

Lua Getsinger - Herald of the Covenant

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[Mrs. Louisa A. Moore Getsinger was affectionately known by the Bahá'ís as 'Lua'. She was also called "The Flame" and "Liva" which in Persian, means "Banner". 'Abdu'l-Bahá named her "Herald of the Covenant". The Guardian wrote of her as "the mother teacher of the west" (*God Passes By*, page 257). She was born on November 1, 1871 and passed on May 2, 1916.]

"Lua in Persian means 'Flag', and you must be my flag and wave it in the East and in the West!" 'Abdu'l-Bahá said to Lua Getsinger when she visited Him as a prisoner of 'Akká, a member of the very first pilgrimage from America in 1898.

Stepping up to the lovely young woman standing beside Dr. Edward Getsinger, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, seeing with His spiritual vision her capacity to become one of the great teachers of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, put something into her mouth, saying,

"I have given you the power to speak and loosened your tongue!"

Dr. Getsinger tells us of the scene.

"Then, the glorious Servant of God gave an exhortation into which He put such spiritual force and emphasis that it seemed as though the very walls trembled, and we were hardly able to stand on our feet. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was declaring that the millennium had come and the Kingdom of God was to be established on earth, and that he wanted Lua to proclaim it everywhere in a loud voice."⁽¹⁾

And from the beginning, she was able to speak fluently and brilliantly and without fear in any gathering, because of the precious gift bestowed upon her by the Master. In May Maxwell's words,

"As Qurratu'l-'Ayn was the Trumpet of the Dawn in the Orient in the Day of Bahá'u'lláh, so Lua Aurora shall wave forever and ever the Banner of the Dawn in the Day of the Covenant."⁽²⁾

During the next eighteen years she returned again and again to 'Akká and Haifa to receive 'Abdu'l-Bahá's instructions, as He entrusted her with many delicate and difficult missions, and she travelled far and wide, in the

Orient, Europe, Africa and America, under His guidance.

On one of these visits. He said to her:

"Thou must be firm and unshakable in thy purpose, and never, never let any outward circumstances worry thee. I am sending thee to India to accomplish a certain definite result. Thou must enter that country with a never failing spirituality, a radiant faith, an eternal enthusiasm, an inextinguishable fire, a solid conviction, in order that thou mayest achieve those services for which I am sending thee.

"Let not thy heart be troubled. If thou goest away with this *unchanging condition of unvariability of inner state* thou shalt see the doors of confirmation open before thy face, thy life will be a crown of heavenly roses, and thou shalt find thyself in the highest station of triumph.

"Strive day and night to attain to this exalted state. Look at me! Thou dost not know a thousandth part of the difficulties and seemingly unsurmountable passes that rise daily before my eyes. I do not heed them; I am walking in my chosen highway; I know the destination. Hundreds of Titanics may sink to the bottom of the sea, the mad waves may rise to the roof of heaven; all these will not change my purpose, will not disturb me in the least; I will not look either to the right or to the left; I am looking ahead, far, far. Piercing through the impenetrable darkness of the night, the howling winds, the raging storms, I see the glorious Light beckoning me forward, forward.

"Qurratu'l-'Ayn had attained to this supreme state. When they brought her the terrible news of the martyrdom of the Bahá'ís, she did not waver; it did not make any difference to her; she also had chosen her path, she knew her goal, and when they imparted to her the news of her impending death, no one could see any trace of sorrow in her face; she was rather happier.

"Although she never cared for dress, that day she wore her best white silk dress and jewelry and perfumed herself with the most fragrant attar of roses. She hailed the chamber of death as a happy bride entering the nuptial bower of the bridegroom.

"To this lofty summit of unchanging purpose thou must attain; like Qurratu'l-'Ayn nothing must shake thy firm faith."⁽³⁾

With such divine confirmation and assistance, Lua's teaching tour of India, accompanied by her husband, was a complete triumph. She lectured at Theosophical Society Hall in Surat on "Purity and Divinity"; in Bombay, she spoke in Pratana Mandir Hall for an hour on "The Bahá'í Movement—Its Rise and Progress." She addressed the students of the Theistic Society on "Individual Spiritual Progress"; and in the Ideal Seminary she spoke on

"Service as an Act of Worship." In addition to the public lectures, to large and enthusiastic audiences, Dr. and Mrs. Getsinger were kept busy meeting people of various creeds. Lua's most important interview, and the one which 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke of as a "certain definite result", was with the Maharajah of Jalowar whom He had met in London. He wished to acquaint this receptive enlightened person with the Bahá'í Teachings, and chose Lua to seek him out. The Maharajah received her most graciously, and afterwards corresponded with her, remaining a staunch friend of the Faith.⁽⁴⁾

Another mission entrusted to Lua, probably the most far-reaching in its influence, was the interview in Paris with Muzaffari'd-Dín Sháh of Persia. She presented to him a petition asking that he stop the martyrdoms of the Bahá'ís in his kingdom. This he promised her he would grant.

In 1910, Lua and her husband were in America, making their home in Washington, D.C., teaching in the surrounding cities, notably Baltimore and New York. In December of that year, there was an exchange of letters to and from the Holy Land, written by Lua for the community, on the ever recurring subject of a visit to America by 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

"To the attracted maid-servant of God, Lua M. Getsinger ; ...

"Your epistle was received and the desire and request of the loved ones and the maid-servants of the Merciful became known. The conditions requisite for the coming of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to those regions have just been written for the friends and the maid-servants of the Lord— through you. I am hopeful that those conditions will be carried out, perchance at some time a trip to those regions may be taken; but if these conditions be not realized, this will hinder a trip to those parts . . . "

(signed) 'Abdu'l-Bahá 'Abbas.

The "conditions" of His coming were given in the general letter,

"If the beloved of God in all America strive for unity and harmony, attain perfect love and accord, and act according to the divine teachings and the precepts of the Blessed Perfection, this will prove a magnet attracting 'Abdu'l-Bahá so that, perchance. He may journey to America. But, until the light of oneness, unity and love shine forth from the lamp of America, and the beloved act in accordance with the Divine Teachings and precepts of the Blessed Perfection, and all the believers in America become united and harmonious, my coming . . . will be hindered—nay, impossible. Therefore, strive ye that ye may become the embodied Teachings of the Blessed Perfection, confirmed in the divine precepts, resurrected in holiness and purity, severance, humility and meekness, set aglow with the fire of divine love; and loosen your tongues with the praises

and commendations of the Heavenly Kingdom.

Thus may the great attainment be realized.

Upon ye be Bahá'u'lláh-el-Abha!

(signed) 'Abdu'l-Bahá 'Abbas"⁽⁵⁾

Accepting this challenge, as well as a call for more intensive teaching in preparation for the longed-for visit, Lua, with Dr. Ameen U. Fareed, traveled to the West Coast, and began to call the people to the Kingdom of Bahá'u'lláh in Southern California.

In the spring of 1911, glowing reports of the success of their efforts were circulated. They began their work in San Diego where there were no known believers. Here, among strangers, they gave the new Glad Tidings in a public hall, and to two men's clubs. Soon, some prominent citizens became attracted and opened their homes for meetings and the number of believers grew.

The two messengers of peace even spoke on the battleship California and across the boundary in Mexico. Dr. Fareed was asked by the Red Cross commander to act as surgeon in the field, and Lua was installed as one of the nurses. Several newspapers reported this work and called attention to the two Bahá'í volunteers, so that when they returned to Los Angeles many came to their lectures. Lua addressed an audience of four hundred; also a large session of the World's Spiritual Congress in Long Beach. A center was established in La Jolla. It was estimated that during this campaign at least five thousand heard for the first time the Words of Bahá'u'lláh.⁽⁶⁾

In the San Francisco Bay Area where they continued their work, interest was rapidly developed. Dr. Fareed was introduced at some of the prominent clubs, and spoke at lunches and functions of the Masons and Knights Templar. He and Lua were invited to lecture at the Unitarian Church of Alameda. President Taft, in the city for the dedication of the 1915 Panama Exposition, was a guest at a luncheon of the Union League where Dr. Fareed talked with him briefly, congratulating him in the name of the Faith, on his efforts for arbitration treaties and promotion of peace between nations.

Lua's work was no less strenuous and important, as she was invited to speak before the women's clubs. One outstanding presentation was given at the Jewish Ladies Council of San Francisco. Over nine hundred were present.

"The platform was arranged like a Persian home, and a Persian tea party was given by Mrs. Getsinger, assisted by several friends, all in costume, appearing as Persian, Turkish, Egyptian and Jewish ladies. After the tea serving, Mrs. Getsinger talked of the Bahá'í influence and effects upon the lives of the women of the Orient, and Dr. Fareed arriving as a guest at the party, and garbed as a Persian

Sheik, also addressed them. It was a successful and delightful way of presenting the Glad Tidings of the Bahá'í Movement for women."⁽⁷⁾

Thousands were hearing the Message in the Bay Area. In Berkeley, she met with a group of writers; at Santa Rosa with the Saturday Morning Club, where many school teachers and a few ministers heard the Message. At San Mateo the Federation of Women's Clubs invited her; and with Dr. Fareed she made a trip across the Bay to San Quentin. In Palo Alto, she addressed a large meeting of faculty and students at Stanford University, preparing the way for 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit there the following year. In San Francisco, they were given a reception at the Sequoia Club, composed of literary and professional people. They were entertained at the Century Club and spoke on Persian poetry by request. A series of nine lectures was given in San Francisco at the California Club presenting the Faith in detail. These were well attended by a thoughtful, earnest audience; they were repeated at the Bellevue Hotel.⁽⁸⁾ So Lua gave her whole time and divinely bestowed talent of beautiful speech to sowing the seeds for the coming of her beloved 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Finally, the great message of acceptance arrived. 'Abdu'l-Bahá would come to America!

Dated December 16, 1911, the Tablet reads:

"O ye friends of God and the beloved maidservants of the True One!

'Abdu'l-Bahá has the utmost longing to meet you . . . and hopes that during the next spring no obstacle may arise, so that with infinite joy and fragrance he may hasten to America to meet the friends, to unfurl the banner of rejoicing, to spread the Glad-Tidings of the Kingdom of Abha, to illumine the meetings and gatherings with the Rays of the Sun of Truth, to perfume the nostrils with the Fragrances of Holiness, to impart gladness and delight to the hearts, to attract the souls to the Realms of Might, to grant the outpourings of the Holy Spirit so that in this nether world the congregation of the Righteous Ones may be firmly established."⁽⁹⁾

During the months that followed His arrival on April II, 1912, on the Steamship Cedric, it was Lua's great joy and privilege, shared by several others of His "near ones", May Maxwell and Juliet Thompson prominent among them, to be with Him constantly and to serve Him.

They followed Him from city to city, arranging His appointments, preparing His apartments with flowers and every comfort, receiving His many guests and the seekers who streamed to Him day after day and far into the night. When they tried to protect Him from these demands when He was

weariness to exhaustion it was not permitted, for He always insisted that every guest, especially the poor and humble, be shown utmost courtesy. The children, too, He never denied, but drew them into the circle of His arms, lifting them to His knees, whispering loving words in their ears. On one occasion, when He was particularly tired but would not stay in bed and rest, He said to His anxious friends "I do not work by hygienic laws. If I did I would get nothing done. I work by the confirmation of the Holy Spirit."⁽¹⁰⁾

On the great occasion when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was announced at the National Convention in Chicago, April 30, Lua was on the platform speaking. As the Master walked down the aisle with His stride of a king, the vast audience rose as a man and in breathless silence stood while He proceeded to the stage.

The story of those exalted days of His presence in America cannot be told here. Lua was always near, sharing with May and Juliet intimate moments and an ocean of profound experiences. May Maxwell said afterwards, "The months I spent near ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in New York have done more for the education and enlightenment of my heart and conscience than all my life's experience."⁽¹¹⁾ The three close friends were present at a moving and significant scene which took place on the porch of a home in Montclair, New Jersey, when the Master spoke to them of the death of an early martyr. Juliet writes:

"Suddenly, His whole aspect changed. It was as though the spirit of the martyr had entered into Him . . .

With His head thrillingly erect, snapping His fingers high in the air, beating on the porch with His foot till we could scarcely endure the vibrations set up—such electric power radiated from Him—He sang the martyr's song, ecstatic and tragic beyond anything I had ever heard."⁽¹²⁾

Lua Getsinger, herself, possessed the qualities, enriched through love and obedience, of the martyrs. No doubt, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá saw these attributes of her soul at their first meeting, as did her husband when throughout the years he accompanied her on her arduous tours. He wrote after her death; "In these journeys she never spared herself. Time and again, I have seen her in a state of utter exhaustion yet she would pull herself together by sheer will power in order to keep her appointments . . . She knew but little rest, for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, 'Day and night thou must engage in spreading the Message. Nothing else will avail thee.'"⁽¹³⁾

She was often ill, having to remain in bed after a heart attack for long periods. In referring to one of these illnesses, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, "I told the angel of death to stay away!"⁽¹⁴⁾ Such was the importance of Lua's qualities and services for the establishment of the Cause during those early days when believers were so few and scattered, when there would be but one

Bahá'í in a whole nation, even on an entire continent.

January, 1915, Lua arrived in Haifa and remained there as a guest of the Holy Family for seven months. This was her last visit. When news came of the possibility of America declaring war, and a United States gunboat came to the very port of Haifa, 'Abdu'l-Bahá told her that now was the time to leave and take news to the friends in Egypt, Europe and America who had been cut off from correspondence with the Holy Land during the war. "It is a long time that they are without any word," He said, "and I desire to send you to them, after which you are to go and teach."⁽¹⁵⁾

From Port Said, Egypt, September 20, 1915, Lua wrote to Zeenat Bagdadi in Chicago,

"I arrived in Port Said so tired and exhausted that I could do nothing but talk to the friends . . . Praise be to God! when I left He ('Abdu'l-Bahá) was in good health, though surrounded by difficulties and dangers which I am powerless to describe.

"What He has not done for Syria! Such suffering as was manifest on all sides can scarcely be believed. People were coming day and night begging and weeping at His gate. He became the sole comfort and hope of the people whether they are believers or unbelievers. I am sent forth again 'to herald the Covenant' by its Holy Center, and I shall do it with His divine assistance, better and more powerfully than I have ever done."⁽¹⁶⁾

To Mr. Joseph H. Hannen, Washington, D.C. she wrote:

"'Abdu'l-Bahá said, 'Tell everyone now is the time to teach and spread the Cause!' O these days of trial and test! The whole world has been flung into the melting pot. Each individual soul must be put into the crucible and 'tried as gold is tried and refined as silver is refined.' The Center of the Covenant now sitteth as the Refiner, and it is He who judgeth the purity, capacity and station of every servant. He is the Divine Assayer Who accepts and rejects. He alone knows the hearts, and in Him only can one find justice and truth. He is the Judge of the high court in the Supreme Concourse, Who renders judgments in righteousness and stations the souls of His sincere worshippers. In this day all must be sure that He is the Center from which every living soul is sent forth, and to which every faithful and sincere one must turn."⁽¹⁷⁾

At this same writing, she enclosed a most important Tablet in which He confirmed her loyalty, which on the surface would seem completely unnecessary.

"To the beloved of God in America—on them be glory and bounty'. The maid-servant of God, Lua, was a long time occupied in India in spreading the fragrances of the love of God. She is now ready to return to the regions of America. Show her every consideration. She is firm in the Covenant of love. In reality she worked vigorously during her sojourn in India, and she is worthy of love."

(signed) 'Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas.⁽¹⁸⁾

By this Tablet, He was restating His instructions of several years' standing:

"Highway robbers are many, and hypocrites are innumerable. The wolves clothe themselves with the shepherd's garment, and thieves show themselves in the form of watchmen. Hereafter, if any Persian or Oriental come to those parts, even though he be from the very city of 'Akká, if ye find he does not possess a letter written by the hand and sealed by the seal of 'Abdu'l-Bahá you must decidedly avoid him."

(signed) 'Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas.⁽¹⁹⁾

Leaving Port Said, Lua sailed to Cairo expecting to depart shortly for America, but was taken ill and was forced once more to take to her bed. She was cared for most tenderly in the home of her Bahá'í host, Mirza Taki Esphaim and his family, but her weakness lingered on through the winter.

"Before and after this illness," wrote a friend, "though she never recovered her strength, Lua went about with heroic will giving the Bahá'í Teachings, her work being chiefly among the young men, as they are the only ones among the Egyptians who know English. All listened to her eagerly, and all were wonderfully uplifted and blessed by her influence. Such was the power of the words of Bahá'u'lláh upon her lips."⁽²⁰⁾

In the early spring, she moved to Shoubra, a suburb, to the home of a believer who greatly desired that she should remain with his wife and family for the sake of her uplifting influence. It was here that she spent her last days. She writes to a friend, less than a month before her death:

"Little by little I am seeing all the reasons why many things are as they are, and the lessons I have to learn thereby. I am sure that until the last day of our lives, we will be learning lessons, for this world is a school, from which we graduate only when we leave it.

"The lessons of the earth world, she learned beautifully in those last days of illness and trial. Her suffering had a purifying influence

upon her, and seemed to burn away all the dross and leave her pure gold. She had only love and forgiveness for all. She saw that every experience had been for the best. Like an angel ready to enter the kingdom of Light, she turned her face, a few days before her departure, to the picture of the Center of the Covenant, which hung on the wall, and said, with tears in her eyes, but with manifest firmness, 'All I want to do is His will, and to be severed from aught else save God.'"⁽²¹⁾

During the night of the second of May, 1916, she woke with a severe pain in her heart. Although the doctor was called, she had passed to the kingdom of Abhá before he arrived.

The grief of the friends was very great, for all loved her as a devoted sister. A choice site was purchased for her tomb, and every loving service performed for this beloved of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to honor her in her last resting place.

There in Cairo, Egypt, Lua, the Banner of the Dawn, the Herald of the Covenant, lies buried—"far from the land where she sowed the seed from the Atlantic to the Pacific—from the land where she arose like the dawning star heralding the light of Bahá'u'lláh, in those days when the Occident lay frozen in the grasp of materialism—without home, money, or earthly hope or refuge, after her years of suffering, service and sacrifice, she attained her supreme desire and lay at last a martyr."⁽²²⁾

Notes

1. *Star of the West*, vol. VII, No. 4
2. *Bahá'í World*, vol. VIII, p. 642-3
3. *Star of the West*, vol. IV, No. 12, p. 208
4. *ibid.* vol. V, No. 2, p. 21-22
5. *ibid.* vol. I, No. 16, p. 1 -2
6. *ibid.* vol. II, No. 13. p. 6-7
7. *ibid.* vol. II, No. 14, p. 13-14
8. *ibid.* vol. II, No. 16, p. 12-13
9. *ibid.* vol. II, No. 16. p. 8
10. *'Abdu'l-Bahá's First Days in America*, p. 22
11. *Bahá'í World*, vol. VIII, p. 637
12. *'Abdu'l-Bahá's First Days in America*, p. 34
13. *Star of the West*, vol. VII, No. 4
14. *ibid.*
15. *Star of the West*, vol. VI, No. 12, p. 90
16. *ibid.* p. 89-90
17. *ibid.* p. 90-91
18. *ibid.* p. 92
19. *ibid.* p. 93
20. *ibid.* vol. VII, No. 19
21. *ibid.*
22. *Bahá'í World*, vol. VIII, p. 642-643

[*'Abdu'l-Bahá's First Days in America* is an older smaller collection of materials from Juliet Thompson's diary. All materials in it are also in Marzieh Gail's volume. - formatter's note]