

‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Through the War Years

BY H. M. BALYUZI

FROM early childhood ‘Abdu’l-Bahá lived His life in public. Devoted followers recorded His sayings and His movements. Cruel and relentless enemies kept Him under an unceasing watch. However, some periods and episodes in 'Abdu’l-Baha's life have received more attention than others. His travels in Europe and America, for instance, have been set down in great detail in memoirs, diaries, newspaper and magazine stories, private correspondence, and books. Much less is known of His life in Baghdád, Constantinople, and Adrianople. Relatively little is known about Him during the First World War, when Palestine was isolated and the flow of pilgrims to ‘Akká and Haifa ceased.

The gap is large and unfortunate, for the years 1914-1918 witnessed the first of the great catastrophes of which Abdu'l-Baha had repeatedly warned humanity, particularly during His visits to Europe and America in 1911-1912. Those were also the years during which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá fashioned the tools for the administration and propagation of the Faith of Baha’u’lláh. It is therefore with a sense of satisfaction and joy that, beginning on the next page, World Order offers its readers an extract from Mr. Hasan Balyuzi's new book *‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Centre of the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh*. The chapter entitled "The War Years" begins to fill the gap.

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The Ottoman Empire had always had subjects who sought to destroy it. In return for their unruliness they had received condign punishment. As far back as the sixteenth century, under Sultán Selim I, "The Grim" (reigned 1512-1520), the Shi'áhs of Anatolia, who favored Selim's rival, Sháh Ismail I, the Safavid ruler of Írán, were massacred in their thousands. Greeks and Slavs, Macedonians and Albanians had, in the course of years, rebelled, met with harsh suppression and finally obtained their freedom. With the overthrow of despotism, new hopes had arisen, but were soon dashed by the Young Turks.

Within a few weeks of Turkey's entry into the war, the British occupied the port of Basrah, deposed the Khedive of Egypt, proclaimed a protectorate over the country, and set policies in motion which would affect profoundly the future of the Ottoman realms. Arabs, the largest minority in the Ottoman Empire, had already shown signs of restiveness and were to pay for it dearly in Damascus at the hands of Jamál Páshá. Uprisings among them, particularly the revolt of the Sharíf of Mecca, were still far off, but signs were discernible and the Turks were suspicious. It was also apparent that the call for a holy war (Jihád), coming from Istanbul, would go unheeded. Except for a tiny number, the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent ignored it and, even more, did not hesitate to fight the Turks.

Spies were everywhere in the Holy Land and authorities were becoming increasingly repressive. Fear was abroad, a fear which could sweep over the population like an epidemic, a fear such as was felt in Great Britain and France at the outbreak of the Second World War, when the opening of hostilities brought the prospect that whole towns and cities might be razed to the ground. An enemy warship did bombard the railway bridges between 'Akká and Haifa. On that occasion a shell came down in the garden of Ridvan but did not explode. One day, when the sea was calm with hardly a ripple on it, and rocks, far from the shore, were clearly visible under a sunny sky, the people of 'Akká took them for warships and fled *en masse*.

It was against such a background that 'Abdu'l-Bahá decided to move the Bahá'ís of Haifa and 'Akká away from the hysteria of the officials and the people around them. As a temporary home for them He chose the Druze village of Abú-Sinán, situated to the east of 'Akká. 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself stayed in 'Akká with one attendant, and occasionally spent a night or two in Abú-Sinán. Shaykh Sálíh, the Druze chief, had put his own house at the disposal of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and that was where His family lived. Quarters were found for the other Bahá'ís in the homes of villagers. Bahá'u'lláh had once lived for three months among these friendly people in the foothills of Galilee. The room in the house of Shaykh Mazrúq, which He had occupied, was always left untenanted.

Dr. Habíbu'lláh Khudábakhsh (Dr. Mu'ayyad) ran a dispensary at Abú-Sinán, to which people who were not members of the Bahá'í community soon came for treatment. They received equal attention but paid according to their means. For most of them the treatment was free. Dr. Mu'ayyad performed operations as well and was assisted by Lua Getsinger. Badí' Bushrú'í, another graduate of the Syrian Protestant College, ran a school, side by side with the dispensary, for the children of the Bahá'ís. Life was naturally rather primitive in this isolated village in the hills. On Mount Carmel, the sole occupant of the pilgrim house was the veteran, Hají Mírzá Haydar-'Alí.

Mírzá Fadlu'lláh Khán Banán reached Haifa from Shí'ráz with the offerings of the

Bahá'ís of that city, on January 19th 1915. His arrival was the last link with the outside world for a long time. Banán's journey was fraught with considerable difficulty, for he had to make his way from India to Haifa.¹ To have succeeded was indeed an achievement. However, sometime during the war years an Arab Bahá'í, advanced in years, named Hájí Ramadán, braving all hazards, managed to reach Tihran. His perilous journey included walking for forty-five days. He delivered to the Bahá'ís a Tablet entrusted to him by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and returned bearing gold and letters. A second time he attempted that heroic feat, but he did not reach his destination, and no trace of him was ever found.

Early in 1915, Jamál Páshá appeared on the scene, Commander of the 4th Army Corps, whose mission was to overrun the Suez Canal and drive the British out of Egypt. With him came a reign of terror. The whole of Syria (including the Holy Land) was under his martial control. Throughout 1915 and into the following year, Jamál Páshá was bringing Arab nationalists to trial in his military courts. Thirty-four of them were executed, and many more were deported. Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí and his associates, long discredited and cowed into silence, now found fresh opportunities to plot against 'Abdu'l-Bahá. They went to Jamál Páshá with various tales. Majdi'd-Dín told him that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was hostile to the Committee of Union and Progress. The tent which Bahá'u'lláh had used, the violators gave to Jamál Páshá. It was a tent under which, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is reported to have said, "representatives of the Most Great Peace" should have met.² Then in order to create confusion, the violators set rumors afoot that the military government had banished 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Damascus.

When Jamál Páshá encamped in the vicinity of 'Akká, he told the Governor that he must see 'Abdu'l-Bahá at once. Riding His donkey 'Abdu'l-Bahá went to the military cantonment. Jamál Páshá received Him courteously, but told Him that He was a religious mischief-maker, which was the reason He had been put under restraint in the past. It happened that, in the days of 'Abdu'l-Hamid, Jamál Páshá himself had been known as a political mischief-maker. So 'Abdu'l-Bahá, to humor him, now replied that mischief-making was of two kinds: political and religious; and then, pointing at the arrogant Páshá, He said that so far the political mischief-maker had not caused any damage, and it was to be hoped that the religious mischief-maker would not do so either.

Lady Blomfield has recorded another encounter between 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Jamál Páshá, the story being related by Mírzá Jalal, a son-in-law of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

At the beginning of the yeat 1916, at about seven o'clock one morning, 'Abdu'l-Bahá sent me for His faithful coachman. 'Tell Isfandiyar to have my carriage brought, and you and Khusraw be ready to accompany me to Nazareth in half an hour.' We did as He commanded, and at the appointed time 'Abdu'l-Bahá left His home in Haifa, accompanied by Khusraw and me. That day the health of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was not very satisfactory, as one could see by the signs of weariness on His blessed face. However, the Commander-in-chief of the Syrian and Palestine fronts was in Nazareth. He was Jamál Páshá, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá was determined to meet him there, so in spite of His great fatigue and physical weakness, the Beloved started on His journey.

'Abdu'l-Bahá . . . arrived at Nazareth in the evening at seven o'clock, and took up His residence at the German Hotel.

The next day the Master was invited to lunch at the home of one of the notables of the town of Nazareth. He was one of the Fahúm family. On that day Jamál

1. Banán passed away only recently. As far as the present writer knows he has not left a full record of that remarkable journey.

2. Dr. Habib Mu'ayyad, *Khátirát-i-Habíb*, Memoirs of Habíb. (Tihrán: 1961), p. 333.

Páshá, and nearly two hundred of the war leaders, were present at the lunch where the Master sat down at one o'clock and arose from the table at four.

During all those hours 'Abdu'l-Bahá was speaking in Turkish on philosophical and scientific subjects, and on heavenly teachings. So intense was His utterance that all stopped eating while they listened to His blessed words.

. . . Jamál Páshá, who had been His great enemy because of false accusations, had not paid the proper respect to 'Abdu'l-Bahá when He had first arrived. Now, however, having heard the Master speak so learnedly and wisely, he was most deferential and full of all kinds of politeness. When the time came for the Master to rise, Jamál Páshá most courteously held the Beloved's arm to assist Him to leave the table, and himself led the way to the reception room, and seated the Master comfortably.

Finally, after answering more questions, and giving wondrous light on many subjects, the Master arose to bid farewell to His host. Jamál Páshá accompanied Him out of the house, and to the bottom of the steps, and would have gone further with the Master, but was thanked with great kindness and urged by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to return. This was that Jamál Páshá who was not accustomed to rise from his seat to pay respect to any one. . . . 'Abdu'l-Bahá was excessively fatigued, and remained that night at the German Hotel at Nazareth . . .³

But in time the constant insinuations of the violators had their effect. Jamál Páshá stated that he would crucify 'Abdu'l-Bahá, when he returned victorious from his campaigns. When he did come back, however, he was in full flight, defeated and humiliated, and could not stop to carry out his threat.

In the early months of the war, 'Abdu'l-Bahá said one day that, if it had not been for the intrigues of the violators, He would have gathered together some of the leading men amongst the Muslims and Christians of the Holy Land and would have counseled them to concert their efforts to prevent disorder. But the actions of the violators prevented this.

Relative inactivity and increasing isolation, in the opening months of 1915, made 'Abdu'l-Bahá remark, on another occasion, that He wished He had gone to India, where His presence had been fervently requested. Not having work to do, He said, had an adverse effect on His physical condition. But although pilgrims could no longer come and correspondence was almost halted, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was kept occupied with local affairs, and soon the task of raising and providing food for the Bahá'í community and many others in need faced Him. The mismanagement and the impositions of the Ottoman overlord were gradually leading to a state of near famine.

No matter how relaxed or arduous life might be, 'Abdu'l-Bahá always found or recalled a humorous situation. A cat purring beside His chair would amuse Him: this cat, He remarked, is indeed joyous, so carefree, so free of fear. A donkey standing in the street made Him remember that He saw no donkeys anywhere in the United States, and reminded Him of a polar bear in the Paris Zoo. People were staring at the bear, He said, and the animal was staring back, as if wanting to say: how did I get entangled with these folk? A man passing by the gates of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's house in Haifa, carrying a basket, put it down as soon as he saw Him, saying that he could not find a porter and had to carry the basket himself. 'Abdu'l-Bahá remarked afterwards that a man should not feel ashamed of doing useful work. Someone had written to ask where 'Abdu'l-Bahá was. Tell him, 'Abdu'l-Bahá replied with a smile: in front of a cannon.

The war fever slowly abated and life in

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3. Lady Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway* (Wilmette, 111.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970), pp. 202-05.

‘Akká and Haifa, although not back to normal, became calmer and more sedate as the year advanced. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá felt then that the Bahá’ís could return to their homes. Edith Sanderson, who had remained behind when other Western Bahá’ís had gone, and had moved to Abú-Sinán, left as early as January 1915. Well before Italy's entry into the war on the side of the Allies in May 1915, she obtained a passage on an Italian boat. On May 5th the sojourn of the Bahá’ís at Abú-Sinán came to an end. On that day, the box that contained the portraits of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh, which was always kept in the room of the Greatest Holy Leaf, was brought back to Haifa by Badí’ Bushrú’í and Dr. Mu’ayyad. Ten days later the doctor himself, who had rendered sterling services, set out for Persia by the Baghdád route. From Persia, where the Bahá’ís were still being persecuted, news had come of a fresh martyrdom. Shaykh ‘Alí-Akbar-i-Qúchání, a highly learned and respected Bahá’í teacher, who had served the Faith with distinction in the Caucasus and India, was shot while making purchases in the bazaar of his native town. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sent this cable to a Bahá’í of Mashhad: "[May] My life be a sacrifice unto ‘Alí-Akbar. I am well. ‘Abbás."

Írán fared very badly during the war. None of the belligerents respected her declared neutrality. Her own people adopted active partisan attitudes, the majority favoring Turkey and Germany. German and Turkish, Russian and British agents were everywhere. Russia and Turkey fought their battles in the north and the northwest of the country, each side receiving substantial aid from the Íránians. The British occupied the port of Bushire (Búshihir) in August 1915, and landed a small force at Bandar ‘Abbás in March 1916, under Brigadier-General Sir Percy Sykes who, driving inland to Kirmán, Yazd, and Isfahán, reached Shíráz in November. The central government was powerless. Bandits and highwaymen, as long as they did not get in the way of the belligerents, had the freedom of the roads and caravan routes. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had foreseen these lamentable events and had spoken of

them to His countrymen in Paris. Bahá'ís had their share of tribulation. For them tragedy was never far off, and it was easy to make them suffer in order to appease others. The martyrdom of Mírzá Fadlu'lláh, the Mu'ávinu't-Tujjár, a well-known merchant of Naráq (near Káshán), was a case in point. In Sultánábád (now Arák) a family of seven were slain in their home, in the dead of night.

With the Bahá'ís back in Haifa, weekly gatherings were resumed in the house of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and it was in that latter half of the year 1915 that the *Memorials of the Faithful* took shape. These short biographies of early Bahá'ís, so eloquent and pellucid, animated and moving, were spoken by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in these meetings. Each one, a sparkling gem, will remain unmatched. Seventy-nine people are mentioned, and most of them are those who were exiled with Bahá'u'lláh to 'Akká. But others are included such as Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-Taquí, the Vakílu'd-Dawlih (the builder of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of 'Ishqábád) and his brother, Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí. Táhirih, although a luminary of the Bábi Dispensation, also features in that galaxy. These talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá were compiled into a book which was published in Haifa in 1924, with the title: *Tadhkiratu'l- Vafá*—the Memorials of the Faithful.

To this period (and a little beyond) also belongs a slim volume: *Risáliy-i-Tis'a- 'Asha-ríyyih* — Nineteen Discourses on the lives of the Báb and His two heralds: Shaykh Ahmad-i-Ahsá'í and Siyyid Kázim-i-Rashtí. These discourses were written by Ahmad Sohráb, at the instruction of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, for the use of the Bahá'í youth at meetings in the pilgrim house on Mount Carmel. 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself corrected and emended them. *Nineteen Discourses*, together with a short autobiographical monograph by Áqá Muhammad Mustafáy-i-Baghdádí (who in his childhood went to Persia with his father, Shaykh Muhammad-i-Shibl, in the company of Táhirih) was published in Cairo in 1919, by Shaykh Muhiyyi'd-Dín-i-Kurdí, an outstanding pupil of Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl.⁴

As the war years followed their weary course, the depredations and misgovernment of Ottoman authorities, to which was added devastation caused by locusts, led to increasing scarcities and hardships. 'Abdu'l-Bahá now arose to alleviate suffering. There were properties and lands in the Jordan Valley and beyond, at Samrah and 'Adasiyyah, and by the shores of the Sea of Galilee (Lake Tiberias), which 'Abdu'l-Bahá could cultivate for food. Some of these were part of the endowments of the Shrines of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb. Sons of Mírzá Muhammad-Qulí, the faithful half-brother of Bahá'u'lláh, owned land at Nuqayb, on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, where Mírzá Muhammad-Qulí was buried.

In the past, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had stayed at Tiberias from time to time, whenever He needed a respite from the humidity of the coast. But in summer time the heat in Tiberias, and in the lands that lie below it, is intense and onerous. Until the return of normal conditions, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had to spend days and weeks in and around Tiberias. The wheat He sent to 'Akká was given into the care of a lady named Sakínih Sultán, in whom He had great confidence.⁵ In a Tablet addressed to her, dated Shavvál

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4. Dr. Zia (Diyá) Baghdádí, son of Aqa Muhammad-Mustafa, was a well-known and much-loved figure in the American Bahá'í community for three decades. He died in 1937-.

5. Sakínih Sultán was the widow of one of the martyrs of Yazd. She had a daughter, named Fatimih, her only child, who died young, but left a baby, a solace for the stricken grandmother. Both because of her cruel bereavements and because of the services she had rendered (which included nursing both Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl and Shoghi Effendi, during his first year at the university in Beirut), 'Abdu'l-Bahá always showed her a very generous measure of kindness. The tenderness of that kindness is shown in the many Tablets addressed to her. In a Tablet dated October 17th 1921, He tells her that although He is overburdened with work, with little time to write, He has written her that letter to ascertain her wishes regarding her grandson, Labib. Whatever she chooses He will carry out; her wish is the same as His own, and He will never forget her services. The present writer knew this lady well during the years that he was a student in the American University of Beirut.

15th 1336 A.H. (July 26th 1918), ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says that because it has been very hot, so hot as to affect His breathing, perforce He has had to return to Tiberias. If He obtains relief in Tiberias, He will stay until the wheat is secured; otherwise He will have to return to ‘Akká and Haifa. He has sent some wheat for the time being, to be distributed according to the list enclosed. He also states that prices have gone up considerably, more than threefold, in comparison with the previous year; the cost of transport is also doubled and trebled. It is indicated that there was a shortage of camels for transport, because ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that much more wheat will be dispatched when camels are available. In another Tablet, in which Saki’nih Sultán is told to give two kayls⁶ of wheat to Áqá Jamshíd, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says that He yearns to visit the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh; He has been so heavily occupied that He has been prevented from going there.

Most of the communications to Sakinih Sultán, regarding the distribution of wheat, consist of a list of names and quantities. The brevity of the following may be indicative of how pressing time was:

	<i>Ratls</i> ⁷ Neighbors' daughters	25
'Abdu'r-Rahman the son		
of Ahmad Effendi	30	
Hanna's wife	15	
The fat woman	25	
<u>Rafi'ih</u>	<u>25</u>	
	120	

Although at ‘Abdu’l-Bahás table, both before and after the war, His guests were provided with choice dishes, and there were times when He Himself cooked them, His own food was often a very simple fare. He took little meat, and hardly any fruit. His preference was for milk, cheese, and herbs such as mint, tarragon, and basil.

The ravages of war were mounting. The British-Indian army was pushing forward in Mesopotamia, and in spite of its grave setback in April 1916, at Kút-al-‘Amárah, it retrieved its position and captured Baghdád in March 1917. A month later the United States declared war on Germany. The isolation of the Holy Land was almost complete. Shoghi Effendi said of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in these days:

Agony filled His soul at the spectacle of human slaughter precipitated through humanity's failure to respond to the summons He had issued, or to heed the warnings He had given. Surely sorrow upon sorrow was added to the burden of trials and vicissitudes which He, since His boyhood, had borne so heroically for the sake, and in the service, of His Father's Cause.

And yet during these somber days, the darkness of which was reminiscent of the tribulations endured during the most dangerous period of His incarceration in the prison-fortress of ‘Akká, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, whilst in the precincts of His Father's Shrine, or when dwelling in the House He occupied in ‘Akká, or under the shadow of the Báb's sepulcher on Mt. Carmel, was moved to confer once again, and for the last time in His life, on the community of His American followers a signal mark of His special favor by investing them, on the eve of the termination of His earthly ministry, through the revelation of the Tablets of the Divine Plan, with a world mission, whose full implications even now, after the lapse of a quarter of a century, still remain undisclosed, and whose un-foldment thus far, though as yet in its initial stages, has so greatly enriched the spiritual as well as the administrative

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6. Kayl was a measure for grain. [proofer's note: ?1 kayl = 6.1 pounds?]

7. Ratl in Syria was equivalent to 5 lbs. [proofer's note: other sources say a ratl was about 14 ounces]

annals of the first Bahá'í century.⁸

The Tablets of the Divine Plan are fourteen in number and were revealed at two separate times: eight of them in 1916, and six in 1917....

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In all, 'Abdu'l-Bahá mentioned by name in these Tablets some 120 territories and islands, to which the message of Bahá'u'lláh should be carried. When He did so, there were Bahá'ís in only 35 countries. Immediate response came from loving and devoted hearts, but before "the proclamation of the oneness of humanity" could be raised to all the world "systematically and enthusiastically," the Administrative Order had first to be developed as an instrument of collective teaching—a tremendous labor of sixteen years initiated by the Guardian of the Faith after Abdu'l-Baha's passing—so that by 1937 the first stage in fulfilling the Tablets of the Divine Plan could be inaugurated in the First Seven Year Plan of the American Bahá'í community. Since then, the launching of a number of teaching plans of limited scope in all continents, and the undertaking of two successive world-encompassing projects in which the Bahá'ís of the whole world have participated, have revealed the potentialities of the master-plan which the mind of Abdu'l-Baha conceived in those years of sorrow and stress. But much still lies in the lap of the future, for the Tablets of the Divine Plan are no less than 'Abdu'l-Bahá's charter for the teaching of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh throughout His Dispensation.

On December 9th 1917, General Allenby entered Jerusalem. It now seemed certain that the days of the Ottoman rule in the Holy Land were numbered. But the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was still in danger. Let those who helped to avert that danger speak. First, Lady Blomfield:

In the spring of 1918, I was much startled and deeply disturbed by a telephone message: " 'Abdu'l-Bahá in serious danger. Take immediate action." It came from an authoritative source. There was not a moment to be lost. Every available power must be brought to bear to save the Master.

I went at once to Lord Lamington. His sympathetic regard for 'Abdu'l-Bahá, his understanding of the ramifications and "red tape" necessary for "immediate action" were of priceless value.

A letter was immediately written to the Foreign Office explaining the importance of Abdu'l-Baha's position, His work for true peace, and for the spiritual welfare of many thousands of people. Through the influence of Lord Lamington, and his prompt help, the letter, with its alarming news, was at once put into the hands of Lord Balfour.⁹

That very evening a cable was sent to General Allenby with these instructions, "Extend every protection and consideration to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, His family and His friends, when the British march on Haifa."

So a terrible tragedy was averted, by the promptness and understanding of Lord Lamington and the power of Lord Balfour, his colleagues in the Cabinet here in London, and by the devotion, efficiency, and promptitude of Major Tudor-Pole at the Turkish end, for Haifa was still in the hands of the Turks.

The Turks had been so aroused by the enemies of the Master that they had threatened to crucify Him, and all His family, on Mount Carmel.

When General Allenby took Haifa, several days before it was believed possible for him to do so, he sent a cablegram to London which caused everybody to wonder, and especially filled the hearts of the Bahá'ís in all the world with deep grati-

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8. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, 111.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970), pp. 304-05.

9. Then, the Right Honorable Arthur Balfour, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

tude to the Almighty Protector.

The cable of General Allenby was as follows: "Have to-day taken Palestine. Notify the world that 'Abdu'l-Bahá is safe."¹⁰ Major Tudor-Pole writes:

It must have been in the early spring of 1918 that I began to feel acute anxiety for 'Abdu'l-Bahá's safety at Haifa, and that of His family and followers there. I came out of the line in December 1917 during the attack on Jerusalem, and being temporarily incapacitated for active service, was transferred to Intelligence, first at Cairo and later at Ludd, Jaffa, and Jerusalem.

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With an advance base at and around Jaffa, we were beginning to prepare for a move towards Haifa and the north at that time. For several reasons, including shortage of men and munitions, the British advance was delayed well into the summer of 1918.

Meanwhile, the news reaching me concerning 'Abdu'l-Bahá's imminent danger became more and more alarming. I tried to arouse interest in the matter among those who were responsible for Intelligence Service activities I also brought the matter before my own chief, General Sir Arthur Money (Chief Administrator of Occupied Enemy Territory). . . .

At this time chance brought me into touch with an officer whose social and political connexions in London were strong. Through his courtesy and interest I was enabled to get an urgent message through to the British Foreign Office.

Through friends associated with the Bahá'í Cause in England, an independent avenue of approach to the ruling powers in London was discovered.

By these means Lord Balfour, Lord Curzon, and others in the Cabinet were advised as to the critical situation at Haifa. Lord Lamington's influence proved of special help at this time. The upshot of these various activities bore fruit, and the Foreign Office sent a despatch to General Allenby instructing him to ensure the safety of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and His family and entourage so soon as the British Army captured Haifa.

This despatch passed through my hands in Cairo *en route* for Army Headquarters at Ludd and Intelligence was requested to make urgent inquiry. In due course this demand for information reached the Headquarters of Intelligence at the Savoy Hotel, Cairo, and ultimately (when enquiries elsewhere had proven fruitless) was passed to me for action. As a result, General Allenby was provided with full particulars in regard to 'Abdu'l-Bahá . . . and the history of the Movement of which He was the Master.

Allenby at once issued orders to the General Commanding Officer in command of the Haifa operations to the effect that immediately the town was entered, a British guard was to be posted at once around 'Abdu'l-Bahá's house, and a further guard was to be placed at the disposal of His family and followers. Means were found for making it known within the enemy lines that stern retribution would follow any attempt to cause death or injury to the great Persian Master or to any of His household.

When Haifa was ultimately taken, these instructions for posting a guard were duly carried out, and all dangers of death or accident were thereby averted.

It was a wonderful experience in the midst of the chaos of war conditions to visit the Master at His Mount Carmel home, which even at that time was a haven of peace and refreshment.

I can remember Him, majestic yet gentle, pacing up and down His garden whilst He spoke to me about eternal realities, at a time when the whole material world was

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10. Blomfield, pp. 219-20.

rocking on its foundations. The divine power of the spirit shone through His presence, giving one the feeling that a great prophet from Old Testament days had risen up in a war-stricken world, as an inspirer and spiritual guide for the human race.

One or two incidents which happened shortly afterwards, connected with the capture of Haifa, are worthy of record.

During the British advance from the south, field batteries were placed in position on high ground immediately to the south-east of Mount Carmel, the intention being to shell Haifa at long range over Mount Carmel itself. Some of the Eastern Bahá'ís living on the northern slopes of Mount Carmel becoming agitated, went to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's residence and expressed fear as to the tragic course of possible events. According to an eye-witness of this scene (from whom I obtained the story when I reached Haifa), 'Abdu'l-Bahá calmed His excited followers and called them to prayer. Then He told them that all would be well, and that no British shells would cause death or damage to the population or to Haifa and its environs. As a matter of historical fact, the range of the field batteries in question was inaccurate, the shells passing harmlessly over the town and falling into the Bay of 'Akká beyond.

Another incident of those stirring times is worthy of record, although I am not able to vouch for its complete accuracy at first hand. Before the fall of Haifa, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was discussing the British campaign with a few of His followers in His garden one day. He then predicted that, contrary to the general expectation, the taking of Haifa and the walled town of 'Akká would come about almost without bloodshed. This prediction was verified by the facts. He also stated that the Turks would surrender 'Akká (supposed to be impregnable) to two unarmed British soldiers. The resultant facts so far as I was able to gather them were as follows:—

Subsequent to the entry of our troops into Haifa, the front line was pushed forward half-way across the Bay of 'Akká, and outposts were placed in position on the sands of the Bay some four miles from 'Akká itself. 'Akká, as a fortified and walled town, was believed to be filled with Turkish troops at this time. Very early one morning two British Army Service soldiers, who had lost their bearings in the night, found themselves at the gates of 'Akká, believing erroneously that the town was already in British hands. However, the Turkish rearguard troops had been secretly evacuated only eight hours earlier, and the Mayor of the town, seeing British soldiers outside the gates, came down and presented them with the keys of the town in token of surrender! It is credibly stated that the dismayed Tommies, being unarmed, dropped the keys and made post haste for the British lines!¹¹

On September 23rd, British forces coming along the coastal road, rounded the promontory of Mount Carmel and appeared before Haifa. The Mayor and the notables went out to offer their submission. The first question that the British commanding officer put to the Mayor of Haifa was: "Is 'Abdu'l-Bahá in this city? Is He safe?" 'Abdu'l-Bahá was sitting calm and unperturbed in the forecourt of His house. Bahá'ís were there around Him, tense and awaiting news. Indian army outriders arrived posthaste at the gates of the house. The next evening, the Governor of Jerusalem came in person to pay his respects. Lt. Colonel (later Sir) Ronald Storrs was not a stranger. He had known 'Abdu'l-Bahá as far back as the days of His incarceration within the city walls of 'Akká. He came again, the following morning—September 25th—before returning to Jerusalem.

11. Ibid., pp. 222-25.