeal, the highest court, in a controversial decision, ruled against the Baha'is and in favour of the 'heirs' of the caretaker, who promptly turned the House over to the Shi'ah Waqf (religious endowment).

Believing that the justice system had failed, Shoghi Effendi enlisted the assistance of an American Baha'i lawyer, Mountfort Mills,<sup>31</sup> to draft a petition on behalf of the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Baghdad, to the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations, seeking relief.

At its Fourteenth Session in 1928, the Commission made the following recommendation:

The Permanent Mandates Commission, recognising the justice of the complaint made by the Baha'i Spiritual Assembly of Bagdad, has recommended to the Council of the League such action as it thinks proper to redress the wrong suffered by the petitioners.<sup>32</sup>

The matter was brought up at successive sessions of the Permanent Mandates Commission, but as the following extract from the minutes of the Twenty-First Session (November 2, 1931), on the eve of the accession by Iraq to the League makes clear, no progress had been, or would be, made:

#### The Bahai Case

M. Orts wished to know whether the question raised by the Bahais petition had at last been settled. The Mandates Commission had examined this petition in November 1928, and on the basis of its report, the Council of the League had, in March 1929, invited the British Government to remedy the wrong done to those people.

At the twentieth session of the Mandates Commission the accredited representative had said that no steps had yet been taken. As the accredited representative was now perhaps before the Commission for the last time, M. Orts wished to ask him whether effect had been given to the Council's resolution. It might be argued that, as so much time had elapsed, the affairs was of no further interest. It was, however, characteristic of the Moslem spirit of intolerance and the fears that spirit caused the Iraqi Government. Those fears seemed to be stronger than the government's desire, particularly at the present time, to avoid any appearance of disregarding the opinion of the League Council

Sir Francis Humphrys repeated the explanations which he had given at the June session. There was, unhappily, no doubt in the mind of His Majesty's Government that a miscarriage of justice had taken place, and he explained at length the various difficulties, legal and otherwise which stood in the way of a revised settlement. ..

M. Orts fully appreciated the difficulties of the situation. It should not be forgotten however, that the Iraqi courts had created that situation by their partiality and the Iraqi government by its weakness. He noted that no progress had been made in the matter. Religious passion was at the bottom of this injustice and it was clear that the delays in righting the wrongs were due to the same cause. The Iraqi Government was not strong enough to make a majority respect the right of a minority...'<sup>33</sup>

We will let Gertrude have the last word on this matter of religious intolerance. While her unabashed confidence in European tolerance and secular values might seem out of place today, (as Baddeley would say, ‘while individually any man may have the right to condemn..., collectively, as nations, it is a case of glass houses all round’<sup>34</sup>) her analysis, nonetheless, still has resonance today.

After the Arabs had gone Mr. Cooke and I sat long talking over the fire and we agreed that there couldn’t be anything in the world more absorbing than to be in the very heart of intellectual Asia - to be watching and encouraging the effort to overmaster secular prejudices. Heaven knows their wits are acute enough; it’s moral courage that’s lacking to throw off the long domination of the theocratic ordinance in human affairs, which from a valuable restraint has become a cord of strangulation. After all it has taken us Europeans centuries to win through. I can frankly say, thanks to the struggles of the last two generations, that I’m not a Christian and no one excommunicates me, but Moslems have the battle still before them and it’s complicated by the fact that the only obvious way to rouse the ignorant masses of Asia against foreign overlordship is an appeal to their religious beliefs. The men who make the appeal are themselves long past the tenets they preach - they use them merely as a weapon in political controversy, but until the battle is won they dare not abandon them.’<sup>35</sup>

1. *The Baha’i World*, 2001-2002, Baha’i World Centre, Haifa, 2003 World Centre Publications, pp. 8-9

2. *Letters*, 14/3/1920

3. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pps. 129-130.

4. *God Passes By*, pp. 134-135. We learn from Balyuzi, *Baha’u’llah*, p. 124, that Shaju’u’d-Dawlih, the prince referred to in this passage, was a son of Zillu’s- Sultan (one of Fath-ali Shah’s sons exiled in Baghdad):

on one occasion some retainers of Ali-Shah, the Zillu’Sultan, cursed a Babi who was passing the door of that exiled prince’s residence. Baha’u’llah sent a message to Zillu’s-Sultan to ask his men to hold their tongues. The Prince obeyed. Before long his sons, Shuja’u’d-Dawlih and Safu-d-Dawlih, were *habitués* of the *biruni* of the house of Baha’u’llah.

5. *Letters*, 3/10/1920

6. *God Passes By*, pp. 138-141

7. Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Baha’u’llah, Baghdad, 1853-63*, pp. 211-212.

8. Balyuzi, *Baha’u’llah*, p. 150.



9. Ruhiyyih Rabbani, *The Priceless Pearl*, Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1969, p. 94. She adds, but without further details, that during the time of Abdu'l Baha, the Shiah had seized the house, but it had been restored to its legitimate custodian by the British authorities.

10. *Star of the West*, the first Baha'i magazine published in the Western world, began publication in March 1910. The magazine shared news of the Baha'i world, articles on the Baha'i Faith, and letters and tablets from Abdu'l Baha and later Shoghi Effendi.

11. *Star of the West*, Volume 8, reprinted, George Ronald, Oxford, 1978, p. 345

12. Foster, *The Making of Modern Iraq*, pp. 95-95 gives a neat summary of how this came about:

On July 11 [1921], according to the proposal of the Naqib, who was president of the Council of State, that body unanimously adopted a resolution declaring Feisal King of Iraq provided that His Highness' government shall be a constitutional, representative and democratic government limited by law.' ...in order that this king-making might have the semblance of government by the consent of the governed a survey was now made of the popular will. This survey, frequently called a farce by the opponents of British rule in Iraq (most of the critics being British), was carried out by the ministry to the interior under the supervision of the Council of State. It consisted in recording the opinion of representative committees in the various political divisions of the country as to whether they approved or disapproved of the above resolution. The canvass covered the entire country except the Sulaimani *liwa*, inhabited mainly by southern Kurds, which took no part in this election. The results of the referendum gave, according to the High Commission, 96 per cent for Feisal.

Foster relies on and cites the Report of the High Commissioner, 1920-1922, Parliamentary Debates, 1921, vol. 144 and 145; Cox's account in *The Letters*, pp 432-433, as well as the remarks of a Lieutenant Colonel Freemantle, Parliamentary Debates (vol. 151):

The account that the secretary of state gave us of the election...is more absurd than anything I could imagine ...we arranged and hope that it is all for the best, but for God's sake let us drop this sham of democratic government for Orientals by themselves.

Feisal was duly crowned on August 23, 1921 (Longrigg, *Iraq*, p. 133). Gertrude describes the investiture in a letter to her father (*Letters*, 28/8/1921):

...It was all Arab organisation and it was quite right..Exactly at 6 [a.m.] we saw Faisal in uniform, Sir Percy in white.., Sir Aylmer, Mr. Cornwallis and a following of ADC's...and so to the dais. With them was Saiyid Mahmud, the eldest son of the Naqib and Saiyid Husain Afnan, secretary of the Council of Ministers. We all stood up while they came in...Faisal looked very dignified but much strung up - it was an agitating moment. ...Then Saiyid Husain stood up and read Sir Percy's proclamation in which he announced that Faisal had been elected King by 96% of the people in Mesopotamia, long live the King!

13. *Letters*, 26/2/1922

14. Gertrude once described her reports as follows:

I am doing a little less than writing a history of Mesopotamia in fortnightly parts. I myself find it an invaluable record but I've not heard what they think of it at home..Each number is divided into the following parts: 1. Proceedings of the Council of Ministers

(as you might say Hansard compressed) 2. Public opinion - all significant events or propaganda or newspaper campaigns or anything [of political] that shows how the currents are setting; 3. Notes on Provincial Affairs, the actual history of the provinces, tribal unrest, irrigation, everything that is going on. 4. Frontiers - whatever affects us in the doings of Ibn Sa'ud in Arabia, the French in Syria, the Kamalists in Anatolia and the Kurds on our northern and eastern frontiers. It's a great work, it really is. It goes to all our provincial officers as well as to India, Egypt, Aden, Jaffa, Constantinople, Jerusalem and London. Also Tehran. If they don't know everything they ought to know about us, it's not my fault. *Letters*, 2/10/1921

15. Jarman, *Political Diaries of the Arab World, Iraq*, Volume 2: 1922-1923, Archive Editions, 1998, pp.45-63

16. 'O Ye the faithful loved ones of 'Abdu'l Baha! It is incumbent upon you to take the greatest care of Shoghi Effendi...For he is, after 'Abdu'l-Baha, the guardian of the Cause of God, the Afnan, the Hands... of the Cause and the beloved of the Lord must obey him and turn unto him.' *Will and Testament of Abdu'l Baha*, Baha'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette Illinois, 1968 reprint, p.25

17. Mohammad-Ali, shortly after Abdu'l-Baha's ascension, had filed a claim, based on Islamic law for a portion of the estate of 'Abdu'l-Baha. He also applied to the civil authorities to have custodianship of Baha'u'llah's Shrine turned over to him on the grounds that he was 'Abdu'l-Baha's lawful successor:

The British authorities refused on the grounds that it appeared to be a religious issue; he then appealed to the Muslim religious head and asked the Mufti of Akka to take formal charge of Baha'u'llah's Shrine; this dignitary, however, said he did not see how he could do this as the Baha'i Teachings were not in conformity with Shariah law. All other avenues having failed he sent his younger brother, Badiullah, with some of their supporters, to visit the Shrine of Baha'u'llah where, on Tuesday, 30 January, they forcibly seized the keys of the Holy Tomb from the Baha'i caretaker...This unprincipled act created such a commotion in the Baha'i community that the Governor of Akka ordered the keys to be handed over to the authorities, posted guards at the Shrine, but went no further, refusing to return the keys to either party.

Ruhiyyih Rabbani, *The Priceless Pearl*, pp 53-54

18. Ruhiyyih Rabbani, *The Guardian of the Baha'i Faith*, Bahai Publishing Trust, 1988, p.23. This book is a condensed and re-edited version of her book, the *Priceless Pearl*..

19. Ruhiyyih Rabbani, the former Mary Maxwell of Montreal, Canada, in her posthumous biography of Shoghi Effendi's life, *The Guardian of the Baha'i Faith*, says that the then Chief Secretary of the Government of Palestine, Sir Gilbert Clayton, (Gertrude's one-time chief at the Arab Bureau in Egypt at the start of the war) advised Shoghi Effendi's representative in Jerusalem, that the High Commissioner for Palestine, Sir Herbert Samuel, had decided to return the keys to Shoghi Effendi. *The Guardian of the Baha'i Faith*, p.23.

20. An early seminal letter of Shoghi Effendi, addressed to the National Assembly of America, in which he laid out the broad outlines of his vision of an emerging Baha'i administrative order based on strong local and national assemblies, contained an unequivocal

reminder that political activities, in any form, were forbidden: *'for the friends of God the world over are strictly forbidden to meddle with political affairs in any way whatever...'* [italics added]. This letter was dated March 5, 1922. *Baha'i Administration*, Shoghi Effendi, reissued 1960, Baha'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, pp.23-24

Saiyid Husain Afnan would become a Covenant-breaker. Ruhiyyih Rabbani, commonly referred to as Ruhiyyih Khanum, the wife of Shoghi Effendi, in her history of Shoghi Effendi's life, *The Priceless Pearl*, mentions a letter written to Saiyid Husain in January of 1923 by Shoghi Effendi (*Note: Ruhiyyih Khanum spells his name as Hossein; Shoghi Effendi has spelled his name Husayn; Gertrude used the spelling Husain.*):

In January he wrote to Hussein Afnan: 'I presume you have gathered from past experience that I stand for absolute sincerity, scrupulous justice in all matters pertaining to the Cause, and an uncompromising attitude with regard to the enemies of the Movement, the Nakezeens [Covenant-breakers] whose vile and unceasing efforts God alone shall frustrate.' The man to whom this was written, a grandson of Baha'u'llah and a nephew of Abdu'l-Baha, *became himself a notorious Covenant-breaker not long afterwards.* [italics added]. *The Priceless Pearl*, pp. 69-70.

In a later passage in *The Priceless Pearl* which also refers to this letter of January 1923, we learn what the letter was about - a request to Saiyid Husayn to confirm on behalf of his family, that the Shrine at Bahji was the property of the Bahai' Faith, not a personal family holding (a principle applicable to the 'Most Great House' in Baghdad as well):

'From the time in January 1923 when he had written to the eldest son of Baha'u'llah's daughter, requesting him to make a definite pronouncement that whatever the legal rights of these Afnan might be the Shrine at Bahji because of its nature belonged to the Baha'i Movement...' *Priceless Pearl*, p. 233

And in a cable addressed to all National Spiritual Assemblies by Shoghi Effendi, dated April 3, 1952, announcing the death of Saiyid Husayn's younger brother, Nayer Afnan, who had unremittingly opposed the Guardian during his lifetime ( he is referred to as the 'pivot of machinations'), Shoghi Effendi castigated his whole family, and accuses Saiyid Husain of having deliberately misrepresented facts during the trying of the case of the House of Baha'u'llah in Baghdad (though he does not go into further detail):

Inform National Assemblies that God's avenging wrath having afflicted in rapid succession during recent years two sons, brother and sister-in-law of Archbreaker of Baha'u'llah's Covenant, has now struck down second son of Siyyid Ali, Nayer Afnan, pivot of machinations, connecting link between old and new Covenant-breakers. Time alone will reveal extent of havoc wreaked by this virus of violation injected, fostered over two decades in Abdu'l-Baha's family. History will brand him one whose grandmother, wife of Baha'u'llah, joined breakers of His Covenant on morrow of His passing, whose parents lent her undivided support, whose father openly accused Abdu'l-Baha as one deserving capital punishment, who broke his promise to the Bab's wife to escort her to Holy Land, precipitating thereby her death, who was repeatedly denounced by Center of the Covenant as His chief enemy, *whose eldest brother* [Saiyid Husayn] *through deliberate misrepresentations of facts inflicted humiliation upon defenders of the House of Baha'u'llah in Baghdad...* [italics added]. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Baha'i World 1950-1957*, Baha'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, reprinted 1971, pp.24-25

21. *Political Diaries of the Arab World, Iraq, Vol 2: 1922-1923*, p.66.

22. *Letters*, 26/2/1922

23. On February 22, 1922, the King ordered the Governor of Baghdad to take possession of the House, ostensibly to preserve order. The date, February 22, 1922, is found in the response of His Majesty's government to a petition presented to the Permanent Mandate Commission of the League of Nations in September 1928 [see *Note* below] by the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Baghdad :

... on February 22, 1922, His Majesty King Feisal issued an order to the Governor of Baghdad to turn out the Baha'is and take possession of the property in order to prevent a breach of the peace...

*Comments of His Majesty's Government on the Petition from the Baha'i Spiritual Assembly, Baghdad, to the Permanent Mandates Commission*, contained in the Report of the Permanent Mandates Commission, Minutes of the Fourteenth Session of the Permanent Mandates Commission, reprinted in *The Baha'i World*, Vol III, 1928-1930, Baha'i Publishing Committee, N.Y., 1930, p. 53-54.

*Note:* See *God Passes By*, p. 557 for confirmation of the date, September 11, 1928, the Baghdad Assembly presented its petition to the Permanent Mandate Commission.

24. *Political Diaries of the Arab World, Iraq, Vol 2: 1922-1923*, p.72. Both Shi'a dignitaries would be sent back to Persia in August, of 1922, in a purge effected by Sir Percy Cox while Feisal was undergoing surgery for appendicitis, during which time several anti-mandate and anti-treaty agitators were exiled from Iraq. The dramatic details can be found in two letters of Gertrude to her father, 27/8/1922 and 31/8/1922.

25. *The Baha'i World*, Vol III, 1928-1930, *Comments of His Majesty's Government on the Petition from the Baha'i Spiritual Assembly, Baghdad, to the Permanent Mandates Commission*, p.54.

26. *Letters*. 9/1/24

27. *Political Diaries of the Arab World, Iraq, Vol. 3: 1923-1924*, p.347

28. Sir Henry Dobbs was not a stickler. In fact, he had a very nuanced understanding of his role as High Commissioner. In a report addressed to the Duke of Devonshire, Secretary of State for the Colonies dated January 10, 1924, he had written:

Concerning the political life of the country it is difficult to speak. An Iraq nationality has hardly yet developed. Men feel the ties of loyalty to their tribe or their town or family, but as yet little to their country. There are no parties and not even any clear personal programmes, and few outstanding characters have yet shown themselves. King Faisal, in spite of a disconcerting mutability of temper, is easily predominant. The people are growing used to his rule and his personal share gains him an increasing number of adherents. He recognizes fully his obligations to the British; but he has to keep his eye constantly fixed on possible developments after our departure and to guard above all against the allegation that he is a puppet king, propped up by our bayonets, who is willing to sacrifice the true interests of the country in order to keep in our good graces. He can hope to strike roots in the soil only by an attitude of independence and we must therefore look with indulgence upon any opposition on his part to our wishes, when those wishes run counter to popular clamour...

*Political Diaries of the Arab World, Iraq, Vol. 3: 1923-1924, p.298.*

In view of this liberal interpretation of his role, it is all the more impressive that he chose to take a principled stand on this issue of the Baha'i house.

As for Feisal - he had met with Abdu'l Baha in Haifa shortly before he became King. Shoghi Effendi mentions 'the interview at His Haifa residence between Him and King Feisal who shortly after became the ruler of Iraq;' *God Passes By*, p. 306. We know, based on a passage from the *Priceless Pearl*, that King Feisal had, at some point given assurances that he would respect the claim of the Baha'is to the Most Holy House. Ruhiyyih Khanum says that Feisal reneged on this promise:

In 1922 the government took over the keys of the House *in spite of the assurance King Feisal had given* that he would respect the claims of the Baha'is to a building that had been occupied by their representatives ever since Baha'u'llah's departure from Baghdad; His Majesty, for political reasons, now went back on his word... *Priceless Pearl*, pp. 94-95 [italics added]

It is possible that these assurances were given at the time of Feisal's interview with Abdu'l-Baha in Haifa.

29. *Letters*, 13/2/1924. In this letter, Gertrude also mentions that the mujtahids who were 'invited' to leave Iraq by Percy Cox (see Footnote 25 above) will be returning:

Somehow the question of the possible return of the mujtahids from Persia cropped up, and they flared out - being members of the Cabinet which refused to let them return. Their observations on this head were so striking that I reported them to Sir Henry. Nevertheless, they are coming back. Sir Henry has agreed with the King that they may....

30. *Letters*, 20/2/1924.

31. The memorial tribute to Mr. Mills contained in the Baha'i World, 1946-1950 published by the Baha'i publishing Committee, Wilmette, Illinois, 1952, Vol XI, p. 510, alludes to this work:

His appeal of the case of the House of Baha'u'llah at Baghdad to the League of Nations, whose verdict was favorable to the Faith, is historic. The case is documented in earlier volumes of this biennial record. Mills made two journeys to Baghdad while studying the facts pertaining to the Baha'i rights to possession of a sacred Baha'i shrine confiscated by leaders of Islam. During this mission, acting on behalf of the Guardian, Mountfort Mills had audiences with the late King Feisal of Iraq who assured him that the government would carry out the terms of the decision rendered by the League, an intention the King's untimely death made it impossible for him to fulfill. Mysteriously attacked while in Baghdad, Mr. Mills suffered a brutal assault the effects of which lingered for many years.

32. Minutes of the Twenty-Second Session, Permanent Mandates Commission, Official no. C.772.M.364, 1932, VI, Geneva, Dec. 6, 1932, p. 41

33. Minutes of the Twenty-First Session, Permanent Mandates Commission, Geneva, November 2, 1931, p. 97

34. See Footnote 12, Chapter 1 of this book, for the reference to Baddeley's quote from *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus*:

35. *Letters*, 26/2/1922

## EX ORIENTE

A distinguished divine who had been travelling in Syria summed up the result of his experiences in these words: "All my life I have been studying and teaching theology, but I blame myself for having neglected to study it in the East, for I see that my life has been in part wasted." It was a touching and a striking admission which, spoken as it was in an atmosphere permeated with an overmastering interest in the things of the spirit, struck the listener as the natural, if not the only, conclusion to which a wise and learned man could come. For in that little Syrian town all men were primarily occupied with the way of salvation, some were still seeking it, some had found it and had closed the door to further speculation, and some, while they felt that their feet were in the right path, knew that constant search was needed to insure their continuance in it. And the way was not one but many, a separate road to the Mahommedan in the plain, the Druze in the mountain, the Jew, the Persian, the Orthodox, the Catholic, the German Templar, and the English missionary, leading always to the same destination but by devious routes and over countless varieties of level.

We who know by hearsay that men look for the explanation of things in many fashions and that they find as many answers, have little personal acquaintance with any answer but one. We are not brought face to face with the profound believer in a different faith. We may, if you like, set him aside, not realising, because we do not see with the eyes, his fidelity to his own creed, a fidelity that carries him through such straits as are to us a part of the half-forgotten ills that history records, and the mind refuses to contemplate. Exile, persecution, martyrdom are far from us; the echoes of them, reaching us from time to time, rouse in us a wild and furious indignation, which, if the victims happen to be of our own race and creed, drives us to punitive expeditions and savage retaliation. Possibly the juxtaposition of religions does not make for tolerance nor shake the certainty that each man feels as to the correctness of his own opinion, but at least he knows because he must that others exhibit the same determination in upholding views diverse from if not adverse to, his own, and that not one teacher only has led his disciples to death and fired them with an unquenchable devotion.

The East has much to say to the theologian. There he may see the life which is described in the Old Testament and the New still going forward, and distinguish between the ordinary aspects of Eastern existence and what was new and vivid to the nomad of the time of Moses and the villager of the time of Christ. And this is not without advantage, for the habits of the East are so unfamiliar to him that they are apt, as recorded, to assume the air of dogma, so that the simplicity of pastoral life or the conditions of a Galilean hamlet seem a part of the message instead of being, as every Oriental knows, the inevitable setting. It is as though a twentieth century Messiah were to arise in Europe and his gospel were to fall into the hands of races ignorant of European science, who might exalt railways and the electric telegraph into essential aids to salvation. There, too, he may learn to realize the original aspect of a religion which has been so curiously coloured by Western thought, and so deeply modified to satisfy Western needs. It is the Christianity of the Gospels, not that of the Church Councils, which appeals to Orientals, and which has inspired such men as the leaders of the modern theistic school of India, the Brahmo Somaj. It may, indeed be questioned whether this movement should be counted among the few which are due to the influence of Western ideas, so entirely do the Brahmo Somaj rely upon the Eastern interpretation of the faith which is, to use the words of one of their founders, “Akin to my Oriental nature, agreeable to my Oriental habits of thought and feeling.”<sup>1</sup> To one trained in the schools of Hinduism, the doctrine of the Incarnation ranks among ideas accepted by the earliest thinkers, the rapt communion with the older prophets on Mount Tabor is familiar to him who knows by the effort to attain a similar “merging of spirit in Spirit”; even to the mysterious symbolism of the Last Supper, so incomprehensible to the West as have been one of the causes of the greatest schism between the churches, he gives an explanation probably nearer to the original significance than we can supply.<sup>2</sup> He recognises Christ “in the hymns of the Rig Veda, the mystic utterances of the Upanishads, the Gathas, the Psalms of David, and the Songs of Solomon, the wild strains of Jeremiah, and the ecstatic visions of Isaiah.” It may be that he shows a tendency to fall back into the deep sea of Pantheism which underlies his national faith, and, indeed, it is difficult for him not to give a Pantheistic explanation of such phrases as “I and my Father are one”; but as the apologist of the New Dispensation remarks, “the Brahmo Somaj is not frightened by the name of Christianity. That Pantheism which identifies the Universe with its Maker, and man with God, the Brahmo Somaj repudiates...but it was never afraid of recognising the spirit of a presiding Providence in all things.”<sup>3</sup> The Christ presented to us by these Hindu thinkers is very different from our conception of Him, but it is open to doubt whether they are not nearer his conception of Himself. Dean Stanley got to the root of the matter when he said that Christ was not a Christian. To them, as to us, his “simple code” of religion and morality is admirably calculated to elevate men’s idea to high and liberal notions of one God, and well fitted to regulate the conduct of the human race in the discharge of their various duties to God, to themselves and to society.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Keshub Chunder San: “Jesus Christ, Europ and Asia.”

<sup>2</sup>:The Oriental Christ”: Pratab Chander Mozoomdar.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>1</sup>Rammohun Roy: “The Precepts of Jesus”



Any intimacy with the East reveals the fact that religion is there actually in that all-important position which it is supposed to occupy with us, and from which other, and to us more pressing, matters have ousted it. It is the interest which is second to none, the subject of conversation which is common to all, conversation always of the most serious nature. Faiths are not taken lightly upon the tongue nor used as counters in the social game; they are the principles by which every act of life is guided and every instant ruled. What your creed may be is an essential point in the definition of your personality. It strikes the European oddly when the wandering beggar who trudges half a day's journey of desert by his stirrup, begins with "Your Presence is a Christian? I also, praise be to God!" and continues with some pertinent inquiry into his opinion concerning supernatural manifestations. We are not accustomed to having much value set upon our personal beliefs. They are assumed to be those of our fellows, with unimportant variations, and if they differ, the matter does not touch practical life closely enough to be worth a question.

The Oriental is still living in the Age of Faith, a term which we confine to a period considerably anterior to our day. It is still possible in the East to watch the birth of creeds and comparing them with our own, to arrive at a true idea of how that began on which our civilisation rests. The mental atmosphere which surrounds him is favourable to them; no later acquired science has stepped in to divorce him from the miraculous. He has grasped few of the laws which govern natural phenomena; he refers the variety of nature directly to the Divine Will, and accepts with equal alacrity a miracle or an ascertained fact of science both being covered by his theory of the order of the universe. His ignorance, his love of speculation, his power of sustained thought, the childlike belief which is frequently to be found in him, that by much thinking or much searching for the enlightened person a comprehensive explanation may be reached, his readiness to accept authority wherever he meets with it - all these are the same as they were when Asia put forth religion after religion. It is impossible to journey through the rocky valleys leading to the Dead Sea without feeling how little it would need to send another John the Baptist down to Jordan. Men are living there as he lived, as absorbed in ecstatic meditations, as ill fed, lodged in the same caves, prone to religious hallucinations; but the incredulity of the West is too near them. They cannot embark upon prophecy on any important scale without attracting the attentions of correspondents, and the morning papers are not fitting organs for the publication of a new gospel. We are too all-pervading in the Wilderness of Judea to allow of the East having a free hand. We silence with our clatter the potential seers. They are like the seedlings of Lebanon, which spring up in thousands, under the parent cedars, put forth the first exquisite coronet of fir needles on a tiny stalk, and then die for want of space. But as, to the naturalist, the little foredoomed shoot is as much a cedar as the great bole beside it; so to him that studies the birth and growth of faiths, the anchorite half crazed with hunger and profitless thought is part of the same order that produced the stern figure of the Baptist.

The prophet is not always thus held in check. Among peoples less influenced by our civilisation he does appear and gains disciples. We have known the deserts of the Soudan and the sandy hinterland of the Cyrenaica give ear to him; the southern highlands of Asia Minor have recognised him in our time, subject to the limitations introduced by railway trains and European tourists. Nor will the manifest failure of many Mahdis discourage the credulous Mohammedan world from putting implicit trust in the next warrior or holy man who lays claim to be the fulfilment of prophecy, for unelastic as the bounds of Islam are, they yet admit of the prophet that is to come. The conception is a part of the Semitic scheme of things: the Christian borrowed it

from the Jew, the Mohammedan from both, and in the hands of the three great monotheisms it has girdled the earth with its double expectation, the touching belief in a millennium, and the savage hope - the hope of the down-trodden and tenacious race from which it sprang - that at the last the children of the revelation shall be justified and their enemies cast into outer darkness. Another set of causes, working under Islam but independent from it, have resulted in a ferment of dissent and innovation among the people on whom the positive and clear-cut doctrine of the Prophet was imposed and to whom it cannot afford a satisfactory explanation of the riddle of life. "There is no God but God" is to the Arab, as it is to the Jew, the beginning and end of knowledge; it is the message of the Semitic races, simple, lofty, incapable of modification, needing no explanation. As such the Arab bore it into the Aryan East and drove it home at the sword's point. The inevitable revolt followed. To Persia is due the widening of the great rift in Mohammedanism, that between Sunni and Shiah; in Persia, where the mystic Pantheism of India was familiar and the air heavy with religious speculation, grew up, under the cloak of Mohammedanism, the secret doctrine of the Sufis, which is fundamentally opposed to the recognised creed, and akin rather to the Upanishads than to the Koran. Nor is that all; the process is still going on. One teacher after another thinks out his own modifications, preached them to his little band of disciples, by whom they are accepted with a greater or a lesser belief in their Divine origin, and dies handing on the torch. Probably the sect ends by breaking up into infinitesimal divisions and vanishes in the debris of many similar movements; but occasionally something remains to differentiate the followers of one sheikh from those of another. In one of its most recent developments this religious activity is worth considering, for it offers an example and a warning to the impartial observer.

In Acre there dwells a group of noble Persians of whom the little colony which is settled round them speak respectfully as the Holy Family. They are the sons and daughters of the last incarnation of the divinity, Beha Ullah, the Splendour of God. They and their followers are known as Babis, after the title of the founder of the sect, whom they now regard as a sort of John the Baptist, but they themselves use the term Beha'i, which distinguishes them from another and less important branch for the disciples of the Bab. The Bab was put to death in 1850 by order of the Shah, that monarch being alarmed by the rapid spreading of this doctrine and the fighting spirit to which it gave birth among its adherents. Shortly after his death two of his followers made an unsuccessful attempt to stab the Shah, who retaliated by ordering the annihilation of the sect. Then ensued a terrible persecution. Hundreds suffered death and worse than death, and many who had been marked down fled from Persia and implored the protection of the Sultan. They bore with them to Baghdad one whom the Bab had appointed by will to carry on his work, Subh i Ezel, the Dawn of Eternity. He was, however, gradually supplanted by his elder half-brother, Beha Ullah, who was a man of great power and ability, and who ended by announcing that the will known to all was merely a blind, the Bab's intention having been to interpose a life between the fury of the Shah and Baha'Ullah's most precious life, while by a secret will he had named Beha as his successor, and had declared him to be he who was to come, whose advent the Bab had been sent to announce, and who should give the law that was to supersede the revelation of Mahommed and the elder prophets. The conflict between the two parties reached such a pitch that the Turkish authorities decided to separate them. Accordingly Subh i Ezel was shipped off to Cyprus and Baha Ullah to Acre, "And the sea by God's mercy was calmed before his Holiness" related a Beha'i, "And when he reached Haifa he found a white ass prepared for him which had been brought from Persia for his service. No man had ridden on it before him, and

upon it he entered into Acre” - clearly an attempt to bring the incident of Beha’s life into line with the story of the New Testament. This imitation is frequently to be traced in Baha’i anecdote; it corresponds to the desire of the Evangelists to draw together the Old Testament and the New; “That the Scripture might be fulfilled.”

Beha bought himself lands outside the town, laid out a garden, a true Persian garden, on the banks of the river, and took up his abode in a large house in the corn-growing plain of Acre for in those days, and during all his lifetime, money flowed in from Persia to support the exiles, money enough to permit of Beha’s organising an army of missionaries both in Persia and in India. These missionaries met, and still meet, with success. “To north Persia,” said a Beha’i, “the Europeans have sent out many missions to convert the Jews. How many have they converted? Not one. All the converts among the Jews are ours, and to us many hundred have turned.” A Hindu from Lahore who had become a Babi in India and journeyed out to Acre to receive the doctrine at the fountain head, stated that the faith prospered in his country. “My wife I left and my children in Lahore,” he explained. “It is two years since I saw them, but news reaches me by the post. First, I opened a shop in Alexandria, then having made sufficient money I came here to witness to the truth. After some time I shall return, for in my city we are many.” The printing press of the sect is in Bombay. The holy books amount to some hundred, exclusively the work of Beha. They are written in Arabic and Persian, the style of them being pure and beautiful, but singularly original. For Beha was an educated Persian gentleman, unlike the Bab who was too illiterate to write Arabic correctly, which defect he explained by saying that he had come to release all creation, animate and inanimate, from the bonds which sin had laid upon it, including letters, which were henceforth to be free from the rules of grammar and orthography. In his many works Beha laid down the New Law which the Bab had predicted would be given to the people by his successor, he modified the ordinances of the Bab himself, who was a dreamer rather than a practical reformer, and he launched into prophecy, some of which has been fulfilled and some of which has not, after the manner of prophecy. A man of singular learning and discernment, he searched East and West, and combined the ordinances of both hemispheres in his teaching. He instructed his followers to acquire with all diligence Western science, and insisted that the sum of learning which dawned in the East is now at its zenith in Europe; but he was an Oriental wise in Oriental philosophy, and he handled the East reverently, not forgetting that he was one of the hierarchy of manifestations of the Divinity, from Zoroaster to Mahommed all Orientals, and all equally engaged in bring revelation up to date, that is of suiting it to the developing needs of man. The manner which he dealt with the vexed question of the position of women is a good instance of his wise comprehension of the mind of his race and of his boldness in striking at dangerous prejudices. He did not enjoin, nor did he practise, monogamy, though he limited the taking of a second wife to cases where the other had borne no children, judging that the childless wife would as a rule be the first to urge upon her husband the propriety of this course. But he set women free, treated them with a distinguished courtesy, put them on an intellectual equality with men, and educated his daughters as carefully as his sons, and in the same manner.

Again, to compare the Babi movement with the Christian, it must be borne in mind that Beha is not only the Messiah of the sect, but also the Saint Paul..

Beha Ullah died in 1892, and is buried in Acre. Already the story of his life has passed into legend, and tales of miracles (though he himself refused to give any miraculous proof of his divinity) are circulated among his followers. The fitting romantic appanages have been attache to

the incidents of his career, and his memory is surrounded with a supernatural halo of righteousness. All this is not surprising; indeed, it is more surprising that so few wonder tales are related of him. In the East a very short time is needed for any invention to pass into history. Round Jerusalem a number of holy places are exhibited to pilgrims which twenty years ago no one had thought of, and in another twenty years it will be impossible to distinguish these modern products from the sites that have had the sanction of the Church since the days of the Empress Helena.

There is no inherent reason why the new faith should not have a marked influence in the East, the more so because it approaches every man through the gates of his own religion. To the Mahommedan Beha Ullah says :”I am the Mahdi”; to the Jew., “I am the Messiah”; to the Christian, “I am the Comforter who was promised you;” and to the Hindu he comes with a doctrine deeply tinged with Hindu thought. The Babis are convinced that they will eventually conquer the West also, and their belief in Babi-ism as a universal religion was strengthened a year or two ago by the conversion of a small number of Americans. The only Babi place of worship in the world is to be found in Chicago. It would be useless to point out to them that in a land where Mrs. Eddy and the Third Elijah flourish, the making of converts is not dependent upon the merits of the faith, and that there is a curious sentimentalism combined with a certain want of balance sometimes to be found in the complex American mind which makes it peculiarly susceptible to religious influences. It is true that Beha, while embodying most of the teaching of the New Testament, not infrequently lays down maxims more in accordance with modern practice than those of the Gospels, enjoining, for instance, Charity, without burdening it with an incipient communism such as would cripple the social organism as we know it - presumably for us the inevitable social organism - but he has nothing to add to those accepted modifications, exceptions or additions, by which we have tried to make Christianity a working creed. Moreover, illogically enough he would say, we believe in a miraculous story that has had the adherence of twenty, mostly ignorant, centuries, while we would certainly reject a similar story of to-day.

Seeing that the moral code of the Babis differs so little from that which we recognise as the best, why must they seek a fresh sanction? Why is it that Christianity makes no headway in Persian and in India, while in both countries there seems to be an inclination on the part of thinking men towards the teaching of Christ? It is difficult to find any answer but that of the Brahmo Somaj: Christianity, as we offer it, is not suited to the Eastern mind. That which satisfies us does not satisfy the subtler Oriental, that which seems to him a comprehensive doctrine will be to us inconclusive and unpractical. Where, as Hafez says, is the music to which both the drunk and the sober dance?

It is curious to observe the striking difference of outlook which exists between an Eastern and a Western thinker, both actuated by an equally ardent devotion to creeds of which the fundamental principles are very similar. This difference may be illustrated, briefly, by recording a conversation between a Persian and an American, the one a Beha’i, a man of humble extraction but learned, as the humblest Persian may be, in all the sacred lore of the East, especially the older Persian faith contained in the Zend Avesta, a seeker in the truest Oriental sense, an exile for his faith, a dreamer of dreams, “his ear strained to catch the sound of the lute,” to describe him in the words of a mystic of Ispahan, and himself a mystic to the tips of his long thin fingers; the other as good a type of the learned Western, a scholar, a searcher into the hearts of men and very patient of what he found in them, wearing his years with a cheerful content that contrasted singularly

with the Oriental's resignation, too wise not to admit his own ignorance, and too profoundly convinced of the great truths by which his life had been guided not to look confidently to a future in which they should be made clear to all. On the faces of both men was stamped the distinction of thought, they both belonged to the aristocracy of the mind, whose pedigree is older than that of the proudest Maharajah, and each in his separate fashion bore the air of "quegli che vince e non colui che perdie." They sat in the circle of the lamplight, the Oriental with his hands folded into his sleeves and his eyes cast down, as he would sit before a superior; The American with his grey head leaning on his hand and his keen and kindly gaze fixed upon his interlocutor, piercing, as it were, the veil of a different speech which separated them.

The Persian had asked to be allowed to put these questions: he got no further than the first, the second was to have been concerning the eternity of matter, the third he did not mention. His first question was: "What proofs have you that Jesus of Nazareth was God?" The American began his answer slowly, pausing between the sentences as one who selects the best argument out of a well-stocked mind, but as the arguments came the interpreter felt how little fitted they were to convince the Oriental. He spoke of the long hope of the Jews, though he did not insist upon, indeed he expressly repudiated, the strict Messianic interpretation of the prophetic books; he told of a world searching for truth, and described how Christ came at the moment of greatest expectation, an answer to all questions, a treasure exactly rewarding the search.

The Persian gathered his long robe about him. "You speak only for the West," he said. "In the East it was not so. Persia was not living in expectation, nor India; China had received the answer to the question."

The American passed on to the nature of the message "I value it," he said "as the greatest dynamic force the world has ever experienced."

To this the Persian had no answer to give, for the phrase meant nothing to him. He set little store by dynamics; he asked of a faith that it should give him a resting-place for the contemplative mind, not that it should furnish an incentive to action. Moreover, Christianity as he knew it was no more a dynamic than any other religion. It has not proved a moving force in the East nor an incentive to progress; its tendency has been to clothe itself in a veil of superstition as clogging to the spirit as the superstition of the Mahomedan or the Hindu. He replied with a question equally alien to the other.

"All that a man's intelligence can grasp," he said, "is inferior to his intelligence. But if you understand the nature of God made manifest in Christ, you are putting God beneath you."

This seemed to the American a quibble; he took no interest in such subtleties, and he could scarcely realise that the Oriental should be genuinely stopped, as was clear he was, by such a difficulty. He returned to the teaching of Christ, saying:

"I lay no stress on the evidence of miracles, holding that He is to be justified only by what He taught."

"You speak our language," said the Persian. "We also believe that the proof lies in the message."

The American continued: "In His teaching I find the most admirable law that was ever set between man and man. The Golden Rule is the best guide to conduct that has been formulated."

"Do you not speak thus," said the Persian, "because your fathers and mothers have taught you? You love and follow what has been dear to your race for many ages; but for us who have not that inclination of the heart, it does not seem that this law is different from what was given to men by other teachers of the East. See you," he continued with deep emotion, "I do not cling to

my faith because I received it with my mother's milk. Ours is a new faith, each one of us has been separately convinced of its truth, each of us has suffered for it and the blood of our martyrs is not yet dry."

"But without a hereditary learning, to which I admit," said the American, "do you not recognise the beauty of the injunction to love your neighbour as yourself?"

"I recognise it," he said, "and I have not far to seek for the explanation of the law."

The listener was reminded of a German philosopher's examination into the metaphysics of morality: "treating the other as himself because he sees in the other only himself again."<sup>1</sup> The words are at the root of that far-reaching utilitarianism in which the tendency of much modern thought has been to find the surest sanction for morality. On being questioned as to whether this idea underlay his last answer, the Persian replied gravely:

"Without doubt, so we explain it to them that know, but the ignorant cannot understand the saying."

He accepted as perfectly natural that there should be an esoteric and an exoteric doctrine; no Oriental would attempt to make public the higher mysteries, for the East being free from the theory of the equality of man is not obliged to assume an equal understanding. Turning toward his interlocutor, he continued:

"Your Christ was the mediator between God and man, but Zoroaster was the mediator between God and all living things."

The American replied: "I feel my ignorance. You are as well acquainted with my sacred books as I am, while I have only a cursory knowledge of the greater number of yours."

But he confessed later he thought it improbable that the Zend Avesta had much to teach us, nor is it to be denied that the exaggerated care for all forms of life, which is to be found in an extreme degree in some Oriental sects, seems to the Western to militate against more important laws. To us it points to the absence of a sense of proportion and the want of a power to perceive when it is unwise to press a good rule too far, where, indeed, other equally weighty considerations step in to modify a true axiom. Our wish is, roughly speaking, to arrive at the best possible working code; we are not concerned with the logical conclusion to which each maxim taken by itself might lead us. Further, it can scarcely be questioned that, going forward according to our lights, we have reached in practice a better idea of our duty towards our neighbour than any that is to be found in the East. We have given the matter much thought, far more than the Oriental is accustomed to devote to it, and we have considerably modified the teaching of the New Testament which has formed the basis of our system, just as in all probability we should have modified the teaching of Zoroaster. If we do not turn the other cheek, it is not only because we have found the process to be disagreeable to ourselves, but also because we consider that it rarely produces the desired result in the mind of the striker and still more rarely is advantageous to society at large, which it is our first duty to protect. For the same reasons, and not primarily because we fear starvation, we do not give all we have to the poor. But these compromises, resulting from a deep-seated regard for the individual combined with a clear conception of an orderly and practical society, seem to the Oriental illogical, and the results gained by them supremely unimportant.

After his confession of ignorance the American continued:

"You say that I follow the belief of my fathers: it is so, but I add to it a personal

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<sup>1</sup>Deussen: "Elementary Metaphysics."

conviction. I have found the teaching of Christ to satisfy my highest needs, just as I have found that His life fulfils, and more than fulfils, my highest ideals. He has shown me the way which is for me the true way, and He has helped me to follow it, and I bring to Him the personal devotion of the disciple as well as the gratitude of one whom He has directed.”

The Persian turned to the interpreter and shook his head.

“I have been asking him,” he said, “the questions of the learned, but he give me the answer of the lover.”

On hearing this the American replied with a grave and simple sweetness: “It is true. What other answer can I give?”

So the two men parted with mutual respect and esteem, but with opinions as widely diverse as when they met, and the interpreter was left with the sense of one who has been cast backwards and forwards between two hemispheres, has caught a momentary glimpse of two facets of the many-sided jewel of truth, and realized for a moment that the light of knowledge rises for each of us from that undefined quarter of which Landor speaks:

Look from your arcade, the sun rises from Busrah:  
Go thither, it rises from Ispahan.  
Alas, it rises neither from Ispahan nor Busrah,  
But from an ocean impenetrable to the diver.

Gertrude Lowthian Bell.<sup>1</sup>

1. *The Monthly Review*, No. 34, XII, 1. - July, 1903, pp. 100-115