DR. SUSAN I. MOODY (1.) WITH MISS ELIZABETH STEWART

AMERICAN BAHÁ'Í WOMEN AND THE EDUCATION OF GIRLS IN TEHRAN, 1909–1934

by R. Jackson Armstrong-Ingram

In 1909, the Protestant women of the United States were represented in "heathendom," after fifty years of effort, by 1,948 unmarried women missionaries whom they supported through 44 missionary societies which collectively contributed four million dollars that year. In the same year, the first representative of the Bahá'í women of the United States to be sent to that vast realm of missionary activity, Dr. Susan Moody, arrived at her post in Tehran. Moody was joined over the next few years by Elizabeth Stewart, a nurse; Dr. Sarah Clock; and Lillian Kappes, a teacher. These four women formed the first resident embassage of Western Bahá'í women in the East.

The Bahá'í women had much in common with their Protestant compatriots: they were unmarried; they were products of a nineteenth-century North American socialization and education; they were fired with an urgent need to enlighten and to succor; and they would be faithful to their calling unto death. But they had also much that set them apart.

For most of the missionaries who came bearing the lantern of Western Protestantism, their main wish was to light the way to faith, however important the work of health and education

along the way. The Bahá'í women came to the homeland of their faith. The members of the community they joined there were themselves bound up, as were their recent forebears, with the early history of that faith, and they had among them some of its most illustrious propounders. The ultimate goal of the Protestant missionaries was an accomplished fact for the Bahá'í women—an established and operating community of faith. The latter's attention could be more confidently concentrated on goals that were more socio-political then overtly religious. To convert was not their chief aim, but rather to assist the already converted. The expansion of the host community was primarily its own concern, theirs was largely the welfare and prestige of that host community. To be sure, their activities were not limited to the Bahá'í community in Tehran: indeed, their influence outside that community was considerable. But that outside activity was only indirectly linked to spreading their faith: they might teach it by example, by preparing the ground, but they did so without expectation of any immediate harvest.

The Protestant missionaries were often, with varying degrees of formality and actuality, under the supervision of American men. The Bahá'í women were independent of such control. Certainly, the official authority structure of the Bahá'í community in Tehran was male, but as Westerners these women functioned largely as honorary men within that structure, rather than filling any available female role. That is, although not eligible for elected offices and while associating freely with women, they otherwise participated in men's social and religious activities and had personal friendships with men.

Western Bahá'í men had visited and continued to visit Tehran (as did other Western Bahá'í women), but the only American man who had become a resident member of the Tehran Bahá'í community, the teacher Sydney Sprague, left as the group of women was becoming established. The Western Bahá'í presence in Tehran was female and was largely supported by a female

constituency in the United States. Thus, though it operated with reference to a male host community, it had no immediate need to refer to, confer with, or defer to a male incursionary element parallel to itself; and in their interaction with that male host community these women knew, as did their hosts, that their concerns and efforts had the fervent support of the then head of their common faith, 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

The careers of these Western Bahá'í women in Tehran are of interest, not only as features of both Western and Eastern Bahá'í history, but also as being part of, yet distinct from, the general missionary effort being supported by American women at the time. My concern in this essay is to present some selected aspects of their careers—in particular, their work as change agents in the field of the education of girls in Tehran, in respect to both general education and religious education within the Bahá'í community.

This group of women was active in Tehran from the period of their arrival (1909–1911) to the mid-1920s. By then both Clock and Kappes had died, the latter being replaced for a time by Genevieve Coy. In 1925, Moody and Stewart arrived back in the United States for the sake of their health and to encourage support for the work they had been doing in Tehran. During this visit, Stewart died in October 1926, one month before Shoghi Effendi wrote to the American Bahá'í community asking that competent teachers be sent to assist the schools in Tehran, with Moody accompanying them if possible. In 1928, Moody left the United States for Iran accompanied by Adelaide Sharpe. They were later joined in Tehran by Sharpe's mother, Clara Sharpe. This "second wave" of American Bahá'í women is linked to the first by the presence of Moody and by its overt social intent: but in considering it, we find some differences between the attitudes that Moody and the Sharpes had about their posts. As a complement to the discussion of the activities of the early group, I will discuss the tensions inherent in the later one.

Moody went to Iran in 1909, in answer to an appeal that an American woman doctor join with a small group of Iranian Bahá'í doctors in starting a hospital in Tehran, so that the new institution's services could be made available to women. After her arrival in Tehran on 25 November, Moody established her own practice as well as working with the group of Bahá'í doctors and other Iranian doctors. On 26 December 1909, she wrote:

> My sign was swung below the window yesterday. So imagine me hanging there in both English and Persian. I think the news of my being here spread rapidly over the city and the sign serves to locate the office and dispensary of Dr. Moody, the American.[1]

Her services were evidently in considerable demand and she was consulted by men as well as women:

> There is work for 20 women doctors in Teheran. I wish you could have seen into my house to-day—crowds, and when a hurry call came from a distance where a woman had been poisoned—I had to turn away 5 women and three men and rush off in a carriage.[2]

And on the following day she had to, "turn away ten patients, time and strength cannot be stretched further."[3]

Despite her heavy schedule Moody found time to visit and be visited. From the day she arrived, she had frequent visitors from among the Bahá'í community and their friends, and was taken to various homes. The Tehran Bahá'ís did their best to make her feel welcome and appreciated, including giving her Christmas (1909) presents of rose water, nougat, pomegranates, etc. She gave a special dinner for three guests:

> Christmas day was a pleasant one for me. Ismail did his level best and served our little feast well. I was a little uneasy when I saw the small size of a Persian turkey, but it went the rounds. He stuffed it

with pistachio nuts, figs, thin slices of cocoanut, etc., and it tasted delicious. Our drink was a sherbet made of quince juice. We had nuts and fruit, as well as some of Mrs. Lundberg's gift of fruit cake, and "American chocolate creams" for desert.[4]

As Moody knew some Persian (*fársí*) before coming to Iran, she was able to converse directly with her new friends. Also, in some of the homes she exchanged visits with, various members of the family spoke English or French. As might be expected, a number of the homes that Moody saw belonged to the more prominent members of the Tehran Bahá'í community. On the afternoon of Sunday, 28 November 1909, she was collected at her hotel to visit the Varqá home:

I knew I was to go there, so put on my hat again and went down to find their carriage and a fine team of greys at the door. Was driven rapidly to Arbab Jemshid, the Varga home, where Mr. Sprague lives. It is a beautiful home. Walls hung with fine rugs and exquisite Japanese embroideries. Lemon trees loaded and plants and flowers in the drawing room. Fine banquet lamp. Tables of fine brass open-work. Luxurious chairs and sofas and the floor covered with the choicest rugs. Mirza Azizullah Khan and Mirza Valiollah Khan both took me to the door of the women's apartments. When the former turned back and the younger took me in to see his wife and mother. The latter is the wife of Varga and mother of young Ruhullah, the martyr. She had a sweet sad look, born of sorrow. . . .

Then came one of the deep experiences of my life. I hardly dare to write of it. They have the most precious mementoes of the Bab and of the Blessed Perfection [Bahá'u'lláh], as well as their own loved ones, and of Abdul Baha and these treasures they opened and showed to me. My dear friends, I cannot describe them. It is impossible. Enough to say we four were sobbing together. It was a long time before we could again converse.

We had tea and real sponge cake, the first I have seen since I ate it in America.

Later they asked me to go back to the drawing room where Mirza

> Azizullah Khan was teaching the head Mollah of Teheran. His secretary was with him. The Mollah had read but did not believe and easily became irritated. I could see that his discomfiture was making a Bahai of his secretary and was sure of it when the latter took my hand in parting for that is unheard of from a devout Mussulman. It was most interesting to listen, though I could follow but little. I could see the Mollah's weakness. Mirza Azizullah Khan brought me back to the hotel . . .[5]

In January 1910, she met "the son of the Regent of Persia" at another home:

> His title is Sirdar. He spoke of his pleasure in having an opportunity of meeting the two Americans of whom he had heard and expressed delight that Mr. Sprague, who was also there, had adopted the "kola" (Persian hat).
> This family are advanced, the women are educated and do not veil before the men visitors; that is, the older ones do not, but the young married daughter of the doctor's, who had been playing both European and Persian music for us on the tar, left the room as the Sirdar came in. She had not veiled for Mr. Sprague. The doctor's sister has lived in Paris, going there with a daughter of Muzaffar-ed-Din-Shah, sixteen years ago.[6]

This issue of veiling was one of great symbolic significance for Western Bahá'í women and their progressive Eastern sisters. It functioned as a symbol of all that they felt to be wrong with the position of women in Iranian society, while being unveiled was taken as evidence of progress. Also in January 1910, Moody sent a photograph of a group of unveiled Bahá'í women of Tehran to the United States to be duplicated and spread there at the women's request:

> I think I mentioned that this is an important event in their lives; they have thrown down one rule, for once, that is, to show their faces to the world. I cannot describe to you how they are deprived.

> Again to-day I was in a home—The wife's mother was closely veiled because the husband's young brother was in the room; and later all the women left the room because two men, friends of the family, were coming. I could stay and enjoy hearing the newcomers tell of a recent trip to Russia, etc. On leaving I went to say good bye to the women—their rooms are in an entirely separate court, as if in another house. A man servant passed just as I raised the heavy curtain to leave, and all the women screamed and pulled down their veils, or drew the "chadur" up over their mouth and nose. The husband we met in Paris and since being on the continent, he is anxious to help free the women from their dreary life.[7]

Among the women Moody met in Tehran were those who had been leaders in advancing women's education in the Bahá'í community, and she found that one of her main roles was to reinforce and legitimize their efforts. Moody felt that her work for women's health was inextricably linked to the developing of women's education. The conditions she found when visiting the sick, even in quite affluent homes, were not conducive to her work as a doctor:

> . . . how often I long for dear Miss Stewart, as the need for good nursing becomes more and more evident. The women seem so ignorant and incapable of the simplest hygienic measures, and my own strength is often overtaxed in giving douches, enema and rubbing. I try to teach a midwife, if present, these things, but younger women would take it up easier. I discussed this with two of the men yesterday and find there is a barrier still to be surmounted—a false pride . . . only education can set these dear sisters free.[8]

> In these homes I must do all the work myself, and so little to do with; not a piece of flannel, nor rags enough to put on a compress; they know so little about nursing that they think I should stay and do everything day and night. I just have to break away when I feel that the patient is out of danger. Wouldn't your tender hearts ache if you could see some of these homes? One room, the only sign of

> furniture is the "corsi", . . . a table covered by a quilt, beneath is a brazier of charcoal. It is about two feet or 18 inches high and they sit or lie with feet under it. The walls and floors are mud, the ceiling is rafters which show the straw covering. The poor are very poor.
>
> In the better class homes they still use the "corsi" and sleep on the floor. I was called the other night to a wealthy home, the owner of the electric light plant here. Several courts and several separate dwellings enclosed within the grounds. The wife, who was ill, is a beautiful woman; her mattress was on the floor, but there was a fire in the chimney place. Everything showed wealth. This dear woman has hysteria, beside physical ailments, and her brother who talks French, told me that he knew it came from living in the harem. No exercise, no outside interest.
>
> Well, my American sisters, I am sure your hearts would ache in this home as well as in the other. Nothing but education can free them and it cannot come too soon.[9]

Some Bahá'í women in Tehran had conducted small schools for girls, an exercise that could sometimes be hazardous due to the combined prejudice against Bahá'ís and against the education of girls on the part of the majority of the population. For several years the Bahá'í community of Tehran had maintained a boys school, and in 1910 Moody persuaded the school committee to adopt one of these fledgling girls school as a separate department under the aegis of the boys school committee. This girls department began with 30 Bahá'í girls from poor homes. But by the time it was closed in 1934, it had grown to around 750 students of various religious backgrounds and had the reputation of being the best girls school in Tehran, drawing pupils from all levels of society.

The other strand of education that Moody found herself involved with was religious education within the Bahá'í community itself. As with secular education, the Bahá'í community of Tehran had provided organized religious education for its boys for some time, but no comparable program for girls. There

were study meetings held for interested women in the houses of certain Bahá'í teachers, but there was no graduated program to prepare girls for participation in their religious community. Moody, and the other American Bahá'í women, assisted in the establishment of a religious education program for the community's girls comparable to that provided for the boys.

These two strands of education that the Western Bahá'í women became involved with were central to their concerns. Although three of the women were theoretically concerned primarily with medicine, and most of their time was devoted to health care, the main thrust of their correspondence is the development of girls' education and the need to support it. Their attitudes toward and activity in education, as well as those of the succeeding group of women, had a significant impact on the development of the education of girls in the Bahá'í community of Tehran, and more generally on the education of girls in Iran as a whole. (It should be borne in mind throughout this essay that the focus is on the attitudes and perceptions of the American women. This is not a rounded account of the education of girls in the Bahá'í community in Tehran, but a detailed look at only one facet of that topic. On many of the issues discussed, there were no doubt other points of view which must be taken into account in any attempt to paint a broader picture.)

The change from small independent schools run by individual women to a department of the boys school was not an unmixed blessing as it put the education of girls under the direction of the boys school committee. Relations between the American women and this committee were not entirely happy for several years. Even when relations improved because of changes in the composition of the committee, there was a feeling that the girls school did not receive the same level of consideration that the boys school did. This was particularly felt in regard to the accommodation made available for it. In 1916, Clock decided that it was time for the Bahá'í women in the United States to

know the problems their representatives had been facing with the committee:

> Yesterday Miss K. [Kappes] was simply abused by the meeting of 5 men, came home in perfect nervous collapse & was awake all night from sheer nervousness & worry. Until now we have kept all our troubles to ourselves & I do not know what will come of my having told this, but I have not asked any one's advice about it. I only hope all the Bahai women will know but not Miss K's family, of course it will turn out right some way, we don't know how. . . .
>
> Not long ago a tablet [i.e., a letter from 'Abdu'l-Bahá] came to a Persian here praising Miss K & her work in the school, the improvement among the teachers as well as pupils & she has the moral support of many of the best men, all the women who in an excited meeting all stood by her.[10]

> . . . if Miss Kappes were not a Bahai or not less than a saint she would not have put up with all she has, for five years her hands have been tied, that is they have not allowed her to use her own advanced ideas as to a school, she is exceedingly clever, the only reason was because one man had power but no sense. last year the school committee turned him out & another man was put in his place, who having been educated in Europe is advanced & the school came up wonderfully. . . . At the time Miss K took her vacation July & Aug. (the schools were all closed during July) the entire committee disbanded & a smaller one of 5 men attempted to put things in shape, one of these 5 is the one they forcibly turned out. he is Miss K's enemy. They put in two teachers whom everyone knows cannot teach & when Miss K returned to school everything was in terrible shape, now they want her to take full charge of the finances, a thing they failed in themselves, besides all the other management, she has refused to take the financial responsibility. . . . some of the good men are entirely with her. They offer to open another school for her & several of the nicest of the girls will teach for nothing.[11]

By 1918, Clock was able to report that things were going better:

> The working affairs of the school are being much better conducted than last year when through personal enmity among themselves the schools were made a target, but this year both the boys and girls schools have been put in the hands of a society of young men who follow all Miss K's suggestions even in the working of the boys school where she taught English until last year when they permitted her to devote all her time to the girls . . .[12]

Apart from the basic issue of who should control the girls school, the committee or those who were actually running the school, the main bones of contention were finances and the curriculum. The premises provided for the girls school were much inferior to those provided for the boys, and the women who taught there were paid a pittance. The American women felt that some of the school's financial problems were due to the committee having "put in many pupils as free who can afford to pay."[13] They wanted the decision as to whether or not a pupil should be subsidized to be in the hands of those capable of judging the pupil's ability. Clock wrote to Mrs. Platt:

> Miss K & I are agreed on the question of free pupils & what we really think from practical experience would startle most people. Miss K took on a little girl as your pupil [Platt was providing a scholarship], tried her for a year & she did not make good progress either she was lazy or lacked in brain capacity & so Miss K said, 'How can I keep that child & let money from Mrs P go toward her?' she notified the family if they want her kept in school they must pay for her & so now they do. almost without exception the girls who are free pupils are the ones who cause disturbance & we think they should be made to pay even a part of the regular fee, but the fees are so small it is not enough to pay proper teachers for good work, building rent, coal & the ordinary incidentals, & provide materials such as is often needed, school furniture, materials for teaching. there may be & have been exceptions to this idea of ours & if Miss K finds a girl whom she thinks bright & ambitious whose parents are not able to pay for her she will tell you, but most of the

> charity children come from the lower class who have not brain capacity & the money spent on them is wasted.[17]

The American women ameliorated what they saw as the inadequate financial management of the committee by keeping control of certain funds in their own hands. Scholarship funds from the United States for both the boys and girls schools came through Moody. But aside from these funds, some women wished to send further support specifically to the girls school. At first they were asked to send educational materials that were difficult to obtain in Iran, but later quite considerable sums of money were sent.

In July 1919, a bank account was opened in the name of the girls school into which such contributions could be paid. And Iranian Bahá'í women were encouraged to contribute directly to it also. The main aim for this account was that it should grow into a building fund to permit the erection of a purpose built girls school. This effort was seen as being equivalent to the effort of the American Bahá'ís to raise money for the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár (Bahá'í House of Worship) in Wilmette, Illinois. It not being possible at that time to contemplate building a public place of Bahá'í worship in Tehran, to work for the realization of what would become a dependency of such a place of worship was regarded as of equal importance. After Kappes died in 1920, the fund that she had started continued as the "Lillian Kappes Memorial Fund," and into the 1930s it was an important source of auxiliary funding for the school. The expansion of the school was aided by this fund: for example, when new grades were added, it often paid for the desks and chairs.

On the matter of the girls school curriculum, Kappes felt that: "The feeling here is more in sympathy with domestic & child training work than higher instruction . . ." Her view was that the necessity was for a "solid academic basis" to be given in

the school, so that there would be a growing core of capable women teachers to make a good education for girls more widely available. The "domestic arts" she felt would be more adequately raised by developing "a modified 'girl-scout' movement" that took account of conditions in Iran.[15] Her feeling that the teaching of the "domestic arts" needed to be adapted to Iranian conditions was based on experience, as Kappes had tried teaching them in the school:

> . . . giving cooking lessons to the 7th class as well as sewing and housekeeping, the latter is very difficult to teach here, since all the furniture in many houses consists of the rugs on the floors, and then very simple cooking utensils, a very small proportion of people have tables and chairs and much smaller still have bedsteads, they sleep on the floor on often a very thin mattress.[16]

(In fairness to the Bahá'ís of Tehran, it should be mentioned that after Godseah Ashraf arrived in the United States in 1911, as the first Iranian Bahá'í woman to be sent there to study, her pursuit of a lengthy education, including graduate work in educational philosophy and psychology, was looked upon as unnecessary and wasteful by some American Bahá'í women who felt that all she needed to assist her in teaching the girls of Iran was a quick diploma in home economics.)

The American women's view of a suitable curriculum was that of an "advanced" Western school, but with some adaptation to local circumstances. Character moulding was to be an important goal, in particular as the "Oriental" character was held to be severely flawed:

> You may think as I did the Persian children are very docile & lamblike but if you were here you might call some of them lambs but many of them would have to be called by another name. I believe it is Abdul Baha who says "now they are the most depraved people in

the whole world", BahaUllah also speaks of their degradation etc. We must be most charitable with them but in the school small things cannot be overlooked & any one is fortunate who has a girl under the care of Miss Kappes to be trained. They have an inborn sense of disregard for the truth, all of them, I do not know one single person upon whose word you may rely, not excepting one, but I think some of the girls at least will learn to tell the truth for Miss K washes their mouths well with good strong laundry soap & it has worked wonders. No matter where you go in a meeting or anywhere else you can always pick out a girl from The Tarbiat school from her behavior & general conduct. . . .

In general there is no such thing as a sense of necessity of discipline in a Persian home, if a child wants anything it has but to cry & everything comes its way. No such thing as self control is even dreamed of & the great lack in the Persian character is Sincerity. I do not wish to give you an exaggerated idea or put them in a false light to you, but if some of these things were not true why were we sent here to work among them? I am sorry that we did not know more of the truth of the people before we came . . .[17]

The harshness of these comments is typical of observations by many Americans on the members of cultures distinct from their own among whom they have lived for any length of time. The American women in Tehran did make friends for whom they had considerable respect, but these were mainly from among those who also filled roles as change agents within the community.

The women also felt that the girls were handicapped by their native language, in that traditional texts and their associated pedagogical methods were so inadequate. They felt that: "there is only one way in which they can be taught, that is by learning another language & teaching them in it."[18] One of the principal aims in making a wider range of educational materials available to the girls through another language was to broaden their worldview, both literally and figuratively. Clock reported that,

"Miss K's ambition has been to have the girls have enough knowledge of English to teach them proper geography."[19] Thus there was an early concern to acquire good geography teaching aids for the school, maps of the world and the continents and texts. Clock also reported that by 1916, "many of the girls know enough English to be taught all sorts of subjects in English"[20]; and among these were anatomy, physiology and first aid.

The girls' horizons were also expanded by the regular use of pictures cut from American magazines (the *Ladies' Home Journal* was particularly available) as rewards and as stimuli for English lessons. It must not be thought that there was a conscious effort to "Americanize" the pupils, however. On the contrary, there was a conscious attempt to instill in them a sense of Iranian national identity and a consideration of their own roles in the progress of their country. This blend of elements may be clearly seen in the commencement ceremonies held by the school from 1917 onwards.

The 1917 commencement was held in a garden adjoining the school and was attended by about three hundred women. The decorations for the occasion were planned by Clock as, "the Persians know nothing about what we call decorations, their only idea is to hang up rugs on the walls."[21] Clock's idea was to festoon the verandah of the garden, which was used as the stage, with garlands of ivy and to place a picture of the shah, inside a heavy ivy wreath, as the centerpiece. This somewhat somber motif was lightened by a liberal use of Iranian flags. The girls entered the garden in a procession and all from the third through sixth grades carried flags: "each one was made by hand by the little girl who carried it & she even drew the 'Lion & the Sun' herself. Some of the sewing is very good & some very bad." As the girls reached the stage the teachers collected the flags and hung them on the ivy. Before making the flags, the girls had not even known the colors used in it. Their sense of

the national colors was reinforced by all "displaying the Persian colors, green, red & white," in some way in their dress except the graduates who wore white.[22]

The program continued with a mixture of poems and songs in Persian and English, with one recitation in French, and the reading of several essays, including one on hygiene and one on the "duty of extending the work of the school by opening higher grades." The climax of the program was the recitation by the entire school of a poem to the flag that had been commissioned for the occasion. This was followed by a group of five third-grade girls from various states singing "Our Native Land," with the school joining in the refrain, and then the fourth grade singing "Iran." The program represented an amalgam of "advanced" ideas, including a display of gymnastics ("because some talk had gone abroad that I try to teach dancing which here is regarded as something akin to a sin"),[23] and an effort to infuse a national consciousness. The amalgam seems to have been well received:

> At the end of the program one of the princesses who occupied one of the front seats, called Miss K down from the platform & took a beautiful gold ring with her own initials from her finger & put it on hers. She also wrote a little speech which was read by one of the teachers thanking the Americans in a very nice manner. Everybody everywhere is praising Miss K for her work . . .[24]

The making of the flags became a regular feature of the school curriculum for the next several years, and was one of the features of Kappes' regime copied by other girls schools. However, the staffs of these other schools were often unaware of the rationale behind what Kappes did and could introduce quirks into their copying that defeated the original point. This was the case in one school with the idea of the flags:

> To show you how silly some of the women are one of the schools has imitated Miss K's idea of making flags by the pupils but not of Persian colors, of blue & pink. Many of them imitate her methods in school work but in such a crude way you hardly realize the original plan, they think they improve on the ways of the Tarbiat school.[25]

Kappes influenced other schools also by her pupils going to them as teachers. Once a girl had taken the Board of Education examination, she was technically qualified to teach in any girls school in Iran. Girls who had passed that exam under the tutelage of Kappes were widely regarded as the cream of potential teachers. Indeed, not only schools but mothers of marriageable sons attempted to recruit through Kappes, although she declined to take advantage of this latter testimony to the reputed quality of her product.

A useful assessment of what had been achieved by the school during this early period is given in a report by Kappes' successor, Dr. Genevieve Coy. As a highly trained educationalist, and as someone who had not had ties to the school during the Kappes regime, Coy's assessment is the nearest to neutral expert testimony available. After her arrival in 1922, Coy found that the school had 255 pupils, of which around a quarter were not Bahá'ís. By this time, the school had expanded to nine grades and a further grade was expected to be added shortly. Most of the teachers had been trained in the school, and Coy felt that the success with which the school had continued to operate between Kappes' death and her own arrival was due to the quality of the training they had received there. However, she also believed them to be very underpaid and mostly "working entirely for the love of the work and the Bahai Cause," and she was eager that their salaries should be raised. The building used for the school was still not a satisfactory one, either. She

thought that the girls were, "on the whole, a happy, merry, well-behaved group," who had, "learned to play, in the last few years." As to the opinion of Tehran at large:

> The school is recognised as the best Persian Girls' school in the city. Not long ago the City Director of Education said the Girls' Tarbiat School was the best girls' school in the city, that all their work was excellent,—but alas, that they were Bahais![26]

During this early period, then, we may say that the Western Bahá'í women had a large part in establishing a creditable educational institution that catered to the secular educational needs of some of the girls of the Tehran Bahá'í community and that was sufficiently non-sectarian for the quality of the education it offered to be recognized and utilized by a number of non-Bahá'ís. They do not seem to have succeeded in having the education of girls taken as seriously as the education of boys within the Tehran Bahá'í community, at least if we may use the criteria of finances to judge this point. They did succeed in making the internal operation of the girls school largely independent of the male authority structures of the community and in fostering a deep concern in the women of the community for the education of girls. The American women brought with them an expertise that, allied with their honorary male status, enabled them to legitimize and actualize the wishes of the leading women of the Tehran Bahá'í community to an extent that would have hardly been possible without their presence. Many Iranian Bahá'í women shared in the development of secular education for the girls of their community, but the four Western Bahá'í women were a necessary leaven in the process.

The Western Bahá'í women themselves had an undoubted belief in the validity of the content and method of "advanced" Western education, but this was balanced by a concern that these advantages should be integrated into a program that also

developed a committed sense of national indentity. The Western women may have had considerable doubts about the value of certain aspects of Iran's past and present, but they had none about the importance of its future and the need for women to play an active role in the making of that future.

The Western women were also concerned that the girls of the Bahá'í community be firmly grounded in their faith, as well as given a good secular education. There was already a graduated system of instructing and examining the boys of the community and, in 1914, twelve centers where girls would be taught a similar program were established.[27] In 1915, Moody described the examinations held for these girls:

> We are also examining in my home, all the advanced girls who have completed the first and second courses in their study of the Revelation. We take them in small groups by request of the Spiritual Assembly. They are given simple gifts, as a remembrance—a penholder; a ticket bearing their name and stamped by the Mahfil Dars Aklagh [the organizing committee]; once we added a printed telegram from Abdul-Baha; another time one of Mr. Remey's illuminated cards; again, a photographic copy of a holy tablet. Miss Kappes loans out a beautiful gold medal sent by Miss Holmes, which is worn by each graduate in turn during one session of the class. We serve sherbet and tea, the pupils chant prayers and poems from memory and the atmosphere is just what one desires, nearness to each other and to the Beloved.[28]

By 1923, there were sixteen centers with thirty-two teachers and assistants and a number of visiting inspectors who examined the girls as they passed from one grade to the next.[29] In the area of developing religious education for girls within the Tehran Bahá'í community, then, the Western women also served an important leavening function.

Although it is beyond the scope of this essay to go into it in detail, it should be mentioned that the Western women did not

limit their educational efforts to girls, but were also concerned with the adult Bahá'í women of Tehran, even providing some of them with training and experience in coping with mixed gender situations. No doubt their activities with the adult women strengthened the support available for their activities with girls.

The second period of Western Bahá'í women's resident influence in Tehran began with the departure of Moody and Adelaide Sharpe from the United States in late 1928. Moody returned to take up her practice again, and Sharpe took over the girls school. They were later joined by Sharpe's mother, Clara Sharpe, who assisted with the school and kept house for her daughter. As before, Moody was the main channel through which Western funds came to the school, mainly through the Kappes Memorial Fund.

They found the school in considerable financial difficulty, largely they felt because of laxity in collecting school fees, and they started a vigorous collection program that recovered much of the delinquent amounts. The school also had a debt for construction work. Moody paid part of this from the Kappes Fund, leaving the remainder to be paid in installments by the school committee. They also felt that some of the problem with the school had arisen "from ignorant management by underpaid teachers who of course lacked the inspiration to do their best."[30] Indeed, six of the original teaching staff had left, and Adelaide Sharpe had to train older girls to take classes. Sharpe and her principal assistant were both appointed to the school committee, the first time that it had included women.

As part of the reorganisation, the school was expanded further by adding a kindergarten, the Kappes Fund providing the furnishings. More significantly, in respect to the curriculum, a rug weaving department was opened with the hope that "in time this will be of some financial aid, tho' at first an expense."[31] The establishing of this latter department seems to depart considerably from the ethos that embued the Kappes regime. Even

the hint of possible future financial advantage takes it beyond the "handicraft" level of her curriculum. Also, when one considers how important an issue workshop rug weaving was to those concerned with the welfare of children in the Middle East, since it was the main area of industrial exploitation and abuse of children in the region, to create such a department in what was considered one of the most "advanced" girls schools in Iran suggests that a different view was being brought to bear.

Adelaide Sharpe does not seem to have developed a rapport with her staff either. Even if she did train much of her newer teaching staff, in 1933 she could still write:

> I have no real competent help in the school and so many little things that the teachers should do fall on my shoulders and I find that I am quite worn out at the end of school. There are 34 teachers and when each one shirks her responsibilities you can imagine how tired I am at times.[32]

Despite Sharpe's opinion of her staff, the school's reputation remained high and the number of girls rose to 400 by late 1929, and to 750 by 1933.

The relationship between Moody and the Sharpes suggests much about the latter's attitudes to their new environment. After her return to Tehran, Moody found that her age did not permit her to practice full time, although for a while she did keep a free clinic and see a few paying patients. For the last four years of her life she was increasingly bedridden, suffering a number of bouts of dysentery and pneumonia. From her return, she lodged with a Bahá'í family the husband of which was virtually her foster son. The Sharpes maintained their own house at the other side of the city. Clara Sharpe warned Platt that if she ever visited them she:

> . . . must expect to find every thing in a very primitive condition. We have no luxuries here. While I am writing this a woman is

> sweeping the floor with some broom straws tied together, they are about a foot long. You can imagine the dust she leaves behind her. The usual method of dusting is to blow the dust where it has settled with your breath. Breath costs nothing, or sometimes slap here and there with any thing that is convenient. Not speaking the language makes it a little difficult to teach them how to work but little by little something can be done. I have yet to see a kitchen that is clean or that has any conveniences. They have no one place to put any thing nor very few methods for doing their work. I read much about this country before coming here and I thought they were often too hard and unjust but I could have written worse things two weeks after being here. One has to be here awhile to be able to realize what Baha'u'llah said when he wrote that it was a dark country. They can be excused for many things because there is nothing to do with. The new king is trying little by little to arrange for finances to have things manufactured, get clean water to drink, and have things a little more convenient.[33]

While the Sharpes did evolve a style of housekeeping more to their liking, they do not seem to have adapted as well to living in Tehran as the earlier women. However severe her strictures on the population generally, Clock could also state:

> We live so much more comfortably than people may think we do, our house is very nice for a Persian one, we have very nice coffee with real cream in the a.m. and altho we have but one servant we are good to him and he is very faithful, of course we are not quite as clean as we want to be for this is a country with plenty of dust.[34]

The two groups of women had come from different Americas. The first group had grown up with unpaved streets, oil lamps, garbage and attendant livestock in the gutter, and water supplies of uncertain provenance. Particularly for the two older women, Clock and Moody, there can have been little in the physical conditions of life in Tehran that was that different from the experience of much of their life in the United States.

New York at the end of the last century was not so different, as far as its cleanliness and "conveniences" were concerned, from the Tehran they lived in.

For the Sharpes, however, there was a much greater change. They came from an America of municipal services and soap, even of washing machines and vacuum cleaners. Moody's preference for living in a "native" household, rather than with them, they found explicable only by presuming her senility:

> Dr Moody has given us much pleasure this summer by coming several times and spending two days with us. She, too, enjoyed it so much. We want to keep her with us all the time because she is becoming more feeble and forgetful than she realizes and does not get the care there that she should. Altho they have money they have no idea how to take care of old or sick people & the conditions I have had to put up with when I go out to help her when she is ill make me sick at heart. She has turned over every thing she has to them to keep for her so whatever she wants she has to ask for it, which often she will go with out rather than ask and if I take the most necessary things out for her to use when I go out again they are lost. So we only take what is needed for the moment. This causes me too much trouble as she is too far away. It is difficult to get a carriage when you need it and takes much time. She has always paid her board there and met all her expenses. While if she were with us we would be glad to take the best care of her just because we love and appreciate her with out any thought of remuneration. Recently she had dysentery for about two weeks which left her very week. I went out and did my best to get her to return with me but she became very indignant, told me she had rather stay there and to go home and mind my business. Altho she always appreciates so much when I do go out to do things for her or take her things she needs and does not get there. I had some one go to the National Spiritual Assembly and see if they could not make it better for her there. She found it out and was very indignant and told me so in no pleasant terms. This does not make me feel the least hard toward her for I know she is old and childish and I am keeping away from her for a week or so hoping she will forget

> all about it and perhaps we may get her to come to us yet. She said one time she might have to come to us but would not until she had to as she would not burden us. We assured her in every way possible that it would not be a burden but a joy to have her, that we needed her in the work and that her place was with us. But they cry out there and goodness only knows what else and because they do not know how to take care of her she has to suffer for it. Altho she pretends it is a joy.[35]

The struggle over where Moody should live continued for the remainder of her life. The Sharpes were really concerned for her, and they felt they were acting for her own good. They obviously held her in high regard: Adelaide always introduced her as the "mother of the school" when she visited there. However, they were incapable of seeing her wish to stay where she was as a rational choice. She simply had to be senile or undue influence had to be involved. Part of this influence they felt to be directed toward Moody's money and the Kappes Fund. The Sharpes accused the family she lived with of appropriating her own money and of tricking her into handing over some of the Kappes Fund.

Whatever may be the actual facts of the last months of Moody's life, during the preceding years her correspondence does not suggest any great deterioration of her faculties, indicates that she had very few personal funds, and that she continued to operate the Kappes Fund as usual. The Sharpes tried to stop money being sent direct to Moody for over two years before her death on the grounds of her incompetence. Their continued claims of her incapacity during the last few months of her life, when she was not able to write and present her own views, must be taken in the light of the very probable exaggeration of their earlier ones.

It is clear from her own letters that Moody was in no way pretending joy at her circumstances. She was exactly where she

wished to be. Her health was looked after by Dr. Yúnis Khán Afrúkhtih, and her care cannot have been that bad, since it saw her through four years of frequent dysentery and pneumonia. Though she was often restricted to her bed, or the house, she was much loved by the Tehran Bahá'ís and was regularly visited when too ill to go out:

> The friends here come to me often and we have beautiful meetings, chanting by these young brothers is simply heavenly food. I do not get around among the friends but next Sunday there will be a meeting of the women here . . . and I shall go up stairs and enjoy it with them.[36]

Moody died on 23 October 1934, after a final illness of twelve days. Her funeral was a considerable affair:

> Some of the children of the school led the hearse while the teachers of the school followed with her Baha'i sisters and then last but by no means least came her Baha'i brothers.
>
> The Baha'i cemetery is not a cemetery in comparison to the Moslem's but is a garden. Ours here is called the Everlasting Rose Garden. So Dr. Moody was taken to the Everlasting Rose Garden where a most impressive ceremony was held. Jenabe Fadil read the burial prayers.[37]

> Her burial was majestic because hundreds of Bahais men & women and Tarbiat Girls' school students thronged with flowers in hand and she lies near Dr. Clock and Miss Lillian Kappes, because it was her wish to be buried near them.[38]

The Sharpes persisted in their view that Moody had been "childish" and had been taken advantage of. That she had simply become so acculturated to the local environment that she preferred to live as part of it was inconceivable to them. This is

what sets them apart from the earlier group of women. The dispute over what part of the Kappes Fund had, or had not, been embezzled—with a cognate dispute over Moody's will—continued for several years. But the girls school as an interested party only survived Moody by a few weeks.

> The closing of the school was a great shock altho we had expected that it might happen. The Bab's Martyrdom in this country is kept by the Arabic Calendar which came this year on the 6th of December Thursday, Friday is Muhammadan holyday and no schools are opened. Saturday afternoon a policeman came with an order from the Board of Education to close the schools. They said Tarbiat had been closed for no reason Thursday and the license for Tarbiat school existed no longer. This order came after school had been dismised and there was no time to tell all the children, so A & her assistant went to school the next morning at 6.30 a.m. before the policeman could get there so they themselves would be sure of getting in and as the children came to enter the school they had to be turned back. This was very hard as many of the little ones did not understand and called to Adelaide to tell the policemen to let them in and many cried. Our porter of the school also stood at the door and explained to the children that the school was closed because we had kept the Holyday of the Bab's Martyrdom. This annoyed the policeman very much and he told told him not to explain to the children but he said they would have to tell their mothers why & kept on telling why in a very loud voice. . . .
>
> The Bahai children have not gone to other schools, a few had been going to other schools and one man took his out because Tarbiat was closed. The Muhammadan children of course went to other schools but they are not satisfied or happy. Tarbiat School was far ahead of the other persian schools, in their text books, character training and every thing else. All the schools say this. The educated Muhammadans are with the Bahais. One important Muhammadan said he knew it was a Bahai school when he sent his children there and said that was no reason for closing the school and he would tell the Board of Education so. We had many of the

best families in town sending their children and they are feeling very badly about it. There are nearly 1500 pupils in both schools & about 50 teachers.[39]

The Sharpes stayed on in Tehran after the school was closed to continue other work with the community's women. Adelaide Sharpe, herself, eventually became the first woman elected to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran.

The activities of the American Bahá'í women who were involved with the girls school in Tehran encompass twenty-four years, but the earlier of those years seem to have been fueled with a vision that was lacking in the later ones. The early group of women went to Tehran to teach, but also to learn. They came to teach the methods and content of "advanced" Western education, but they also expected to learn from the history, devotion and life of the community they came to. They came to join their sisters in belief in creating a new day. The later group was both literally and conceptually a rescue mission. To rescue the school from its mismanagement, and to rescue the ignorant East through Western enlightenment.

Moody retained the old vision and was incomprehensible to those with the new. The early women came from an American Bahá'í community that was only recently established. It felt its ignorance of the history and practice of its faith and in its meetings with the Eastern Bahá'í community was eager to receive as well as give. The later group came from an American Bahá'í community that was rapidly institutionalizing and developing a self-image as the model for other communities to follow. Its humility and openness were the less for that. The early group saw their relationship with their hosts, particularly the women, as symbiotic: the future was to be their mutual creation. The later women saw their role as teachers.

It will take a great deal of study to eventually determine what

the effect of these women was on the position of Bahá'í women in Iran generally. That there was no sudden, or even relatively rapid, change from inherited Middle Eastern patterns of gender interaction is apparent. But undoubtedly, the presence of the early group made considerable difference to a number of Bahá'í women in Tehran. The possibilities of their lives were changed, and they had choices that did not previously exist. The impact of the later group was much less dramatic, their activities being largely a continuation of, rather than a departure from, established patterns.

The biggest hurdle to change, the attitudes of men in the Bahá'í community, was not cleared by either group. Much of the support they received seems to have been from men who already had exposure to Western ideas. Most others who were prepared to support the separate education of a few girls were unlikely to have had any associated commitment to a basic change in gender roles. The mothers who sought wives for their sons from Kappes probably expressed the mass view of the utility of girls education. As in much of the Third World today, an educated girl was seen as a better bargain in the marriage mart.

NOTES

This essay draws generally on a familiarity with the holdings of the National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, Illinois. The specific manuscript materials cited are from the Thornton Chase Papers and Orol Platt Papers. Of the periodicals cited, the *Star of the West* is too well known to need further comment, the *Magazine of the Children of the Kingdom* was published by Ella Robarts from 1919 to 1924, and is an insufficiently known source of Bahá'í children's activities of those years. All quotations are reproduced here as in the source.

The statistics on the involvement of American Protestant women in overseas missionary work at the beginning of this essay are from a 1910 survey of the field excerpted in Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller (eds.), *Women and Religion in America:*

The Nineteenth Century, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981. Despite the title of this book, the documents and essays in it also cover the early part of the twentieth century.

1. Moody to Russell, 27 December 1909. Chase Papers.
2. Ibid., 24–25 January 1910.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., 27 December 1909.
5. Ibid., 27 November 1909.
6. Ibid., 29 January 1910.
7. Ibid., 11 January 1910.
8. Ibid., 2 January 1910.
9. Ibid., 24 January 1910.
10. Clock to Platt, 15 August 1916. Platt Papers.
11. Ibid., 20 November 1916.
12. Ibid., 29 January 1918.
13. Ibid., 20 November 1916.
14. Ibid., 9 July 1919.
15. Kappes to Platt, 31 August 1920. Platt Papers.
16. Clock To Platt, 29 January 1918. Platt Papers.
17. Ibid., 15 August 1916.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., 20 November 1916.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., 22 June 1917.
22. Ibid.
23. Kappes. "Programme of Exercises." Platt Papers.
24. Clock to Platt, 22 June 1917. Platt Papers.
25. Ibid., 9 July 1919.
26. *Magazine of the Children of the Kingdom*, no. 4 (September 1923) pp. 82–83.
27. *Star of the West*, vol. 5, no. 4, p. 74.
28. Ibid., vol. 6, no. 7 (13 July 1915) p. 54.
29. Moody to Platt, 21 May 1923. Platt Papers.
30. Ibid., n.d. [1929].
31. Ibid., 22 June 1929.
32. A. Sharpe to Platt, 26 February 1933. Platt Papers.
33. C. Sharpe to Platt, 4 March 1931. Platt Papers.

34. Clock to Platt, 29 January 1918. Platt Papers.
35. C. Sharpe to Platt, August 1932. Platt Papers.
36. Moody to Platt, 1 January 1934. Platt Papers.
37. A. Sharpe to Platt, 29 October 1934. Platt Papers.
38. Roozbehyan to Platt, 5 November 1934. Platt Papers.
39. C. Sharpe to Platt, 16 January 1935. Platt Papers.