

From *Tahirih in History: Perspectives on Qurratu'l-'Ayn from East and West*, ed. Sabir Afaqi (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2004); electronic publication with the permission of the publisher.

QOURRÈT-OUL-AÏNE

by A.-L.-M. Nicolas

trans. Peter Terry

[Chapters IV (pp. 273-287) and XII (pp. 446-452) from *Seyyed Ali Mohammed dit le Bab* (Paris: Dujarric, 1905), translated by Peter Terry]

I

The Council of Bedesht¹

Molla Saléh had, among his children a girl, Zarrine Tadj — the crown of gold — who called attention to herself from earliest childhood. Instead of devoting herself to games and amusements like her peers did, she spent hours listening to the theological discourses of her parents. Her lively intelligence quickly assimilated all of Islamic science, without floundering, and soon she took part in discussing the most obscure and esoteric points. The traditions [*hadith*] held no secrets for her. Her reputation was quickly established in the town, and her fellow townsmen considered her a true prodigy.

A prodigy in knowledge, but also a prodigy in beauty: for the child grew up and became a young girl whose face gleamed with such radiant beauty that she was given the surname of Qourrèt-oul-Aïne — which M. de Gobineau translates “Consolation of the Eyes.”

Her brother, Abd oul Vahhab Qasvini, who inherited the learning and reputation of his father, has himself stated, even though he remained (in appearance at least) a Muslim: “All of us, her brothers, her cousins, we did not dare to speak in her presence, so much did her knowledge intimidate us; and if we hazarded to express an hypothesis on a contested point of doctrine, she demonstrated to us that we were taking the wrong route in such a clear, precise, and peremptory fashion that we retired, all confused.”

She attended the classes of her father and of her uncle in the same room as two or three hundred students, but concealed behind a curtain; and more than once, she refuted the explanations that these two elders proposed for this or that question.

Her reputation became immense among the learned of Persia and the highest ulama consented to adopt some of her hypotheses and her opinions. This fact is even more remarkable inasmuch as the Shiite Muslim religion has placed woman almost at the rank of the animal: she does not have a soul and exists only for reproduction.

While still very young, she married the son of her uncle, Mohammed Qasvini, who was the Imam Jomé [leader of the Friday prayers] of the town and, afterwards, she went to Kerbélah where she assisted in the lessons of Seyyed Kazem Rechti. She shared the ideas of her teacher with passion, ideas which she knew of previously, Qasvine having become a center for the Cheikhies [Shaykhí] doctrines.

She possessed, as we will see, an ardent temperament, a clear and lucid intelligence, a marvellous composure, and an indomitable courage.

All these qualities together were to bring her to occupy herself with the Báb, whom she heard about after her return to Qasvine. What she learned about him interested her so intensely that she entered into correspondence with the Reformer and, soon convinced by him, she made her conversion known to one and all. (1848)

The scandal was immense and the clergy were dismayed. In vain her husband, her father, and her brothers counselled her to renounce this dangerous foolishness, but she remained inflexible and loudly proclaimed her faith.

It is perfectly untrue that she, from this moment, rejected the usage of the veil and that she appeared in assemblies with an uncovered face. So complete a rejection of all the most sacred laws would have been promptly and severely punished. Prejudice is too strongly rooted in the spirit of the Persians for her to have dared to do so, and it would have served no purpose. Furthermore, up until the time of the council of Bedesht, the command for those who knew the secret thoughts of the Báb was to announce that the promises contained in the Qoran were being realized, that the hidden Imam was manifest, and that he was going to submit the whole world to the religion of Islam. It would have been a singular aberration to act in contradiction to the laws which one announced as deemed to be so soon triumphant.

These two reasons suffice to demonstrate the error which M. de Gobineau made. Furthermore, we will soon see where and how Qourrèt-oul-Aïne appeared for the first time before a crowd with an uncovered face.

In any case, the scandal went on, growing every day; and it was with a sigh of relief that her family accepted the proposition she made to them that she return to Kerbélah. It was hoped on the one hand that her absence would make her forget [her folly], and on the other that the majesty of the sacred shrines would cause her to return to her senses. But it was in vain that she accomplished the pilgrimage; for, in the midst of the illustrious tombs of the martyrs [of Shí'í Islam — the Imam 'Alí

and the Imam Husayn], she remained as resolute a Bábí as she had been in Qasvine. So before her attitudes caused some grave consequence in the very center of fanatical Shiism, her family believed they must affect her return.

Hadji Mohammed Hammami was chosen for this mission, along with several servants from the house. This is how he described his journey:

I arrived in Kerbélah and immediately went to see Qourrèt-oul-Aïne. I gave to her the letters that had been entrusted to me by her father, her husband, and her uncle. I begged her to obey the orders that they contained, and I ended up convincing her by my insistence. I prepared a conveyance for her, and we set off. Some Bábís accompanied her until we reached a forest of date palms which was close by, where they took leave of her.

I was very happy to have succeeded in my mission, and I thought only of the joy of returning. Suddenly, after having passed the said forest, I was joined by some riders who approached the conveyance, respectfully saluted Qourrèt-oul-Aïne, and took up escorting her.

When we arrived at the way station, it was they who installed her at a certain distance from us and who devoted themselves to her service.

It was like this all through the journey. When we arrived in Qasvine, the riders dispersed in all directions.

I conducted Qourrèt-oul-Aïne to the house of her father and told him what I had seen. Hadji Molla Taghi who was present at the meeting, showed himself to be very irritated, and ordered all the servants to prevent this woman from leaving the house under any circumstances, and to permit no one without an authorization expressly from himself, to visit her.

These orders given, he visited the traveler and hoped by persuasion to convince her of the error in which she was engaged. He could not do so, and furious before her calm and conviction, he could not restrain himself from cursing the Bab and showering him with insults.

Qourrèt-oul-Aïne looked him in the face then and said to him: “Alas for you, for I see your mouth filled with blood.”

After that, she was closely watched and spent her days walking in what now became her prison, singing psalms and sacred songs.

One night, armed men forced entry into the house. The prisoner received them, had them enter, and delivered a sermon that lasted for more than two hours. When this became known, Hadji Molla Taghi was informed. Giving free reign to his temper, he insulted his niece, and beat her.

Thereafter, excitement grew every day in the town. The Babis of Qasvine could not repress their enthusiasm, and these signs of happiness further increased the fury of the Muslims. There was nothing but heated debates, mutual insults, and the renewal of troubles without ceasing. Qourrèt-oul-Aïne, always in correspondence with the Bab, had just received an order from him to go forth and evangelize the provinces.

Seyyed Ali Mohammed was at this time imprisoned in [the fortress of] Makou. This precipitated further events, for it became urgent to take counsel. The imprisonment of the Prophet could be the prelude to a bloody end. Already in various places, isolated Babis had been massacred and persecution was always menacing. If they did not take immediate and forceful measures, they risked seeing all this agitation collapse as it was being born, and the new religion drowned in rivers of blood. And this very religion, was it not now finally necessary to unveil it before the eyes of its followers, so they might follow it without doubting what it was in reality and where it could lead them? Was it not necessary to finally consider a means of removing the Bab from the painful and dangerous situation in which he was found? All of these questions were the subject of an active correspondence among the various Babi leaders, and it was precisely in order to find the solution that it was decided to convene a general convocation, which we have called the Council of Bedesht.

It was therefore necessary that Qourrèt-oul-Aïne find a way to leave Qasvine. But before this she had to punish the heretic who had dared, in her presence, to proffer a curse upon the Bab.

Molla Mohammed Taghi had a habit of going out before sunrise to say his morning prayers in the mosque. There he saw nobody but the servants charged with the upkeep of the temple and two or three beggars. That morning, he had just entered the mosque when an individual struck him in the mouth with the blow of a lance, fulfilling thus the prediction which his niece had made. Five or six other assassins threw themselves upon him and dispatched him with blows of saber and knife. This deed accomplished, each left for his own place, leaving the victim where he fell.

The tumult was frightful in the town. This bold sacrilege made the hearts of all the Muslims tremble. They solemnly proclaimed Molla Mohammed Taghi a martyr of the Islamic faith and loudly called for the punishment of the guilty ones. The governor arrested all those whom he suspected of being Babis, and he referred the matter immediately to Mohammed Chah. In the meantime, an Arab, Cheikh Saleh, declared himself to be solely responsible for the assassination.

Qourrèt-oul-Aïne was closely watched, but the investigation was long, and one lovely night the Babis came and took her away. She was mounted on a horse and the troop left the town through a breach in the city walls. Naieb Quli, who afterwards became the agent of the shah, tells of this escape thus:

I was among the servants who accompanied this woman. As soon as we had left the town, we abandoned the main road and followed that of Zah'ra of Qasvine. We arrived by traveling in this way at Enderman, near the Chahzadeh Abd Oul Azim. Having arrived

there, she gave me a letter and commanded that I carry it to Téhéran, to the house of Mirza Bouzourg Nouri,² where I was to give it to Mirza Housseïn Ali.³

I arrived in the town early in the morning and remitted my letter into the hands of its destined recipient. He ordered me to return to Endermane and to announce that he would arrive there himself in the afternoon. In fact, about five hours before sunset, Mirza Housseïn Ali, accompanied by some riders holding saddled horses by the reins, came to join us. Qourrèt-oul-Aïne retired to change clothes and mounted a horse whose bridle was made of gold. We each one of us mounted one of the horses that had been brought, and we set off, one hour before sunset. Two hours later, we were in the house of Mirza Housseïn Ali. We remained there for several days during which Qourrèt-oul-Aïne received numerous visitors.

About five days after our arrival, I was surprised to see that there was only one single servant left in the house. He served me tea and announced that a horse was saddled for me in the stable. He told me to go to Mesker Abad, near Sourkh Eçar. I arrived in this village before lunch, and I saw lots of people and numerous tents. Qourrèt-oul-Aïne summoned me, and asked me if I wanted to convert to Babism. Upon my refusal, she gave me several handfuls coins and said to me: “Tonight you are still my guest, but tomorrow morning you will leave for Téhéran.”

After dinner she left with her people, and the next morning I returned to the town with some servants who did not wish to follow her. I learned afterwards that she had gone to Khorassan.

This was, in fact, the route that she took to arrive at Bedesht where she found herself with Molla Husseïn Bouchrouyéhi — the Bab el-Bab, Mirza Housseïn Ali, Qouddous and others, who had arrived before her.

These persons discussed amongst themselves certain obscure points over which they were not in accord. They chose as arbitrator the one who had just arrived, who gave her responses in writing, which all accepted.

The imprisonment of the Bab was the object of the first consultation. They agreed to organize a pilgrimage to the mountain of Makou. Their missionaries were to spread out over the land, recruit as many pilgrims as possible, and as soon as their troop was formed present themselves at the prison of the Prophet. Even though no history says it, even though oral tradition is mute on this subject, it is certain that — in the final analysis — this was to result in the liberation of the prisoner. I certainly hope that it was decided in principle not to make recourse to violence, but I am convinced that this mass of pilgrims would have waited for the outcome of events and, if the Government had decided upon the death of the Bab, they would have opposed the execution of the sentence by force. Perhaps they even had the idea that, in case too many troops should attack them, they could easily escape into Russia.

Their action on behalf of the prisoner thus decided, the new doctrine was examined in all its aspects. They were all unanimous on this point: that Seyyèd Ali Mohammed was a new prophet greater than those who had preceded him and that, even as Jesus had abrogated the law of Moses, even as Muhammad had abrogated that of Christ, the Bab had abrogated the Qoran, which [doctrine] was represented by this formula — “God has manifested himself and the earlier religion is abrogated; the old law is uprooted; we must disseminate the new among men.”

Qourrèt-oul-Aïne declared then that it was right and fair to inform the ignorant Babis of this fundamental teaching.⁴ Qouddous observed that their followers were sincere Muslims, that their natural fanaticism had been even more excited by their predictions, and that it was actually dangerous to disillusion them.

Qourrèt-oul-Aïne replied that to postpone the explanations [of these teachings] until later would only delay the inevitable; that furthermore the danger would only grow with the exaltation of their fellows, and that it would be better — before a drop of blood be spilled — to be assured of the conscious devotion of those who wished to follow them.

Would there be any? This was the heart of the question, and all besides Qourrèt-oul-Aïne were of the view that, at the first words they would hear pronounced against the Qoran, their adherents would be appalled by the blasphemy, and would cover them with maledictions and insults; and that might not be the worst of it. They could not imagine without trembling the rage that would follow the shock [in the hearts of] these unknowing Babis. Perhaps for the first time, they understood the responsibility they had in having sought to attract human beings to such a terrible adventure without making them aware of what they were engaged in.

Things were at great risk of turning out badly when Qourrèt-oul-Aïne thought of a strategy.

To understand this plan, one must know that the Shiite religion condemns every apostate [from the religion of Islam] to death without remission. No excuse is accepted, and even if the transgressor returns to Islam, he cannot stop or suspend the sentence pronounced against him by the law. But it is not so for women. They are just reproducing animals; they are not responsible for their acts. Also, if one of them happens to change religion, she cannot do so except unconsciously — one must then reason with her, instruct her, make her understand her crime, and bring her back to Islam. Her return to her original religion assures forgiveness for her mistake. Only if she persists in her deadly error, it is then, and only then, that she merits death.

It was by stressing this distinction of Shi’i law that Qourrèt-oul-Aïne convinced her coreligionists to attempt the adventure. “We will convene,” she said, “all those who have come here with us. Qouddous will not attend the gathering. When our faithful ones have assembled, I will unveil all the truth to them. I will make them understand the manifestation of God and the abrogation of the Qoran. If these men accept, we will have attained our aim without difficulty; if on the contrary they are scandalized and revolt, they will certainly go to inform the only one of their leaders who did not take part in the meeting. Qouddous then will renounce me, will declare me an unbeliever, and will try to make me return to Islam. This will take some days, during which we will have time to calm the

excitement and convince our people. If we are not successful, then I will appear to accept the arguments of Qouddous, and I will pretend to return to the Qoran.”

After having maturely reflected upon this proposition, the leaders understood that it was the best means to arrange things. As it was necessary to make this proclamation, it was better to make it immediately and in a fashion that would not compromise them all.

All these dispositions having been taken and determined, the Babis were summoned to a sermon, as was done every day in the camp. Everyone knew that Her Highness the Pure [Táhirih] was to speak. Everyone came to the meeting except Qouddous, who found a way to make his absence and explained it by an illness which obliged him to take to bed.

Qourrèt-oul-Aïne had, conforming to the usage she had adopted, caused a light piece of cloth to be suspended from two cables like a curtain. It was always from behind this veil that she spoke. That day she dressed in her most beautiful garments and her richest adornments. She ordered that her two maidservants stand a little behind her, armed with scissors. At a sign that she would make, the two of them together were to cut the cords holding the cloth, which would fall in a single motion.

She began forthwith her lecture: the adventure she had planned, the very natural emotion which she felt, the hope of success, the fear of a failure excited her to such a point that never before had she been so eloquent or so persuasive. The listeners, charmed by her voice and by her talent, listened to her with profound attention — no one moved. At the moment when she pronounced these words: “You must today all know that God has manifested himself and the Qoran is abrogated: a new book has descended to us from heaven, a new law is given to us,” she made the agreed upon sign. The maidservants obeyed her, the curtain fell, and resplendent she appeared to the eyes of her listeners. She returned for one second to her maidservants as if to ask them to take account of what had happened, and immediately she faced the crowd: “What does this accident matter?” she said. “This has no importance — am I not your sister and are you not my brothers? And what sister has ever hidden her face from her brother?”

But the effect produced was overwhelming. Some hid their faces with their hands, others prostrated themselves, others enveloped their heads in their garments so as not to see the face of Her Highness the Pure One. If looking at the face of an unknown woman who passes in the street is a serious sin, what a crime was this for one's eyes to rest upon the saint that she was?

She tried to convince them, walking among them and calling them her brothers, telling them that the Qoran being abrogated, and the law which ordained that women be veiled existed no longer. But she could not succeed. Some, very few, looked at her. Mirza Husseïn Ali Beha, understanding that the scene had lasted long enough and that it might turn towards the tragic, threw his overcoat, called an *aba*, over the head of Qourrèt-oul-Aïne and conducted her to his tent.

The meeting ended in the midst of an indescribable tumult. Insults poured down upon a woman so indecent as to show herself in this way, with an uncovered face. Some said that she had suddenly gone mad, others that it was a provocation, others — very few — took her defense. The discussion

intensified to the point of violence, and in the end it was decided to go inform Qouddous of the scandal which had just happened. Only those who had defended her installed themselves around the tent of Her Highness Tahéré.

Qouddous received the malcontents and had them describe the affair in minutest detail. He could thus see for himself the horror that was inspired in these fanatical Muslims by the act of Qourrèt-oul-Aïne. Not wishing to deflate the emotions which had exploded with such force, and thinking to reserve this in the future, he declared: "The fact in itself is incomprehensible and confuses me. If in acting and in speaking as she has Her Highness Tahéré has really expressed her conviction, she is an unbeliever and you must hereafter consider her such. But perhaps there is in all of this a hidden significance."

As the speaker had hoped, these last words fully preoccupied the imagination of those who had heard them. They sought with passion the inner purpose, the mysterious significance [of these events], and from then on, a basis for discussion was found.

Every day Qouddous drove deeper into the spirit of his adherents the doubt which he had so deftly seeded. "Certainly," he said, "the veil is more a custom than a law; the wives of the Prophet did not veil themselves except after an Arab had the impudence to wish to buy Aïcha from Muhammad, and one can think that the commands of the Qoran concern only these sacred wives. But this custom is venerable in its antiquity and, furthermore, protects the modesty of our wives and the sanctity of the family. Certainly, if the contrary usage established itself, men would get used to it very quickly and, from thereon, they would respect those with whom it is forbidden for them to have commerce. This might even improve the debauched customs of our large cities. But how dare anyone say that the Qoran is abrogated and wish to substitute a new law? The Mahdi must explain all that is obscure in the Divine Book, but he must amplify it, not destroy it. Qourrèt-oul-Aïne is a heretic."

Having thus reconciled them to so unexpected an act of Qourrèt-oul-Aïne, he deftly insisted on the obscurities and the inconsequentialities of the Qoran, all the while renewing every day her excommunication. When he thought he had sufficiently prepared them, he informed his associates to attempt a final test.

Qourrèt-oul-Aïne did not remain inactive. When she was informed of the excommunication pronounced against her, she assembled those who had remained faithful to her, whose number had increased since the earliest days. She explained to them the new doctrine, demonstrated to them the divinity of the Bab, and excommunicated in his turn Qouddous and his adherents. Her unmatched talent won over the conviction of those whom the marvelous beauty of her face did not predispose altogether in her favor. When Qouddous let her know that the hour had come to try a last assault, she asked for two men who were ready to die. Two young men presented themselves, and she gave them her instructions.

They went to the enemy camp and arrived there at the moment when Qouddous made his daily address. They interrupted him and shouted: "Her Highness the Pure reproaches you for saying bad things about her without daring to debate her in person. She thus challenges you to come into our camp and to dispute with her according to reason and true arguments, and this publicly. That if you triumph

over her, she will acknowledge this and will obey you; if, on the contrary, it is she who triumphs over you, it will be for you to incline yourself towards her and to submit.”

“No,” said Qouddous, “This woman has apostatized her religion: I want neither to see her, nor to speak with her.”

“Certainly,” they replied, “we will not bring back a response so offensive to her. Therefore, here are the three alternatives that she has left us: either we must bring you to her willingly; or, if you refuse, bring her your head; or, if we do not succeed, ourselves be killed in seeking to succeed in this. These are the orders which we have received, and we are here to execute them. So then, choose: Come, be killed, or kill us.”

Qouddous turned towards his companions and said to them: “It is you that must reply: if you say to me *kill*, I will kill; if you say *die*, I will die; if you say *go*, I will go.”

There was a lively discussion, but the decision was not long in coming; it was formulated thus: “Go find Qourrèt-oul-Aïne and speak with her; it is better than killing or being killed.”

Qouddous then arose and, followed by all his people, went to the camp of Tahéré. When all the people had taken their places, our heroine came to sit opposite her adversary and the discussion immediately began. By deft citations from the Qoran and the *hadith*, she successfully demonstrated what the task of the hidden Imam was to be: that he was charged with speaking all the divine truths ordained in the name of God, and that before the grandeur of this role the stations of all the prophets gone before, including Muhammad, were completely effaced.

Defeated, Qouddous arose and proclaimed loudly: “That which she says is the Truth, and what she did it well done.” He then turned towards her and asked her forgiveness for his errors and his blasphemies. All his people imitated him, and the new religion was thus founded in the midst of universal enthusiasm and happiness.

After some days given to joy and mutual congratulations, the leaders separated in order to search for pilgrims [willing to go to Máku]. Mollah Houssein Buchrouyehi retraced his way towards the interior of Khorassan. Qouddous directed himself towards Mazanderan. And Qourrèt-oul-Aïne, after having been escorted for some days by the apostle of Mazanderan [Bahá’u’lláh], separated from him and seems to have directed herself to Qasvine, passing of course through Nour [Bahá’u’lláh’s home region]. We will return to her around 1266.

II

The Execution of Qourrèt-oul-Aïne

It is certain that Qourrèt-oul-Aïne returned to Qasvine,⁵ because it was then that she was arrested and taken to Téhéran where she was imprisoned in the house of Mahmoud Khan, the Qalenter [mayor].

She remained there for a long period, receiving numerous visits from men as well as women. She impressed the latter by demonstrating the abject role that Islam had assigned to them, and she captivated them in showing the liberty and respect accorded to them by the new religion. There were, as a result, many domestic scenes from which the husbands did not always exit victorious.

These discussions could have lasted for a long time if Mirza Agha Khan Nouri had not been appointed the Sadr A'azam. The prime minister gave the order to Hadji Molla Mirza Mohammed Endermani and Hadji Molla Ali Kéni to interview her in order to examine her convictions. There were seven meetings between the two men and the prisoner. She discoursed with passion and affirmed that the Bab was the promised and awaited Imam. Her interviewers remarked to her that, according to the prophecies, the promised Imam must come from [the heavenly cities of] Djab oul Qa and Djab oul Sa. She replied to them with vehemence that this was not true, that these were false traditions, that these two cities did not exist, and that this was only a superstition worthy of an ailing mind. She proclaimed the new doctrine, bringing forth the truth, but they continued to clash with her citing the same argument referring to Djab oul Qa.

Impatient with them, she said, "The arguments that you give are those of an ignorant and stupid child. When will you stop these insanities, these lies? When will you lift your eyes to the Sun of Reality?"

Infuriated by this blasphemy, Hadji Molla Ali arose and addressed his companion, saying: "What would it profit us to have more discussions with an infidel?" They returned to the home of one of them and drew up the verdict that, affirming her apostasy and her refusal to make penitence, condemned her to death in the name of the Qoran!

One of the women, a Muslim maidservant in the house of the Qalenter, describes the sojourn of Qourrèt-oul-Aïne there in this fashion:

The prisoner's habit was to rise at the time of the séhèr (a little before dawn), while everyone else was still asleep. She made her ablutions, all the while softly chanting prayers and spontaneous praises of God. During the day she did not leave the room in which she was installed, which she kept in a state of scrupulous cleanliness. Nobody was admitted to her presence without having first obtained her permission. Alone, she was always carefully dressed and held herself as if she was in the midst of assembled company without letting anything go. Sometimes she arose and walked in her room while praying. The women who came to see her, after having received clearance, were all captivated by the charm of her beauty and her eloquence; they were won over and transported in their admiration of her.

While she was a prisoner, the marriage of the son of the Qalenter was held at the house. All the wives of the important personages in the town were naturally invited. But, no matter how much the family tried to entertain the guests with all the diversions that are encountered in these circumstances, with great cries the guests called for Qourrèt-oul-

Aïne to be brought in. Finally she presented herself, and she began to speak. Musicians and dancers were sent in, but forgetting all the sweet things of which they are so fond, the women had eyes and attention only for Qourrèt-oul-Aïne.

Finally, one night she left her room, as she was accustomed to doing. I was awake and I saw her go into the courtyard where she washed her whole body. Then she returned to her room, where she changed into all white clothing. She perfumed herself while singing, and I had never seen her so content and so joyous. She spoke to all the women of the household and begged them to pardon the discomforts which her presence had brought upon them and the wrongs she had committed towards them. She acted, in a word, exactly like someone who is going to undertake a great journey. We were all surprised, asking ourselves what this meant. The evening having arrived, she wrapped herself in a tchagehour. Her joy, in acting this way was so strange that we began to weep, for we loved her on account of her goodness and her inexhaustible benevolence. But she smiled at us and said: 'Tonight I am going to undertake a great, a very great voyage.' At that moment, there was a knock on the door to the street. 'Run and open it,' she said. 'It is me they have come for.'

It was the Qalenter who entered. He came into her room and said to her: 'Come, madam, for you have been summoned.'

'Yes,' she said, 'I know where I will be taken; I know what will be done to me. But, remember well, a day will come when your master will in turn kill you.' (This prediction was realized in short order.)

She thus went out with the Qalenter, dressed as she was. We did not know where they were taking her and did not learn until the next day that she had been executed.

One of the nephews of the Qalenter gives the following details on the death of Qourrèt-oul-Aïne:

When the juridical sentence of Hadji Molla Mirza Mohammed Endermi and Hadji Molla Ali Kéni, condemning to death the Babi apostle was submitted to the shah, His Majesty ordained her execution. The secret was carefully guarded and was known only to two government functionaries. Already some days before, my uncle had given me the order to attentively watch the police and by frequent patrols to assure myself that the policemen were actually at their posts. An ordinance was published forbidding the inhabitants of the city from remaining in the streets later than three hours after sunset, the hour after which it was forbidden for anyone to leave his dwelling. That night I received the order to establish a cordon of policemen from the house of the Qalenter to the garden of Ilkhani. I made excuses to my men as best I could and ordered them to fire upon whoever would present himself who was not of our administration. Four hours after sunset, the Qalenter asked if all the measures had been taken and, based on the assurances I gave him, he

conducted me to his house. He entered alone into the *enderoun* [women's quarters] and returned soon afterwards accompanied by *Qourrèt-oul-Aïne*. He gave me a sealed envelope saying: "Conduct this woman to the garden of *Ilkhani* and deliver the proof of her receipt to *Aziz Khan Serdar*."

A horse was brought and *Qourrèt-oul-Aïne* was mounted upon it. But, afraid that the *Babis* might have been alerted to what was happening, I threw my coat over her in such a way that she was taken to be a man. With a well-armed escort, we set off through the streets. Notwithstanding the precautions I had taken and the large number of troops that I had with me, I am convinced that, had we been attacked, all of them would have fled, so much did the *Babis* inspire terror.

I let out a sigh of relief when we entered the garden. I had my prisoner placed in a room, which was found under the corridor of the entryway, and ordered my soldiers to carefully guard the door while I went to the first floor to find the *serdar*.

He was alone and awaited me. After having read the letter that I gave him, he asked me, "Nobody knows who you have brought here?" "Nobody," said I, "and now that I have fulfilled my mission, give me the release form for my prisoner." "No," he said, "you must assist in the execution, and I will then give you your receipt."

He summoned a Turkish domestic manservant in his employ, a young man with a very handsome face. The *serdar* gave him many compliments and said to him, "You have been in my service for a long time, and I have been mistaken not to take note of you. Nevertheless, I love you well and I want to reward you. Take these twenty pieces of gold, spend them as you wish, and soon I will find you a good job. But while waiting, take this silk handkerchief and go down with the officer. He will conduct you into a room where you will find a young infidel woman who turns away the believers from the path of Muhammad. Strangle her with this handkerchief—in this way you will render a great service to God, and I will recompense you generously.

The valet responded and left with me. I conducted him to the room in which I had left my prisoner. I found her prostrated and praying. The young man approached her to execute the order he had received. Then she raised her head, looked him straight in the eye, and said to him, "Young man! It would be unworthy for your hand to soil itself with this murder."

I don't know what happened in the soul of this domestic servant, but he ran off like a madman. I ran after him, and we arrived together before the *serdar* to whom he declared that it was impossible for him to accomplish the act that had been assigned to him. "I will lose your protection," he said. "I will lose myself. Do with me whatever you wish, but I will not touch this woman."

Aziz Khan chased him off and thought for a few minutes. He then called for one of his horsemen who, being punished for his bad behaviour, had been made to serve in the kitchen. When this man entered, he chided him amiably: “So, son of a dog, bandit, philanderer, I hope that your chastisement has made you reflect and that you will be wiser in the future. You should be disgusted now to engage in follies, and I think you are worthy of winning back my affection. It must have very much bothered you to go so long without being able to drink spirits. Here, take a large glass and drink, I give you leave.” He then gave him a new handkerchief and repeated the order that he had previously given to the young Turk.

We arrived together in the room. As soon as he entered, he attacked Qourrèt-oul-Aïne, put the handkerchief around her neck and pulled it several times. Unable to breathe, the woman fell to the ground. Then he put a knee on her back and pulled on the handkerchief with all his might. As he was roused up and afraid, he did not allow her time to exhale. He took her up in his arms in a swoon and carried her behind the wall of the icehouse. There was a well there into which he pitched her alive. We called some men, and we hastily filled up the well, because dawn was approaching.

Opposite the British Legation and the Embassy of Turkey, there was a fairly large yard which disappeared after 1893. Towards the middle of this yard, but alongside the street, there were five or six trees that marked the spot where the Babi heroine died, because at that time the garden of Ilkhani extended to that place.

Upon my return [to Tehran], in 1898, the yard had disappeared, invaded by modern construction, and I do not know whether the new owner honoured those trees, which a pious hand had planted.⁶

Notes

Translated from A.-L.-M. Nicolas, *Seyyèd Ali Mohammed dit le Bâb* (Paris: Dujarric & Cie, Editeurs, 1905) pp. 273-87 and pp. 446-52.

¹ Translator — The transliterations of Persian and Arabic words employed by A.-L.-M. Nicolas have been preserved in this translation, to render it as close as possible to the French version, which sought to reproduce the actual pronunciation by Persians in his time; however, Bedecht has been changed to Bedesht, as “ch” is pronounced differently in English than in French. Also, a familiar transliteration for Bahá’u’lláh has been used in place of the original *Beha Oullah*. The comments [in brackets] were inserted into the text by the publisher in order to facilitate the intelligibility of the text.

² Translator – Father of Mirza Husayn-‘Ali (Bahá’u’lláh).

³ A.-L.-M. Nicolas — The future Bahá’u’lláh.

-
- ⁴ A.-L.-M. Nicolas – Bouchrouyéhi joined thus with Hadji Mollah Ali and Quourrèt-oul-Aïne who had left Khorassan before him. They had private meetings where they occupied themselves with the details of the religion. Finally, they lifted curtain and Quourrèt oul Aïne ascended the dais and took off her veil, crying forth: “O my brothers, these very days are days of the interregnum. There are no more obligations. These prayers, these fasts signify nothing any more. When the Bab will have conquered the seven climates and reunited all the religions, he will bring a new doctrine and will propagate his Qoran among men, and all obligations he then will indicate, one will have to accomplish. But for the moment, do not make useless difficulties [for yourselves]. All women are common [property] for you, common for you are all good things.” When she was heard thus to speak, those who were Muslims abandoned Babism, but the others who possessed nothing good, no woman, abandoned Islam. (*Mutanabiyyin*)
- ⁵ A.-L.-M. Nicolas — According to Mirza Djani, she went to Barfourouch, and from there with Soubh-i-Ezel to Nour.
- ⁶ A.-L.-M. Nicolas — I don’t know to whom M. de Gobineau makes allusion when he speaks on page 313 of his work of a woman named “Djenab Motcherreh.” I that that Qourrèt-oul-Aïne, Djenab Tahérèh, left poems extremely valued by the Persians.