

## Queen Marie and the Bahá'í Faith

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### Abstract

This article focuses on the first monarch to embrace the Bahá'í Faith, Queen Marie of Romania. It sets out to convey the stature and the character of this remarkable woman, her unique position in the early twentieth century, and, above all, her position within the Bahá'í Faith. It also sets out to examine two issues. First, it is widely known that Queen Marie was a Bahá'í. Yet, a number of her own statements seem to contradict this affiliation and bring into question her conversion to the Bahá'í Faith. By examining her diaries and public statements, this work attempts to clarify the contradiction. The second issue concerns Queen Marie's plan to visit the Bahá'í Centre in Haifa in 1929. Shoghi Effendi had made arrangements for a visit that never took place. It is well known that she reached Haifa in Palestine (Israel) on 30 March 1929, but failed to contact Shoghi Effendi or to visit the places she had deeply wished to visit. Information from her unpublished personal diaries sheds new light on her pilgrimage. In the process of exploring the above issues, what emerges is the friendship of Martha Root, an early Bahá'í teacher, from the moment Martha met the Queen in 1926. An integral part of that relationship were some deeply touching letters from Martha to Marie about the Bahá'í Faith. Excerpts from these letters are included in this article.

Bahá'u'lláh enjoins his followers to give due regard to the monarchy: "Regard for the rank of sovereigns is divinely ordained, as is clearly attested by the words of the Prophets of God and His chosen ones (quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *Promised Day* 72). And Bahá'u'lláh gives us a vision of a true monarch, whom he describes as "the very eye of mankind, the luminous ornament on the brow of creation, the fountainhead of blessings unto the whole world" (quoted in Rabbaní, *Priceless Pearl* 117).

When one looks at the life and character of Queen Marie, it can easily be said that she falls into this category. Marie was a royal's royal. She could hardly have been born into a more exalted position in royal Europe. Her paternal grandmother Queen Victoria, and her maternal grandfather Alexander II, the Tsar of Russia, were two of the most powerful rulers of their day. An interesting fact about this lineage is that when Bahá'u'lláh wrote to the kings and rulers of the world in the second half of the nineteenth century,<sup>1</sup> these were the only two monarchs Bahá'u'lláh addressed favorably.

Queen Marie was a people's queen as well. She earned a reputation for having a deep love and concern for her subjects, as being a woman of action and of compassion, and of mixing easily with the people. Few, if any royal in Europe in her day, surpassed her devotion and service to her compatriots. Before World War I, she established the practice of allowing the public easy access to her. One of the queen's governesses said: "All day long people call at the palace and if Queen Marie is at home she will see them at once" (Pakula, *Last Romantic* 264).

Marie was a celebrity in her own right too. She was loved, admired, sought after, gifted, and renowned for her beauty, charm, kindness, and humanity as well as for her intelligence and political savvy. Contemporary journalists described Queen Marie as "the most famous Queen of

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<sup>1</sup> In the second half of the nineteenth century, Bahá'u'lláh addressed a series of letters to the rulers of his day, proclaiming the coming of the unification of humanity and the emergence of a world civilization.

Europe,” and “the world’s first ultra-modern Queen” (“Marie” *New Republic* 237). One reporter described Marie as

a story-book queen, so variously gifted and so altogether regal in her charm that one who writes of her must fear the accusation of flattery. Even a few minutes in her presence enable one to understand why all Rumanians [*sic*], and the foreigners who have met her, glow in praise of the simplicity, naturalness, warm-heartedness, and talent of this queen who is kinswoman to many other queens and kings, and who has lived all her life in the purple. The womanliness of the queen and the queenliness of the woman have made her the idol of a kingdom. (Ellis, *Roumania’s Soldier Queen* 330)

### **The Childhood and Youth of a Princess**

Born October 29, 1875, Queen Marie was of Russian and British descent. Her mother was the former Grand Duchess Marie Alexandrovna, the only daughter of Russia’s Tsar Alexander II. Her father, the Duke of Edinburgh, was the second son of Queen Victoria. This lineage conferred upon her a high rank among the royals of Europe in the late nineteenth century.

Her childhood was “a happy, carefree one, the childhood of rich healthy children protected from the buffets and hard realities of life” (Marie, *Story* 3). But, it was a Victorian childhood, which included certain duties and the strictness of the era, as well as the discipline of a Russian mother. One of those duties was regular visits to “Grandmamma,” Queen Victoria:

The hush around Grandmamma’s door was awe-inspiring, it was like approaching the mystery of some sanctuary. Silent, soft-carpeted corridors led to Grandmamma’s apartments . . . those that led the way . . . talked in hushed voices and trod softly. . . . One door after another opened noiselessly, it was like passing through the forecourts of a temple, before approaching the final mystery to which only the initiated had access. . . .

When finally the door was opened there sat Grandmamma not idol-like at all, not a bit frightening, smiling a kind little smile, almost as shy as us children, so that conversation was not very fluent on either side. . . . I have the sort of feeling that Grandmamma as well as ourselves was secretly relieved when the audience was over. (Marie, *Story* 26)

Marie, along with her two sisters, grew up in several homes, including Clarence House in London and Osborne Cottage on the Isle of Wight. Her favorite was a rambling gray mansion known as Eastwell Park in Kent. It was set in an English park where, in Marie’s words, “magnificent old trees grew well apart in great stretches of grass; where herds of lowing cattle grazed while deer scampered away in the woods” (Marie, *Story* 3).

Marie was a beauty, even as a young girl, with a vivacious, energetic personality to match, a combination that often captured the hearts of young boys. In her autobiography *The Story of My Life*, she told of one little boy completely taken with her. She described him as being

red-haired, freckled, and impudent, with a fine disdain for authority. We had a sneaking liking for each other. At first, we did not dare show it openly, but by degrees, our red-

haired guest threw away all pretense and brazenly admitted his preference for me, declaring before witnesses that when he was grown up, he would marry me. (Marie, *Story* 32)

This “red-haired, freckled” boy was later to become prime minister of Great Britain during one of its darkest hours. That boy was Winston Churchill.

When Marie turned sixteen, there was talk of marriage. Many thought she would marry her cousin “Georgie,” heir to the throne, and become the next queen of Great Britain. Even Queen Victoria had encouraged this match, and Prince George himself wanted her for his wife.

However, the Duchess of Edinburgh had other plans for her daughter and worked to prevent the marriage. She steered Marie toward the young crown prince of Romania, Ferdinand Viktor Albert Meinrad, Prince of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen. In those days, marriages were orchestrated by the royal mothers, and daughters were often uninformed about the plans made by their mothers to lead them toward the young men selected for them. This certainly was the case with Marie. In 1892, her mother arranged for Marie and Ferdinand to be together often in Munich—outings, tours of galleries, parties, and shopping. The plan worked wonderfully from the Duchess’s standpoint as Marie and Ferdinand fell in love and soon became engaged. To the majority of royals throughout Europe, especially the English court, however, sending such a talented and beautiful princess to Romania seemed an unfortunate waste.

Perhaps Ileana, Marie’s youngest daughter, provides the best explanation for why the Duchess favored Marie’s union with Ferdinand to that with George:

It was only because they were first cousins. And my grandmother [the Duchess of Edinburgh] disapproved terribly of cousins marrying. . . . She [Marie] did want to marry him [George]. But she was only sixteen. . . . I don’t think my mother was aware of the proposal [from George]. In fact, I’m convinced she wasn’t. . . . (Pakula, *The Last Romantic* 58)

Ferdinand was a painfully bashful and inarticulate man, who became heir to the throne by default. Ferdinand’s uncle, King Carol, had a son, who had died in 1874. So, it fell to Carol’s older brother, Prince Leopold, to provide a successor. Leopold’s oldest son, Ferdinand’s older brother, Wilhelm, resided in Romania for a year but found it “unrewarding.” He returned to Germany and passed down the “honors” to his younger brother, Ferdinand, who could not bear to displease his uncle or his father by refusing the post.

This approach to life was characteristic throughout Ferdinand’s reign and often embarrassed his ministers and Marie. Unlike his wife, Ferdinand would tremble or be speechless when he met subjects. Although they began their life in a naïve, romantic state, by the time Marie reached her twenties, she admitted she did not love Ferdinand. In her thirties, she told her mother they had become very good friends. And later in life, as they mellowed, and, after suffering so much together from the war and other burdens of rank, they both appreciated each other for their strengths: Marie for her superb handling of people, and Ferdinand for his behind-the-scenes coordinating. He told her what points to make as she charmed foreign visitors.

In spite of these social inadequacies, some people who knew Ferdinand well commented on his intelligence. In one interview, George Duca, the son of Jean Duca, a Romanian Premier, described Ferdinand as “a great personality intellectually, and practically no one knew it. Those

who knew it like my father, were absolutely full of admiration” (quoted in Pakula, *Last Romantic* 133).

## **A Royal Wedding**

As one would expect, a royal wedding was a huge social event, drawing members of royalty and prominent people of the day. On the morning of January 10, 1893, at Sigmaringen Castle in southwestern Germany, “bells pealed outside her window as her maids dressed her in a white silk wedding dress” (Marie, *Story* 264). Three ceremonies were performed—civil, Catholic, and Protestant—to accommodate both sets of parents and the civil authorities. Afterwards the company of royals, including Kaiser Wilhelm II, Emperor of Germany, and some future subjects celebrated the marriage in a huge glass and steel amphitheater built just for the occasion.

At nine o’clock the newlyweds left the castle for an evening sleigh ride across the moonlit snow to Ferdinand’s father’s hunting castle, Krauchenwies, a romantic setting for a honeymoon. Several days later, Marie and Ferdinand left by train for the long journey to Romania.

## **Early Years in Romania**

Marie’s first years in Romania were sad and painful. Romania was a strange country to her, with many unfamiliar customs and ways. And her rather carefree life was suddenly confined by the strict habits and rules of the Romanian court established by Ferdinand’s uncle, King Carol, a man of German descent and a stern disciplinarian.

Other than official public royal functions, King Carol forbade the young couple outside contact for fear of the heirs allying themselves unintentionally with a political party or family. The only human contact Marie had other than Ferdinand and the King were her German maids and a tutor sent to teach her Romanian. Marie passed endless hours in the stone-silent palace, which was set in the middle of a lively city, wandering from room to room trying to fill the time.

The birth (1893) of her first child, a boy named Carol, made matters worse: she felt trapped and used. It was not until several weeks into her pregnancy that she first became fully aware of her real function: to produce a future heir. “So this is what they wanted me for,” she recalled in her autobiography. “They wanted me to give them an heir. But I had only just left home. . . . I was feeling so ill, so lonely; there was no one to go to and no one to talk to; there were no flowers and no one seemed to care about fresh air and out-door exercise” (Marie, *Story* 293). Indeed in the English court, pregnancy was never referred to directly, the most said was that a “lady” was “in delicate health.” Her mother had succeeded in leading Marie to the altar innocent of sex. Years later Marie wrote:

And in this she succeeded marvelously. . . . A *risqué* book never reached our hands, we blushed when it was mentioned that someone was to have a baby, the classics were only allowed in small and well-weeded doses; as for the Bible, although we were well up in both Testaments, all the more revealing episodes had been carefully circumscribed. (Quoted in Elsberry, *Marie of Romania* 48)

Marie resented her new role partly because she was remote from the Romanian people and then had absolutely no desire to produce an heir for them and partly because pregnancy was so difficult for her. In her day, the only pain killer available for a difficult pregnancy was chloroform, but

doctors in Romania did not give her this relief because the Romanian clergy believed that women should suffer for the “sin” of Eve. Nevertheless, over the next twenty years, until she was thirty-eight, Marie gave birth to five more children, two boys and three girls: Elisabetha (1894), Marie (Mignon) (1900), Nicholas (1903), Ileana (1909), and Mircea (1913).

Her children were the center of her life. She wrote: “As only my two eldest children were born in close succession, and there were longer pauses between the other four, I was able to prolong it [the joy and pleasure of motherhood] indefinitely” (Marie, *Story* 516). Unlike other royal parents, Marie spent a great deal of time with her children and became more of a friend and companion than a parent during those years. Disciplining her children was not one of her strengths, something she admitted later in life: “I was in fact always inclined to be too lenient, as I hated the feeling of any sort of tyranny or coercion, and had an insurmountable aversion from scolding. . . . I confess that many of the failures, even disasters of my life, can be brought back to this fundamental inability to scold or reprove” (Marie, *Story* 516).

The royal mother was proud of her first-born Carol’s intelligence and natural curiosity, and found his resolve in matters preferable to his father’s passivity. The queen enjoyed Nicholas for his charm; humor, and independence. She appreciated Elisabetha’s “classic look” as a child but had trouble liking her because of Elisabetha’s lack of affection. Marie described herself as a lover of beauty and certainly took particular pleasure when she found classic beauty in one of her own. Mignon’s sweetness, patience, and unjudging manner brought Marie a certain satisfaction since this daughter was not demanding or self-centered, as her first two children gradually became. The Queen called Ileana, her youngest daughter, the child of her soul. These two became close, and Marie saw her selflessly serve others as she herself did, and approach life in much the same way. This brought her great pleasure and satisfaction too. Her youngest child Mircea would not survive past the age of four after having contracted typhoid fever.

Except for Ileana, Marie’s children became a source of sadness as they reached adulthood. Carol especially seemed destined to break Marie’s heart. As Marie reached her sixties, his cruelty toward her and his siblings was almost beyond belief. When he became king in 1930, for example, he appropriated for his own use the retirement funds Ferdinand had provided for Marie.

How a woman as competent and attentive to (although not strict with) her children as Marie could produce such a tyrant is easily explained. When Marie was still only eighteen and nineteen, King Carol I selected German governesses to rear the first two children. They were completely spoiled by the household and allowed to do as they pleased. These two children developed a superior attitude toward others, as they were treated with excessive deference.

As she grew older, Marie demanded that she have primary responsibility for the other children. Nevertheless, Marie found her two oldest daughters’ inclination to be overweight and somewhat lazy, even during World War I, almost intolerable. This became an obstacle in her efforts to find them suitable mates later in life.

## **Romania’s Soldier Queen**

Marie’s early aversion to Romania gradually changed to a deep love. As she matured and the restrictions of her life slowly lifted, she came to know her adopted country intimately. World War I, in particular, gave her that opportunity.

World War I’s immense casualties and losses pale from the perspective of the end of a century that has witnessed relatively more devastating wars and infinitely more powerful weapons. In its day, however, World War I was unprecedented in its devastation. And in its day, it produced

what most wars produce, victors and vanquished, spoils and losses, and the inevitable heroes and heroines. Marie easily fell into the latter category during the war, when her remarkable nature, her humanity, kindness, and courage became fully evident.

As one writer, Pauline Astor, said about Marie:

No woman in all Europe has a better war record than Queen Marie. She showed the greatest courage, tenderness, and devotion. Do you know that she went into places where nobody else would go—into leprous buildings and villages filled with influenza where the dead were piled high and people dying of disease, and others were afraid to enter? (“Queen’s” 35)

Mrs. Astor, as a close friend of the Queen, knew more than most about what Marie did during the war, but her statement still only suggests what Marie accomplished, suffered, and endured. We see a woman, the queen of a Balkan country of 7.5 million people, which even in her day was considered a secondary power in Europe, but an important one in the web of European politics. We see a woman who was, in the course of the war, a wife, a mother, a politician, a fighter, a negotiator, a manager, a relief worker, a prisoner, an assassin’s target, a victor, and a diplomat.

At the same time, we see Romania neutral for two years in the early days of the war, August, 1914, to August, 1916. We see Romania enter the war on the side of the Entente (also known as the Allies: Great Britain, France, Belgium, Italy, Russia, Serbia, and later Portugal, the United States, and Greece). Ill-prepared and with an ill-equipped army, Romania relied largely on the promise of help from her allies. We see, in a matter of months, her defeat by the German forces, with the government compelled to flee Bucharest to the provisional capital of Jassy. We see a country eventually overcome and forced to surrender to the German forces (December 6, 1917), as well as a country occupied and completely spoiled by its conquerors (December, 1917 to the Autumn of 1918). But when the Central Powers were finally defeated by the Allies, we see a country that discovered itself being treated with greater respect and more as an equal, largely because of Marie.

The queen was in the center of these events from the very beginning. During her country’s neutrality, Marie, with the assistance of Romania’s Prime Minister Bratianu, laid out the terms for Romania’s entry on the side of the Entente. Among other things, she wrote lengthy letters to her first cousins, Great Britain’s King George and Russia’s Tsar Nicholas. Indeed, even in these early days, Marie was recognized as a powerful woman. Germany and Austria sent representatives to her to persuade her to enter the war on their side. They knew the influence she had over King Ferdinand, who being of German ancestry was naturally inclined to enter the war on the side of the Germans.

Once Romania picked sides and was faced with the superior German forces and lessening support from its allies (mostly Russia, which was internally crumbling and on the verge of revolution), Marie actively and increasingly involved herself in the war effort. Her primary work initially focused on the hospitals, where she visited the sick and dying soldiers. These were hospitals in the Bucharest area that were a prime target for German bombers. As one war correspondent reported:

But no hospital was too hard for her to visit. Where the railroad did not run, or the royal automobile could not go, she went on horseback. Even also right to the front and under shrapnel fire she insisted upon going to inspect the troops and cheer the men in

the trenches. Through the plague, pestilence, and death that now swept the country, she the Queen went everywhere undaunted. Alike fearless of the bullets falling at the front and the terrible filth and disease she faced in the overcrowded hospitals, she went indefatigably on with her war work. (Maria Regina" 323)

Her connections with the royal houses of Europe, particularly the allied ones, were invaluable for Romania. Marie would write frequently apprising them of Romania's situation and requesting more support.

In Jassy, the temporary seat of government, Marie established hospitals and bakeries to help feed the more than 230,000 refugees during the coldest winter in Jassy in fifty years. She organized a means to transport fuel into the city and provide sanitation. At one point, she cleaned up the triage at the Jassy rail station—a filthy, dark, stench-filled place where soldiers lay on the floor, covered with lice. She continued to visit hospitals and, against doctor's advice, touched soldiers without her rubber gloves, "insisting that the touch of her hand was soothing to the patients and that the gloves were clammy and disconcerting" ("The Queen" 90). Of course, this put her at risk of catching a deadly disease. In Jassy, too, one of the most tragic moments for her came when her three-year-old son Mircea succumbed to typhus and meningitis.

Under occupation, a situation that was a complete anathema to her, she defied as best as she could the occupier's demands. She endured not only German propaganda against the royal family but also a constant threat of assassination from Bolsheviks, the revolutionaries who had already killed her cousin Tsar Nicholas and his family.

She endured her son Carol's elopement with a commoner. Carol's action brought the King and Marie "almost insurmountable grief," and they viewed it as "a staggering family tragedy." Personally, Marie would not begrudge a son the one he loved, commoner or not. She was sufficiently liberal to advocate that people marry for love and have the right of choice. But Carol, who was heir to the throne, had horrendous timing. With Romania still occupied by the Germans, his action was considered the height of irresponsibility. Not only did he desert his military post as a soldier, an act of treason punishable by death, he also completely disregarded the Romanian constitution, which required princes to marry foreign princesses of equivalent rank, a provision designed to prevent a faction or a family from gaining undue political influence. The king and queen were sensitive to such issues, too, because the trend of the time was to dethrone monarchs, some brutally so, and such acts gave enemies a pretext to advocate their overthrow.

With Allied victory, Romania was faced with completely rebuilding a nation. Marie plunged into this work as well. She began her prewar practice of being available to the public again, meeting with her subjects daily. Afternoons she reserved for visits to the devastated villages around Bucharest to which she led a small convoy of cars filled with food and clothing. It was on one visit that Alice Rohn, a reporter for *Good Housekeeping*, described a touching moment during Marie's busy relief work:

In one village, an old woman, sick in rags miserable came forward to Queen Marie when she was handing out clothing in her village. The old woman's eyes were dimmed with tears and her body bent with disease. Pellagra, a disease caused by malnutrition, had claimed her. She lifted her rags to show Marie the ugly marks of the disease. The two dressed in peasant clothes, Marie in her fresh ones, and the old woman in her old, worn ones, looked at each other. Someone tried to pull the lady away. Instantly, Marie stepped forward and drew her back to herself.

“Majesty!” the old woman said, and the elderly lady pulled from beneath her skirt a soldier’s cap. “I have brought it to you.”

Close by a boy of fourteen watched, and laughed. “A battered old soldier’s cap, a gift fitting for a Queen? Surely the old lady was mad.”

Again Marie leaned forward and drew the old woman to her. They sat there, the aged head on the bright blouse of the Queen, Marie’s arm around her. The Queen took the battered cap as if it were the most precious gift she had ever received. Marie talked to the woman of the woman’s boy and her country, and gave her back the cap to keep as a memory of him and of her Majesty. She then placed a huge bundle of clothes in the woman’s arms and dismissed her with a smile. (15)

With Allied victory came recognition of Romania and one last “war” effort by Marie on behalf of Romania—to represent Romania at the Paris Peace Conference in the Spring of 1919. Her mission was to persuade the Allies to honor their commitments toward Romania and ensure that it gained the territory it felt was its due. Her role brought her into contact with all the principal players there: Georges Clemenceau, France’s premier; Woodrow Wilson, president of the United States; David Lloyd George, Great Britain’s prime minister; and others. Her mission included a visit to England, where she met with King George and Queen Mary, as well as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Lord Curzon and the then Secretary for War and Air Winston Churchill.

In both France and England, Marie was wildly popular and drew very favorable publicity for Romania. In England, the *Times* ran an editorial outlining Romania’s suffering and bravery, in particular the country’s “heroic but hopeless struggle, the abandonment by Russia, and the rape of Romania by the Germans.” The editorial further argued that because the Romanians were committed to land reform and demonstrated their loyalty to the monarchy, they deserved Britain’s aid. The editorial described Marie as “not only a niece of King Edward VII, but a Queen of an Allied State, who has done her full woman’s part in sharing the sorrows and the sufferings of her adopted country” (“Resurrection” 11).

Marie’s efforts that Spring of 1919 helped make Romania the fifth largest country in Europe, after France, Spain, Germany, and Poland.

### **A Spiritual Journey for the Queen**

Seven years later, in 1926, Queen Marie learned of the existence of the Bahá’í Faith. Martha Root, a journalist and a famous Bahá’í teacher, introduced her. Miss Root traveled extensively between 1919 and 1939 promoting the Bahá’í teachings, and Marie was one of many royals and distinguished figures she interviewed in the course of her travels. In the Balkans that year, Miss Root’s schedule was packed with daily lectures and barely enough time to rest. She wrote to Shoghi Effendi: “I am speaking each day or evening in Bukarest [*sic*], everything is going just like a miracle. . . . I have just strength enough to do the daily work and the correspondence is utterly neglected—I cannot do more” (Garis 240).

On this trip, Martha set her heart on an audience with Queen Marie, at the very least hoping for an interview with Marie’s lady-in-waiting:

I shall leave here Feb. first or second or third, [as] soon as I can have [an] interview with the Lady in Waiting to the Queen of Rumania [*sic*], she had promised to see me, but she has gripe these few days, of course I should be happy if I can meet the Queen,



but if I cannot this Lady in Waiting will convey to her my messages and Bahá'í books.  
(Quoted in Garis 241)

It must have seemed quite difficult to see the Queen of Romania. Indeed, the American Minister to Romania flatly told Martha she could not see Queen Marie. Martha had other plans:

I wrote her a letter & sent her 'Abdu'l-Bahá's picture and Dr. Esslemont's book. Next day came a letter from the Palace inviting me to visit her the next day at noon. Next to my visit to the Greatest Holy Leaf, this visit to Queen Marie was one of the most splendid events of my life. I took her the Greatest Name and "Seven Valleys" and two Esperanto books and my Esperanto pin, a little bottle of perfume, a little box of candy, a branch of white lilacs, and a report of the Education Congress in Edinburgh.<sup>2</sup> (Quoted in Garis 241–42)

That day at the queen's beautiful Cotroceni Palace outside Bucharest, Marie warmly welcomed Martha. Among her first words were: "I believe these Teachings are the solution for the world's problems today!" (Qtd. in Root, "Queen" 580). She asked Martha to tell her about the Bahá'í Faith and told her she had been reading Dr. John E. Esslemont's book *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* until 3 a.m. and was very interested in the principles. Later, Queen Marie recorded in her diary for that day:

Real thaw today which makes everything dull and ugly. Received a kind modest American, a Miss Root who goes about trying to spread good will amongst nations. She is a great upholder of Esperanto believing that a universal language learnt by all would promote good feelings and understanding among all Nations and there is certainly something in the idea.

Curiously enough she is interested in the same teaching as Roxo and has brought me the very book Roxo always keeps near her bed with the teachings of a certain old Baha'u'llah now dead but who was one of the wise ones of this earth. She seemed terribly moved by our grief about Carol [Marie's oldest son] and liked to believe that there was some devine [*sic*] trial in it which would ultimately turn out for the good of all of us, even of the Prodigal Son. (Marie, Personal Diaries, Jan. 30, 1926)

Marie's friend, Roxo Weingartner, had already exposed Marie to the Bahá'í Faith, at least to the extent that Marie had seen Roxo's copy of *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*. Ms. Weingartner was an obsessive admirer of Marie, but a friend that Marie said she had a real feeling of affection for and one Marie considered wiser in spiritual things. In a letter to Roxo a week after Martha's visit, Marie wrote:

Through the books I am reading I am getting also very near your venerable old master Baha'u'llah. I know all about him now and love him profoundly, Vandyne [Ileana, Marie's youngest daughter] shares my discovery of him. His universal kindness to all men is what makes him feel so near me. —No creeds, but God. (Marie, Letters to Roxo, Feb. 9, 1926)

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<sup>2</sup> Before her marriage, Marie was Princess of Edinburgh.

The “grief” that “moved” Martha was the king and queen’s grief over their eldest son’s abdication of the throne just a month earlier. Since the war, Carol had created numerous serious difficulties for Marie and Ferdinand. The first blow came with his elopement in 1918. The marriage, which was unconstitutional, was annulled by the Church and State, and Carol returned to Romania. Then, Carol’s infidelity after his marriage to Princess Helen of Greece in 1921 compounded problems. Finally, in December 1925, he fled to Paris, abandoning the succession and deserting his wife for another woman. These actions greatly embarrassed his parents and also damaged the prestige and authority of the monarchy. Marie was deeply hurt.

This event was the catalyst for several months of intense soul searching by the queen, something only alluded to in her public statements. As she wrote to Roxo: “Roxo dear, I have been having a curious inner life lately. In the life of this world I have perhaps been through the hardest times of my whole 32 years in this country” (Letters to Roxo Weingartner, March 3, 1926).

During most of February 1926, Marie immersed herself in the Bahá’í writings, beginning every morning for awhile with the “reading of some of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings and wisdom [sic]. It does me a great deal of good, consoles me and makes me think” (Marie, Personal Diaries, Feb. 23, 1926). The Bahá’í Faith moved her at the depth of her being. At one point, she said that the Bahá’í Faith “at last has brought God quite near—for the first time I have *felt* religion” (Feb. 22).

Later, for most of March, her inner search included work with Dr. Frank Buchman, an American evangelist and founder of the Oxford Group. This movement set out to strengthen the spiritual lives of individuals, while encouraging participants to continue as members of their own churches. Marie’s American friends in Turkey had sent this self-styled “soul surgeon” to her in her “hour of need.” During his month in the palace, he acted as her spiritual guide and psychologist, her confidant and family mediator. To Marie, her crisis was a purification, a way to greater self-realization, and Buchman helped her in that journey. He acted as a “mirror” to herself, she said, and helped her understand her weaknesses and limitations:

I have liberated my own spirit, my own personality, but a Buchman makes me see, holding a mirror up to myself. I am something, of a heathen for all that. My spirit is not all Christian—I’m too sure of my own rights—too dominating, not out of want of heart, but have freed myself of the fetters of timidity, ill will, suspiciousness and diffidence. I am too impatient and uncompromising with those still bound by their own selves.

I see it all and it is certainly most healthy, if not always quite pleasant to have an over-clear mirror held up to one’s own face. (Personal Diaries, Feb. 26, 1926)

At the same time, her spiritual path took her occasionally to the Catholic Church for Holy Communion and to the Anglican Church, the emptiness of which reminded her of how much the Bahá’í Faith brought God close. It was all part of a healing process. She did not rely on any one persuasion, but all. She saw all of the religions as one great process and put this belief into practice. From her perspective, if they were all from God, then there was no contradiction in turning to them all when the need was so great. About her taking of Holy Communion with her children, which she described as a solemn and happy moment, Marie wrote: “I was living up to my soul creed, the unity before God. Here we were of different confessions, kneeling before God’s table—some would condemn me for it—but I felt God’s hand over us in blessing” (Personal Diaries, March 27).

She practiced this “soul creed” for the next twelve years and boldly expressed it through her public testimonies about the Bahá’í Faith. She never actually publicly called herself a Bahá’í until the end of her life, which was both in keeping with this “soul creed” and a practical matter since she was bound by her position to uphold the State religion, the Romanian Orthodox Church. Any outward alliance with a religion other than the official one would have created untold political complications within the country. Indeed, on one occasion when pressed by reporters as to whether she was a Bahá’í, she stated that she was not. But during these years, it was an act of courage to support enthusiastically through her testimonies a seemingly obscure and non-traditional religion. It was the act of one who deeply believed, felt, and appreciated “the beautiful truth of Bahá’u’lláh.”

### Queen Marie’s Open Letters

As a result of her first contact with Martha Root, Marie spontaneously wrote her first article in support of the Bahá’í Faith. The queen wrote her own syndicated columns for Hearst and the North American Newspaper Alliance in 1926. By this time in her life, she was developing into a literary talent. Reporters saw in Marie a kindred spirit, and called her “a thoroughly modern journalist and the first queen-journalist of modern Europe” (“Queen’s” 35). Already she had published several books, some to support the war efforts in Romania, and some fairy tales. By the mid-1930s she had written over fifteen books, the most popular and famous of which was her two-volume autobiography *The Story of My Life*.

Her open letter about the Bahá’í Faith appeared in her column entitled “Queen’s Counsel,” first in Canada in the *Toronto Star* on May 4, 1926, and later in nearly 200 newspapers in the United States and in several newspapers around the world. She wrote in part:

A woman brought me the other day a Book. I spell it with a capital letter because it is a glorious Book of love and goodness, strength and beauty. . . .

It teaches that all hatreds, intrigues, suspicions, evil words, all aggressive patriotism even, are outside the one essential law of God, and that special beliefs are but surface things whereas the heart that beats with divine love knows no tribe nor race. . . .

It is Christ’s Message taken up anew, in the same words almost, but adapted to the thousand years and more difference that lies between the year one and today.

. . . If ever the name of Bahá’u’lláh or ‘Abdu’l-Bahá comes to your attention, do not put their writings from you. Search out their Books, and let their glorious, peacebringing, love-creating words and lessons sink into your hearts as they have into mine. (*Bahá’í World 2*: 174)

Her spontaneous public testimony was astounding and completely unexpected. When Shoghi Effendi read the first of the Queen’s “open letters,” he wrote Martha Root that this was “a well deserved testimony of your remarkable and exemplary endeavours for the spread of our beloved Cause. It has thrilled me and greatly reinforced my spirit and strength, yours is a memorable triumph, hardly surpassed in its significance in the annals of the Cause” (quoted in Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl* 109).

There could hardly have been a better or more well-known supporter of the Bahá’í Faith in 1926 than Queen Marie, or a better time. Her popularity and fame were at their peak after 1925. Journalism students at Northwestern University voted Queen Marie the most important woman in

the news (from a newspaper clipping found in Marie's diaries 1927). The religion she promoted, however, was young and relatively unknown. The Heroic Age<sup>3</sup> had just come to a close with the death of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the Formative Age<sup>4</sup> had been under way only five years. The Bahá'í Faith could claim a scattering of local Spiritual Assemblies and Bahá'í Centers, and only five National Spiritual Assemblies worldwide. The first formal teaching plan, the first Seven Year Plan,<sup>5</sup> was still over ten years away. A young Shoghi Effendi, twenty-eight years old in early 1926, had barely assumed his weighty duties in Haifa. So, the queen's action boosted the Bahá'í Faith enormously.

Shoghi Effendi, "moved by an irresistible impulse" (quoted in Rabbaní, *Priceless Pearl* 108), wrote to Queen Marie thanking her for her testimony and describing how it had relieved the suffering of the Bahá'ís in Iran, who had been under severe persecution that year.<sup>6</sup> Marie responded in what Shoghi Effendi described as a "deeply touching letter":

I was deeply moved on reception of your letter. Indeed a great light came to me with the message of Bahá'u'lláh and Abdu'l-Bahá. It came as all great messages come at an hour of dire grief and inner conflict and distress, so the seed sank deeply.

. . . We pass on the message from mouth to mouth and all those we give it to see a light suddenly lighting before them and much that was obscure and perplexing becomes simple, luminous and full of hope as never before.

That my open letter was balm to those suffering for the cause, is indeed a great happiness to me, and I take it as a sign that God accepted my humble tribute.

The occasion given me to be able to express myself publically [*sic*], was also His Work, for indeed it was a chain of circumstances of which each link led me unwittingly one step further, till suddenly all was clear before my eyes and I understood why it had been.

Thus does He lead us finally to our ultimate destiny.

Some of those of my caste wonder at and disapprove my courage to step forward pronouncing words not habitual for Crowned Heads to pronounce, but I advance by an inner urge I cannot resist.

With bowed head I recognize that I too am but an instrument in greater Hands and rejoice in the knowledge. (Quoted in Rabbaní, *Priceless Pearl* 108)

From her standpoint, her open letters were a relatively simple matter. Marie did what she felt moved to do. About the letter from Shoghi Effendi, she wrote to her friend Roxo Weingartner:

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<sup>3</sup> The Heroic Age, 1844-1921, included the ministries of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and was a period of revelation, martyrdom, and persecution.

<sup>4</sup> The Formative Age, is a period that began in 1921 under the leadership of Shoghi Effendi, appointed Guardian and great-grandson of Bahá'u'lláh, and a period of expansion and the maturing of Bahá'í institutions that is still occurring.

<sup>5</sup> The Seven Year Plan (1937-1944) was the first systematic plan in the Bahá'í world, launched in the United States and Canada, involving specific goals for the growth of the Bahá'í Faith in North and Latin America. It was followed by a second Seven Year Plan in 1946 intended to carry the work of the first one a stage further and involving Western Europe.

<sup>6</sup> Twelve Bahá'ís had been martyred in Jahrum, Iran, April 11, 1926, causing widespread sympathy for them and their families, and concern that this persecution might spread throughout the country.

I am enclosing a letter that will interest you—when read you will send it back. Amongst the Queen’s Counsels, I once wrote of the wonderful message of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that had come to me at an hour of grief. This gave the Bahá’ís tremendous joy, they consider it as a sign that the great of this world are opening their ears to truth, but the letter speaks for itself. Of course, I never thought whilst writing that small little article that it would be read by so many. But I am pleased though that my words were a consolation of peace to those oppressed. (Aug. 27, 1926)

In the 1920s, Ileana studied the Bahá’í Faith and shared her mother’s interest. In Ileana’s later years, she developed an interest in Christian Science and tried to interest her mother in it. In her final years, she became a nun in the Orthodox Church and founded a convent in Pennsylvania. Why Ileana’s interest in the Bahá’í Faith did not blossom is not clear, although it seems reasonable to suspect that she had little support for an allegiance to the Bahá’í Faith other than her mother, and that life simply overwhelmed her. Ileana had six children and lived with her Austrian-born husband near Vienna when the Germans captured it at the outset of World War II. She tried to assist Romania after the War but had to flee because the country came under Communist rule. So, her initial spark of interest must have been overcome by events and life’s concerns. In later years, she turned to the religion and way of life closest to her heart. None of the other children expressed interest in the Bahá’í Faith to our knowledge.

As far as we know, Ferdinand had no interest in the Bahá’í Faith, although he must have known of his wife’s interest, at least in 1926 when the whole family was a part of her spiritual growth. Even if he had an interest, it would have been unlikely that he would act on it in any way. He was a cautious, reserved, traditional man. For example, once Marie took her the children to Communion. When he discovered this, he became upset, since Communion was not within the Orthodox church; it was a Catholic rite. Marie said that Ferdinand was “upset at her unorthodoxy, at our admission of all confessions equally” (Personal Diaries, April 28, 1926). So, if he would be upset by a relatively minor thing as taking of Communion by his family, to consider the Bahá’í Faith for himself would have been unthinkable in this context.

### **Queen Marie in North America**

In the summer of 1926, Shoghi Effendi, upon learning that Marie might visit North America, wrote to the American National Spiritual Assembly through his secretary with the following instructions:

We read in *The Times* that Queen Marie of Rumania is coming to America. She seems to have obtained a great interest in the Cause. So we must be on our guard lest we do an act which may prejudice her and set her back. Shoghi Effendi desires that, in case she takes this trip, the friends will behave with great reserve and wisdom, and that no initiative be taken on the part of the friends except after consulting the National Assembly. (Quoted in Rabbaní, *Priceless Pearl* 107)

Queen Marie felt deeply drawn to the United States. It was not only a matter of friendship and curiosity for her, or the benefits that might accrue for her country from such a visit, but something much deeper, something a part of the personal development she began early in the year. A week before her departure from Romania on October 2, 1926, she wrote in her diary:

I cannot say that I am anxious to off so far for so long, only I have such a [*sic*]—instinctive feeling that I *ought* to go to America, that I will make a good thing of it for the country. It is a real *urge*, as though something hidden within me knows that it is good that I should go. It is not a selfish desire to see, do, and amuse myself. It is something much deeper, a sort of feeling that I *have* to have this experience, it is in a way a final step in my development, for my own personality.

The Americans *want* me. Of course this may be a complete illusion, but I have strongly that feeling. There is some bond between us I cannot quite explain, some attraction towards each other from over the seas. (Personal Diaries, Sept. 26)

It promised to be an extraordinary trip, far beyond what she envisioned herself. What she would encounter were throngs of admiring people of all strata of society and, as one would expect, great demands on her time and for her attention, as well as a relentless press that would report her every move.

After a train trip from Romania, Marie and her youngest children, Prince Nicholas and Princess Ileana, set sail from France on the luxury liner S. S. Leviathan, one of the premier ships of her day. Correspondents covered her cruise across the Atlantic and sent detailed reports back to the United States describing her voyage. What impressed them most were Marie's democratic ways. She would stroll freely among the passengers and dined often in the main dining room. They reported how she entertained the four-year-old son of a New York garment manufacturer in her suite and swam mornings in the ship's pool.

On her arrival in New York Harbor (October 18, 1926), her first words in the United States echoed the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá about women's role in bringing about world peace: "I am interested in the position of women in America and their work for world peace. We've all had enough wars, haven't we? I am confident that women will end all wars!" Then after a pause she added, "If they do not quarrel among themselves first" ("New York" 1).

This official state visit to the United States, the third by a reigning queen (the others being Elizabeth of Belgium and Liliuokalani of Hawaii) was to last over a month and take her on an 8,750-mile journey from New York and Washington, D.C., to Washington State and back. Along the way, she would attend an endless stream of banquets, receptions, dinners, luncheons, and dedications. She also granted numerous newspaper and radio interviews and gave countless speeches. Coverage of her trip was exhaustive. From October 4, before Marie's arrival in the United States, front-page articles about her appeared daily in the *New York Times*, except for two days. The *Times* said that she faced "probably the most relentless camera bombardment that anyone has ever been called on to face in the world's history" (*Times* 2).

What disarmed everyone and reinforced their respect and admiration, especially reporters, were her openness and candor. In those days, questions usually asked of royalty by the press were limited to those about health, but Marie fielded questions about her life as an author, persecutions of Jews in Romania, and her son's position in regard to the throne, among others.

In spite of the rather rainy fall weather, Marie's arrival in New York was spectacular. Mayor Jimmy Walker and his official welcoming committee met the queen first at her ship. Waiting on shore were two specially selected battalions from the army and the navy, three batteries of coast artillery, an infantry war unit, a company of Marines, and 750 New York police. Once ashore, her twenty-car motorcade set out at noon (a move planned by the mayor to ensure the largest possible crowd). Marie was greeted by tens of thousands of New Yorkers who showered her with ticker-tape and torn paper. "I was not prepared for the American custom of throwing papers of every size,

shape and description from the thousands of windows of the extraordinary buildings, whose tops I could hardly see. The air seemed alive with fluttering wings, as though swarms of birds had been let loose in the streets” (quoted in Pakula, *Last Romantic* 345). Front-page headlines read “New York Gives Hearty Welcome to Queen Marie” and “Ovation in Fog Stirs Royal Visitor.”

The next day, Marie arrived in Washington, D.C. for her official visit with President Calvin Coolidge. After a formal reception during the day, Coolidge hosted a formal state dinner in her honor at the White House. About this dinner the American humorist Will Rogers said, “I can just imagine when the President and Queen Marie sat down to the dinner table. I don’t know, but, I bet they sat there a long time and then Cal said: ‘What country are you from Marie?’” Actually, Rogers was not too far off the mark. It was a rather stiff affair due in large part to President Coolidge’s excessive formality and his well-known frugality with words. Even with her charm, Marie could not engage the President for the evening.

This aspect of his personality and his dry Yankee humor were legendary. A young woman who once sat next to the President at a dinner party told Coolidge she made a bet she could get at least three words of conversation out of him. Without looking at her, he quietly replied, “You lose” (Freidel, “America Enters the Modern Era” 570).

Characteristically, Marie soon tired of formal affairs and officials, although she never showed it. As she journeyed westward through New York (Albany, Utica, Syracuse) and up through Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, and Winnipeg, toward Washington State, she increasingly expressed a desire to meet “real Americans.” And indeed she did. She met with North Dakota farmers, cowboys, and American Indians. The Sioux and Blackfoot inducted her into their tribes. The Sioux gave her the name *Winyan Kipanpi Win*, which means “The Woman Who Was Waited For.”

There is no record of her having met with any Bahá’ís. They apparently remained in the background. However, during her audience with Martha Root a year later in 1927, the queen did lovingly recall and wanted to thank

all those Bahá’í friends in America who sent me the lovely bouquets in all the cities through which I passed. How it touched my heart! Wherever I came, those nosegays always on my table, nothing personal, never saying who had brought them, never able to thank anyone, just sent with the love of the Bahá’ís of those cities, went straight to my heart! No one ever understood how much those bouquets meant to me! (Quoted in Garis, *Martha Root* 287)

Marie’s tour came quickly to a halt when she received news of her husband’s sudden illness in Romania. She left the United States on November 23, 1926, to return home to be with him. But in the days prior to her departure, her pace did not slacken.

### **Queen Marie and Martha Root: 1926-1931**

The day in 1926 when Martha and Marie’s paths first crossed was three months after Marie’s fifty-first birthday. Over the next twelve years, until Marie’s death in 1938, Martha kept in close touch with her “spiritual child,” showering her with love and the spirit of the Bahá’í Faith. Including her first visit, Martha visited Marie eight times from 1926 to 1936.

Each audience was eventful. In 1927, for example, after the passing of King Ferdinand, when the family was receiving few people because they were “still in deep mourning,” Marie told

Martha how she had been reading the Bahá'í teachings about life after death. During this second audience, she gave Martha an appreciation of the Bahá'í Faith in her own handwriting for the fourth volume of *The Bahá'í World*. Marie would write two additional appreciations of the Bahá'í Faith for *The Bahá'í World* in the coming years.

Earlier that year, Martha had received a precious gift from the Bahá'ís of Mashad. Martha described it as “a Prayer of Bahá'u'lláh. It was adorned and blessed in the center with a lock Bahá'u'lláh's own shining hair” (quoted in *Star* 370). Martha wrote her friend Harry Randall, an early American Bahá'í and co-worker, about how this gift would be a worthy gift for Her Majesty Queen Marie—“if I could give them up,” she explained. During this second audience, Martha presented her gift to Marie. The Queen was deeply touched. Struck by the polished gold calligraphy, she observed: “It is in the most perfect taste of all the Orient! I know how rare and beautiful it is!” (Quoted in *Star* 370). She also told Martha that she planned to have a frame specially designed for it and in the frame also place a small photograph of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá.

Also during this meeting, Ileana invited Martha to her room, where she asked her, “How does one become a Bahá'í?” During their conversation, Martha noticed the Bahá'í books, nearly all the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and ‘Abdu'l-Bahá then in print, and a photo of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá there. Ileana, touched by the beauty of the Bahá'í Faith, offered to translate some Bahá'í booklets into Romanian, which she did at a later date.

Of this 1927 meeting, Queen Marie wrote in her diary:

Had no time to go out as had several people to see. Miss Root the Bahá'í adept came with a heart full of love, with books and an ardent desire to carry on her message. Ileana and I received her with affection and listened with interest to all she had to tell us about ‘Abdu'l-Bahá whose teachings we are so profoundly in sympathy with. Nicky [Marie's youngest son] came to listen. (Personal Diaries, Oct. 9, 1927)

January 1928, saw Martha in Greece and Yugoslavia, where she gave a number of lectures and published newspaper articles. Queen Marie and Ileana had traveled to Yugoslavia to help Marie Mignon, Marie's second daughter, now Queen of Yugoslavia, at the birth of Mignon's son. Marie and Ileana, learning that Martha was in Belgrade, sent her an invitation to tea at the royal palace. During this audience, Marie's comment about the Bahá'í Faith delighted Martha: “The ultimate dream which we shall realize is that the Bahá'í channel of thought has such strength, it will serve little by little to become a light to all those searching for the real expression of Truth” (qtd. in Garis, *Martha Root* 296–97).

On this visit, too, Marie gave Martha a precious gift. Many years earlier one of her royal relatives in Russia had given Marie a beautiful brooch consisting of two tiny wings of gold and silver, set with little diamond chips and a large pearl between the wings. Marie looked at Martha and said: “Always you are giving gifts to others and I am going to give you a gift from me.” Smiling, she pinned it on Martha's dress. Martha remarked how the wings and pearl made it appear “Lightbearing” [Bahá'í], and she proceeded to send it to Chicago as a gift to the Bahá'í House of Worship under construction. Later that spring, at the National Convention, the delegates consulted about the appropriateness of selling the gift from a queen who had promoted the Bahá'í Faith so eloquently and widely. However, the brooch was sold and the money went to finance the Temple. Willard Hatch, a Los Angeles Bahá'í, purchased this precious piece and carried it to Haifa in 1931 to be placed in the Bahá'í archives, where it remains on display.



Over a year later on October 29, 1929, Martha's fourth audience took place at the queen's favorite castle. Modest by comparison to her other palaces, this handsome home had been designed by the queen herself, who had it built in the small, quiet town of Balcic on the Black Sea. She named it "Tehna-Yuva," a Turkish name that means "A Solitary Nest." At this meeting, Marie spoke of her plans to visit the Holy Land soon.

Martha attended a luncheon that day, a birthday party for the queen. The guests, including Martha, received a unique welcome at the gate of the palace. Speaking of herself in the third person, Martha described the "welcome":

She [Martha] sat alone in the motor car halted at the royal entrance gate while her card was-being sent on to the palace in the distance.

Suddenly a bugler comes out on the cliffs far above and to the right and began to play a welcome. Yodelers on still higher rocks echoed the sweet sounds. (Quoted in Garis, *Martha Root* 323–24)

After the lunch, Queen Marie led only one guest, Martha, upstairs to a spacious drawing room overlooking the sea. On this occasion, Marie gave Martha some autographed photos for Shoghi Effendi and the holy family. On this occasion, too, Marie expressed her plan to visit Haifa, Shoghi Effendi, and the Bahá'í holy places on her upcoming tour of the Middle East.

### **The World Centre Anticipates a Queen's Pilgrimage**

When Shoghi Effendi learned of Queen Marie's possible visit, he wrote a letter thanking her for the photos, and extending to her "a most cordial welcome should Your Majesty ever purpose to visit the Holy Land to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's home in Haifa as well as to those scenes rendered so hallowed and memorable by the heroic lives and deeds of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá" (quoted in Rabbaní, *Priceless Pearl* 113).

Several days later, Martha Root wrote to Marie from Haifa. As always, it was a loving, moving message, but this long letter made it almost impossible for the queen not to visit Haifa (Root, *Letters*, Dec. 7, 1929). Martha spoke to the heart and soul of the queen, beginning the letter, "O beloved Queen of all our hearts and precious Princess [Ileana], Alla-o-Abha!<sup>7</sup> We all send you tenderest love and every day we think of you and pray for you."

Martha goes on to paint for Marie a moving portrait of Shoghi Effendi and to describe Marie's station as the first Bahá'í queen. Martha compares Marie to Constantine, saying that "her name will go down forever. People today still honor Constantine that he was the first King to accept Jesus Christ, so Queen Marie will be remembered with love all down the ages as the first Bahá'í Queen of this Universal Epoch." She tells Marie of Bahá'ís in Haifa and of the new pilgrim house. Above all, Martha Root describes how this visit will be a balm to the queen's soul. For, Martha said, she will have come "home, and at last to the House of your Lord!"

And when you rest your head at the Holy Threshold of Bahá'u'lláh's Sacred Shrine you will know you are in paradise and the cares, the hurts, the sorrows will all vanish away and only the Reality, the Love of God will remain. At This Threshold with your head bowed amid the jasmynes you will *hear* with His Ear, see with His Eye, inhale

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<sup>7</sup> A greeting and invocation to God in Persian sometimes used by Bahá'ís which can be translated as "O Glory of Glories" or "O Glory of the All-Glorious."

the Fragrance of His Nearness, and drink His Cup. Such a peace will possess your heart, such a courage will come, such a joy to live and serve! And beloved Queen and Princess when you lift your head from that dear threshold perhaps you will find yourselves “crowned” for the jasmine flowers may cling to your tresses!

Also, you will feel ‘Abdu’l-Bahá taking your hand and speaking to you. He will always be with you when you kneel at His Great Shrine.<sup>8</sup>

At the Shrine of the Báb you will feel His Purity and His Sacrifice and the great longing to be worthy of all this Spiritual Heritage. (Quoted in Root, Letters, Dec. 7, 1929)

The prospect of such a prominent figure in the world visiting the Bahá’í World Centre and meeting the head of the Bahá’í Faith was one full of significance for the religion and for Marie.

Queen Marie and Princess Ileana set out on their journey on February 21, 1930, apparently fully intending to visit Haifa. She had told Martha at their meeting in October 1929, “We shall surely go to Haifa.” The royal yacht, “The Dacia,” took them from Romania to Constantinople, then to Athens, and finally to Alexandria, Egypt, where they boarded a ship, “The Mayflower,” provided by the Egyptian government.

In anticipation of her impending visit, Shoghi Effendi on February 21 cabled the Bahá’ís of Tehran, requesting that the tablet Bahá’u’lláh revealed for Marie’s grandmother Queen Victoria be copied in fine Persian calligraphy and illuminated. Furthermore, he instructed that it should arrive in Haifa no later than March 10. It was to have been a special gift for Queen Marie. As the likely date approached for Marie’s arrival, Shoghi Effendi cabled her twice, extending a “loving and heartfelt invitation . . . to visit His home in Haifa” and cordially apprising her of the historical significance of such a visit, and the strength and joy it would bring the persecuted Bahá’ís in Iran. No reply came to his first cable on March 8 (Rabbaní, *Priceless Pearl* 114).

The day Shoghi Effendi’s telegram arrived in Egypt, though, it was beginning to look as if the queen’s visit to the Holy Land might need to be canceled. Politics in Romania and Palestine were making it increasingly difficult for her to visit there. In her diary on March 8, Marie lamented how her connection with the Bahá’í Faith had become a “political complication.”

But everything in this world is complication. Of all things my sympathy for the Bahá’ís is also being brought up as a political complication. . . . Who would ever have imagined such a thing. They consider it political propaganda! It is really sometimes a curse to be a Queen. And one meets with almost no comprehension. The world wishes to rule everything on hard-cut lines, there is to be no enthusiasm, no deeper thought, no privacy, no poetry, no idea, only try reason and selfish calculation. How discouraging it is—I would never have thought that even this would be made a question. . . .

In the winter and spring of 1930, the possible return of Carol, Marie’s prodigal son, to Romania was a burning political issue in the nation. He had been in exile for five years, with little hope of ever being restored to the throne. But, by 1930, conditions in the country had changed dramatically, and a political crisis had developed. This crisis had been building since King Ferdinand’s death in 1927, when Carol’s then four-year-old son Michael ascended to the throne.

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<sup>8</sup> The Shrine of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the resting place of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and located in the same structure as the Shrine of the Báb, is sacred to Bahá’ís. Both are places of pilgrimage, prayer, and meditation.

In 1926, Michael had been made nominal head of the country, backed by a three-person Regency Council established to administer the country's affairs until Michael was older.

But by 1930, the Regency had lost much of its authority and prestige, not to mention public confidence. The Liberal Party, the political party associated with Queen Marie that had established the Regency and had ruled Romania for sixty years, had lost control of the government. A new political party, the National Peasant Party, came into power. This party and like-minded people, all known as Carolists, increasingly called for Carol's return. Contributing to the political storm were the depressed economic conditions in Romania brought on by the Depression in Europe. Many Romanians longed for a strong hand, and many believed that Carol might restore the nation to stability. To create favorable public opinion for his return, the Carolists began discrediting the queen in the news media. Along with the Liberals, Queen Marie was not in favor of Carol's return. Marie described the tense political conditions to a friend:

I frankly don't see how we're going to labor through another ten-and-a-half years of such an unnatural state of affairs [referring to the boy King and the Regency]. No head, no one responsible, no confidence, no prestige, the dynasty falling to pieces. I, the only efficient member of it, put on one side, insulted, calumniated, denied and rejected so that I can't be of any help. We can't hold on like this. . . . (Quoted in Elsberry, *Marie* 226)

Above and beyond all political considerations, Marie also had to think of the trip in terms of its impact on the person closest to her, her daughter Ileana. A few months before the trip, Ileana fell deeply in love with Lexel of Pless, a young German prince. They planned to marry and had already picked out a house. Marie had high hopes for this marriage and was extremely pleased with her daughter's choice. However, upon investigation of Lexel, a standard practice for a prospective spouse of a princess, a "black spot" in Lexel's past—alleged homosexual involvement—was discovered. This discovery made it impossible for the marriage to take place. For Marie, the grief from such bad news was such that it was almost physical pain. They undertook the trip in part to help Ileana recover from this devastating experience (Pakula, *Last Romantic* 374).

One of Marie's leading critics was Gregori Filipescu, whom the *New York Times* called a "new Carolist" and a "well-known politician and particular critic of the Dowager Queen Marie . . . who will use his newspaper, *Epoca*, in behalf of the exiled Prince" ("General," *The New York Times* 2). As Marie toured Egypt that spring, Filipescu attacked her for an interview she gave to a Greek newspaper and for her handling of Ileana's engagement. It is highly likely that he and his allies made Marie's sympathy for the Bahá'ís a political issue as well, all to sway public opinion against her and the Liberals. There is little question that someone was using this for political gain, and the Carolist camp led by Filipescu would be the most likely group to make it a political liability to their rivals.

Shoghi Effendi wired Queen Marie again on March 26 at the Hotel Semiramis in Cairo, renewing his invitation:

Fearing my former letter and telegram in which Family of 'Abdu'l-Bahá joined me in extending invitation to Your Majesty and Her Royal Highness Princess Ileana may have miscarried, we are pleased to express anew the pleasure it would give us all should Your Majesty find it feasible to visit Bahá'u'lláh's and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Shrines

and the prison-city of 'Akka. Deeply regret unauthorized publicity given by the Press.  
(Quoted in Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl* 114)

On March 28, a day before Marie had planned to arrive in Haifa, Shoghi Effendi received a cable from the Romanian Minister in Cairo: "Her Majesty regrets that not passing through Palestine she will not be able to visit you" (quoted in Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl* 114). However, the next day, the royal party departed from Egypt for Palestine, where they traveled incognito for a few days. Her diary entry for that day, March 29, partially explains the secrecy:

I was to avoid Palestine as much as possible only skirt it so to say which is a great disappointment [*sic*]. To be so near & not to go either to Jerusalem or Akker [*sic*] is indeed hard.

But authorities were afraid the visit of a queen might stir up passions & the state of the spirits is excited & unsettled. Besides some stupid press campaign started that I had become a Bahá'í. . . . I even had worry from at home on the subject. Unjustifiable nonsense, but food to that curr [*sic*] Filipescu. Everything is disagreeable for me at home just now. They have got their knife into me and behave like ungrateful servants.

Palestine was a tinderbox at this time, and British authorities feared that Marie, a well-known cousin of George V, King of Great Britain, and a direct descendant of the British monarchy, might be the spark that set off protests. The *New York Times*, reporting on the royals' tour, wrote "their trip is understood to have been shortened at the request of the British Government which feared that a longer stay might provoke unpleasant demonstrations" ("Queen Marie," *The New York Times*, 17 March 1930, 8). Two highly visible events were then taking place concerning the Holy Land: a Palestinian Arab delegation had traveled to London to plead before Parliament for equal rights for all inhabitants in Palestine and the abandonment of British rule there. Also the British government was to issue the Shaw Commission's report, which attempted to fix blame for the summer 1929 Palestinian racial disorders. It is reported that 133 Jews were killed and 339 wounded during these conflicts (Sears, *Horizon History* 451). The Arab delegation planned to be present when the report was released. Officials in Palestine were so concerned about the inflammatory conditions in Palestine that British troops were sent from Malta, and British warships moved into Palestinian waters.

On March 30, Marie and Ileana reached Haifa by train and proceeded through northern Palestine by car, visiting Nazareth, Capernaum, and Tiberias. But to her great disappointment, she barely saw Haifa and completely missed the Bahá'í holy shrines, as well as Jerusalem and 'Akka. In her personal diaries, she described her feeling about not attaining her heart's desire on that day:

On March 30th we arrived at Haifa, early in the morning incognito as I was not supposed to travel through Palestine, but I could not reach Syria except through part of Palestine unless I took a ship which would have been more complicated. My heart ached at Haifa not to be able to stop and greet Shoghi Effendi now head of the Bahá'ís who had sent me a warm invitation to be their guest because *although I am not a Bahá'í* I am deeply interested by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's teachings and I would have loved going to his grave. [Emphasis added.]

The stupid fuss the papers raised made this alas impossible and I felt like a coward creeping past their holy shrines without giving sign of life. No one understood this except Ileana. Those who look at you principally as Queen, a representative, understand very little and care less for what you feel . . . or what are your inner loyalties. They protect your outward prestige, so to say guard you from making foolish mistakes but know none of the inner ache their reasonableness leaves in your heart. I do not blame them, they are there for that, their conscience is at rest, they have civilized their rash & impulsive Queen's impulses, have spared her future trouble so they have done their duty, there with all is well.

It is no good expecting Roumanians to understand any subversive religious aspirations or even quite plausible ones, religion plays a small part in their plan of life & religious thoughts seldome (sp.) trouble them. but I am their Queen, I have no right according to them to compromise them through my ununderstandable ideas & ideally I belong to them and they are there to protect me against myself. I honour their intentions. . . . I bow my head & submit, keeping my disappointment to myself.

Given the state of affairs back home and the negative press from the Carolists, a visit to the Bahá'í World Centre would only appear to confirm reports that Marie had become a Bahá'í. Obviously, those who were close to her and wanted to protect her advised her not to visit the shrines. Marie was also duty bound, as a Romanian monarch, to uphold the official religion, the Romanian Orthodox Church.

In a letter to Martha Root over a year later, Marie acknowledges that part of the decision not to visit Shoghi Effendi in Haifa was related to Ileana:

Both Ileana and I were cruelly. disappointed at having been prevented going to the holy shrines and of meeting Shoghi Effendi, but at that time were going through a cruel crisis and every movement I made was being turned against me and being politically exploited in an unkind way. It caused me a good deal of suffering and curtailed my liberty most unkindly. There are periods however when one must submit to persecution, nevertheless, however high-hearted one may be, it ever again fills one with pained astonishment when people are mean and spiteful. I had my child to defend at the time; she was going through a bitter experience and so I could not stand up and defie [*sic*] the world. (Quoted in Rabbaní, *Priceless Pearl* 115)

Marie's arrival in Syria four days later was in stark contrast to her low-key entry into Haifa. At the Syrian frontier, she said, "the English handed us over to the French authorities who came in numbers as here I am quite officially myself although there is nothing official about my journey. There was even a detachment of cavalry and an officer has been attached to us. The French Governor of Damascus came to meet us" (Marie, *Diaries*, April 3, 1930). She reached Damascus on April 4.

March 30th passed and Shoghi Effendi had no indication at the time of Marie's arrival in Haifa. He and Bahíyyih Khánum, Bahá'u'lláh's daughter, had expected her any day. For Bahíyyih Khánum's part, she waited patiently for hours in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's house to receive the royals. By April 2, though, when Marie still had not arrived, Shoghi Effendi feared the opportunity had passed and wrote Martha Root to have her communicate to Marie what transpired on his end and to ensure that there was no misunderstanding because of the media. He wrote: "I am now writing to you

quite confidentially regarding the projected visit of the Queen to Haifa. Unfortunately it did not materialize. The reason, I absolutely ignore” (quoted in Rabbaní, *Priceless Pearl* 114). He explains to Martha how he had cabled the queen twice (which he quoted) and how he had extended a written invitation, but that the only reply he had received was a telegram from the Romanian Minister (which he also quoted). He went on to express his concern about the apparent widespread, unauthorized publicity in the media and the misunderstanding this might have created. He then tells Martha that

reporters who called on me representing the United Press of America telegraphed to their newspapers just the opposite I told them. They perverted the truth. I wish we could make sure that she would at least know the real situation! But how can we ensure that our letters to her Majesty will henceforth reach her. I feel that you should write to her, explain the whole situation, assure her of my great disappointment. (114)

Shoghi Effendi asked Martha to keep this matter confidential and reassured her:

I cherish the hope that these unfortunate developments will serve only to intensify the faith and love of the Queen and will reinforce her determination to arise and spread the Cause. . . . Be not sad or distressed, dearest Martha. The seeds you have so lovingly, so devotedly and so assiduously sown will germinate. . . . (Quoted in Rabbaní, *Priceless Pearl* 114–15)

The reply from the queen delighted them both. She wrote: “the beauty of truth remains and I cling to it through all the vicissitudes of a life become rather sad. . . . I am glad to hear that your traveling has been so fruitful and I wish you continual success knowing what a beautiful message you are carrying from land to land.” Significantly, she added: “I enclose a few words which may be used in your Year Book” (quoted in Rabbaní, *Priceless Pearl* 115).<sup>9</sup>

## **The Final Years**

After 1929, Martha did not see Queen Marie for three years. Then, in 1932 and 1933, Martha called on Marie in Austria. Both years the queen traveled there to be with Ileana, who had married Archduke Anton of Austria and was living in her new home just outside Vienna on an estate known as Sonneberg. Of their meeting in 1933, Marie wrote in her diary for January 31, 1933:

Suddenly thaw, later even rain. Eager little Martha Root of the Bahá’í came to lunch. Wonderful how that thin inconspicuous little middle-aged woman manages to spread the teaching, to publish books and get into touch with so many . . . to make her quiet way and in many ways to succeed. It is admirable. She is a touching person and today we had her to ourselves. . . .

The last two audiences with the queen took place in Romania at the queen’s Cotroceni Palace in Bucharest. Martha’s notes and Marie’s diary entries suggest a warmth and intimacy about these meetings not present in the previous ones. Martha described in detail their afternoon tea in 1934:

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<sup>9</sup> The Yearbook referred to here is *The Bahá’í World*, which in the early years of its publication was produced on an annual basis.

How beautiful she looked that afternoon—as always—for her loving eyes mirror her mighty spirit; a most unusual Queen is she, a consummate artist, a lover of beauty and wherever she is there is glory. . . . She received me in her private library where a cheerful fire glowed in the quaint, built-in fireplace; tea was served on a low table, the gold service set being wrought in flowers. There were flowers everywhere, and when she invited me into her bedroom where she went to get the photograph which I like so much, as I saw the noble, majestic proportions of this great chamber with its arched ceiling in Gothic design, I exclaimed in joy, “Your room is truly a temple, a Mashriqu’l-Adhkár!” (Root, “Queen” 581)

The last audience, two years before the queen’s death in 1938, was a highly significant one. In a real sense, from this meeting, Marie gave the world her final spiritual legacy: an article written by Martha and approved by Queen Marie, and her final appreciation written for *Bahá’i World*, volume six. When Martha arrived in Bucharest in early February, she wrote to the palace asking permission for an audience with the queen. In the same letter, she proposed the article for *World Order Magazine* about Marie’s spiritual life, and on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, she asked for another appreciation in the queen’s own handwriting for volume six of *Bahá’i World*.

All was granted. The two met in Marie’s “softly lighted library” at the palace at 6 o’clock in the evening. Martha records later how Marie spoke of several Bahá’í books, “the depths of ‘Íqan’ and especially of ‘Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh’ which she said was a wonderful book!” And that “even doubters would find a powerful strength in it, if they would read it alone and would give their souls time to expand” (Root, “Queen” 582).

The queen told Martha that she had met Lady Blomfield, a prominent early Bahá’í in London, who showed her the original message Bahá’u’lláh had sent to her grandmother Queen Victoria. Also, Marie spoke fondly to Martha of a childhood friend, Mrs. Lilian McNeill who was then living near ‘Akka at Bahá’u’lláh’s home of Mazra’ih. They both had recognized Bahá’u’lláh separately and independently. Mrs. McNeill had sent Marie pictures of ‘Akka and Haifa, and the two had corresponded. That Marie considered herself a Bahá’í is evident from one letter she sent to her old friend. Queen Marie wrote:

indeed nice to hear from you and to think that you are of all things living near Haifa and are, like me, a follower of the Bahá’í teachings. It interests me that you are living in that special house . . . so incredibly attractive and made precious by its associations with the Man we all venerate. (Quoted in McNeill, “Treasured Memories” 278)

Her Majesty promised to write a special appreciation and send it in four days. Martha drafted notes based on the audience for the article and sent them to Marie the next day (February 5, 1936) for approval, along with a touching and powerful letter:

Most beloved Majesty Queen Marie:

Allah-u-Abha! Deepest love to you precious Queen! [ was so happy to see you yesterday. Every time seems the best time yet. You are so lovable, so great, *you are a Queen!* I believe always this servant will be more kind, more thoughtful to every one whom she ever meets, because she saw how charming you are. Thanks with all my

heart for the clear audience yesterday, I shall remember it always. Always too, beloved Queen Marie, I pray for you.

Shoghi Effendi prays for you everyday, and how *happy* he will be to have your beautiful greeting. He will be so delighted too, about the ‘Appreciation’ for Vol. VI, and the audience and the article will be good news to him.

I shall write to him every word you said, for I know he thirsts to hear from you, for just *you* are the soul who can understand Shoghi Effendi. I am sure that when you two meet, you will be close friends all your lives. You will admire his spirit, his intellect, understanding, his courage. Life is so short and not many people can be a companion to your soul—nor to his—you fly too high in the spiritual realms, but he *will be*. When you meet him, you will be sorry you did not go to Haifa sooner. Some day you two will meet—and Bahá’u’lláh will do the rest. I do not mean just outer friendship, pleasant as they are, but I mean *soul friends*, who see life and eternity and act to bring again tranquility to humanity. . . .

Here are the notes of the audience yesterday, but I shall rewrite them and “polish them like diamonds” if I can, but I shall not say anything that is not in these notes. If there are any changes in these two sheets, would you please correct & resend them when you send the “Appreciation” before I leave Saturday. . . .

With dearest love to you and again thanks, most beloved Queen Marie, “Our Queen” (When I left you, I glanced to be *sure* no one was in the hall, and I left a little kiss on your door)

Yours most humbly  
In His Covenant  
Martha L. Root

(Root, Letters, Feb. 5, 1936)

Queen Marie did make a few changes in the article. Most significantly, though, in this piece she expressed how in her heart she was “entirely Bahá’í” Martha wrote in this article, “she mentioned an incident in Hamburg when she was en route to Iceland in the summer of 1933. As she passed through the street, a charming girl tossed a little note to her into the motor car. It was: ‘I am so happy to see you in Hamburg, because you are a Bahá’í.’ . . . Her Majesty said to me [Martha], ‘In my heart I am entirely Bahá’í’” (qtd. in Root, “Queen” 582).

It was as if this was Marie’s final confession of faith. Never before had she stated so explicitly that she was a Bahá’í, although she had, as we have seen, expressed profound sympathy with the Bahá’í teachings and a deep love for Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. At the same time, Martha said, it showed that Marie stood “strong for the highest Truth, and as an historical record . . . of what the first Queen did for the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh” (Zinky, *Martha Root* 112). The seeds Martha had sown, as promised by Shoghi Effendi in 1931, had germinated. The appreciation Marie offered for *Bahá’í World* read:

More than ever today when the world is facing such a crisis of bewilderment and unrest, must we stand firm in Faith seeking that which binds together instead of tearing asunder.



To those searching for light, the Bahá'í Teachings offer a star which will lead them to deeper understanding, to assurance, peace and good will with all men. (6: frontispiece)

Queen Marie died July 18, 1938, at the age of sixty-three. Of her death, Lilian McNeill wrote, "The world is poorer for the passing of such a noble lady, and a blank, impossible to fill, is left in the lives of those who knew her personally" (277–78).

Hand of the Cause of God, George Townshend later wrote eloquently of her passing:

Her death and obsequies were attended with all the ceremonial that befits the passing of a Queen. But who can tell what was the greeting that awaited her on the other side where she learned in an instant how true had been her intuitions of the manifestation of God and where she saw unobscured now by any mortal veil the white eternal splendour of the Truth that she, alone among the earth's queens, had risen to acclaim. ("Queen" 275)

Shoghi Effendi gives us a glimpse of the blessing that was Queen Marie's when he wrote:

Queen Marie's acknowledgement of the Divine Message stands as the first fruits of the vision which Bahá'u'lláh had seen long before in His captivity, and had announced in His *Kitab-i-Aqdas*. "*How great . . . the blessedness that awaits the King who will arise to aid My Cause in My Kingdom, who will detach himself from all else but Me!*" (*God Passes By* 395)

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