

SHINING LAMP

A Bahá'í who served humanity with radiance

MARTHA ROOT (1872–1939): Roaring the Call By Gail Radley



Martha Root (above) traveled to share the Bahá'í Faith with many people, notably Queen Marie of Romania (left).

"Roar out the call of the Divine Kingdom," 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote Martha Root in 1918. "Thou shalt witness great results and extraordinary confirmations."

In 1912, Martha Root had often attended talks by the Bahá'í leader as he traveled in North America. She arranged for him to speak in Pittsburgh, where she lived. She even met with him, and listening to him filled Martha with longing to spread his message of love and unity. She was so eager that she wrote to him in 1918, suggesting she go on a world tour to share the Bahá'í Faith. His answer thrilled her. By 1919, at age 47, she was stuffing her bags with books and pamphlets to set off for South America.



Treasured Message

Martha, an experienced journalist, went to the newspaper office after she landed in Brazil. Through news stories, she explained her purpose—as she would throughout her future travels. "If any one feels timid about asking opportunities to speak . . ." she once said, "remember that no day comes twice . . ." Martha found plenty of opportunities. She gathered

people into study classes and spoke to clubs, colleges, and community leaders. She once gave 25 talks in about a week!

Yet speaking to crowds wasn't always easy. Once she suddenly felt nervous before a talk and ducked into the ladies' room. "I get this way sometimes," Martha confessed to her companion. But no case of jitters could keep Martha from giving her message. She didn't try to

convince others that she was important.

She traveled and ate as cheaply as possible, spending little on herself. Martha spoke to crowds around the world. Her talks were simple and given with love.

Her message went straight to listeners' hearts. They were touched by her warmth and the light in her eyes. At times, her talks ended with the audience surrounding her.

Royal Response

Even kings and queens were charmed by the woman who arrived bearing simple gifts—a sprig of flowers, a bit of candy—along with the greatest gift, the words of Bahá'u'lláh, the Bahá'í Faith's Founder. One of those was Queen Marie of Romania.

Determined to meet the queen, Martha sent her a letter and a book about the Faith. The queen read the book that night and invited Martha to visit the next day, January 30, 1926. "I believe these Teachings are the solution for the world's problems today!" she told Martha. Later, the queen urged all people to "search out" the teachings and let them stir their hearts as they had hers. Martha would meet eight times with the queen, the first monarch to become a Bahá'í.

Martha circled the globe four times, studying new languages and speaking before audiences more educated and powerful than herself.

She passed away in Hawaii on September 28, 1939, while planning yet more travels. Shoghi Effendi, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's grandson, named her a Hand of the Cause of God* and said that her efforts were "the nearest approach to the example set by 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself . . . in the course of His journeys throughout the West."