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The Central Figures

Bahá'u'lláh

Volume Three



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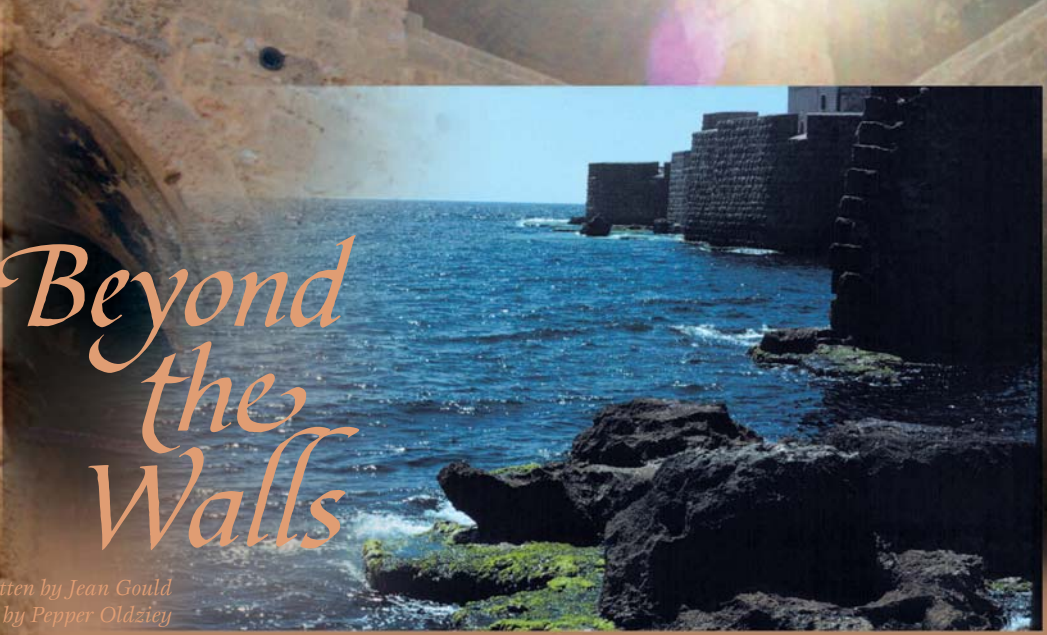
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Beyond the Walls

*Written by Jean Gould
Photography by Pepper Oldziej*

It was August 31, 1868, when Bahá'u'lláh entered the prison city of 'Akká. The Holy Family and His companions went with Him. They were pushed in through the gate in the towering sea wall. Bahá'u'lláh was an exile and a prisoner. For many years, He had been beaten, poisoned, starved. Now He was staggering from heat and thirst. It had been a long, hot, sea voyage. Soon the great iron-studded doors crashed shut behind Him. It seemed that the King of Kings was finished at last.

It was a terrible life in the prison-city. Once, though, Bahá'u'lláh said, "Fear not. These doors shall be opened, . . . and the utmost joy shall be realized."

Nine long years passed, and Bahá'u'lláh never left the city. He seldom even left His narrow prison house. His only exercise was to pace the floor of His bedchamber. Back and forth He went, day after long day.

Of course, Bahá'u'lláh won over the people of that foul city. Even the governor of 'Akká came to love Him. He said that Bahá'u'lláh might leave the prison-city. Any time He wished, He could make His home in the nearby countryside.



One day, early in 1877, Bahá'u'lláh stood at His window. "I have not gazed on verdure for nine years," He said. "The country is the world of the soul, the city is the world of bodies."

Bahá'u'lláh was longing for the green and growing countryside. 'Abdu'l-Bahá knew this. Now the Master knew it was time to act.

Muhammad Páshá Şafwat owned a small but lovely palace called Mazra'ih, about four miles north of 'Akká. It was surrounded by gardens, and a stream of fresh water ran through the property. Unfortunately, the Páshá was much opposed to the Bahá'ís. 'Abdu'l-Bahá still made an appointment to see him.

"Páshá," He said. "You have left the palace empty, and are living in 'Akká."

"I am an invalid and cannot leave the city," replied the Páshá. "If I go there, it is lonely, and I am cut off from my friends."

"While you are not living there and the palace is empty, let it to us," said 'Abdu'l-Bahá.



The Mansion of Mazra'ih, Bahá'u'lláh's window has the white frame

The Páshá was amazed at such a bold request from a prisoner. Even so, he soon agreed. He even let it go at five pounds per year—a very low price.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá paid the Páshá the rent for five years. Then he hired skilled workers to repair the tiny palace. They also put the gardens in order and built a bath. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was even able to arrange for a carriage for Bahá’u’lláh. At that time, it was difficult to find carriages in either Haifa or ‘Akká.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá was confined to the city under strict orders. Still, He was determined to inspect the palace. One day, He walked boldly to the city walls. There He approached the Land Gate where guards kept a sharp lookout. Without hesitation, He walked on until the gates were behind Him. Soon He was on the open road to the palace. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá made His inspection that day. Then He returned to the city. No one stopped to question Him.

Now, there was only one thing left to do. Bahá’u’lláh had only to go to the lovely palace. It was prepared and waiting for Him. But there was an unexpected difficulty. He refused to go! “I am a prisoner,” He said. Three times the Master said, “The palace at Mazra’ih is ready for You, and a carriage to drive You there.” Three times Bahá’u’lláh said, “No!”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá dared not ask His Father again. He decided to bring in a strong ally. There was in ‘Akká a Muslim Shaykh called ‘Alí-i-Mírí. He was the Muftí of ‘Akká, the highest dignitary of the city. This man loved Bahá’u’lláh. In turn, Bahá’u’lláh greatly favored him. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá went to the Shaykh.

“You are daring,” He said. “Go tonight to His Holy Presence, fall on your knees before Him, take hold of His hands and do not let go until He promises to leave the city!” It was a bold and simple plan.

The Shaykh went directly to Bahá’u’lláh. He seated himself close to His knees. The Shaykh held Bahá’u’lláh’s blessed hands and kissed them. Then he said, “Why do you not leave the city?”

“I am a prisoner,” Bahá’u’lláh replied.

The Shaykh was outraged. His understanding of the situation was pure and complete. “God forbid!” he cried. “Who has the power to make You a prisoner? You have kept Yourself in prison. It was Your own will to be imprisoned and now I beg You to come out and go to the palace. It is beautiful . . . The trees are lovely and the oranges like balls of fire.”

The Shaykh was hard to resist. But the King of Kings could not be won over as easily as that! As often as the Shaykh begged Him to go, Bahá'u'lláh said no. “I am a prisoner,” He said. “It cannot be.” But the Shaykh was patient. An hour passed. Then Bahá'u'lláh granted the answer the Muftí of 'Akká longed to hear: “Khaylí khúb.” Very good.

With great joy, the good Shaykh hurried to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The very next day, the Master took the carriage to Bahá'u'lláh. Together They passed through the gates of the prison city. No one raised a hand to stop Them.

For two years, Bahá'u'lláh made His home at Mazra'ih. He could view the blue Mediterranean on one hand. The green hills were on the other. He was surrounded by gardens and orange groves. He could hear the music of the clear running stream. Sometimes, He visited the friends in the farm village of Mazra'ih. Sometimes He visited them at Haifa or 'Akká. And sometimes, He pitched His tent on Mount Carmel, the Holy Mountain of God. This Prophet had once paced His narrow room in endless circles. Now He was free to walk wherever He pleased. ★

