

MEMOIRS OF NORA CROSSLEY*

1921

I was born in 1893, in Old Trafford, Manchester. I came from a wealthy Manchester family who, however, completely disowned me when I ran away from home to marry my uncle's apprentice; a lad without a penny to bless himself with. Crazy? - but a lot of crazy things were done in the First World War. We thought they were all heroes, if they had been serving in France, as he had been.

My father was a ladies underclothing manufacturer and my mother a headmistress. It was a disastrous marriage. You could not have found two people more unlike, and they separated because they could not get on with each other. This made it very difficult for me, as I adored my father who was a gay, irresponsible Irishman. He was born in Kildare and his family, a military one, had been "on the strength" for many years. My grandfather, John Harbourne, was the Barrack Master at Chester Castle just before he died, and had served in the Boer War. My father and I were like two peas in a pod, but I could not get on with my mother, who was a strict disciplinarian; yet she had me educated, and did her utmost to bring me up properly. Actually, she did far more for me than my father, and only in recent years have I realised how much I really owed to her.

I was always running away to my beloved father, who immediately brought me back home again, but it was a very unhappy childhood. I was educated at the High School, at Chorlton-cum-Hardy, then the Higher Grade School at Urmston; going on to the High School in Portland Street, Manchester, and then across to the Technical College, where I learnt French and German. I was restless at home and insisted on going out to work, but as I was always in bad health (sixteen of my father's family had died of T.B.) I had to have a job where I would not be sacked when I kept staying off because of ill-health; so I was apprenticed to my uncle, the Director of Jesse Broads, the Printers, Manchester.

My salary was five shillings a week (and my fare to get there from Urmston each day was eight shillings - so, actually, I was working all day and every day, for nothing). My husband, then a lad of thirteen, was a book-binder's apprentice, in the same room. We just loathed each other, so MUCH so, that the other binders used to chaff us and call us sweethearts.

Then one day they had a works picnic. Each man had to choose a girl to take, and MY partner

* From the UK National Bahá'í Archives, unpublished.

was a young man called Tom - but for some queer reason, my husband attached himself to us and would not leave my side. After that, each morning he would be at the station, waiting to escort me to work, and insisted on seeing me safely on the train at night. That was the start of an intensely tragic life.

My husband's mother had died, and his father had gone off years before and my husband was brought up by a guardian, a friend of his mother. This man, however, was as strict a disciplinarian as my mother was, and my husband, too, was always running away. When I first knew him he was living in a tiny attic, for which he paid three shillings out of the five shillings a week he earned. Coming from a good home, as I was, I was shocked to find him practically starving, and used to help him out with my pocket money.

Then, in 1914, he was conscripted and sent to France. Every day, throughout the war, he wrote begging me to marry him, even though his army pay was only twelve and sixpence a week. But I was not only sorry for him; he seemed such a waif and stray that I not only became attached to him, but in some queer way, felt I was responsible for him.

When he was demobbed in 1917, I was then working at the Ministry of Munitions in Manchester, as cashier. It was a very responsible job. I had my own office, with a staff under me. During the day (in which I did practically nothing) the staff made the wages up to pay the men out at the various munition works. Then, when the staff went home, I, with two armed escorts, took a car, and at each munition works I paid the day staff as they went off, and the night staff as they came on. I was still doing this job when my husband came home on seven days' leave. I had a good income (to supplement his twelve and sixpence per week) and a nice furnished flat in Raby Street, Manchester - and while he was on leave, we married at Saint Margaret's Church, Whalley Range, Manchester.

I did not see him again, until he came home for good, in 1917. The future looked quite healthy. As my first-born son was eighteen months old, I had had to give up my splendid job, but my husband was still apprenticed to my uncle, and provided nothing went wrong, had a job for life as a book-binder. He was very good at his trade and would eventually have been foreman at the work, but instead of going back to his job, he sat at home twelve months and would not move. He was not lazy and would work until the early hours of the morning making little books to give to friends, or repairing hymn books for a church, but nothing on earth would induce him to work for money to support his family. That was the beginning of over half a century of tragedy.

He also had a real soul for music and was a wonderful organist. He would give his services to any church who asked him; but again, he would not give his services for any kind of payment. I could not understand it, and not for many years afterwards did I realise he was a schizophrenic, a

man with a split personality who was not responsible for the queer actions he took.

I am referring to these personal things because it was solely because of them, and not only because of my small gift to the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, that the Beloved Master, and Shoghi Effendi, took such an interest in me. Nearly all their letters to me were not about the Faith, as was usual, but about my husband and my family.

When I first joined the Bahá'ís I was scrubbing café floors for ten shillings a week, in order to try and feed my children and keep a roof of some sort over our heads. The Bahá'ís were very distressed at the poverty-stricken way in which we were living, and tried all ways to help; but I refused all help offered. It is extraordinary how proud one can be when one has NOTHING.

Only once, since 1921, have I ever accepted help from one of the friends; that was **Doctor J. Esslemont**, who insisted on installing me in a fancy-goods shop in Northendon. He was sure it would give me a chance to get on my feet, but unfortunately it failed as my health broke down. I was once more taken to hospital (as I was every year) - and all the time I was away, all the overhead expenses were going on, and there was no one to look after the shop for me. So that when I came out, I had to sell the shop in order to pay the accumulated debts. I shall never forget how distressed I was at having to write and tell Doctor Esslemont the project had failed, after all he had done to help; but all he was said, "Never mind, my dear, there is always another day." Did anyone ever have a truer friend?

I am often asked how I came into the Cause. This is what happened. On the morning of Tuesday, 24th May 1921, I reached breaking point and could not take any more; so I walked out, leaving my husband sat in front of the fire, with my two sons. All that day I tramped the streets, heedless of the pouring rain that was soaking me through, but when dusk came - I knew I would have to go back on account of the children. They had no one else to care for them, and I could not desert them; so I brought an evening paper, and boarded a tram for home. While waiting for the conductor to arrive, I scanned the advertisements, and a notice caught my eye. It said there was a lecture being given that night about the Holy Land. I had always been deeply religious, and vitally interested in anything to do with the Holy Land - and I thought that if only I could attend that lecture, before I went home, it might tend to raise my drooping spirits a little. So I got OFF the tram, and made my way to the Raglan Café, Mosely Street, where I found a man named Charles Mason Remy was going to speak. He impressed me greatly. `Abdu'l-Bahá once said, "His face shone with the beauty of holiness." It certainly did THAT night. When the meeting was over, a friend (who I found out afterwards was **Edward E.T. Hall**) came up to me and asked me how I liked the meeting? I told him I was thrilled at all I had heard, but "Who?", I asked, "is the `Abdu'l-Bahá the speaker kept referring to?" He laughed, and explained a little; but as the hour was late he suggested that I go and have tea with his wife and him the next day, when he would

tell me more about the Cause. I went home as though walking on air, and my husband was astonished when he saw my face - as it was very different to what he had anticipated. The next day I went to the Halls' home, and that was beginning of a new era for ME. I was so full of enthusiasm that I went day after day, learning more and more - until I became one of the Bahá'ís.

Several important things happened at this time, and we were told that Doctor Esslemont, who was in London at that time, was appealing for funds to build the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in Chicago. All the other friends were contributing but I had no means of any kind, and was both embarrassed and unhappy. Then I remembered I had just ONE thing of any value - my hair.

As a girl I was known all over the North for my lovely hair. It was a beautiful auburn, and my mother was so proud of it that she used to brush it for an hour night and morn, until it shone like gold. Artists used to come from far and wide to paint me, usually sitting in meadows et cetera. It was so long, it almost reached the bottom of my dress, and I knew that hairdressers would offer a good deal for hair of my colour. It was a sacrifice, as it was the only beauty I had - but I had nothing else to give - so I cut it off; but I could not summon enough courage to sell it myself - so I just parcelled it up and sent it to Doctor Esslemont - just as it was.

It was just a simple action on my part. All I was conscious of, was to try and do something to please the Beloved Master; but even I never dreamt how far-reaching the effects were going to be. Doctor Esslemont showed the hair to the National Spiritual Assembly and Zia'u'llah Asgharzadih, a Persian Bahá'í, asked that the hair should be valued; then he himself would give one pound more than the highest offer as he wanted the hair for a special purpose. I learned afterwards that he intended to send it to Persia, to be woven into an ornament, which would later be placed in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár itself, and preserved for all time. You can imagine how thrilled I was - but that was not all.

Doctor Esslemont sent a letter to **Doctor Lutfu'lláh S. Hakím** in Haifa, telling him about my gift; and Lutfu'lláh told the ladies of the Holy Household. While they were reading the letter in the garden, the Beloved Master came by and asked them what they were reading. Lutfu'lláh read the letter to Him, and He said, "I must write her at once." And standing there in the garden He wrote (on the palm of His hand) my first Tablet. Lutfu'lláh translated it, and sent me a copy signed by the Beloved Master.

Then this article appeared in the Bahá'í News, 1921:

ENGLAND The Holy Cause is spreading all over the world and the wonderful spirit of love and sacrifice is manifested by the friends of God. We have read with great pleasure the real heartfelt sympathy expressed by our dear sister, Mrs Norah Crossley of Manchester, in giving her beautiful hair to the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in Chicago. The

Mashriqu'l-Adhkár that will be built, will be the greatest edifice of the solidarity of the whole human race; the Unity of East and West, and it will be built with the sincere efforts of Bahá'ís all over the world. We quote the words of our dear sister Norah Crossley, from her to Doctor Esslemont, dated July 6th, 1921, for the information of the friends.

She writes: "I am a stranger to you personally, but have recently joined the Manchester Bahá'ís, and have heard a great deal of you from Mr Hall. He told me about the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár - that you are the Collector for it in England, therefore I am sending you my share, small though it is. You may think mine a very strange share, but I am poor, and penniless, so I have cut off my hair and wish you to sell it for me. Hairdressers are only too anxious to obtain hair my colour, but it cost me a great deal to cut off, and I feel I could not possibly sell it myself. If it only does a little good, I shall be content. It has been a sacrifice I admit, as it was the only beauty I possessed, but it is nothing to what the Beloved Master has given me. He has given me a wonderful, boundless joy that no one can take from me. He has also chosen me for a great part in spreading the Cause and I am trying to make myself as worthy as possible of His trust.

At present, I am very incompetent, but He is training me in His own way. My deep gratitude to the other Bahá'ís, who have shown me so much sympathy, passeth all understanding, in my need - and I am only too anxious to do some little service for the Cause in return. It is only a small gift, but it is all I possess, so I hope you will be able to make use of it in some way, and send the proceeds to the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar. If you ever know of ANYTHING I can do to help the Cause, I will even give my life if need be - for it belongs to the Beloved Master after all."

The hair was purchased by Ziá'u'lláh, a Persian Bahá'í, who offered one pound more than the rest. HOW VERY SIGNIFICANT THAT A SISTER IN MANCHESTER OFFERS HER BEAUTIFUL HAIR FOR A BAHAI TEMPLE TO BE BUILT IN CHICAGO AND THE HAIR IS PURCHASED BY A BROTHER FROM PERSIA. Hearts throb with joy when news of such love is received. We congratulate our dear sister, Norah Crossley, for the wonderful confirmations of God which she receives, and pray to God that she may receive eternal and wonderful confirmation from the Kingdom of Abhá."

Then the Beloved Master wrote the beautiful Tablet to Najaf-Abád. Doctor Esslemont paid us a visit in the late half of August and told us that the Beloved Master had asked Shoghi Effendi, who was studying at Balliol College, Oxford, at the time to come to Manchester and read the Najaf-Abád Tablet to us. This made us all very happy. Shoghi Effendi arrived on the first day of

the month, October. Never shall I forget the night he arrived.

Eighteen of the friends were gathered in **Mr Jeff Joseph's** office. For an hour we sat in silence, hardly daring to breathe. Then the door opened, and THERE HE WAS, in all the prime of his young manhood. How can one describe Shoghi Effendi? He was so full of vitality, like a piece of quicksilver, his face glowing with love and eagerness. And his eyes - `Abdu'l-Bahá once said they were like "pools of liquid light" - keen, alert, infinitely loving. Because he said he wished to tell them of the Master's pleasure at my gift, they placed my chair next to his. He also brought me gifts from the Beloved Master - a lovely Persian silk handkerchief, with a tiny photo of Himself lain in its folds - and the beautiful Bahá'í ring I now wear.

Shoghi Effendi gave us all the news from Haifa, and then read to us the Tablet of Najaf-Abád. I did not know whether I was on my head or my heels. How could all this be happening to ME? He also told us the beautiful story of Qurratu'l-'Ayn, the great Persian heroine, who was so foully murdered.

The next day we all met again in the office, and in the evening gathered at the home of **Mr and Mrs Heald** in Miles Platting. Shoghi Effendi was greatly interested in our hymn singing, and told us how the Master would ask Lua Getsinger to go out on the terrace of the house in Haifa, in the cool, fragrant night, in the clear moonlight, and sing the hymn which always pleased Him: "Nearer my God to Thee". Her voice, Shoghi Effendi said, "would rise and fall clear as a nightingale", to the joy of the Master.

Shoghi Effendi had purchased a quantity of purple grapes. At eight o'clock, twenty-three people had assembled, and Shoghi Effendi chanted a prayer. To understand music, was to hear Shoghi Effendi chant. He then said he would endeavour to give us an idea of the meetings in Haifa and the East, and saying this, he proceeded to divide the grapes and hand them out, nine grapes to each; telling us to think of our brethren in all lands as we consumed this "fruit of the vine". This caused much cheerfulness yet, underlying the material side of it, we knew there was a profound and sweet inner meaning of the "vine", fruit of life, and the new Communion. We were strangely moved.

He had been sitting down a little while, after distributing the grapes, when he rose again and showed us a small bottle of Attar of Roses. This, he told us, had been given him by `Abdu'l-Bahá's sister, the Greatest Holy Leaf. When she gave it to him, she expressed a wish that he would use it for enfragrancing an Assembly ONLY when he felt that the right spiritual atmosphere prevailed, when there was complete peace and harmony, and when his heart was moved to use it. He said that among us, he felt strongly moved to use it, and would now enfragrance us. He asked each of us to hold out a hand, palm upwards, and as he passed round

the room, he placed a little of this quintessence of rose-fragrance upon it; then we each, following the example of Zia'u'lláh, rubbed our hands together, and stroked our palms over our hair and foreheads, until ourselves and the whole atmosphere was deliciously fragrant. Then he told us beautiful things of the great Fellowship, and tender things of the Holy places, until we were no longer in Manchester, but rather in the spirit of the Holy Land. We knew, then, that the breath of the Holy Spirit had been upon us, and that we had passed through a natural, yet wonderfully spiritual Confirmation Service. Our hearts rejoiced, with a joy that will never die out. It was on this day, too, that a supplication was penned to the Master, and signed by twenty-four people, asking Him to pray for us, that we might become more and more worthy, and stronger in spirit.

The Master's answer to this was the Holy Assurance of God's Love, in the Tablet to the "Beloved of the Lord, in the City of Manchester"; a Tablet now well known. The next day, Tuesday 4th October, **Mr Craven** caused Shoghi Effendi to be shown through the great lino-type works at Broadheath, the management of which was very sympathetic towards Bahá'í aims; and in the evening he met some friends in Mr Craven's front room in Altringham. On Wednesday, 5th October, all the friends gathered again in the office in Mosely Street, at about seven p.m., as Shoghi Effendi had requested that a photo should be taken of him, with the whole assembly.

It has always been said that Shoghi Effendi utterly disliked his photo taken, and would do anything to avoid it; but on this occasion it was something he ardently desired. Zia'u'lláh distributed silk handkerchiefs and cornelian stones among the friends, also enfragrancing them again with the scent from Haifa (Mount Carmel), and at eight p.m. we all strolled off to Van Ralty's, the Photographer in Oldham Street, who took an excellent picture of the group.

We walked back to Piccadilly, where I and other friends were to say goodbye to Shoghi Effendi. Can I possibly describe how I felt? Infinitely sad that he was going, yet bubbling over with enthusiasm because of his visit, and that I had had the privilege of accompanying him for a whole week, going around from one place and another. I was so wound up and exalted that after saying farewell and seeing him walk off with Mr Hall and Mr Joseph, I crossed Piccadilly. In the centre was a big statue of Queen Victoria, and obeying a sudden impulse I climbed to the top of the statue, and stood, holding on to Queen Victoria's shoulder. It was very dangerous. I could easily have fallen and broken my neck - and I would certainly have been arrested - had a policeman been passing; but I was not thinking about broken necks, or policemen - all I could think of was that a great light was going out of our city, and I remember crying out loud (though I was so high that no one could hear me): "Oh, why do you let him go? Cannot you understand WHO has been in your midst?" Somehow it did not occur to me that the milling crowd surging along like little ants below, had probably never even heard of Shoghi Effendi. So, one of the greatest weeks of my whole life came to an end.

I was still very distressed by my domestic problems, however, and again wrote and consulted the Beloved Master. He had become like a Father to me, and at that time I thought it quite natural to consult Him before I ever did ANYTHING of any importance. Since then I have realised how presumptuous it was to bother Him about my personal affairs; but they WERE drastic, and all the letters I had from the Beloved Master, and Shoghi Effendi, were never about the Cause, as they were to the other friends, but always about either my husband, or my family. They were specially concerned about my children. Things had come to such a pass, however, that I could not stand the life any more, and wanted a divorce from my husband -who had no intention of ever being any different - but I could not take a step like this without consulting the Beloved Master.

I was already so sure of the assurance and help He would give me - so that when I received His second Tablet to me on 20th October, 1921, it was a complete shock. He said:

To Mrs Norah Crossley,

O' Dearly Beloved Hand-maid of the Lord,

Thou art indeed well favoured in the Kingdom of God, and in the eyes of `Abdu'l-Bahá, highly praiseworthy. In the path of the Holy Spirit, thou art in truth self-sacrificing, whilst thine heart and soul shine with the Light of Divine Guidance. It is incumbent upon thee however, to forbear with thine husband, - to do thine utmost to please him, and show unto him the utmost respect, that he may see how the Teachings of His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh have raised the husband in the sight of his wife, and how thy faith hath conduced to a still greater love and regard for him."

Signed, `Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas.

Revealed on Carmel, October 20th 1921. Translated by Shoghi Effendi.

On receiving this I was stunned, to say the least of it. I loved Him so much. He was my Beloved Father. How could He expect me to carry on, when He knew my life was such a misery, and I was so unhappy? And I was very ANGRY. Can any Bahá'í ever imagine being ANGRY with `Abdu'l-Bahá, when most people remained on their knees in His presence? But I WAS angry. I told myself that, after all, He was an Easterner and, as such, could never understand the problems of a Western woman - but it was no use. My love for the Beloved Master was far greater than any anger could have been; so, after giving myself time to cool down - I wrote to Him and told Him I would obey His wishes, even though it meant so much distress to me. Then I received my first letter from Shoghi Effendi, who had then gone back to Balliol, Oxford. He said:

"To Mrs Nonie Crossley,

Let me assure you that the Bahá'í affection and admiration I have felt for you, has by no means diminished. On the contrary, it has blazed afresh ever since the second Tablet of the Master was revealed for you.

Pressure of work, and my absorption in my translation work, including "The Hidden Words" have intervened and hampered my correspondence with the friends. Nevertheless, I have been thinking of them and praying for their spiritual advancement.

The intensity, and peculiar difficulty of the test which the Master made, in His unfathomable wisdom (sent you), is but an indication of the noble station He is reserving for you, if you overly persist in your efforts to surmount the many obstacles in your way. Your supplication to Him, has touched me profoundly, as I remember that among the multitude of supplications that I have had to translate for Him, few have revealed so profound a sentiment of attachment, of sincerity and of Faith.

I pray earnestly for your success in overcoming the difficulties that beset you, and I am confident that your noble spirit of faith and love will ultimately triumph.

Yours in His Name, Shoghi."

Two things emerged from this; first, that all the honours that were showered on me by the Beloved Master, were NOT solely because of my gift to the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, as most people think, but because I loved Him so much, I was prepared to obey Him, and carry out His wishes, AT ALL COST. In order to do that, I forgave my husband his many desertions, picked him off the streets and set him on his feet again et cetera, exactly twenty-six times; and when he finally died of cancer, I was at his side. A letter I have before me from Mr Hall, says: "Never again will Bahá'ís ask you to undertake such a terrible load for such a person. Nevertheless, as you have done it for our sakes, God will surely reward you, in His good and best way. Henceforth be absolutely in peace in your heart, for you have carried out the last extremity of the Bahá'í Law - AND NO ONE WILL EVER AGAIN EXPECT ANY FURTHER FROM YOU".

After Shoghi Effendi's visit things went back to normal. Then after four short weeks we received the dreadful news that the Beloved Master had passed away. We were stunned. We could not believe it. I myself was devastated. My Beloved Father, the ONLY one in whose hands I felt perfectly safe - had gone. Not only that, but I had been invited to go to Haifa, and as they knew I could not possibly have found the fares, they had offered to pay all my expenses. And I REFUSED the offer. Why? Because of my pride, which I felt was the only thing I had left. It is extraordinary how proud one can be - when one has nothing; but had I known my Beloved was

going to be taken from me - I WOULD HAVE SWAM THERE!

Hour after hour I lay on the cold floor, too numb with misery and grief to either eat, sleep or even speak. It was as though we had been left with a beautiful lamp, in which the Light had gone out, and I could not imagine a world now, without `Abdu'l-Bahá in it. The other Bahá'ís were also silent. Our grief was so intense, all we wanted was to live in silence.

Then one day I received a letter from Mr Hall. I had not SEEN the Master, but he HAD and I knew how much he loved Him too. In his letter he said: "Do you remember the Disciples gathered together in the upper room after the Crucifixion? They were too stunned with grief to even go outside - but Mary Magdalene (to whom the Eastern Bahá'ís liken YOU!) put aside her own grief and went to the disciples and did all she could to cheer them, and bring them back to normal. AND I EXPECT YOU TO DO THE SAME."

So I rose, and went to find the friends. We heard that Shoghi Effendi was so heartbroken, that he had had to go out into the wilderness, feeling the necessity to be entirely alone. We all tried to pick up the threads, knowing that nothing would ever be the same again. Finally, we heard that Shoghi Effendi, in spite of intense opposition, had become the Guardian of the Bahá'í Cause.

On 7th February, 1922, we were told that Shoghi Effendi had taken up his duties as Guardian, and the first steps towards the wonderful organisation the Bahá'í Faith was to become, according to the plan laid down in the Master's Will. Mr Hall was chosen to represent the group in Manchester, while Doctor Esslemont would represent the Bournemouth group, so that these groups might work harmoniously with the London group, which had elected, in all, seven representatives towards the same end. These nine representatives formed the first ALL ENGLAND Bahá'í COUNCIL, the first meeting of which was held in London, at the home of **Mrs Thornburgh Cropper** in Westminster on 6th June 1922.

During all that year we quietly continued our meetings in Mr Joseph's office in Mosley Street, doing our best to promote the Cause. On Wednesday, 5th July, a special meeting was called, when **Mr and Mrs Stanwood Cobb** (from Washington, U.S.A.) arrived - en route for Haifa. There were twenty-seven people gathered, whom Mr Cobb addressed. These friends were the only visitors during all that year. Then came Avareh, at the bidding of Shoghi Effendi, accompanied by beloved Doctor Lutfu'lláh S. Hakím and Mrs and Mrs Zia'u'lláh Asgharzádih. They stayed for nine days and on the Saturday evening, 3rd March, Avareh addressed twenty friends, on the best method of teaching people about the Cause, also about the New Spiritual Springtime. On Sunday afternoon, 4th March, Avareh addressed the men's class at Dunham Road Unitarian School, Altringham. In the evening, he addressed the congregation of the Unitarian Chapel, from the pulpit, and it was great to hear Doctor Lutfulláh translate the

beautiful prayer and the masterly address which the Persian teacher delivered. After this service, about fifty people from the congregation gathered in the schoolroom to ask questions. Avareh delivered convincing answers, all appertaining to the History and Principles of the Cause of Peace and Reconciliation. On Tuesday, 6th March, there was an interview with the Reverend H.H. Johnson, at his house, and Avareh carefully explained the Bahá'í principle of a World Council for the purpose of preserving peace in the world. Mr Johnson was deeply interested.

On Wednesday, 7th March, Avareh addressed another meeting at Mr Hall's house, thirty-two friends being present. He spoke eloquently of the life of Quarratu'l Ayn, the beautiful Persian poetess, who became a martyr to the Bahá'í Cause. He showed how all creation is built up by the wonderful power of Love, and how, if Love were withdrawn, creation would collapse. It was that love which glorified Christ and Bahá'u'lláh. Lutfu'lláh's translation was splendid, never pausing once for a word. On Friday, 9th March, the visitors were taken through the linotype works at Broadheath, and took lunch with two Superintendents. On Saturday, 10th March, he addressed another meeting at Mr Hall's, concluding his story of Quarratu'l Ayn, and her martyrdom. The twenty-five people present marvelled at the courage of that noble pioneer of womens' emancipation in the East. It was at this meeting that Avareh suggested a Council of five Bahá'ís should be elected as early as possible, to conduct the Movement in Manchester.

On Sunday, 11th March, Avareh addressed fifty people at the Gorton Adults School, in the afternoon; and in the evening he addressed about three hundred people in Cross Street Chapel, in the very heart of Manchester. His words rang out clearly, "The Light has come; and that Light is Bahá'u'lláh".

On 24th March, twelve days after the departure of jenabi Avareh, Doctor Lutfu'lláh and the other friends, the group elected a group of five members. But for various reasons, we thought it best to consult Avareh, and after some correspondence, he came again from London to assist us with his advice. To our joy Lutfu'lláh again accompanied him, and in the evening of Good Friday, March 30th, the friends assembled at Mr Hall's, and under the kindly eyes of Avareh and Lutfu'lláh, our first local Council of nine Members was formed; **Mr Joseph being Chairman, Mr Heald Vice-Chairman, Mr Hall - Secretary, Mr Craven - Treasurer; the other members being Mrs Sugar, Mrs Crossley, Mr Chessell, Mr Ibrahim Joseph and Mr H Jarvis.** Such was the general history of the formation of the Council, fulfilling the request of our beloved Shoghi Effendi. Later, Mr Hall was chosen as Secretary for Haifa, London and America and Mrs Norah Crossley chosen as Secretary for Bombay, Karachi and Tehran.

One thing we found never failed to impress people, and that was that neither `Abdu'l-Bahá, or His Father, Bahá'u'lláh, were ever taught the learning of men, yet scientific men from different parts of the world went to question `Abdu'l-Bahá about various matters. Learned men, priests of

the different systems, and even those in authority, went to consult Him, and they all regarded Him as their Friend and Adviser.

Zia'u'lláh Asgharzádih, about this time, sent me the photo taken with the friends, with Shoghi Effendi in our midst, and on one corner he had written an inscription in Arabic which, translated, said:

"To Mrs Norah Crossley,

O Bahá'í Sister, Blessed are you that His Holiness `Abdu'l-Bahá calleth you His "Daughter of the Kingdom". This is a great favour from the Master, I present to you this photograph as a remembrance. (October 1921)

One other thing I shall always remember, one day when Shoghi Effendi, during his visit, turned to me and said, "Your name is Norah, and you were born on June 7th, 1893, in the month of Nur, which means Light".

I never saw Shoghi Effendi again, but he became my dearest of brothers, always signing himself "Your true Brother", in his letters to me; but one could never forget him. He was so alert, always dashing about, like a piece of quicksilver, always busy for his Cause. His voice, while vibrant and eager, was reassuring, his manners perfect, and his features beautiful, especially his eyes, which, as `Abdu'l-Bahá had said, were like pools of clear water. He was also as one, having full control of himself, was able to control others. He commanded respect wherever he went, and his words and thoughts were tender and vibrant. He never had to raise his voice to emphasise anything, but was always clear and lucid. Life to me has been very tragic, but two things have made it worthwhile; first, that I had the great privilege of serving the Beloved Master, IN HIS DAY, and secondly, that I had held the hand of Shoghi Effendi, and received his commendation.

After such vital happenings, all should have gone well and smoothly. I had the affection of the friends, and the privilege of serving them - but it was not long before a serpent entered my Garden of Eden. One of the friends, an old Bahá'í, became very jealous of all the fuss, as he called it, that had been made of me. I could quite understand his attitude. He had been a Bahá'í for many years, had met `Abdu'l-Bahá, and served the Cause - yet during all that time, he had never been honoured as I was. Then an unknown woman, from one of the worst slums in Manchester, suddenly arrives on the horizon and immediately she is commended everywhere, even receiving TWO Tablets from the Beloved Master, within two months. One could understand, but the time came when the jealousy became gross and vindictive, and he did everything possible to drive me out. Then when Mr Hall discovered what was happening and tried to defend me, he threatened him also. Even this, we might have been able to counter, but we were afraid his vindictiveness might reach to the Group itself. One of the chief things which had attracted me to the Group in the first place, was the love and harmony and peace which prevailed

among the group. My domestic life being in turmoil, this peace and harmony was something vital to me. Again, the friends had gone out of their way to show me every kindness within their power. How then, could I stand by and see that harmony destroyed by insane jealousy, caused by ME, of all people? Try as I could, I could only see ONE way out; that was to remove the bone of contention - namely myself. So, although they meant everything in the world to me - and I had NOTHING else to console me - I disappeared, leaving no trace - as I knew that if the friends knew where I had gone, they would never have rested until I was back among them again. I consulted Shoghi Effendi (the only one who knew where I had gone, and with whom I remained in touch during the whole long exile), but although he was very sad at the turn of events - even he could find no solution.

So, for forty long years, I went out into the wilderness, rather than bring the slightest discord to the Group I loved so well. I had, however, always served God in some capacity, even in the worst of times - so I decided to find a church that was as near to the Bahá'í principles as I could get. I found a Universal Church in London, which catered for all religions, all creeds, all races - and more or less held much the same principles as the Bahá'ís themselves. First, I went in the Choir -then was elected a Deaconess and, finally, was ordained as a Free Church Minister. This meant that I was sent out preaching all over the country - but wherever I went, instead of preaching Christianity, I spoke ALWAYS of the Beloved Master, and the Bahá'í Cause. Our Archbishop (now passed away) did not prevent me, as he too was interested in the

Cause, but because of his position, would never become a Bahá'í. Everywhere I went, I was always known as a Bahá'í-Christian (as were Mr Hall, Doctor Esslemont and other early Bahá'ís).

Although I missed the friends so much and, at times, found the agony of separation almost intolerable, I was fairly happy in the Church. It was a Faith-healing Church - and people used to flock in all day long for healing, even bringing their pets to be cured. Lady Munnings, wife of Sir Albert Munnings, the artist, used to bring her famous poodle Black Knight to me, about once a fortnight, for healing. Frankly, I never found much wrong with him - but I seemed to soothe him, which pleased Lady Munnings very much.

I tended the altars, took services - and assisted generally in the Church work. I left home at 6.00 a.m. and did not return until the midnight train each day - but it was at least some consolation for all I had lost. Then one day I was watching television, when I saw the Centenary of the Cause (1963) - and the friends coming from all over the world to the event - but the tears flowed faster still when they showed the Shrine of Shoghi Effendi. I had not been in touch with Shoghi Effendi for some time, as I did not feel I should burden him with MY troubles - when he had so many of his own. Also, I knew I could always contact him at any time, should the need arise - and would receive the same love and friendship he had always afforded me. But I could not believe he had

passed away - and in ENGLAND too. Had I known he was here, it is just possible, I MIGHT have made some effort to see him. Naturally I was anxious to know why he had passed away in OUR country - but I still could not bring myself to contact the Bahá'ís - in case the whole trouble was reaped up again.

So more months passed, then my companion (Leonora Miller), who has lived with me and cared for me for thirty-eight years, came home one day and said: "There is something in the 'Southend Standard' that will interest you." It said there was a meeting of Bahá'ís in Southend the following week. I was too ill to go myself, but asked my companion to go in my place, as I had not known there were any Bahá'ís in Southend. The meeting was addressed by **Meherangiz Munsiff**, and my companion came home full of excitement. It was the first time she had met a Bahá'í, with the exception of myself. It was to prove a memorable meeting, for I also learned that the man who had caused all the trouble, all those years ago, had also passed away - and at long last, I was free to join the friends again - which I did - as fast as my legs could carry me. I thought that this generation of friends would look dubiously at me, after hearing I had been out of their midst all those years - but everywhere I have gone I have had a great welcome, and receive all the love and affection I received in the old days. It seems there are hardly any of the friends left who can tell them of all the happenings of the early days - and as one young girl said, it was the first time she had ever heard anything of the Cause FIRST-HAND, from someone who had BEEN there, and taken part in the events that had been so vital.

Today, June 7th, 1976, I am eighty-three. I thought, owing to continued ill-health, my usefulness was over - but I seem to be as much in demand as I ever was. Added to which, time has brought maturity and deepened my faith in the Faith - and throughout the long years of loneliness and trial - the Beloved Master has never left me. He promised, that when he passed away, He would always help and guide me, from the Other side of life - as He had always done in this - and He has never failed me.

My one hope now, is that I shall never fail HIM.

Yours in His Love,

(Nonie Crossley)

P.S. In spite of all my ill-health, and the fact that I was given only six months to live, TWO YEARS AGO, I am still writing and typing twelve hours a day for the Cause and World Peace - and do not believe I shall be called until my work is done (if it ever IS).

On the desk in front of me, I have the following text - taken from 1 Chronicles 28 - Verse 20. It says - "HE WILL NOT FAIL THEE - until thou hast finished the work". On that promise - I rely.

The Anchorage
276 Rayleigh Road
Eastwood
Essex SS9 5XN
June 4th 1977

Allah'u'Abhá - Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Thanks for one of the nicest letters I have ever received in my life. I shall always keep it along with all my other Bahá'í Treasures. It is all the more incredible, owing to my having had to ask for the loan back, owing to such distressing circumstances. I shall never forget your quick response when I needed help. My trouble has always been because my Social position never fitted in with my financial position. NONE of the Bahá'ís (apart from the early Bahá'ís in Manchester) have ever had the faintest idea of the poverty existence I have led for over half a century. Whenever I have been asked to go anywhere, I have received the warmest of welcomes, feted, put up in the best hotels, cars at my disposal every day etc. -but None of them ever realised my financial position. This was due to the fact that when my husband, a Schizophrenic, died, he had wandered around the country for 40 years living like a hobo. Therefore he did not have the right amount of stamps on his cards - and all the pension offered me was 14 shillings a week. I was very bitter about it - and thought it a very poor reward for fighting and struggling for half a century, striving to bring 5 children up, and keeping a roof over their heads, and also my husband (the 26 times he was back home). I have been fighting this for years - and have gradually got it up to £10 a week, which is all I will get for the rest of my life. I have no other income of any kind - and was forced to apply for Social Security.

It was because the Beloved Master KNEW of my struggles - that He took such an interest in us - and NOT solely on account of my little gift to the Mashrek, as people think. What I now receive is not enough to keep the home going - and I have to keep selling things - so that when I get months in bed, there are endless extra expenses. I deeply regretted having to ask for the loan back but I had no alternative. I am sure you will understand.

Re. my Social position - I have always been at the TOP. The last place I went to was Eastbourne, where we have so many friends. I had been very ill, and the Drs said I MUST have a change. The very day we arrived, Mrs Azizi and other friends came round to try and persuade me to go to the meeting - but I was not well enough. Then Mrs Azizi begged me to promise to have a CUP OF TEA with her, at her own house on the Sat. I agreed, for Leo, my companion's sake. They brought the car for us - and we were taken to one of the most magnificent houses I have ever been in. Even the loo seat was pure white marble. After we had been shown all the lovely things

in a vast room, I was taken to the dining room - to DINE with the family (NO CUP OF TEA). It seems they had asked Leo what I would like to eat - and she said "a piece of chicken" - but they dumped a whole chicken on my plate, along with some Persian food - which of course I could not touch. Then we were taken back to the vast room where, to our surprise, we found at least 39 friends, apart from the youngsters, sat around. I thought we were going to listen to an interesting evening. Abbas Mehrnoosh took charge of the meeting, and sat opposite to me, on the other side of the room - but he was too far away for me to hear what he was saying. Then Leo, who was sat next to me, gave me a nudge, and said "They are waiting for you to begin." "Begin WHAT?" I gasped. It seemed they had brought friends from far and wide to hear me tell them about the early days in Manchester. I was stunned. I had nothing prepared, was ill, and could not remember anything. I closed my eyes and sent up a desperate prayer for help to Bahá'u'lláh and the Beloved Master. Then a wonderful sense of peace and calm came over me. I opened my eyes, smiled round at everyone, pulled my chair forward, and BEGAN. And never in my life did I speak so well. The friends made a great fuss of me, and I was still sat there at midnight, signing autographs. One lady said "She looks like Elizabeth Taylor, signing her autographs."! Then a tall Persian stood near, said: "The name of Nonie Crossley will be remembered long after Elizabeth Taylor is forgotten". I cannot tell you how I felt. It was the nicest tribute I had ever had. Then Abbas Mehrnoosh got the car out and drove us all the way back to our hotel, in the early hours of the morning. I have received the same kind of welcome at Croydon and other friends who have wanted us - but NONE knew my financial position. I often wonder if I shall ever see them again? I have been so ill, I nearly lost my life several times - but I STILL believe I shall be spared to finish my work (if one ever does finish).

But to return to the loan. There are no other Bahá'ís down here, except Leo and myself, and I am in a dilemma. I WON the £100 in a competition, and should have reported it at once to the Social Security, but I kept looking at the cheque and remembering how interested I had always been in the Publishing Trust, so I banged the cheque off to YOU instead, but HOW can I get the return of income tax? Of course I do not pay income tax, and if I approach the Social Security NOW, I might not only find myself in trouble for not telling them in the first place, but there would be endless officials coming round, asking all kind of questions, who have probably never even heard of the Bahá'ís, and I am still far too ill to go through all that. So I can see no alternative, but to lose the £7 odd that was deducted for income tax. I knew it was wrong of me not to tell them at first, but I much preferred the Publishing Trust to benefit - rather than the Social Security.

The only other one at home now is my son Ralph (59). He is divorced from his wife, and came home to look after me when my husband died 15 years ago. He adores me - and will never leave me - but he is a disabled person, having injured his leg playing football. He had to have the

cartilage taken out - and has had terribly ulcerated legs ever since. He can only work as a Gents Hairdresser (his trade for 38 years) in a tiny shop, just his boss and himself - but he only gets £12 a week, and out of that he has all his insurances, expensive bus rides to and from work each day, and also maintenance to pay his wife - so he cannot help me in any way.

You will know by now that I managed to get the MEMOIRS finished, and sent off - and sent a brief copy to our N.S.A. I would like you to keep the enclosed copy for yourselves - so that you could refer to it any time you needed anything.

I can only say once more, God Bless you both for your love, sympathy and understanding. I pray night and day for your welfare and happiness.

Yours in His love,

(signed) **Nonie Crossley**

Two of my other children died & the other 2 are no longer interested in the home now they are able to stand on their own feet! They have not been near us for years even when they were told I had gone stone blind for 2 years! My youngest daughter Rose (40) is Assistant Sec to the Lord Chief Justice in the High Court - but we never hear from her now.

Norah Crossley passed away on 20th November 1977 (aged 84) from abdominal cancer.

TABLETS OF `ABDU'L-BAHA

1. TABLET TO CROSSLEY ·

62. O my well-beloved daughter of the Kingdom! The letter thou hadst written to Dr. Esslemont was forwarded by him to the Land of Desire [The Holy Land]. I read it all through with the greatest attention. On the one hand, I was deeply touched, for thou hadst sheared off those fair tresses of thine with the shears of detachment from this world and of self-sacrifice in the path of the Kingdom of God. And on the other, I was greatly pleased, for that dearly-beloved daughter hath evinced so great a spirit of self-sacrifice as to offer up so precious a part of her body in the pathway of the Cause of God. Hadst thou sought my opinion, I would in no wise have consented that thou wouldst shear off even a single thread of thy comely and wavy locks; nay, I myself would have contributed in thy name for the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar. This deed of thine is, however, an eloquent testimony to thy noble spirit of self-sacrifice. Thou hast, verily, sacrificed thy life and great will be the spiritual results thou shalt obtain. Rest thou confident that day by day thou shalt progress and wax greater in firmness and in constancy. The bounties of Baha'u'llah shall compass thee about and the joyful tidings from on high shall time and again be imparted unto thee. And though it be thine hair that thou hast sacrificed, yet thou shalt be filled with the Spirit, and though it be this perishable member of thy body which thou hast laid down in the path of God, yet thou shalt find the Divine Gift, shalt behold the Celestial Beauty, obtain imperishable glory and attain unto everlasting life.

2. TABLET MENTIONING CROSSLEY †

63. O ye blessed souls!‡ The letter ye had written to Rahmatu'lláh hath been perused. Many and various were the joyful tidings it conveyed, namely, that through the power of faith and constancy in the Covenant, numerous gatherings have been convened, and the loved ones are everywhere astir and active.

`Abdu'l-Bahá's ardent desire hath ever been that the soil of that hallowed spot, which in the

* See <https://reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/SAB/sab-63.html>

† See <https://reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/SAB/sab-64.html> and <https://www.bahaiblog.net/2021/06/a-tribute-to-nora-crossley>

‡ The Bahá'ís of Najaf-Abad.

earliest days of the Cause hath been refreshed and made verdant with the spring showers of grace, may so bloom and blossom as to fill every heart with joy.

Praised be the Lord, the Cause of God hath been proclaimed and promoted throughout the East and the West in such wise that no mind had ever conceived that the sweet savours of the Lord would so rapidly perfume all regions. This, verily, is only through the consummate bounties of the ever-blessed Beauty, Whose grace and Whose triumphing power are time and again abundantly received.

One of the wondrous events that has of late come to pass is this, that the edifice of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is being raised in the very heart of the American continent, and numerous souls from the surrounding regions are contributing for the erection of this holy Temple. Among these is a highly esteemed lady of the city of Manchester, who hath been moved to offer her share.

Having no portion of goods and earthly riches, she sheared off with her own hands the fine, long and precious tresses that adorned her head so gracefully, and offered them for sale, that the price thereof might promote the cause of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár.

Consider ye, that though in the eyes of women nothing is more precious than rich and flowing locks, yet notwithstanding this, that highly-honoured lady hath evinced so rare and beautiful a spirit of self-sacrifice.

And though this was uncalled for, and `Abdu'l-Bahá would not have consented to such a deed, yet as it doth reveal so high and noble a spirit of devotion, He was deeply touched thereby. Precious though the hair be in the sight of western women, nay, more precious than life itself, yet she offered it up as a sacrifice for the cause of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár.

It is related that once in the days of the Apostle of God * He signified His desire that an army should advance in a certain direction, and leave was granted unto the faithful to raise contributions for the holy war. Among many was one man who gave a thousand camels, each laden with corn, another who gave half his substance, and still another who offered all that he had. But a woman stricken in years, whose sole possession was a handful of dates, came to the Apostle and laid at His feet her humble contribution. Thereupon the Prophet of God - may my life be offered up as a sacrifice unto Him - bade that this handful of dates be placed over and above all the contributions that had been gathered, thus asserting the merit and superiority thereof over all the rest. This was done because that elderly woman had no other earthly possessions but these.

* Muhammad.

And in like manner this esteemed lady had nothing else to contribute but her precious locks, and these she gloriously sacrificed in the cause of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár.

Nay, this is but a lesson unto them that perceive.

In conclusion I am greatly pleased with the loved ones in Najaf-Abád for, from the very early dawn of the Cause unto this day they have one and all under all conditions evinced a great spirit of self-sacrifice.

Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín hath throughout his lifetime prayed with all the sincerity of his stainless soul on behalf of the believers in Najaf-Abád and implored for them the grace of God and His divine confirmation.

The Lord be praised that the prayers of this gracious soul have been answered, for the effects thereof are everywhere manifest.