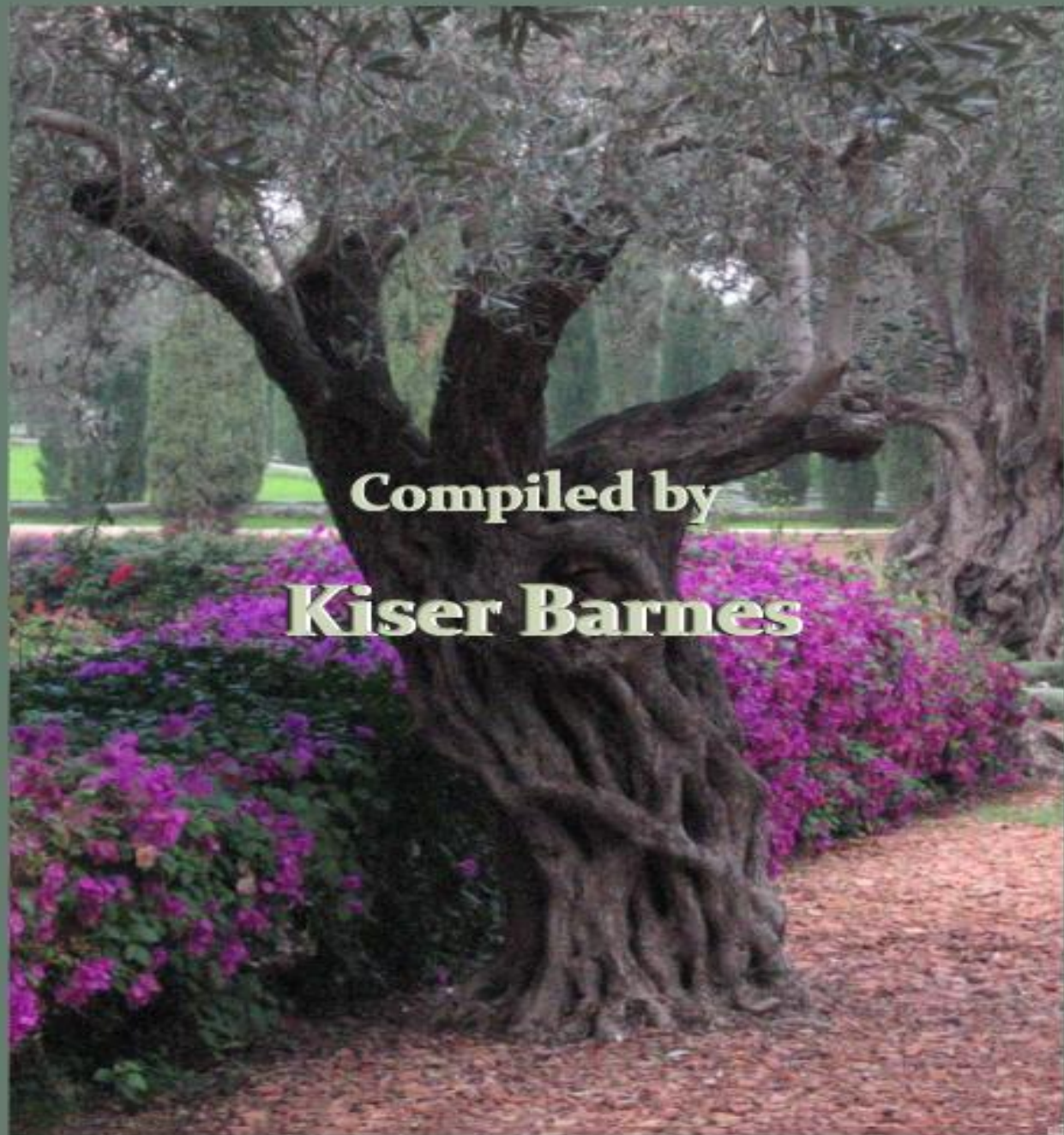


Stories of
BAHÁ'U'LLÁH



Compiled by
Kiser Barnes

and
Some Notable Believers

Stories of
BAHÁ'U'LLÁH
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Some Notable Believers

*(Extracted from Adib Taherzadeh's
The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Volumes 1-4)*

Compiled by

Kiser Barnes

Bahá'í Publishing Trust
New Delhi, India

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STORIES OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

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INTRODUCTION

The stories in this book are about Bahá'u'lláh, the latest in a succession of Prophets or Manifestations of God, and of early believers who were transformed by His Teachings into new creatures. They have been selected from the scores of stories embedded in the four-volume study, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, by the late Adib Taherzadeh, a prolific author, and one of the greatest Bahá'í storytellers of our time. The subject matter of this precious collection is of engrossing interest. It allows the powerful accounts themselves, which are cast in the series of volumes in a supportive role, to carry one into the heart of the youngest world religion with a sense of a spiritual reality that is both profound and startling.

The series of events presented in the volumes tell the story of religion alive once again, in such a way that the reader can appreciate it is the most potent influence in the human venture for the advancement of civilization. They tell of mankind's spiritual strivings, with the same charm of direction and quickening effect as do the parables and episodes in all the literature about the prophets' advent. These stories belong to mankind, bound as they are with the reality that "The supreme and most important happening in the human world is the manifestation of God".¹

They cry out for a place of their own which would make them easy to get at. And not just for the few million adherents of the Bahá'í Faith

today, but for people of all ages and backgrounds everywhere, who have as yet not felt the spirit of the age unleashed by the Bahá'í Writings. From mud huts in Africa to skyscrapers in Singapore, there is a real hunger on the part of Bahá'ís everywhere for stories about Bahá'u'lláh and the early days of the Cause. This longing merely expresses, it seems, a yearning latent in the hearts of the people of the world. For humanity will come to know it is a precious thing to have stories of Bahá'u'lláh, since He belongs to that select group of universal Prophets chosen by God, "the Author of all Manifestations".

In selecting the stories for this book, two objectives were pursued: to make accounts that touch upon the most penetrating events in the life of Bahá'u'lláh readily available for believers in every field of Bahá'í endeavour, and to include the less familiar narratives, which in many cases were translated by Mr. Taherzadeh, of early believers who had attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. The Persian memoirs, notes and manuscripts, which the consummate storyteller drew upon, are generally unknown in the West.

The book begins with stories of Bahá'u'lláh. Here will be found accounts of His kinship with Abraham; the signs of greatness that appeared in His youth; how He championed the cause of the common people, the poor and the weak, against the oppressive caste nobility of His day; His stepping forth into a new religious life as a follower of the Báb; the divine summons in the Síyáh-Chál prison of Tíhrán, where, "Wrapped in its stygian gloom, breathing its fetid air, numbed by its humid and icy atmosphere, His feet in stocks, His neck weighed down by a mighty chain, surrounded by criminals and miscreants of the worst order"², He received the first stirrings of God's Revelation within His soul; and the

public declaration of His station as the Supreme Manifestation of God, which settled the destiny of mankind for ages.

The first section continues with historic descriptions of the revelation of the Word of God, when sacred utterances streamed forth from the Blessed Beauty “as in a copious rain”. The circumstances surrounding the revelation of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, The Most Holy Book, and the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, the Book of Certitude, one of the most outstanding treasures from the ocean of His Revelation, are presented.

This first section also contains stories of His exiles and banishments from Írán to Baghdád, to Constantinople, to Adrianople and then to ‘Akká. The fierceness of the opposition, the relentless persecutions, the severity of the cruelties and the nature and purpose of the sufferings heaped upon Him by a host of powerful enemies, as well as accounts of His majesty and glory are told. These valuable narratives show once again that the Prophets have a wonderful way of triumphing over the most determined political and religious adversaries. In this section, too, will be found the episode of “The Most Great Separation” between Bahá’u’lláh and Mírzá Yahyá, His half-brother and the arch-breaker of the Covenant of the Báb. Here it is especially affirmed once more before a distracted world that the Almighty will not put up forever with corruption, injustices and disunity.

The portion of the section about Bahá’u’lláh’s Ministry in ‘Akká is quite comprehensive. Here may be read the accounts of His banishment to the Most Great Prison; how it fulfilled the prophecy of the arrival of the Lord of Hosts; and the astonishing acceptance of the Faith by influential members of the hostile population. The martyrdom is told of Mírzá Mihdí, His youngest son, along with episodes of Bahá’u’lláh’s life

outside the prison at the Mansions of Mazra‘ih and Bahjí. And finally, the riveting story of that “supreme affliction”, that “shattering calamity”, His Ascension in the vicinity of ‘Akká in 1892 is presented.

The second section contains the great stories of men and women who stood before the world with a fresh love for the Creator that Bahá’u’lláh had awakened in them. It is the story once again retold of the spiritual development of receptive souls and of believers who turned their hearts to God with splendid renunciation. They are stories which illustrate the transforming impact the Revelation had on some notable believers whose lives stand as a testament to Bahá’u’lláh’s lasting and far-reaching influence.

The first accounts in this section take us back to Persia. They are of the four Hands of the Cause of God appointed by Bahá’u’lláh—Ḥájí Mullá ‘Alí-Akbar (Ḥájí Ákhúnd), Mírzá ‘Alí-Muḥammad (Ibn-i-Aṣḍaq), Mírzá Muḥammad Taqí (Ibn-i-Abhar), and Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥasan-i-Adíb. Accounts of such Apostles of Bahá’u’lláh as Badí’, Ḥájí Amín, Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl, Varqá, Nabíl-i-Akbar, Samandar and others come next. These episodes are followed by other stories, such as those of Khadíjih-Bagum and Fátimih-Bagum, the wife and mother of the Báb; Ḥakím Masíḥ, the first Jewish believer; Fáris, thought to be the first Christian to believe; Suhráb-i-Púr-Kávús and Kay-Khusraw-i-Khudádád, the first Zoroastrian believers; Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-‘Alí, who took the Faith to Sub-Saharan Africa; Sulaymán Khán, who carried the Faith to India; Khatún Ján, a companion and protector of Táhiriḥ; Fátimih-Bagum, who daringly pleaded for her imprisoned co-religionists; and of Ḥájí Muḥammad-Táhír-i-Málmírí, the great teacher of the Faith and Adib Taherzadeh’s father. The reader will see from these stories that a religion of intense

self-effort and transformation has once again come into the world. And that these new stories for mankind show that in Persia a people were raised up who were the first of this age to become dedicated to the complete historical realization of prophetic ideals.

If the stories in the four-volume series about the Scriptures of the Bahá'í Faith were fortunate in their subject matter, it would be doubly fortunate that their presentation here, by themselves or as a companion to the work, may whet the appetite to dig deeper into that unique survey of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings. While remaining faithful to Mr. Taherzadeh's writing style, and retaining some of his personal views, the stories here are in most instances abridged or adapted versions. It is hoped that they may be useful to believers, especially those who are utilizing the art of storytelling in their services. Like the grand old accounts of the great world religions, these stories show a "Faith re-arisen upon the world, bringing a New Day, shedding a new glory, calling men from sleep to a new life".³

NOTES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When Mr. Adib Taherzadeh was told the Ife Bahá'í Writers' Association (Nigeria), of which I was a member, wished to bring some of the stories in his series of volumes, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, which we felt were somewhat difficult for the ordinary believer to get at, together in one manuscript for believers of all ages and cultures, he warmly encouraged the effort. I would like to thank Olu Aladetan and Rosemary Mills-Tetty, the other members of the defunct Writers' Association who caught the vision that authentic stories about the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith must become more readily available. These devoted friends inspired me to persevere. I wish to acknowledge with sincere thanks George Ronald, Publisher and Mrs. Lesley Taherzadeh for permitting me to quote extensively from *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh* volumes.

To Paige Fowler, Ailsa Hedley and Shahla Maghzi, I extend my heartfelt gratitude. Over different periods of assistance, they generously gave of their time and energies in reading, evaluating, editing and arranging the stories.

The words in these stories which are attributed to Bahá'u'lláh cannot be regarded as direct quotations. They constitute for the most part recollections of His companions, pilgrims and others who had attained His presence. The locations of the events in the volumes are listed in the reference section of this book.

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STORIES OF
BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

*That which beseemeth you is the love of God, and the love of Him Who is the Manifestation of His Essence, and the observance of whatsoever He chooseth to prescribe unto you, did ye but know it.*⁴

Bahá'u'lláh

This is the foundation of the belief of the people of Bahá...‘His Holiness, the Exalted One (the Báb), is the Manifestation of the Unity and Oneness of God and the Forerunner of the Ancient Beauty. His Holiness the Abhá Beauty...is the Supreme Manifestation of God and the Dayspring of His Most Divine Essence. All others are servants unto Him and do His bidding.’
5

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

1. He was heralded by the Báb, Himself a Manifestation of God

Never before in history, until the appearance of the Báb, has one Manifestation of God heralded another Who was His contemporary. The Báb was two years younger than Bahá'u'lláh, and They lived about five hundred miles apart, the Báb in Shíráz and Bahá'u'lláh in Tíhrán.

The Báb was an independent Manifestation of God Who inaugurated the Bábí Dispensation, abrogated the laws of Islám, formulated new laws and, like other Prophets, founded an independent religion which spread very rapidly throughout Persia and ‘Iráq. His advent closed, on the one hand, the Prophetic Cycle in which several Manifestations of

God had appeared and given their visions and prophecies concerning the Day of God, and opened, on the other, the Cycle of Fulfilment whose Central Figure is Bahá'u'lláh. He has been acclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh as the 'King of the Messengers', the 'Point round Whom the realities of the Prophets and Messengers revolve', and One Whose 'rank excelleth that of all the Prophets', Whose 'Revelation transcendeth the comprehension and understanding of all their chosen ones'. His Mission was to prepare men for the coming of Bahá'u'lláh, the Supreme Manifestation of God, Whose advent has been promised in all the sacred Scriptures of the past.

The station of Bahá'u'lláh is so exalted that He was heralded by the Báb, Himself a Manifestation of God, Who paved the way for His coming, established a mighty Covenant concerning His Revelation and reared a new race of men worthy to meet Him and embrace His Cause.

The announcement of 'Him Whom God shall make manifest', which the Báb gave to His followers, was firm and irrevocable, more clear and emphatic than that given by any Manifestation of God before Him. In past Dispensations the signs of the coming of the next Manifestation were always wrapped in mystery and expressed in allegorical terms. But the Báb gave no such signs. Rather, He indicated that the glory of 'Him Whom God shall make manifest' would be so strikingly apparent that there would be no need of signs. Yet none could recognize Him through his own knowledge, He warned, nor judge Him by his own standards, nor adduce proofs to establish His authenticity, for He would be exalted above the recognition of His servants and known only through Himself and His Revelation. The sole testimony to His truth would be that which He Himself would reveal, and not that which men

might produce. In one of His Writings extolling Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb affirmed that 'Certitude itself is ashamed to be called upon to certify His truth ... and Testimony itself is ashamed to testify unto Him'.

Throughout His ministry, the Báb continually emphasized the pre-eminence of the Supreme Manifestation Who would follow Him. In one of His prayers communing with Bahá'u'lláh, He revealed these words:

Exalted art Thou, O my Lord the Omnipotent! How puny and contemptible my word and all that pertaineth unto me appear unless they be related to Thy great glory. Grant that through the assistance of Thy grace whatsoever pertaineth unto me may be acceptable in Thy sight.

In another passage He wrote:

Of all the tributes I have paid to Him Who is to come after Me, the greatest is this, My written confession, that no words of Mine can adequately describe Him, nor can any reference to Him in My Book, the Bayán, do justice to His Cause.

Because He was a Manifestation of God, the Báb had true knowledge of the station of Bahá'u'lláh, a knowledge which is beyond the reach of all humanity. His vision of the omnipotence and grandeur of the One who was destined to follow Him was so majestic that no mortal mind can hope to attain it. It is for this reason that the utterances of the Báb in praise of Bahá'u'lláh stagger the imagination of those who are not in some degree aware of His exalted station.

Anxious to protect Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb forbade His followers to engage in heated argument and controversy, as practised among the divines of Islám, which could only result in contention and discord among them.

He urged them to be chaste in their writings and courteous in their speech, especially when expressing their views or adducing proofs during discussion. His purpose in these exhortations was to ensure that the words or deeds of His followers would in no way give offence to the person of 'Him Whom God shall make manifest'. Moreover, as a token of respect for the Supreme Manifestation of God, Who would be exalted above any question His creatures might put to Him, He admonished His followers not to ask Him any questions except those worthy of His station. But Bahá'u'lláh annulled this prohibition in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* and permitted the believers freely to question Him.

2. Bahá'u'lláh—A descendant of Abraham and Zoroaster, promoting the Cause of the Báb; The first intimations of His station

Bahá'u'lláh, Whose name was Mírzá Ḥusayn-'Alí, was a nobleman of the province of Núr in Persia. He was descended from Zoroaster and the Sásáníyán kings of Persia, thereby fulfilling certain traditions that the great Redeemer of mankind would be of pure Persian lineage.

Bahá'u'lláh was also descended from Abraham through his third wife, Katurah, thus uniting in His own person two branches of the Aryan and Semitic religions. He was born in Tíhrán in 1817, and His father, Mírzá 'Abbás, known in royal circles as Mírzá Buzurg, was at the court of the Sháh.

Almost nine years before His imprisonment in the Síyáh-Chál, Bahá'u'lláh received a message from the Báb, Who revealed He was the Herald of that Universal Manifestation of God foretold by the revealed religions of the world. Bahá'u'lláh arose to promote the Cause of the

Báb, at first among His own relatives and close friends in the province of Núr, and then to others. As a result, several of them accepted the Báb and became active in making His Message known. Among these were some of Bahá'u'lláh's uncles, aunts, brothers, sisters and cousins, as well as certain notables and divines of Núr, a number of whom were later martyred.

To the noble qualities and virtues which had distinguished Bahá'u'lláh's life prior to the birth of the Bábí Revelation were now added the strength and radiance of a new Faith. Thus, inevitably He attracted a great deal of public attention. His innate knowledge, His insight and wisdom, His indomitable faith, His open championship of the Báb, His irresistible eloquence when expounding the newly-born Faith to groups of learned divines and the public, together with His resourcefulness, His penetrating judgement, and His unobtrusive yet effective leadership of the Bábí community during the imprisonment of the Báb and after His martyrdom—all these brought Him the adoration and respect of that community. So highly did His fellow-disciples esteem Him that they refrained from mentioning His name and instead referred to Him in the plural as 'They'. At the conference of Badasht He was designated Jináb-i-Bahá (His Honour Bahá), an appellation which the pen of the Báb later confirmed.

The veneration shown to Him, coupled with His open proclamation of the Cause of the Báb, aroused the opposition of enemies who had already persecuted Him on various occasions and now awaited only an excuse, provided by the attempt on the life of Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh by a few irresponsible Bábís, to imprison Him in the Síyáh-Chál. He was arrested and forced to walk before royal horsemen and at their pace from

Níyávarán to Tíhrán, a distance of about fifteen miles, in the burning heat of a summer day, barefoot and in chains. To further humiliate Him they removed His hat which in those days was the very symbol of a man's dignity.

The Síyáh-Chál (Black Pit) was no ordinary prison, but a huge underground pit which once had served as a reservoir for one of the public baths of the city, and had only one entrance. It was situated in the heart of Tíhrán close to a palace of the Sháh and adjacent to the Sabzih-Maydán, the scene of execution of the Seven Martyrs of Tíhrán. This dungeon was occupied by many prisoners, some of whom were without clothes or bedding. Its atmosphere was humid and dark, its air fetid and filled with a loathsome smell, its ground damp and littered with filth, and these conditions were matched by the brutality of the guards and officials towards the Bábí victims who were chained together in that dismal place. The notorious chains of Qará-Guhar and Salásil, one of which was placed around Bahá'u'lláh's neck at all times, cut through His flesh and left their marks on His blessed body till the end of His life. They were so heavy that a special wooden fork was provided to support their weight (Qará-Guhar, heavier than Salásil, weighed about seventeen 'man'—fifty-one kilos).

Through the kindness of one of the prison officials who was friendly towards Bahá'u'lláh, His eldest son 'Abdu'l-Bahá, then nine years of age, was taken one day to visit His Father at the Síyáh-Chál. He had descended only half-way down the steps when Bahá'u'lláh caught sight of Him and ordered that the child be taken out immediately. He was permitted to wait in the prison yard until noon when the prisoners were allowed an hour of fresh air. When 'Abdu'l-Bahá saw His Father, He

was in chains and tied to His nephew, Mírzá Maḥmúd. He walked with great difficulty, His beard and hair were unkempt, His neck bruised and swollen from the pressure of a heavy steel collar, and His back was bent with the weight of the chain. On witnessing this sight ‘Abdu’l-Bahá fainted and was carried home, unconscious.

While breathing the foul air of the Síyáh-Chál, with His feet in stocks and His head weighed down by the mighty chain, Bahá’u’lláh received, as attested by Him in His *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, the first intimations of His station as the Supreme Manifestation of God—He Whose appearance had been foretold by the Prophets of old in such terms as the ‘reincarnation of Krishna’, the ‘fifth Buddha’, the ‘Sháh Bahrám’, the ‘Lord of Hosts’, the Christ returned ‘in the glory of the Father’, the ‘Spirit of God’, and by the Báb as ‘Him Whom God shall make manifest’. These are Bahá’u’lláh’s words describing this initial experience of the ‘Most Great Spirit’ stirring within His soul:

During the days I lay in the prison of Tíhrán, though the galling weight of the chains and the stench-filled air allowed Me but little sleep, still in those infrequent moments of slumber I felt as if something flowed from the crown of My head over My breast, even as a mighty torrent that precipitateth itself upon the earth from the summit of a lofty mountain. Every limb of My body would, as a result, be set afire. At such moments My tongue recited what no man could bear to hear.

While Bahá’u’lláh lay in the prison of Tíhrán, Náṣiri’d-Dín Sháh ordered his Prime Minister, Mírzá Áqá Khán, to send troops to the province of Núr and arrest the followers of the Báb in that area. The Prime Minister—who also came from Núr and was related to Bahá’u’lláh by the

marriage of his niece to Mírzá Muḥammad-Ḥasan, His half-brother—made efforts to protect Bahá'u'lláh's relatives in Núr, but failed.

Bahá'u'lláh's properties were confiscated by the Sháh and His house in Núr was razed to the ground. Even the Prime Minister took advantage of the situation and, without recompense, transferred the deeds of some of Bahá'u'lláh's properties into his own name. The luxurious house of Bahá'u'lláh in Tíhrán was plundered and its valuable furnishings were removed. Some unique articles, together with many more of great value, fell into the hands of the Prime Minister. Among them were part of a Tablet, inscribed on leather by the hand of Imám 'Alí, successor to Muḥammad, which was over a thousand years old and known to be priceless, and a rare manuscript of the poems of Ḥáfiz written by a celebrated calligrapher.

Although most of the Bábís were taken from the prison, one by one, and martyred in the adjoining market square of Sabzih-Maydán, Bahá'u'lláh's life was providentially spared. After four months He was released, but was ordered to leave Persia within a month.

3. He was a kind father to the downtrodden, the poor and needy

In Persia in the nineteenth century most people were illiterate, under the domination of the clergy whom they blindly obeyed. There were two educated classes, divines and government officials, plus a small number of others. Only the religious leaders and divines (the first class), however, could be called learned.

The second class included government officials, clerks and some merchants, who received a certain elementary education in their

childhood. This consisted of reading, writing, calligraphy, the study of the *Qur'án* and the works of some famous Persian poets. All this was usually accomplished within the span of a few years, after which many of them would marry, as was customary, in their late teens.

It was to this class that Bahá'u'lláh belonged. His father was a senior dignitary at the court of the Sháh and famous as a calligrapher—an art which carried with it great prestige in royal circles. Bahá'u'lláh as a child received a simple education for a brief period of time. Like His father, He excelled in calligraphy. Some specimens of His exquisite handwriting are kept in the International Bahá'í Archives on Mount Carmel.

When Bahá'u'lláh was about eighteen years old He married a lady of noble birth, Ásíyih Khánum. She bore Him seven children of whom only three survived—'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahíyyih Khánum, the Greatest Holy Leaf, and Mírzá Mihdí, the Purest Branch.

In those days government officials enjoyed all the benefits of a totalitarian régime, and were aggressive and arrogant. These men could, by their presence, terrify innocent people. It was for this reason that many who met Bahá'u'lláh in His youth were surprised to see One Whose father had held a high position in the court of the Sháh, Who Himself stood high in the esteem of all the courtiers, especially the Prime Minister, but Who, although He was expected to lead an overbearing and tyrannical life was, on the contrary, the embodiment of love and compassion. To the orphan He was a kind father, to the downtrodden a helper, and to the poor and needy a haven and a refuge. These heavenly qualities manifested by Him from childhood made Him

the object of adoration and love among people who heard His name and came in touch with His vibrant personality.

4. From His early youth signs of greatness were apparent

A story which demonstrates that Bahá'u'lláh always defended the Prophets of the past is the following recounted by Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl. It relates to the time when Bahá'u'lláh was a youth in Tīhrán, before the birth of the Bábí Faith:

Although He [Bahá'u'lláh] had not entered any of the schools in Persia and had not acquired knowledge in any institutions of learning, nevertheless from His early youth signs of greatness and majesty, of good judgement and keen intelligence were strikingly apparent in His countenance. When He was in their gatherings, great men of learning were unable to speak because of His vigorous and awe-inspiring utterances which have always been the early signs of the truth of the Manifestations of God.

A leading figure of the Muslim community recounted the following story. 'One day I was present at a meeting in which a number of state dignitaries and high-ranking government personalities were gathered in the presence of the celebrated religious philosopher, Mírzá Nazar-'Alí-i-Hakím-i-Qazvíní. He was a leader and a spiritual guide to Muḥammad-Sháh of the Qájár dynasty, and one to whom all the sages and devout mystics of the time turned for guidance.

'This famous philosopher, talking in terms of knowledge current at the time, was expounding the subject of man's attainment to the highest level of spiritual perfection. He talked in this vein until the

dormant passion of egotism and sensuality was aroused in him, and it then took over the reins of speech. He diverted from his topic and turned his attention to his own accomplishments. Speaking of his own attainments and perfections, he said: “For example, if at this moment my servant arrived and informed me that Jesus Christ was standing outside the door and was asking for permission to attain my presence, I would find myself in no need of Him and would not deign to meet Him.”

‘A few of those present remained silent and the majority, as is customary among flatterers, agreed with him. Bahá’u’lláh was present at that meeting. Such a disparaging remark about Christ prompted Him to voice his objection. He could not bear to hear the Manifestation of God treated with insolence. His face showing signs of emotion, Bahá’u’lláh asked the learned philosopher whether he would be willing to answer a question. When he agreed, Bahá’u’lláh said, “In spite of the fact that the King is an ardent admirer of yours, suppose that right now the chief executioner arrived here with ten soldiers to arrest you and take you to the King. Would you, in these circumstances, be frightened and disturbed or would you respond to his orders calmly and without fear?” After a little pause the learned man replied, “To be honest, I should be very frightened, would not be able to remain calm and even my tongue would be powerless to move.” Bahá’u’lláh said, “A person who is in such a weak position ought not to utter such a claim!” Those present were awestruck at the firmness of His speech and amazed by the strength of His argument.’

5. He always defended the Prophets of the past

The following story demonstrates Bahá'u'lláh's noble vision of the Prophets and how he held them in high esteem and honour. He would not tolerate it if anyone belittled their station or spoke of them in a discourteous manner. The story concerns Mírzá Taqí Khán-i-Amír Nizám, who for many years was Persia's Prime Minister during the reign of Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh. It was he who ordered the execution of the Báb, and committed great atrocities against the Bábí community.

'Abdu'l-Bahá recounts that one day Mírzá Taqí Khán attended a gathering (presumably in Tíhrán) at which Bahá'u'lláh was present. He was referring to some verses of the *Qur'án* in a disrespectful manner and mockingly questioned the truth of the following verse:

He knoweth that which is on the dry land and in the sea; there falleth no leaf, but he knoweth it; neither is there a single grain in the dark parts of the earth, neither a green thing, nor a dry thing, but it is written in the perspicuous book. (*Qur'án* , vi. 59)

Bahá'u'lláh's immediate response was to disapprove the attitude of Mírzá Taqí Khán and to affirm that the above verse was undoubtedly true. When he asked for further explanation, Bahá'u'lláh told him that it meant that the *Qur'án* was the repository of the Word of God; it contained various subjects such as history, commentaries, prophecies and so on. Within its pages were enshrined verities of great significance and indeed one might discover that everything was mentioned in this Book.

'Am I mentioned in it?' asked Mírzá Taqí Khán arrogantly.

'Yes, you are,' was Bahá'u'lláh's prompt response.

'Am I alluded to or referred to clearly by name?' he asked.

'Clearly by name,' Bahá'u'lláh stated.

'It is strange', Mírzá Taqí Khán retorted with some degree of sarcasm, 'that I have not yet found a reference to myself in the *Qur'án*!'

'The reference to your name', Bahá'u'lláh said, 'is in this verse: "She said, I fly for refuge unto the merciful from thee if thou art Taqí"' (Naturally, those who rendered the *Qur'án* into English have translated the word 'Taqí', which means 'fearful'.)

On hearing such a disparaging reference attributed to him by Bahá'u'lláh, Mírzá Taqí Khán became extremely angry, but did not reveal his anger. Instead he made a further attempt to ridicule the verse of the *Qur'án* in question and discredit Bahá'u'lláh. He asked, 'What about my father, Qurbán, is there a reference to him in the *Qur'án* also?'

'Yes, there is,' Bahá'u'lláh affirmed.

'Is he alluded to or referred to by name?' he asked.

'He is referred to by name in this verse,' responded Bahá'u'lláh, "'... come unto us with the Qurbán (Translated as 'sacrifice') consumed by fire.'"

6. He directed the transfer of the remains of the Báb

The remains of the Báb and His disciple Mullá Muḥammad-'Alí-i-Zunúzí who was martyred with Him were taken to the edge of the moat outside the gate of the city of Tabríz on the evening of the day of martyrdom, 9 July 1850, and ten sentinels were posted to guard them.

Only a few hours after his arrival in Tabríz, Hájí Sulaymán Khán, with the help of the Mayor of the city (who was a personal friend) succeeded in planning his strategy for the rescue of the remains of the Báb. The Mayor called on the venturous Hájí Alláh-yár, a courageous and daring man, to render this service to his friend. In the middle of the night Hájí Alláh-yár took some of his men accompanied by two Bábís from Milán (a town in the province of Ádhirbáyján) to the spot where the remains of the Báb and His disciple lay. The soldiers guarding the bodies did not dare to challenge the Hájí's men, and in the morning they had no choice but to announce that the wild beasts at night had devoured the bodies!

The sacred remains were wrapped in the 'aba (cloak worn by Persian men at the time) of one of the believers and delivered to Hájí Sulaymán Khán who with the help of H̄usayn-i-Mílání took them to the silk factory of Hájí Aḥmad, a believer of Milán. For two days the remains were left in the silk factory. They were wrapped in shrouds and hidden under the bales of silk. They were then placed in a special casket and transferred to another place of safety. Hájí Sulaymán Khán communicated the news to Bahá'u'lláh and awaited His instructions.

It is important to realize that the arrival of Hájí Sulaymán Khán at Tabríz was an act of providence directed by Bahá'u'lláh Himself. As soon as He was informed that the martyrdom of the Báb was imminent, Bahá'u'lláh had summoned Hájí Sulaymán Khán to His presence and instructed him to proceed immediately and speedily to Tabríz.

Now, when the latest news reached Him, He directed His faithful brother, Mírzá Músá (entitled Áqáy-i-Kalím) to send a trusted person to Tabríz and bring the casket to Tíhrán. This was done and the sacred remains were taken via Zanján (where they were kept for one night) to

Ṭíhrán. The casket arrived at a time when Bahá'u'lláh had departed from Ṭíhrán for Karbilá. According to His instructions the casket containing the remains of the Báb and His companion was delivered to Áqáy-i-Kalím who placed it in the Shrine of Imám-Zádih Ḥasan (a Muslim shrine in Ṭíhrán) in a safe location. The only other person who was involved in this mission was Mullá 'Abdu'l-Karím-i-Qazvíní, known as Mírzá Aḥmad.

From there they transferred it after some time to the house of Ḥájí Sulaymán Khán in Ṭíhrán; later it was placed in the Shrine of Imám-Zádih Ma'súm. It was concealed in a northern corner of the shrine and a wall was constructed in front of it.

The sacred casket remained concealed in the Shrine until AH 1284 (1867–68). From Adrianople, Bahá'u'lláh directed Mírzá Áqá of Káshán (entitled Muníb) to transfer the remains to another place. Áqáy-i-Kalím briefed him as to its exact location, but Muníb failed to find it.

Bahá'u'lláh then addressed a Tablet to Mullá 'Alí-Akbar-i-Shahmírzádí, known as Ḥájí Ákhúnd (he was appointed later as a Hand of the Cause of God), and Jamál-i-Burújjirdí, instructing them to remove the casket immediately. The details of its whereabouts were again furnished by Áqáy-i-Kalím.

The transfer of the remains proved to be an act of providence directed by Bahá'u'lláh. For very soon after, the custodians of the Shrine of Imám-Zádih Ma'súm carried out extensive reconstruction work which would have definitely revealed the secret of that precious trust reposing behind one of the walls of the Shrine. Such a discovery could have had disastrous consequences for the protection of the sacred remains.

Hájí Ákhúnd and Jamál succeeded in finding the casket and removing it from the Shrine of Imám-Zádih Ma'şúm. They carried it to a village outside Tíhrán in which stands the celebrated shrine of Sháh 'Abdu'l-'Azím. Finding conditions unsatisfactory for depositing the casket in that area, they moved towards the village of Chashmih-'Alí. On the way they came upon the Mosque of Máshá'u'lláh, an old and dilapidated building which was not commonly visited by people. They waited there until sunset. Hájí Ákhúnd opened the casket and in the dim twilight gazed upon the remains of the Martyr-Prophet of the Faith. What feelings of awe, reverence and grief must have descended upon his soul and what emotions must have erupted in his heart at that time, no one can tell. But knowing the degree of his faith and devotion to the Cause and the vibrant nature of his personality we can imagine the impact of such a mighty event on his soul. It is said that he found a flower which had dried up placed on the old shroud, probably a symbol of living devotion by Hájí Sulaymán Khán.

Hájí Ákhúnd and Jamál wrapped yet another silken shroud around the remains and closed the casket. They placed it in a niche in a wall and bricked it up with old bricks which could be found in plenty in that dilapidated building.

That night the two returned to a village nearby. The next morning they decided to visit the place on their way to the capital. Upon arrival at the spot they discovered to their consternation that someone had opened up the section of the wall and broken the casket. But soon they were relieved to find that the remains were untouched. This was the work of some men who must have seen the two placing the casket inside the old mosque and thought it was treasure of some sort, leaving it alone when

they discovered it to be otherwise. Immediately Hájí Ákhúnd and Jamál closed the casket and took it away. Both were riding on donkeys; one of the men held the casket in front of him and in this way proceeded towards Tíhrán.

In those days guards were placed at the gates of the cities and used to search people entering. Hájí Ákhúnd and Jamál were extremely worried in case the officials might attempt to open the casket. But Providence played its part in this episode. As the two approached the city gate, a severe gale unexpectedly arose, heavy rain began to pour and gusty winds blew hard in every direction. Crowds of people ran through the city gate to find shelter and with them went Hájí Ákhúnd and Jamál.

They took the sacred casket to the home of Mírzá Hasan-i-Vazír, a believer of note. Hájí Ákhúnd rented that house and lived in it as a custodian of that sacred trust. For about fourteen months it was kept in that house, but after some time its whereabouts were no longer a secret. Believers used to come from all over the country to visit the house and pray at the threshold of the room in which it was kept. Alarmed at the possible consequences of this discovery, Hájí Ákhúnd reported the matter to Bahá'u'lláh who by that time was imprisoned in the barracks of 'Akká. On receiving the news, Bahá'u'lláh ordered His Trustee Hájí Sháh-Muhammad to proceed immediately to Tíhrán and remove the holy remains to another place of safety.

Soon after this Hájí Sháh-Muhammad arrived in Tíhrán. He handed to Hájí Ákhúnd a Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh addressed to him.

In that Tablet Bahá'u'lláh had directed Hájí Ákhúnd to hand over the sacred casket to Hájí Sháh-Muhammad. The emphasis was on secrecy and Bahá'u'lláh had bidden Hájí Ákhúnd not to question the bearer of

that sacred trust as to the place of its safe keeping. Once Ḥájí Ákhúnd had consigned the casket to the Trustee of Bahá'u'lláh, he did not even look to see in which direction it was carried.

Ḥájí Sháh-Muḥammad, assisted by one of the believers, succeeded in burying the casket beneath the inner sanctuary of the Shrine of Imám Zádih Zayd, where it remained for about sixteen years.

In the year AH 1301 (1884–85) Bahá'u'lláh instructed Mírzá Asadu'lláh-i-Işfahání, one of the believers resident in Tíhrán, to remove the remains from Imám Zádih Zayd and take it to another place of safety. The exact location of the casket was charted by Bahá'u'lláh and the chart sent to Mírzá Asadu'lláh. It must be borne in mind here that the act of burying a casket in an Islámic shrine without anyone seeing it, and later removing it in similar circumstances, called for great wisdom, caution and courage. There is no doubt that all those who were charged by Bahá'u'lláh to carry out this important mission were assisted by the invisible forces of divine Providence. Mírzá Asadu'lláh succeeded in removing the casket from the Shrine. He first took it to his own house and kept it there for some time, then he transferred it to other localities including the houses of Ḥusayn-'Alí-i-Işfahání (entitled Núr) and Muḥammad Karím-i-Aṭṭár where it remained hidden till the year AH 1316 (1899).

The manner in which the remains of the Báb were taken to these homes is interesting. It demonstrates that those who were charged with their protection carried out their task with great caution and wisdom.

7. He directed the rescue of Táhiriḥ

Almost coinciding with the challenge which Ṭáhirih delivered to Mullá Muḥammad (her cousin and husband) concerning her release from the imprisonment imposed upon her as a result of the murder of her father-in-law by a non-Bábí, Bahá'u'lláh in Ṭíhrán summoned to His presence Muḥammad-Hadí-i-Farhádí, who had fled from Qazvín, and directed him to return there immediately and carry out the rescue operation which He had planned. This is how Nabíl describes this episode:

Muḥammad-Ḥádí was charged to deliver a sealed letter to his wife, Khátún Ján, and instruct her to proceed, in the guise of a beggar, to the house where Ṭáhirih was confined; to deliver the letter into her hands; to wait awhile at the entrance of her house until she should join her, and then to hasten with her and commit her to his care. 'As soon as Ṭáhirih has joined you,' Bahá'u'lláh urged the emissary, 'start immediately for Ṭíhrán. This very night, I shall despatch to the neighbourhood of the gate of Qazvín an attendant, with three horses, that you will take with you and station at a place that you will appoint outside the walls of Qazvín. You will conduct Ṭáhirih to that spot, will mount the horses, and will, by an unfrequented route, endeavour to reach at daybreak the outskirts of the capital. As soon as the gates are opened, you must enter the city and proceed immediately to My house. You should exercise the utmost caution lest her identity be disclosed. The Almighty will assuredly guide your steps and will surround you with His unfailing protection.'

The manner in which Muḥammad-Ḥádí carried out the rescue operation with the help of Khátún Ján is described in detail by Shaykh Kázim-i-Samandar:

Ṭáhirih was confined in the house of her father. Mullá Muḥammad, her cousin and husband, was trying to poison her but had no access. None of the friends, with the exception of the eldest daughter of the late Ḥájí Asadu'lláh [Khátún Ján] who was truly devoted to her, was able to communicate with her. Khátún Ján contrived several plans and disguised herself in various forms. Posing as a washer-woman carrying her washing or appearing as a beggar, she managed to contact Ṭáhirih and take food to her. This was important since Ṭáhirih was taking precautions about the food which was given to her in the house, and consequently she was living under difficult circumstances.

Áqá Ḥádí, ... had fled to Ṭíhrán. There he visited Vahíd whom he knew from earlier days. Vahíd took him to the Blessed Beauty and introduced him. Thereupon Bahá'u'lláh wrote a letter to Ṭáhirih and directed Áqá Ḥádí to rescue her and bring her to Ṭíhrán. Áqá Ḥádí returned to Qazvín in disguise. He managed with the help of his wife ... who used her usual methods of contact, to hand the letter to her. After reading the letter Ṭáhirih indicated that she would shortly come out of the house. She joined them about one hour later. Áqá Ḥádí and his wife immediately took Ṭáhirih to the house of their neighbour, a certain Áqá Ḥasan-i-Najjár [a carpenter] who was a friend, a reliable confidant and one whom nobody suspected of harbouring her.

Shortly afterwards, her relatives discovered that Ṭáhirih was missing. They searched everywhere in vain and, when the news spread, the theological students and groups of ruffians crowded the streets and created a great upheaval again ...

That night Áqá Ḥádí, with the help of a certain Áqá Qulí, (who was not a Bábí, but a faithful friend of Áqá Ḥádí and his confidant; a tradesman in the bazaar who understood the secret nature of the mission, and accepted to carry it out in spite of the dangers it entailed) conducted Ṭáhirih out of the city through the gate of Sháhzádh Ḥusayn. They mounted the horses which were kept ready for them in the abattoir outside the city wall and ... went to Ṭíhrán. At first they arrived in the gardens of Imámzádh Ḥasan. Áqá Qulí was to look after the horses while Ṭáhirih was resting, and Áqá Ḥádí had gone to the city to give the news of their whereabouts. In the meantime, a certain Karbilá'í Ḥasan, a merchant of Qazvín, had heard the news of Ṭáhirih's arrival and went there. Áqá Qulí, who did not know that this man was a friend, warned him not to come in, but the man came in with a smile. Áqá Qulí used force and twice smote him on the face. Ṭáhirih, who realized what had happened, ordered Áqá Qulí to stop. She called both of them to her, took some fruits from Karbilá'í Ḥasan and shared them with Áqá Qulí. When night fell, several horsemen arrived and with full honours escorted Ṭáhirih with her companions to the house of the Ancient Beauty [Bahá'u'lláh]. When the time for sleeping arrived, they showed Áqá Qulí to his bed. But because he was dressed in rags, he refused at first to sleep in such a luxurious bed. He pointed to his torn clothes and said to Ṭáhirih: 'I don't dare to get into this bed while dressed in this way.' But she persuaded him to sleep and assured him that God would soon provide him with a bed as luxurious as that.

The following day, Ṭáhirih, accompanied by Áqá Ḥádí, went to a village outside Ṭíhrán where a number of believers resided.

Bahá'u'lláh left home and soon returned with a porter who brought

in a sack full of coins and emptied it on the floor. He called for a saddle-bag to be brought in and asked Áqá Qulí to place the coins within it. But He instructed him to place the gold coins in one side of the bag and the silver in the other. Áqá Qulí, however, decided to put the gold in the bottom and the silver on the top! When Bahá'u'lláh saw this, He said 'Why did you do this? We told you to put the gold on one side and the silver on the other.' 'I did it,' replied Áqá Qulí, 'for the simple reason that if some coins should fall, either during the journey or when placing the saddle-bag on the horse or taking it off, they would be silver and not gold.' Bahá'u'lláh did not pursue the matter any further. He gave the bag and its key to Áqá Qulí who placed it on the horse's back and mounted. Bahá'u'lláh mounted His horse and, followed by Áqá Qulí, went to the village where Ṭáhirih was staying. Bahá'u'lláh and other guests spent the night there.

In the morning, Ṭáhirih awakened Áqá Qulí, told him to arise for the purpose of saying his prayers, and informed him that he was not fortunate enough to remain there and the time had come for him to return to his native Qazvín, otherwise, great troubles would arise thereto. Ṭáhirih was seated under the shadow of a tree writing letters. Áqá Qulí, having finished his prayers, came forward and stood beside Áqá Hádí in front of Ṭáhirih. At this time Bahá'u'lláh arrived, and Ṭáhirih finished writing. Bahá'u'lláh asked for the bag of money. He opened it and called Áqá Qulí to come forward. He then told him to hold out the hem of his garment, as He was about to pour some coins into it. As an act of courtesy and politeness Áqá Qulí hesitated to comply with Bahá'u'lláh's orders. Thereupon, his friend Áqá Hádí persuaded him to obey Bahá'u'lláh's instructions. So Áqá Qulí held out the hem of his garment and Bahá'u'lláh pushed His own

hand nine times into the bag and emptied each handful onto his outstretched cloak. As Bahá'u'lláh was pouring the coins out, Áqá Qulí for one brief moment wished in his heart that the coins were gold! Bahá'u'lláh instantly responded by saying: 'We give you enough to take you to Qazvín, the money for your wedding feast will reach you later. In any case it is your own fault, you put the gold in the bottom!'

Áqá Qulí went home and delivered the letters of Ṭáhirih. If he had arrived any later there would have been great trouble, as his kinsmen had already become suspicious and were making enquiries about him from Khátún Ján. The faithfulness with which Áqá Qulí served Ṭáhirih pleased Bahá'u'lláh and, as He had promised him, soon after God bestowed upon him wealth and position. He became one of the influential men in Qazvín. Later, he went to live in Ṭíhrán and till the end of his life he remained a friend of the Faith.

8. He unveiled the glory of the new Faith to Fátimih-Bagum, the mother of the Báb

In the *Kitáb-i-Badí'*, Bahá'u'lláh extols the virtues and exalts the station of Fátimih-Bagum, the mother of the Báb, and his wife Khadíjih-Bagum. He designates them both as the Khayru'n-Nisá' (The Most Virtuous among Women) and enjoins on His loved ones to venerate and honour them.

The martyrdoms of the Báb and His illustrious uncle in 1850 brought immense grief and shock to all the members of the family. The Báb's mother, Fátimih-Bagum, could no longer bear to live in her home in Shíráz and took up residence in far-off 'Iráq, in the city of Karbilá, to be

near the Shrine of Imám Ḥusayn. Until the time Bahá'u'lláh arrived in 'Iráq after His imprisonment in the Síyáh-Chál, and established contact with her, she remained unaware of the significance of the Message of the Báb. It was Bahá'u'lláh Who arranged for Ḥájí Siyyid Javád-i-Karbilá'í, one of the distinguished early disciples of the Báb, to meet with the mother of the Báb and demonstrate to her the truth of the mission of her illustrious Son. This contact established by Bahá'u'lláh brought forth a wonderful response. Her soul was quickened and the glory of the new Faith of God founded by the Báb was unveiled before her eyes. Later she recognized the station of Bahá'u'lláh, embraced His Faith and remained steadfast until the end of her life.

9. He assented to the requests of Khadíjih-Bagum, the wife of the Báb

Khadíjih-Bagum was of noble lineage. She was a paternal cousin of the mother of the Báb. Her marriage with the Báb took place almost two years before His declaration. Through the purity of her heart, Khadíjih-Bagum recognized the station of her beloved Husband and acknowledged the truth of His Cause in the early days of His ministry. She was an eye-witness to that transforming power which emanated from the person of the Báb, a power which revolutionized the lives and conduct of His early disciples and the heroes of the Bábi Faith.

Concerning Khadíjih-Bagum, Nabíl -i-A'zam writes in his narrative:

The wife of the Báb, unlike His mother, perceived at the earliest dawn of His Revelation the glory and uniqueness of His Mission, and felt from the very beginning the intensity of its force. No one except Ṭáhirih, among the women of her generation, surpassed her in the

spontaneous character of her devotion nor excelled the fervour of her faith. To her the Báb confided the secret of His future sufferings, and unfolded to her eyes the significance of the events that were to transpire in His Day. He bade her not to divulge this secret to His mother and counselled her to be patient and resigned to the will of God. He entrusted her with a special prayer, revealed and written by Himself, the reading of which, He assured her, would remove her difficulties and lighten the burden of her woes. 'In the hour of your perplexity,' He directed her, 'recite this prayer ere you go to sleep. I Myself will appear to you and will banish your anxiety.' Faithful to His advice, every time she turned to Him in prayer, the light of His unfailing guidance illumined her path and resolved her problems.

Khadíjih-Bagum recognized the station of Bahá'u'lláh from the early days in Baghdád and remained one of His most devoted followers.

In his narratives, the late Hájí Mírzá Habíbu'lláh-i-Afnán writes the following account concerning the wife of the Báb.

... The Blessed Beauty after His arrival in Baghdád sent many Tablets, with His own signature, to various parts of Persia. These were taken to their intended destinations by some trustworthy individuals. Among these was a Tablet revealed in honour of the Exalted Leaf, the wife of the Báb. At that time no one among the family of the Afnán had embraced the Faith, and therefore the wife of the Báb had no close friend in whom she could confide.

When Bahá'u'lláh summoned Munírih Khánum to 'Akká for her marriage with 'Abdu'l-Bahá He instructed Shaykh Salmán to accompany her. The party started from Işfahán for Búshihr via Shíráz.

Arrangements were made for her to stay a short while in Shíráz in the

home of Ḥájí Mírzá Siyyid Muḥammad, the uncle of the Báb. She arrived in the month of Dhi'l-Qa'dih 1288 AH (January–February 1872) and had the privilege of meeting the wife of the Báb several times.

Munírih Khánum describes in her memoirs how eager the wife of the Báb was for her to prolong the visit, but Shaykh Salmán had instructions from Bahá'u'lláh to proceed to 'Akká in company with the caravan which was taking the Muslim pilgrims to Mecca and time was running out.

After we bade farewell to her, the wife of the Báb said, 'Please supplicate the Blessed Perfection to grant two wishes of mine. One, that one of the exalted Leaves of the blessed Family may be permitted to join in wedlock with a member of the family of the Báb, so that the two holy trees may be outwardly knit together. The other, to grant me permission to attain His presence.' I conveyed this message when I attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh; He readily assented to both her requests.

The person whom the wife of the Báb had in mind for this marriage was Ḥájí Siyyid 'Alí-i-Afnán, a son of her brother, the 'Great Afnán', Ḥájí Mírzá Siyyid Ḥasan. Bahá'u'lláh granted the wish of the wife of the Báb, and Ḥájí Siyyid 'Alí was joined in wedlock with Furúghíyyih Khánum, a daughter of Bahá'u'lláh.

As to the second wish, however, circumstances prevented the wife of the Báb from attaining the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. This was a grievous blow to her and she could not be consoled. It is reported that she wept so much that her health was seriously impaired. Grief-stricken, she passed away a few months afterwards, on the evening of the 29th day of Dhi'l-Qa'dih 1299 AH (11 November 1882). Strangely on the same

evening her maid (Fiḍḍih) who had served her since the days of the Báb also passed away.

The news of the passing of the wife of the Báb brought sadness to Bahá'u'lláh. He revealed a special Tablet of Visitation for her and later He composed a verse to be inscribed on her tombstone. During her lifetime too, Bahá'u'lláh had revealed many Tablets in her honour.

10. He favoured Maryam

Bahá'u'lláh spent the month preceding His exile from Persia in the house of His half-brother Mírzá Riḍá-Qulí, a physician. The latter was not a believer though his wife Maryam, a cousin of Bahá'u'lláh, had been converted by Him in the early days of the Faith and was one of His most sincere and faithful followers within the family. With great care and affection Maryam, together with Ásíyih Khánum, the wife of Bahá'u'lláh, nursed Him until His condition improved and, though not fully recovered, He had gathered sufficient strength to enable Him to leave Tíhrán for 'Iráq.

Throughout His exile, Bahá'u'lláh often recalled the loyalty and devotion of Maryam and showered His bounty and blessings upon her. To her, from 'Iráq, He addressed some of His Tablets known as the Alwáh-i-Maryam which are unique in their tone and sentiment. In language at once moving and tender He poured out His heart to her and recounted the afflictions heaped on Him by some of His unfaithful kinsmen and friends within the community:

The wrongs which I suffer have blotted out the wrongs suffered by My First Name [the Báb] from the Tablet of creation ... O Maryam!

From the land of Ṭá [Ṭíhrán], after countless afflictions, We reached 'Iráq, at the bidding of the Tyrant of Persia (Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh), where, after the fetters of Our foes, We were afflicted with the perfidy of Our friends. God knoweth what befell Me thereafter! ... I have borne what no man, be he of the past or of the future, hath borne or will bear.

Maryam was devoted to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. She longed to attain the presence of her Lord again, but some members of the family who were ill disposed towards the Faith prevented her from leaving home and she died sad and disappointed. Bahá'u'lláh favoured Maryam throughout her life, honoured her with the appellation 'Crimson Leaf' and, after her death, revealed a special Tablet of visitation in her memory.

11. Sárih Khánum and Sakíni Khánum, faithful sisters

Sárih Khánum was Bahá'u'lláh's full-sister, in whose honour many Tablets were revealed. She was older than Bahá'u'lláh, a faithful follower and unswervingly steadfast in His Cause. She died in the year 1296 AH (about AD 1879) in Ṭíhrán, and is buried a short distance from the city. So great was the esteem in which Bahá'u'lláh held her that He mentions in one Tablet that there is as much reward in visiting her grave as in visiting Him. Bahá'u'lláh had five other sisters, but of them only one half-sister, Sakíni Khánum, known as Ṭallán Khánum, was a true and faithful believer. She endured many sufferings in the path of God and Bahá'u'lláh cherished her with great love and affection. She is buried in the village of Tákúr in the province of Núr, and a special Tablet of visitation has been revealed in her honour by 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

12. Release from the Síyáh-Chál and exile

When Bahá'u'lláh came out of prison in Tíhrán, stripped of His possessions, His back bent by the weight of the fetters, His neck swollen and injured and His health impaired, He did not intimate to anyone His experience of Divine Revelation. Yet those who were close to Him could not fail to witness a transformation of spirit, a power and a radiance never seen in Him before.

The following is an extract from the spoken chronicle of the Greatest Holy Leaf, the daughter of Bahá'u'lláh, recounting her impressions of Him at the time of His release from the Síyáh-Chál:

Jamál-i-Mubárák had a marvellous divine experience whilst in that prison.

We saw a new radiance seeming to enfold him like a shining vesture, its significance we were to learn years later. At that time we were only aware of the wonder of it, without understanding, or even being told the details of the sacred event.

Bahá'u'lláh departed from Tíhrán for 'Iráq on 12 January 1853. Among those who accompanied Him in His exile was His eldest son, nine-year-old 'Abbás, who later assumed the title of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (Servant of Bahá). He had such spiritual insight that, as a young boy, He intuitively recognized the station of His Father.

Another member of the Holy Family who accompanied Bahá'u'lláh on his journey was His six-year-old daughter Bahá'íyyih Khánum, titled Varaqiy-i-'Ulyá (The Greatest Holy Leaf). She occupies a unique position

in the Bahá'í Dispensation and is regarded as the outstanding woman of this age. The Greatest Holy Leaf renounced the idea of marriage in order to be free to serve her Father. Over the years she managed, by perseverance and the potency of her faith, to alleviate some of the hardships to which Bahá'u'lláh and the Holy Family were subjected. In her life she reflected the very qualities and attributes which distinguished her illustrious Brother 'Abdu'l-Bahá—the Exemplar of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

The Greatest Holy Leaf played a unique part in the advancement of her Father's Faith. After the ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, it was the Greatest Holy Leaf who, at an advanced age, held the reins of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh in her able hands for a short period and rallied the believers around Shoghi Effendi, whom 'Abdu'l-Bahá had appointed the Guardian of the Cause. She died in 1932 and is buried near the Shrine of the Báb on Mount Carmel.

Also accompanying Bahá'u'lláh on His journey was His wife, Ásíyih Khánum, surnamed Navváb and designated 'the Most Exalted Leaf' by the Pen of Bahá'u'lláh. Navváb was the daughter of a nobleman, Mírzá Ismá'íl-i-Vazír. She had a compassionate and loving nature and was endowed with noble qualities. Her daughter, the Greatest Holy Leaf, has described her in these words:

... I always think of her in those earliest days of my memory as queenly in her dignity and loveliness, full of consideration for everybody, gentle, of a marvellous unselfishness, no action of hers ever failed to show the loving-kindness of her pure heart; her very presence seemed to make an atmosphere of love and happiness

wherever she came, enfolding all comers in the fragrance of gentle courtesy.

Her faith in Bahá'u'lláh, Whom she regarded as her Lord, was resolute and unshakeable. In the path of His love she suffered with resignation and patience the agonies and hardships of four successive exiles.

Bahá'u'lláh in one of His Tablets, which was revealed after her death, in 1303 AH (about AD 1886), bestowed upon her the unique distinction of being His 'perpetual consort in all the worlds of God'.

On account of their love for Him, two others with the utmost willingness accompanied Bahá'u'lláh into exile. They were His younger brother Mírzá Músá, surnamed Áqáy-i-Kalím by the Pen of Bahá'u'lláh, and the youngest half-brother Mírzá Muḥammad-Qulí who was in his teens. Both brothers remained with Him and shared the hardships of repeated banishments from land to land.

Áqáy-i-Kalím, whose heart was awakened on that historic occasion when the envoy of the Báb delivered His message to Bahá'u'lláh, was the most loyal of His brothers and a trusted supporter, staunch in his faith and indefatigable in his efforts to shield and protect Bahá'u'lláh. Until 'Abdu'l-Bahá assumed such functions, he would frequently deputize for Bahá'u'lláh in meeting ministers, government officials, notables and divines. His life of service and devotion elevated him to a rank of foremost among the Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh.

The other brother Mírzá Muḥammad-Qulí, who was only about seven years older than 'Abdu'l-Bahá, had from childhood developed a strong attachment to Bahá'u'lláh, for their father had died soon after Mírzá Muḥammad-Qulí was born and he was, consequently, brought up by Bahá'u'lláh. He had a quiet disposition and a loving nature and,

throughout his life, remained a true servant at the threshold of his illustrious Brother.

As for the eight remaining brothers of Bahá'u'lláh, only one, Mírzá Muḥammad-Ḥasan, who was older than Bahá'u'lláh and much esteemed by Him, is known to have been a loyal follower. The others with the exception of Mírzá Yaḥyá, who became the arch-breaker of the Covenant of the Báb and a great enemy of Bahá'u'lláh, had either died before the Revelations of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, or remained untouched by the light of God's new-born Faith.

The journey to Bagħdád, undertaken in the middle of a severe winter across the snow-bound mountains of western Persia, inflicted much hardship and suffering on the exiles. Bahá'u'lláh remained about ten years in 'Iráq, spending two years alone in the wilderness of Kurdistán and most of the remaining time in Bagħdád.

The enemies of Bahá'u'lláh, among whom were the Persian Consul-General in Bagħdád and certain divines, eventually succeeded in having Him banished again. As a result of representations made by the Persian to the Ottoman Government, the Sultán's decree was issued and Bahá'u'lláh was called to Constantinople. On the eve of His departure from 'Iráq in 1863, Bahá'u'lláh, outside the city of Bagħdád, declared His station to His companions as 'Him Whom God shall make manifest', the One foretold by the Báb and anticipated by His followers.

After He had remained five months in the capital city of the Ottoman Empire, His enemies again sought to banish Him. They succeeded, and He was sent to Adrianople, a city called by Him 'the remote Prison'. There the Sun of His Revelation ascended to its zenith and He proclaimed His Message for the whole world. Having endured five years

of tribulations in this city, Bahá'u'lláh was finally exiled to the prison-city of 'Akká in the Holy Land.

The last twenty-four years of Bahá'u'lláh's ministry were spent partly in 'Akká and partly in the surrounding countryside. The sufferings He endured during the first nine years of His imprisonment within the walls of 'Akká were so grievous that, as Bahá'u'lláh remarks in one of His Tablets, 'upon Our arrival at this Spot, We chose to designate it as the "Most Great Prison". Though previously subjected in another land [Tíhrán] to chains and fetters, We yet refused to call it by that name ...'

13. He vindicated the miracles of all the Prophets

Shaykh 'Abdu'l-Ḥusayn was one of Bahá'u'lláh's bitterest enemies. The Sháh had sent him to Karbilá to carry out the repair of the Muslim holy sites. He invited all ranks of clergy to a conference held at his home. There he forcefully condemned Bahá'u'lláh's activities, accused Him of destroying the Faith of Islám, and demanded that holy war should be proclaimed against the Bábís of 'Iráq. The body of the divines approved. However, Shaykh Murtidáy-i-Ansárí, the leading *mujtahid* of the Shí'ah community, a man of justice and piety, refused to sanction their evil plans and arose and abruptly left the meeting.

Some time before, Bahá'u'lláh had invited Shaykh 'Abdu'l-Ḥusayn to meet Him face to face so that the truth of His Cause might be established. But the Shaykh, who had accepted the invitation at first, was afraid to meet the challenge and did not appear at the appointed place. This time, however, the conference of the divines decided to send the devout and high-minded Hájí Mullá Ḥasan-i-'Ammú as an emissary

to Bahá'u'lláh to put certain questions to Him, designed to establish the truth of His Mission. Hájí Mullá Hasan asked Prince Zaynu'l-'Ábidín Khán, the Fakhru'd-Dawlih, a friend and admirer of Bahá'u'lláh who often visited His home, to arrange an interview with Him. When the appointed day came, the prince took him personally to the house of Bahá'u'lláh.

No sooner had Hájí Mullá Hasan presented himself to Bahá'u'lláh than he discovered the ocean of His utterance surging before him and saw himself as a mere drop compared to the vastness of Bahá'u'lláh's knowledge. Having had his questions answered with brilliance and simplicity, he then ventured to inform Bahá'u'lláh that the divines regarded the performance of a miracle to be the final and conclusive evidence of the authenticity of His mission. These are the words of Bahá'u'lláh in answer to him:

Although you have no right to ask this, for God should test His creatures, and they should not test God, still I allow and accept this request ... The 'ulemás must assemble, and, with one accord, choose one miracle, and write that, after the performance of this miracle they will no longer entertain doubts about Me, and that all will acknowledge and confess the truth of My Cause. Let them seal this paper, and bring it to Me. This must be the accepted criterion: if the miracle is performed, no doubt will remain for them; and if not, We shall be convicted of imposture.

Hájí Mullá Hasan found this answer to be satisfactory. He arose, reverently kissed the knee of Bahá'u'lláh and promised to convey His words to the divines. But the assemblage of the divines decided not to respond to Bahá'u'lláh's challenge and did not pursue the matter. Hájí

Mullá Ḥasan conveyed this decision to Bahá'u'lláh through Prince Zaynu'l-Ábidín Khán. Upon hearing this news, Bahá'u'lláh is reported to have said:

We have, through this all-satisfying, all-embracing message which We sent, revealed and vindicated the miracles of all the Prophets, inasmuch as We left the choice to the 'ulemás themselves, undertaking to reveal whatever they would decide upon.

14. His glory made His enemies humble in His presence

The awe-inspiring majesty of Bahá'u'lláh's public appearances and the authority with which He spoke to both friend and foe are facts which even His greatest adversaries have acknowledged. 'Abdu'l-Bahá mentions that those who persecuted the Prophets of the past were able to deride and ridicule them. They laughed at Moses because He was a stammerer, and jeered at Christ because, in their estimation, He had no father. The barbarous people of Arabia, at the time of Muḥammad, laughed at Him, also, because of His inability to beget an heir!

But in the case of Bahá'u'lláh, His glory was so overwhelming that everyone felt inferior in His presence. Even His enemies became humble when they came in contact with His person. While He was chained and fettered in the Síyáh-Chál of Ṭíhrán, the officials in that dungeon became subdued by His greatness. And when He was released from that prison and conducted to the Prime Minister's office in Ṭíhrán, it was not the latter who dominated the scene; it was Bahá'u'lláh who spoke with authority and rebuked the Prime Minister for his short-sightedness and incompetence. Similarly, in Constantinople, in

Adrianople and 'Akká, the enemies and the authorities both civil and ecclesiastical were confounded when they witnessed the spiritual power with which He was invested.

Before Bahá'u'lláh's arrival in Baghhdád, the followers of the Báb in that city did not dare associate with each other in public for fear of being persecuted. The Faith was regarded as a heresy and its adherents ran the risk of losing their lives if they openly declared their faith. Yet, soon after His arrival there, Bahá'u'lláh decided to appear in public. He often went into the streets and bazaars of Baghhdád and frequented certain cafés. Although He was well-known as a leading figure of the newly-born Faith, the people of Baghhdád were charmed by His innate love and dignity, and many of them became His admirers.

Through His majesty which was born of God the enemies of the Cause were humbled. To cite a single example: In the early days of His sojourn in Baghhdád, on one occasion, Bahá'u'lláh passed by the estate of Prince 'Alí Shháh, the Zillu's-Sullán, in company with a few believers. There he overheard a disparaging remark about the Faith from some men who were attached to the household of the Prince. Immediately Bahá'u'lláh turned back, rebuked them severely for their behaviour and demanded that they be punished by their master. He further told the crowd to remind the Prince that neither the pomp and might of the sovereign, Náşiri'd-Dín Shháh, nor all the persecutions he had inflicted, had made any impression upon the followers of the Báb, and they had failed to break their spirit. How much less, then, would they be affected by the Prince's opposition. So potent were His words that the haughty Prince punished his people and sent his son Shhujá'u'd-Dawlih to Bahá'u'lláh to convey his apologies.

For no less than eight years the supreme Manifestation of God lived freely among the inhabitants of Bagħdád. He walked among them, sat with them and poured out His affection and bounties upon them. Although He did not disclose His station to them, yet multitudes of people from all walks of life were attracted to His person and longed to attain His presence, to hear His words, or even catch a glimpse of Him as He walked in the streets or paced along the bank of the Tigris rapt in meditation.

15. The declaration of His station fulfilled the prophecies

The love and admiration of the people of Bagħdád for Bahá'u'lláh was fully demonstrated on the day of His departure from His 'Most Great House' in Bagħdád. Then His majesty and greatness were evident to both friend and foe. The news of His forthcoming departure for Constantinople had spread rapidly among the inhabitants of Bagħdád and its neighbouring towns, and large numbers wished to attain His presence and pay their last tributes to Him. But soon it became apparent that His house was too small for the purpose. When Najíb Páshá, one of the notables of the city of Bagħdád heard of this, he immediately placed his garden-park, Najíbíyyih, at the disposal of Bahá'u'lláh. This beautiful garden, designated by His followers as the Garden of Riḍván (Paradise), was situated on the outskirts of Bagħdád, across the river from Bahá'u'lláh's house.

Thirty-one days after Naw-Rúz, on 22 April 1863, in the afternoon, Bahá'u'lláh moved to this garden, where He remained for twelve days. On the first day He declared His Mission to His companions. (This is

stated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in a talk given at Bahjí on 29 April 1916). These twelve days are celebrated by the Bahá'ís as the Festival of Ridván.

The departure of Bahá'u'lláh from His house witnessed a commotion the like of which Baghdád had rarely seen. People of all walks of life, men and women, rich and poor, young and old, men of learning and culture, princes, government officials, tradesmen and workers, and above all His companions, thronged the approaches of His house and crowded the streets and roof-tops situated along His route to the river. They were lamenting and weeping the departure of One Who, for a decade, had imparted to them the warmth of His love and the radiance of His spirit, Who had been a refuge and guide for them all.

When Bahá'u'lláh appeared in the courtyard of His house His companions, grief-stricken and disconsolate, prostrated themselves at His feet. For some time He stood there, amid the weeping and lamentations of His loved ones, speaking words of comfort and promising to receive each of them in the garden later. Bahá'u'lláh in a Tablet mentions that when He had walked some way towards the gate, amidst the crowds, a child of only a few years ran forward and, clinging to His robes, wept aloud, begging Him in his tender young voice not to leave. In such an atmosphere, where emotions had been so deeply stirred, this action on the part of a small child moved the hearts and brought further grief to everyone.

The scenes of lamentation and weeping outside the house, of those who did not confess to be His followers, were no less spectacular and heart-rending. Everyone in the crowded street sought to approach Him. Some prostrated themselves at His feet, others waited to hear a few words, yet others were content with a touch of His hands, a glance at His face.

A Persian lady of noble birth, who was not herself a believer, pushed her way into the crowd and with a gesture of sacrifice threw her child at the feet of Bahá'u'lláh. These demonstrations continued all the way to the bank of the river.

Before crossing the river, Bahá'u'lláh addressed His companions who had gathered around Him, saying:

O My companions, I entrust to your keeping this city of Baghdád, in the state ye now behold it, when from the eyes of friends and strangers alike, crowding its housetops, its streets and markets, tears like the rain of spring are flowing down, and I depart. With you it now rests to watch lest your deeds and conduct dim the flame of love that gloweth within the breasts of its inhabitants.

Bahá'u'lláh was then ferried across the river accompanied by three of His sons: 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Mírzá Mihdí (the Purest Branch) and Muḥammad-'Alí, who were eighteen, fourteen and ten years of age, respectively. With them also was His amanuensis, Mírzá Áqá Ján. The identity of others who may have accompanied Him, or of those in the garden who had pitched His tent and were making preparations for His arrival, or of those who might have followed Him on that day, is not clearly known.

The call to afternoon prayer was raised from the mosque and the words 'Alláh'u'Akbar (God is the Greatest) chanted by the *mu'adh^hin* reverberated through the garden as the King of Glory entered it. There, Bahá'u'lláh appeared in the utmost joy, walking majestically in its avenues lined with flowers and trees. The fragrance of the roses and the singing of the nightingales created an atmosphere of beauty and enchantment.

The companions of Bahá'u'lláh had, for some time, known the Declaration of His station to be imminent. This realization came to them not only as a result of many remarks and allusions made by Him during the last few months of His sojourn in Baghhdád, but also through a noticeable change in His demeanour. Another sign which unmistakably pointed to its approaching hour was the adoption, on the day of His departure from His house in Baghhdád, of a different type of headdress known as *táj* (tall felt hat), which He wore throughout His ministry.

'Abdu'l-Bahá has described how, upon His arrival in the garden, Bahá'u'lláh declared His station to those of His companions who were present, and announced with great joy the inauguration of the Festival of Riḍván.

Sadness and grief vanished and the believers were filled with delight at this announcement. Although Bahá'u'lláh was being exiled to far off lands and knew the sufferings and tribulations which were in store for Him and His followers, yet through this historic Declaration He changed all sorrow into blissful joy and spent the most delightful time of His ministry in the Garden of Riḍván. Indeed, in one of His Tablets, He has referred to the first day of Riḍván as the 'Day of supreme felicity', and has called on His followers to 'rejoice, with exceeding gladness' in remembrance of that day.

The manner of the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh's Mission is not clear, neither is the identity of all who heard Him. One thing, however, is clear. During His ten years' sojourn in 'Iráq, although Bahá'u'lláh had alluded to His station, and identified Himself with the utterances of God revealed in His Tablets, He had never designated Himself as 'Him Whom

God shall make manifest'. It was in the Garden of Ridván that, in the course of His Declaration, He unequivocally did so, announcing Himself as the One Whose advent the Báb had proclaimed, for Whose sake He had sacrificed Himself and for Whom He had established a covenant with His followers. That day was one of the most eventful in the life of Bahá'u'lláh. The whole day He was occupied with important affairs, which culminated in the Declaration of His Mission—the most momentous event of His ministry.

16. Never before in the history of religion, with the exception of the Bábí Dispensation, has a Manifestation of God left to posterity Tablets written in His own hand

Among the inestimable bounties of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh are the outpourings of His Most Exalted Pen, referred to as the Pen of the Most High, signifying, among other things, the Revealer of the Most Great Spirit. Never before in the history of religions, with the exception of the Bábí Dispensation, do we find that a Manifestation of God has left to posterity Tablets written in His own hand. But innumerable are the Tablets in the form of exhortations, prayers and meditations which Bahá'u'lláh has penned and which constitute the most precious part of Bahá'í Holy Writings.

The early believers often wrote to Bahá'u'lláh asking questions, seeking advice or sending information. Many of His Tablets are revealed in answer to such letters, and Siyyid Asadu'lláh-i-Qumí has described how Bahá'u'lláh revealed them. This believer attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh around 1886 and was permitted by Him to reside permanently in 'Akká. He served the Cause for years, was one of those

who accompanied 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Europe and America, and on these journeys often served the Master as cook. The following is an extract from his spoken chronicle:

I recall that as Mírzá Áqá Ján was recording the words of Bahá'u'lláh at the time of revelation, the shrill sound of his pen could be heard from a distance of about twenty paces. In the history of the Faith not a great deal has been recorded about the manner in which Tablets were revealed. For this reason ... I shall describe it ...

Mírzá Áqá Ján had a large inkpot the size of a small bowl. He also had available about ten to twelve pens and large sheets of paper in stacks. In those days all letters which arrived for Bahá'u'lláh were received by Mírzá Áqá Ján. He would bring these into the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and, having obtained permission, would read them. Afterwards the Blessed Beauty would direct him to take up his pen and record the Tablet which was revealed in reply ...

Such was the speed with which he used to write the revealed Word that the ink of the first word was scarcely yet dry when the whole page was finished. It seemed as if someone had dipped a lock of hair in the ink and applied it over the whole page. None of the words was written clearly and they were illegible to all except Mírzá Áqá Ján. There were occasions when even he could not decipher the words and had to seek the help of Bahá'u'lláh. When revelation had ceased, then in accordance with Bahá'u'lláh's instruction Mírzá Áqá Ján would rewrite the Tablet in his best hand and dispatch it to its destination ...

17. The verses of God streamed forth as in a copious rain

One of the major features of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is the authenticity of its revealed Word. Unlike the Dispensations of the past, when the words of the Prophet were not recorded at the time they were uttered, the words of Bahá'u'lláh were written down as He dictated them. In many cases the circumstances in which He revealed His Tablets were recorded by His amanuensis, or by other trusted companions and pilgrim disciples who at one time or another were privileged to be in His presence.

Whenever revelation came to Bahá'u'lláh, whether in His humble dwelling in Baghdád, or in the bitter cold of Adrianople, whether sailing by sea or travelling by land, whether in the prison cell of 'Akká or in His spacious Mansion of Bahjí, Mírzá Áqá Ján was invariably ready with quantities of paper, some inkpots and a bundle of reed pens to record the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh as they streamed from His lips. Owing to the rapidity with which His words were revealed, the first recordings were not easily legible and had to be transcribed again. After approving these Tablets Bahá'u'lláh sometimes authenticated them with one of His seals.

The onrushing force of the Holy Spirit produced, at the time of revelation, awe-inspiring physical effects on Bahá'u'lláh. An ordinary human being becomes overwhelmed when he receives news of exceptional import: how much more, then, would the human temple of the Manifestation of God be affected when it becomes the channel through which the Holy Spirit of God flows to mankind.

No one except His amanuensis was allowed to be present at the time of revelation, but occasionally some of the believers were permitted to

remain for a short time. Those who received this privilege witnessed a special glory and radiance which emanated from Him. So dazzling was His transfiguration that many found themselves unable to gaze on His face.

Hájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-‘Alí has left the following account of one of his visits to ‘Akká when he was allowed to enter the presence of Bahá’u’lláh at the time of revelation:

...When permission was granted and the curtain was withdrawn, I entered the room where the King of kings and the Ruler of this world and the next, nay rather the Ruler of all the worlds of God, was with great authority seated on His couch. The verses of God were being revealed and the words streamed forth as in a copious rain.

Methought the door, the wall, the carpet, the ceiling, the floor and the air were all perfumed and illumined. They all had been transformed, each and every one, into ears and were filled with a spirit of joy and ecstasy. Each object had become refreshed and was pulsating with life ... To which worlds I was transported and in what state I was, no one who has not experienced such as this can ever know.

It has been said that one of the effects of the revelation of Tablets on Bahá’u’lláh was that He would remain for some time after in a state of excitement and, as a result, would be unable to eat.

18. The revelation of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, the Most Holy Book

In the early part of 1873, almost five years after His arrival in ‘Akká, Bahá’u’lláh, then confined in the house of ‘Údí Khammár, revealed the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, the Most Holy Book, regarded as the Mother Book of this

Dispensation, a Book unique and incomparable among the world's sacred scriptures, designated by Himself as the 'Source of true felicity', the 'unerring Balance', the 'Straight path', the 'quickener of mankind', the 'river of mercy', the 'Ark of His laws'. To it the Prophets of the past have alluded as the 'new heaven', the 'new earth', the 'Tabernacle of God', the 'Holy City', the 'Bride' and the 'New Jerusalem coming down from God'. Shoghi Effendi has acclaimed it as the charter of Bahá'u'lláh's new world order and of future world civilization.

This book, written in Arabic, the brightest emanation from the Pen of the Most High, stands out from among all Bahá'u'lláh's writings as the 'Mother Book' of His Dispensation. Next to it in rank is the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (Book of Certitude). Of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Bahá'u'lláh states, 'this Book is a heaven which We have adorned with the stars of Our commandments and prohibitions', and again, 'verily, it is My weightiest testimony unto all people, and the proof of the All-Merciful unto all who are in heaven and all who are on earth'.

As well as being the mightiest and most exalted of Bahá'u'lláh's writings, the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* is from the literary point of view one of the most beautiful. It is matchless in its eloquence, unsurpassed in its lucidity, enchanting in its style, superb in its composition and varied in its theme. Every sentence is simple and easily intelligible to the reader: it is impossible to suggest a better or more eloquent construction. It is the masterpiece of Bahá'u'lláh's utterances. Though basically a book of laws and ordinances, it is so revealed that its laws are interwoven with passages of spiritual counsel and exhortation, of weighty pronouncements and divine guidance. The manner in which this is done is unique and original. It fascinates the reader with its beauty and

enchantment. Of it Bahá'u'lláh speaks, 'By My life! It hath been sent down in a manner that amazeth the minds of men.' And in another passage He states:

By God! such is the majesty of what hath been revealed therein, and so tremendous the revelation of its veiled allusions that the loins of utterance shake when attempting their description.

After its revelation Bahá'u'lláh permitted Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín, one of His devoted companions, who was formerly a *mujtahid* (Doctor of Islámic law) and highly experienced in the application of Islámic law, to ask any questions he might have regarding the application of the laws of Bahá'u'lláh. The answers given by Him are contained in a book known as *Questions and Answers* which is to be regarded as an appendix to the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*.

In a Tablet written by Mírzá Áqá Ján, Bahá'u'lláh's amanuensis, dated 15th of Jamádiyu'l-Avval 1290 (11 July 1873), it is stated that the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* was revealed around that time. It also refers to the circumstances which led to its revelation. For some years, the believers had been asking questions about the laws of the Faith, but Bahá'u'lláh did not find it timely to respond to them. While in Adrianople He revealed a number of laws in His Persian writings, but did not release them to the believers. Questions continued to come to him while in 'Akká, and when the time was propitious, Bahá'u'lláh revealed the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. But from the beginning He stressed to His followers the need to be discreet and wise in the implementation of its laws. He advised them not to practise any of its provisions which might prove to be untimely or could cause agitation or disturbance among the people.

Shortly after the revelation of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Hájí Siyyid Javád-i-Karbilá'í, a distinguished believer who was held in high esteem by the community, was anxious for the Bahá'ís to implement the laws of that Book. In a Tablet addressed to him, Bahá'u'lláh discloses the pre-eminent position which the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* occupies, refers to it as the most great magnet through which the hearts of the peoples of the world will be attracted, and prophesies that through it the majesty and sovereignty of God will, ere long, be made manifest. But He counsels Hájí Siyyid Javád to exercise caution and wisdom in the implementation of its laws at that time. The following is an extract from the above-mentioned Tablet to Hájí Siyyid Javád:

For a number of years, petitions reach the Most Holy Presence from various lands begging for the laws of God, but We held back the Pen ere the appointed time had come. Thereupon the Day-Star of the laws and ordinances shone forth from above the horizon of the Will of God, as a token of His grace unto the peoples of the world. He, verily, is the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Generous ... Indeed the laws of God are like unto the ocean and the children of men as fish, did they but know it. However, in observing them one must exercise tact and wisdom ... Since most people are feeble and far removed from the purpose of God, therefore one must observe tact and prudence under all conditions, so that nothing might happen that could cause disturbance and dissension or raise clamour among the heedless. Verily, His bounty hath surpassed the whole universe and His bestowals encompassed all that dwell on earth. One must guide mankind to the ocean of true understanding in a spirit of love and tolerance. The *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* itself beareth eloquent testimony to the loving providence of God.

In the same year that the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* was revealed Bahá'u'lláh allowed Jamál-i-Burújirdí, who was then in 'Akká, to copy parts of it and share it with the friends in Persia. But again He emphasized wisdom and discretion in the application of its laws. Through their mercy and compassion the Manifestations of God do not announce all their new laws to their followers suddenly. Knowing man's strong attachment to old laws and customs, they introduce their new laws gradually over a period of time during which their followers become enlightened and ready to receive them.

The study of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes it clear that most of the laws of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, apart from those which are of a spiritual nature, or in conformity with the conditions prevailing at the time, are designed for the future when the Bahá'í Faith becomes the religion of the land. It is then that these laws will be fully implemented within the framework of a new civilization which is to emerge later from amidst the chaos and confusion of present-day society.

Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Faith, has described the laws of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* as the 'warp and woof' of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order. Without these laws, mankind will not be able to take part in the establishment of the promised Kingdom of God on earth. The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, however, is still growing in its embryonic form. In the fullness of time it will be born and will usher in an age the glories of which we in this day cannot fully visualize, an age in which the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh will guide and govern the life of man on this planet. Then and only then will the wisdom and significance of all the laws of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* become manifest, their relevance to the needs

of the age become apparent and their application become a vital necessity.

19. The Revelation of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*

In the whole range of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings, the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (The Book of Certitude) has most importance, with the exception of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book). It was revealed in Baghhdád about two years before His Declaration, in honour of Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muḥammad, the Báb's maternal uncle. Although fully aware of the outstanding qualities of his Nephew, he was not converted to His Faith until he met Bahá'u'lláh in Baghhdád and received the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* in answer to his questions.

Bahá'u'lláh's amanuensis, Mírzá Áqá Ján, has described the circumstances which led to the revelation of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*. He says that one day Hájí Siyyid Javád-i-Karbilá'í went to Bahá'u'lláh and informed Him that the two uncles of the Báb, having visited the holy Shrines in Najaf and Karbilá, were now in Baghhdád and would be returning home soon. Having ascertained from Hájí Siyyid Javád that he had not discussed the Faith with them, Bahá'u'lláh lovingly admonished him for not being engaged in the teaching of the Cause. He then instructed him to invite the two brothers to come to His presence.

The next day Hájí Siyyid Javád arrived with the uncle of the Báb, Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muḥammad. The youngest brother did not come. The utterances of Bahá'u'lláh uplifted and overwhelmed the Báb's uncle as he sat in His presence. At the end he begged Bahá'u'lláh to clarify the truth of the Báb's Message, bearing in mind that, in his view, some of

the traditions of Islám concerning the promised Qá'im were apparently not fulfilled by his Nephew. To this Bahá'u'lláh readily consented. He bade him go home and, after careful consideration, make a list of all the questions which had puzzled him and all the traditions which had bred doubts in his mind, and to bring these to Him.

The following day Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muḥammad arrived with his questions. Within the span of two days and two nights the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, a lengthy epistle (of over two hundred pages) dealing with all his questions, was revealed by Bahá'u'lláh.

Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muḥammad was so affected by meeting Bahá'u'lláh that he immediately wrote a letter to His son, Hájí Mírzá Muḥammad-Taquí, in which he said:

... I attained the presence of His Honour Bahá (may peace be upon Him) and I wish you could have been present! He treated me with the utmost affection and favour and graciously asked me to stay for the night. It is an absolute truth that deprivation from His bounteous presence is a grievous loss. May God bestow upon me the privilege of attaining His presence perpetually ...

The *Kitáb-i-Íqán* dispelled every doubt that Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muḥammad had harboured in his mind. As a result of reading this book he reached the stage of certitude and recognized the station of the Báb. In his will, written some years later, he declared his faith, acknowledged the authenticity of the Messages of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh and identified himself as a follower of these twin Manifestations of God.

For many years this original copy of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* remained with the family of Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muḥammad, until in 1948 his great-

granddaughter Fátimih Khánnum-i-Afnán presented it to Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Faith. It reached him a few years later and was placed in the Bahá'í International Archives Building on Mount Carmel, Haifa.

From the literary point of view the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* can be regarded as an outstanding work in Persian literature. Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Faith, who translated this book superbly into English has described it in these words:

Foremost among the priceless treasures cast forth from the billowing ocean of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation ranks the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* ... A model of Persian prose, of a style at once original, chaste and vigorous, and remarkably lucid, both cogent in argument and matchless in its irresistible eloquence, this Book, setting forth in outline the Grand Redemptive Scheme of God, occupies a position unequalled by any work in the entire range of Bahá'í literature, except the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Bahá'u'lláh's Most Holy Book.

20. Chanting God's Verses

Hájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-'Alí, who is often remembered as the 'Angel of Mount Carmel'—a designation by which 'Abdu'l-Bahá had called him, describes the effect of being in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh when He chanted a Tablet He had revealed for him.

What an effect it had on me! To what a world did I ascend! To what a paradise did I enter! What did I see! In what way did I hear that voice and that melody! ... These I cannot tell. I entered that Paradise which no eye had seen, and no ear had heard, nor any heart had felt. I saw

the Kingdom of grandeur and majesty, and felt the might, the transcendent power, the glory, and the sovereignty of the ever-living, the ever-abiding, the incomparable God. But to speak of it, write about it, give an image or likeness of it, exalt and sanctify it, allude to it, extol and praise it, or describe and narrate it, all these are impossible for this humble servant or anyone else in the world. We have only access to words and terms, whereas that experience and condition are exalted above all things. They cannot be put into words or described by talks. No one can interpret the inner feelings of one's conscience ... But this condition remains only for a single moment. It is a fleeting experience. Its manifestation within the human being is due to a special bounty of God. Its duration, varying from the twinkling of an eye to a longer period, depends upon one's capacity to become the recipient of this bounty. The deeds and actions of the person demonstrate its existence. But it has never been heard that this condition lasted for three or four months in a person except in Badí'...

21. The verses of God were rapidly revealed, without prior contemplation

An account has been given by Mírzá Ṭarázu'lláh Samandari, who at the age of sixteen attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh during the last year of His ministry. Mírzá Ṭarázu'lláh, a native of Qazvín, was born of a Bahá'í family. His grandfather was one of the followers of the Báb; his father, Shaykh Kázim, surnamed Samandar by Bahá'u'lláh, was an outstanding Apostle of the Blessed Beauty.

He himself served the Faith with great distinction and in 1951 was appointed Hand of the Cause of God by Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Cause.

During an interview in Tīhrán, Mírzá Ṭarázu'lláh made the following remarks:

In those days Mírzá Áqá Ján, as instructed by Bahá'u'lláh, would first read the letters to Him and then, as Bahá'u'lláh dictated, write the Tablets in answer to them. The verses of God were revealed with great rapidity and without prior contemplation or meditation. By reason of the speed with which these were written, the recorded words were mostly illegible. Some of them no one was able to read; even Mírzá Áqá Ján himself at times had difficulty in deciphering his own writing and had to seek the help of Bahá'u'lláh for clarification. Thus the Word of God was revealed. The greatest proof of the authenticity of the Manifestations of God is the revelation of the words of God. No one else is capable of doing this. The holy Word revealed from the heaven of the Will of the All-Merciful first descends upon the pure and radiant heart of the Manifestation of God and then is spoken by Him. In His Tablet to Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh, Bahá'u'lláh confirms this in these words: 'This thing is not from Me, but from One Who is Almighty and All-Knowing'. ... I had the great privilege of being present on two occasions when Tablets were being revealed ... The holy words were flowing from His lips as He paced up and down the room, and His amanuensis was recording them ... It is not easy to describe the manner in which revelation came to Bahá'u'lláh.

22. The sayings of the learned appeared before His face

God is the Knower of all things and if one believes that He manifests Himself to man through His Manifestations, then it follows that their words are the truth and that they have the knowledge of all things. To cite an example: it is well-known that Bahá'u'lláh had not read most of the Writings of the Báb, including the Bayán, the Mother Book of the Bábí Dispensation. He Himself testifies to this fact in these words addressed to the notorious Hádíy-i-Dawlat-Ábádí:

God testifieth and beareth Me witness that this Wronged One hath not perused the Bayán, nor been acquainted with its contents ... I swear by God! This Wronged One, by reason of His constant association with men, hath not looked at these books [The Writings of the Báb], nor gazed with outward eye on these Writings.

Despite this, Bahá'u'lláh, during His forty years' Ministry, quoted profusely from the Writings of the Báb. Innumerable are the passages of the Bayán and other Writings of the Báb that Bahá'u'lláh has quoted in His Tablets. Seen from the human point of view, such a performance is impossible of achievement. But there can be no comparison between God and man. The Manifestation of God is endowed with divine knowledge, whereas man is not. Past, present and future are all before the Chosen Ones of God who represent Him in this world. In the Tablet of Hikmat Bahá'u'lláh describes this:

Thou knowest full well that We perused not the books which men possess and We acquired not the learning current amongst them, and yet whenever We desire to quote the sayings of the learned and of the wise, presently there will appear before the face of thy Lord in the form of a tablet all that which hath appeared in the world and is

revealed in the Holy Books and Scriptures. Thus do We set down in writing that which the eye perceiveth. Verily His knowledge encompasseth the earth and the heavens.

23. The Ancient Beauty submitted Himself to a ruthless enemy

The ministry of Bahá'u'lláh is characterized by two features, both unparalleled in the history of mankind: first, the suffering and persecutions which were inflicted upon Him, and second, the vastness of His Revelation. The contrast of light and darkness, of majesty and bondage, of glory and abasement is to be seen throughout His ministry. The history of His life can be described as a book whose pages are darkened by the cruelties inflicted upon Him at the hands of a perverse generation, but whose letters shine with the splendours of God's Revelation, shedding their lustre upon a world shrouded in ignorance and prejudice.

The spiritual energies latent within this mighty Revelation were released by Bahá'u'lláh during the forty years of His ministry. They were destined to revitalize the entire human race and create a divine civilization which has been heralded by previous Messengers as the 'advent of the Kingdom of God on earth'. The vehicle of these energies is the Word of God which He revealed for this age. This Word was not the fruit of learning and knowledge, for Bahá'u'lláh's education was an elementary one, but the emanation of the Holy Spirit.

One of the features of the life of Bahá'u'lláh was that although born of one of the wealthiest families in Persia and having lived many years in luxurious surroundings, He spent forty years of His Ministry in an

austerity to which He had never been accustomed during the earlier days of His life. For two years he lived in utmost poverty in the mountains of Kurdistán where many a day He subsisted on milk alone. In Baghdád He lived a simple life and had to endure many privations. ‘There was a time in ‘Iráq,’ He affirms in a Tablet, ‘when the Ancient Beauty ... had no change of linen. The one shirt He possessed would be washed, dried and worn again.’ In Adrianople and ‘Akká He submitted Himself to the privations and hardships which a ruthless enemy had imposed upon Him.

24. Tribulations will make the Cause victorious

In the following passages in the *Lawh-i-Sultán* Bahá’u’lláh dwells on the sufferings which He had endured in the path of God:

I have seen, O Sháh, in the path of God what eye hath not seen nor ear heard ... How numerous the tribulations which have rained, and will soon rain, upon Me! I advance with My face set towards Him Who is the Almighty, the All-Bounteous, whilst behind Me glideth the serpent. Mine eyes have rained down tears until My bed is drenched. I sorrow not for Myself, however. By God! Mine head yearneth for the spear out of love for its Lord. I never passed a tree, but Mine heart addressed it saying: ‘O would that thou wert cut down in My name, and My body crucified upon thee, in the path of My Lord!’ ... By God! Though weariness lay Me low, and hunger consume Me, and the bare rock be My bed, and My fellows the beasts of the field, I will not complain, but will endure patiently as those endued with constancy and firmness have endured patiently, through the power of God, the Eternal King and Creator of the nations, and will render thanks unto

God under all conditions. We pray that, out of His bounty—exalted be He—He may release, through this imprisonment, the necks of men from chains and fetters, and cause them to turn, with sincere faces, towards His Face, Who is the Mighty, the Bounteous. Ready is He to answer whosoever calleth upon Him, and nigh is He unto such as commune with Him.

Bahá'u'lláh also reminds the King that all the Prophets and Messengers of God have suffered at the hands of their own people, and yet no one reflects on the cause of such behaviour. He speaks of Muḥammad and names some of His enemies who strenuously opposed and denounced Him. He also tells the story of Jesus and the cruel judgement passed on Him by religious leaders.

In the *Lawḥ-i-Sultán*, Bahá'u'lláh dwells on the trials and persecutions which He Himself has endured in the path of God. He speaks about His imprisonment in the *Síyáh-Chál*, recounts the sufferings which were inflicted upon Him in that dark and pestilential subterranean dungeon, recalls His deliverance from that prison through the power of God, and His exile to 'Iráq by the order of the King, after His innocence had been established. He further acquaints the Sháh with conditions in 'Iráq: the opposition of the Shí'ah clergy, their plotting and vicious attacks which resulted in His advising some of His companions to seek the protection of the Governor of 'Iráq. He describes His arrival in Constantinople, and foretells His future exile to and imprisonment in 'Akká, a city described by Him in these words:

According to what they say, it is the most desolate of the cities of the world, the most unsightly of them in appearance, the most

detestable in climate, and the foulest in water. It is as though it were the metropolis of the owl.

In a passage in the *Lawḥ-i-Sultán* written with great eloquence and power, Bahá'u'lláh prophesies in unequivocal language the triumph of His Cause when people will enter it in troops. He declares that in past Dispensations, God established the ascendancy of His Cause through afflictions and sufferings. He prays that in this day these calamities may also act as a buckler to protect His Faith, and makes the following statement concerning trials and tribulations suffered in the path of God:

By Him Who is the Truth! I fear no tribulation in His path, nor any affliction in My love for Him. Verily God hath made adversity as a morning dew upon His green pasture, and a wick for His lamp which lighteth earth and heaven.

25. During His exile to Sulaymáníyyih, He became the focal point for true knowledge

Bahá'u'lláh's retirement to the mountains of Kurdistán ('Íraq) opened a new chapter in the history of His Revelation. Here He lived in utter seclusion for some time on a mountain named Sar-Galú, far away from the world; He left behind His loved ones and admirers, as well as those who had betrayed Him and brought about, through their evil designs, the near extinction of the Cause of the Báb. He had with Him only one change of clothes which were made of coarse material of the type worn by the poor; His food was chiefly milk and occasionally a little rice; His dwelling-place was sometimes a cave and sometimes a rude structure

made of stones; and His companions, as attested by Himself in a Tablet addressed to His cousin Maryam, were the 'birds of the air' and the 'beasts of the field'. In the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, He refers to those days in the following words:

From Our eyes there rained tears of anguish, and in Our bleeding heart there surged an ocean of agonizing pain. Many a night We had no food for sustenance, and many a day Our body found no rest ... Alone, We communed with Our spirit, oblivious of the world and all that is therein...

Alone in the wilderness, He chanted aloud many prayers and odes extolling the attributes and glorifying the character of His Revelation. These outpourings could have revived the souls of men and illumined the whole of humanity, but were instead confined to this remote land; and these words of God were, alas, for ever lost.

He also meditated on such things as the Cause of God which He would manifest, the fierce opposition His enemies would launch, the adversities which had already befallen Him and were still to come, and the perversity and unfaithfulness of the leaders of the Bábí community who had stained the good name of, and brought shame upon, the Cause of the Báb.

After Bahá'u'lláh had spent some time in that area, a certain Shaykh Ismá'íl, the leader of the Khalídíyyih Order, a sect of Sunní Islám, came in contact with Him and was intensely attracted to His person. In the end he succeeded in persuading Him to leave His abode for the town of Sulaymáníyyih. There, within a short period of time, Bahá'u'lláh's greatness became manifest not only to the leaders of religion and men of learning but also to all the inhabitants of the area.

His recognition as a man of outstanding qualities and knowledge occurred when His exquisite penmanship was first noticed, as well as His masterly composition and the beauty of His style in the letters He wrote acknowledging some messages He had received from a few religious leaders. It is interesting to note that some of these letters written by Bahá'u'lláh to eminent personalities such as Shaykh 'Abdu'r-Raḥmán, the leader of the Qádiríyyih Order, Mullá Ḥamíd, a celebrated divine of Sulaymáníyyih, and to a few others, have been left to posterity and testify to His sorrow and anguish in those days. In a letter He wrote to Shaykh 'Abdu'r-Raḥmán He laments the loss of His trusted Muslim servant, Abu'l-Qásim-i-Hamadání, who accompanied Him from Bagḥdád and was attacked and killed by brigands.

Bahá'u'lláh's fame thus spread to Sulaymáníyyih and to neighbouring towns. He soon became the focal point for many who thirsted after true knowledge and enlightenment. Without disclosing His identity He appeared among them day after day, and with simplicity and eloquence answered their questions on various abstruse and perplexing features of their religious teachings. Soon the people of Kurdistán, as testified by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, were magnetized by His love. Some of His admirers even believed that His station was that of a Prophet.

One of the most outstanding events of Bahá'u'lláh's sojourn in Sulaymáníyyih, which captured the hearts of the people, was the revelation in public of a poem in Arabic known as *Qaṣidiy-i-Varqá'íyyih*. The divines of Sulaymáníyyih requested Bahá'u'lláh to undertake a task, which no one had previously accomplished, of writing a poem in the same rhyme as *Qaṣidiy-i-Tá'íyyih*, one of the works of the celebrated Arabic poet Ibn-i-Fárid.

Accepting their request, Bahá'u'lláh dictated no less than two thousand verses as He sat in their midst. Amazed at such a revelation, those present were spellbound and lost in admiration at His performance. They acclaimed His verses as far superior in their beauty, lucidity and profundity to the original poem by Ibn-i-Fárid. Knowing that the subject-matter was beyond the people's comprehension, He chose one hundred and twenty-seven verses and allowed them to be copied.

If we remember that Bahá'u'lláh was a Persian and that He had not attended a school where the intricacies of the Arabic language were studied, this poem, from the literary point of view alone, stands out as a great testimony to His genius which was born of the Divine Spirit.

26. The acts of some believers increased His sorrows

The sufferings Bahá'u'lláh endured through the acts of His enemies, though very severe, were insignificant when compared with the manifold acts of treachery and misrepresentation perpetrated by the followers of Mírzá Yahyá, or the shameful behaviour of those who were reckoned among His own followers but who dishonoured His Name through their misdeeds. These men of evil inflicted far greater sufferings upon Him than His enemies who persecuted Him physically. In one of His Tablets He testifies to this:

I sorrow not for the burden of My imprisonment. Neither do I grieve over My abasement, or the tribulation I suffer at the hands of Mine enemies. By My life! They are My glory, a glory wherewith God hath adorned His own Self. Would that ye knew it! ...

My sorrows are for those who have involved themselves in their corrupt passions, and claim to be associated with the Faith of God, the Gracious, the All-Praised.

27. There were days when a mere loaf of bread was not available to Him

During the days of Bahá'u'lláh, the majority of the believers in Persia were poor, and some needy. But when Hájí Amín (trustee of Bahá'u'lláh) visited them, they had set aside through sacrifice small sums of money and were able to offer them for the Cause of God. It must be made clear that under Bahá'u'lláh's supervision the funds were spent for the promotion of the Cause, and very little, if any, for His own expenses or those of His companions. The history of the life of Bahá'u'lláh bears ample testimony to this fact. For during the forty years of His ministry He lived for the most part in the utmost poverty. There were days when a mere loaf of bread was not available to Him, and the garments He wore were the only clothes He had. The last few years of His earthly life, although relatively more comfortable, were nevertheless greatly influenced by the austerity that had characterized His life since the days of the Síyáh-Chál in Tíhrán, when all His possessions had been confiscated and He had been deprived of the means to support Himself and His Family.

28. Knowing he had no power to confront Bahá'u'lláh, Mírzá Yahyá attempted to take His life

Highly jealous of the rising prestige of Bahá'u'lláh and aware of the declaration of His station as 'He Whom God shall make manifest', Mírzá Yahyá decided it was time to come into the open and wrest the leadership of the community from the hands of the One who had been his guide and refuge all his life, and who had, through His sin-covering eye, concealed many of his shameful deeds. Emboldened by Bahá'u'lláh's loving forgiveness, duped by Siyyid Muḥammad's enticing prospects and spurred on by his own ambitious lust for leadership, Mírzá Yahyá embarked upon a path which is exclusively reserved for the evil, namely, to attempt a person's life. This was his only way, for he knew that he had no power whatsoever to confront Bahá'u'lláh. It is a fact that whenever Mírzá Yahyá came into the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, he found himself speechless. The majesty and authority of the Supreme Manifestation of God was so overwhelming that he was unable to utter a word. Several people have testified to this including Mírzá Áqá Ján who mentions that in the early days in Baghhdád he discovered that Mírzá Yahyá was so insignificant in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh that he could not speak. This puzzled Mírzá Áqá Ján, until later he realized that Mírzá Yahyá was like anyone else in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. However, Bahá'u'lláh had instructed His amanuensis not to disclose his observations to anyone.

It was not surprising for a man such as Mírzá Yahyá, who had already committed several crimes including the issuing of orders for the assassination of some of the outstanding disciples of the Báb and His cousin, to make elaborate plans for the taking of Bahá'u'lláh's life. The first attempt, carried out by Mírzá Yahyá's own hands, was to poison Him. Shoghi Effendi has summarized this shameful episode in these words:

Desperate designs to poison Bahá'u'lláh and His companions, and thereby reanimate his own defunct leadership, began, approximately a year after their arrival in Adrianople, to agitate his mind. Well aware of the erudition of his half-brother, Áqáy-i-Kalím, in matters pertaining to medicine, he, under various pretexts, sought enlightenment from him regarding the effects of certain herbs and poisons, and then began, contrary to his wont, to invite Bahá'u'lláh to his home, where, one day, having smeared His tea-cup with a substance he had concocted, he succeeded in poisoning Him sufficiently to produce a serious illness which lasted no less than a month, and which was accompanied by severe pains and high fever, the aftermath of which left Bahá'u'lláh with a shaking hand till the end of His life. So grave was His condition that a foreign doctor, named Shíshmán, was called in to attend Him, The doctor was so appalled by His livid hue that he deemed His case hopeless, and, after having fallen at His feet, retired from His presence without prescribing a remedy. A few days later that doctor fell ill and died. Prior to his death Bahá'u'lláh had intimated that doctor Shíshmán had sacrificed his life for Him. To Mírzá Áqá Ján, sent by Bahá'u'lláh to visit him, the doctor had stated that God had answered his prayers, and that after his death a certain Dr. Chúpán, whom he knew to be reliable, should, whenever necessary, be called in his stead.

On another occasion this same Mírzá Yahyá had, according to the testimony of one of his wives, who had temporarily deserted him and revealed the details of the above-mentioned act, poisoned the well which provided water for the family and companions of Bahá'u'lláh, in consequence of which the exiles manifested strange symptoms of illness.

In spite of this Bahá'u'lláh did not wish to disclose the wicked deeds of His brother to the public. He advised His companions not to spread the news. However, it was through Mírzá Yahyá's own actions later that the story had to be told. For soon after Bahá'u'lláh's recovery, Mírzá Yahyá openly and by insinuation shamefully claimed that it was Bahá'u'lláh who had tried to poison him! This outrageous and false accusation against One who was the well-spring of love and forgiveness served to unmask Mírzá Yahyá, and revealed his satanic nature to friends and strangers alike.

29. He came to this corrupt world to establish justice, trust, security and faith

The study of the Writings clearly indicates that the purpose underlying the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is to create a new race of men whose thoughts and deeds will reflect and manifest in this world the most lofty attributes and divine virtues. In this connection it is appropriate to quote an interesting account of Nabíl-i-A'zam concerning several statements which were made by Bahá'u'lláh to certain Persian princes in Baghdád on the subject of the future nobility of mankind. This is known as 'Panj Kanz' (Five Treasures). The following is a translation of a part of it:

... Once there were certain Persian princes in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. He was engaged in conversation with them and with loving-kindness sought news of their country. In the course of this interview one of the princes made the following remark: 'How is it that You speak of spiritual matters to Your friends when they attain Your presence, while to us You talk only about the news of the town

and the market?’ He was trying to ask: ‘How could such men who are devoid of learning and discernment be preferable to us?’ In answer to him Bahá’u’lláh said:

‘... I will tell you which people are worthy of listening to My utterances and attaining My presence. Suppose that a person is taken to a vast plain, on the right side of which are placed all the glories of this world, its pleasures and comfort, together with a sovereignty which would be everlasting and freed from every affliction and grief. On the left-hand side of this plain are preserved for eternity all the calamities, hardships, pains and immense sufferings. Then suppose that the Holy Spirit appears before this person and addresses him in these words: “Shouldst thou choose to have all the eternal pleasures that are placed on the right side in preference to the calamities on the left, not the slightest thing would be reduced from thy station in the sight of God. And shouldst thou choose to be inflicted with innumerable sufferings that are placed on the left, not the slightest thing would be added to thy station in the estimation of God, the Almighty, the Unconstrained.”

‘If at that moment this person were moved to choose, with the utmost eagerness and enthusiasm, the left hand of abasement rather than the right hand of glory, then he would be worthy to attain My presence and hearken to My exalted words. In this connection the Tongue of Grandeur (Bahá’u’lláh), addressing the inquirers, says “If thine aim be to cherish thy life, approach not our court; but if sacrifice be thy heart’s desire, come and let others come with thee. For such is the way of faith, if in thy heart thou seekest reunion with

Bahá; Shouldst thou refuse to tread this path, why trouble us?
Begone!" ' ...

To the same enquirer Bahá'u'lláh further said, 'My purpose in coming to this corrupt world where the tyrants and traitors, by their acts of cruelty and oppression, have closed the doors of peace and tranquillity to all mankind, is to establish, through the power of God and His might, the forces of justice, trust, security and faith. For instance [in the future] should a woman ..., who is unsurpassed in her beauty and adorned with the most exquisite and priceless jewels, travel unveiled and alone, from the east of the world to the west thereof, passing through every land and journeying in all countries, there would be such a standard of justice, trustworthiness and faith on the one hand, and lack of treachery and degradation on the other, that no one would be found who would wish to rob her of her possessions or to cast a treacherous and lustful eye upon her beauteous chastity! ...'

Then Bahá'u'lláh affirmed, 'Through the power of God I shall transform the peoples of the world into this exalted state and shall open this most great door to the face of all humanity,'

In this connection Bahá'u'lláh has revealed the following words concerning the people of Bahá:

He is My true follower who, if he come to a valley of pure gold will pass straight through it aloof as a cloud, and will neither turn back, nor pause. Such a man is assuredly of Me. From his garment the Concourse on high can inhale the fragrance of sanctity ... And if he met the fairest and most comely of women, he would not feel his heart seduced by the least shadow of desire for her beauty.

Nabíl continues the story of Bahá'u'lláh's conversation with the princes:

Concerning the sincerity of motive and purity of deeds, the Tongue of Grandeur addressed them in these words:

'Suppose there is a very rich person whose wealth is enormous and beyond measure. And suppose that gradually and in the course of time he bestows so much of his wealth upon a poor person ... that he himself is reduced to absolute poverty while the poor man has turned into a very rich man ... Suppose in his poor and distressed state he reaches a situation in which he incurs some small debt. Being unable to pay it, he is brought to a public square in town where he is humiliated and punished. He is further informed that his release will not be considered until he pays his debt. At this point suppose he sees his friend (who once was poor and as a result of his generosity has become rich). Should the thought flash through his mind that he wishes that in return for all his generosity to him, this friend would now come forward and relieve him of this calamity, immediately all his deeds would become void, he would become deprived of the virtue of contentment and acquiescence, and would be shut away from the virtues of the human spirit.

The same thing is true of the second man who has become rich (through the generosity of the captive). Should he think in his heart that he is obliged to pay this man's debts, free him from his ordeal, and enable him to live the rest of his life in comfort, because he had earlier shown immeasurable love and kindness towards him, then such a motive leading him to repay his friend's generosity (instead of giving for the sake of humanity) would cause him to be deprived of

the chalice of sincerity and would drive him into the world of ignominy.

The only way acceptable to God would have been for the first man to have based his acts of generosity on humanitarian principles wholly for the sake of God. In the same way, the second rich man should have acted for the sake of God and as a duty to the world of humanity regardless of the events of the past or the future. Thus it is revealed: “We nourish your souls for the sake of God; we seek from you neither recompense nor thanks”... (Qur’án, lxxvi. 9.)

30. The “Most Great House” in Baghdád

Hájí Mírzá Hádí, formerly a Persian vizir, was a remarkable person who was held in high repute among the notables of Persia and ‘Iráq. He had migrated to Baghdád where he had established his residence and, being a man of great wealth and influence, was highly esteemed by the inhabitants of that city. Towards the end of his life, Hájí Mírzá Hádí became attracted to Bahá’u’lláh and was devoted to Him. He would often enter His presence and sit at His feet in humility and self-effacement.

After his death great difficulties arose over his estate. When everything was settled, his son, Hájí Mírzá Músá, who was a loyal and steadfast follower of Bahá’u’lláh, inherited a portion of the estate. He owned the house of Bahá’u’lláh in Baghdád and was eager to present it to Him, along with other properties. But Bahá’u’lláh refused to accept this gift. Hájí Mírzá Músá continued to plead with Him, however, until at last Bahá’u’lláh gave instructions that the house be purchased from him at a

fair price. This was accomplished and the house became a property of the Faith.

Bahá'u'lláh has designated this house as the 'House of God', the 'Most Great House', and ordained it to be a centre of pilgrimage. Within its walls innumerable Tablets were revealed and the verses of God were sent down in great profusion for many years. From this sacred spot Bahá'u'lláh shed the splendour of His name upon the peoples of the world and breathed the spirit of life into the body of mankind. This House and the House of the Báb in Shíráz are, next to the Holy Shrines in 'Akká and Haifa where the earthly remains of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb are interred, regarded by Bahá'ís as the holiest places on earth.

Pilgrimage to the House of Bahá'u'lláh in Bagħdád and that of the Báb in Shíráz is one of the holy observances of the Faith ordained in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. When Bahá'u'lláh was in Adrianople He revealed the two Súrihs of Ḥajj (Pilgrimage). He then directed Nabíl i-A'ẓam to proceed to Bagħdád and Shíráz on pilgrimage. He is the first, and so far the only one, who has performed all the rites of pilgrimage prescribed in these Tablets.

Towards the end of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's life, in accordance with His directives, certain constructional work was done on the House of Bahá'u'lláh in Bagħdád. Its foundations were reinforced and the building was restored to its original form. Soon after this, however, the enemies of the Faith seized it unlawfully and this led eventually to the submission of a petition to the Council of the League of Nations. In 1929 this body upheld the claims of the Bahá'ís to the House, but for a variety of reasons, their verdict was not enforced by the authorities and the House is still unliberated.

In some of His Tablets Bahá'u'lláh has extolled the holiness and glory of this sacred spot, has foretold its fate and the abasement to which it would be subjected, and has prophesied its ultimate exaltation and grandeur in days to come. In one Tablet Bahá'u'lláh has revealed the following:

Grieve not, O House of God, if the veil of thy sanctity be rent asunder by the infidels. God hath, in the world of creation, adorned thee with the jewel of His remembrance. Such an ornament no man can, at any time, profane. Towards thee the eyes of thy Lord shall, under all conditions, remain directed ... In the fullness of time the Lord shall, by the power of truth, exalt it in the eyes of all men. He shall cause it to become the Standard of His Kingdom, the Shrine round which will circle the concourse of the faithful.

31. His movements, His manners, were a miracle

Once a Muslim clergyman from Iṣfahán requested Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-'Alí to recount his impressions of Bahá'u'lláh. He did not, he said, wish to enter into discussion concerning proofs of the authenticity of His claims, but rather was interested in hearing about some of the things Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-'Alí had witnessed with his own eyes. Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-'Alí writes about his conversation with the clergyman:

Much as I tried to explain to him [the clergyman] that contrary to all physical phenomena, which are possible of explanation, one cannot describe a spiritual experience, he was not able to understand. So I said, 'Before attaining His presence, I was hopeful of seeing many miracles—physical, intellectual and spiritual. Also I had stored up

several questions in my mind and wished them answered. But when I beheld the light of His beauteous Countenance, I was transported into such a state that all the miracles I had hoped to see and all the physical and spiritual mysteries I had longed to understand, paled into insignificance. They all appeared to me as a mirage to which the thirsty hasten, not the pure water which quenches the thirst and gives life.' He [the clergyman] asked me, 'What did you see that enabled you to acquire such a state of mind and heart?' ... I said, 'His blessed person appeared in the form of a human being, but His very movements, His manners, His way of sitting or standing, eating or drinking, even His sleep or wakefulness, were each a miracle to me. Because His perfections, His exalted character, His beauty, His glory, his most excellent titles and most august attributes revealed to me that He was peerless and without parallel. He was matchless with no one to join partners with him, unique with no peer or equal, the One and Single without a deputy, the Ever-abiding God, the incomparable Being. He who "begetteth not, neither is He begotten and there is not anyone like unto Him"'.

He [the clergyman] said, 'But Bahá'u'lláh's father was one of the outstanding ministers [of the Government], and His Son, 'Abbás Effendi ('Abdu'l-Bahá), is renowned throughout the world and is reputed to be the most perfect being on this earth.' I replied, 'Neither His father nor His Son were seated upon the Throne of the speaker on Sinai, they were not Founders of religion nor Revealers of the Book. Bahá'u'lláh alone is the Throne wherein abides the splendour of God's Revelation, the Mirror reflecting His light, He Who "begetteth not, neither is He begotten". Should you stand in front of a mirror and announce your identity, the mirror will do likewise, but

in reality it is dissociating itself from you.' (Hájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-'Alí is saying that 'Abdu'l-Bahá is a reflection of Bahá'u'lláh, that there is a vast difference between the two, and that the reflection is not the same as the reality of the One Who is reflected.) He [the clergyman] was very pleased with this answer and told me that it was a convincing and weighty reply which revealed many truths. He asked me to tell him more. I said, '... I saw a Person Who, from the human point of view, was like the rest of humanity. However, if one were to add the love, mercy and compassion of all the peoples of the world together, it would appear as a drop when compared with the ocean of His tender mercy and loving-kindness. I even seek God's forgiveness for making such a comparison. Similarly, if one brought together all the knowledge of sciences, crafts, philosophy, politics, natural history and divinity possessed by mankind, it would seem, in comparison with His knowledge and understanding, as an atom compared to the sun. If one weighed the might and power of kings, rulers, Prophets and Messengers against His omnipotence and sovereignty, His grandeur and glory, His majesty and dominion, they would be as insignificant as a touch of moisture compared with the waters of the sea ... As I observed every one of His attributes, I discovered my inability to emulate Him, and realized that all the peoples of the world will never be able to attain to His perfections.' He [the clergyman] admitted that all these were miracles and constituted the signs and tokens of the power of God, exalted be His glory.

32. The transcendental majesty of His Person

Some of the disciples of Bahá'u'lláh who attained His presence have referred to the transcendental majesty of His person. This was such a striking feature of Bahá'u'lláh that people who came face to face with Him were awed by His presence and often became speechless. Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí in the course of recounting the stories of his own pilgrimage to 'Akká has commented on this in these words:

Outwardly He was a Prisoner, condemned and wronged, but in reality He was the Sun of Glory, the Manifestation of grandeur and majesty, the King of the Kingdom of poise and dignity. Although he showed much compassion and loving-kindness, and approached anyone who came to His presence with tender care and humbleness, and often used to make humorous remarks to put them at ease, yet in spite of these, no one, whether faithful or disbelieving, learned of unlettered, wise or foolish, was able to utter ten words in His presence in the usual everyday manner. Indeed, many would find themselves to be tremulous with an impediment in their speech.

Some people asked permission to attain His presence for the sole purpose of conducting arguments and engaging in controversies. As a favour on His part, and in order to fulfil the testimony and to declare conclusively the proofs, He gave these permission to enter the court of His majesty and glory. As they entered the room, heard His voice welcoming them in, and gazed at His countenance beaming with the light of grandeur, they could not help but prostrate themselves at His door. They would then enter and sit down. When He showed them where to sit, they would find themselves unable to utter a word or put forward their questions. When they left they would bow to Him involuntarily. Some would be transformed

through the influence of meeting Him and would leave with the utmost sincerity and devotion, some would depart as admirers, while others would leave His presence, ignorant and heedless, attributing their experience to pure sorcery.

When a believer describes what he has experienced in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, his impressions may be interpreted as being formed through his attitude of self-effacement and a feeling of utter nothingness in relation to Him. But to what can it be attributed when one enters into His presence as an antagonist and leaves as a believer, or comes in as an enemy but goes out as a friend, or comes to raise controversial arguments, but departs without saying anything and, due to wilful blindness, attributing this to magic? To be brief, the bounties which were vouchsafed to a person as a result of attaining His presence were indescribable and unknowable. The proof of the sun is the sun itself.

33. Some accounts of His glory

Referring to the effect which Bahá'u'lláh's presence had on the believers, Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí writes:

To describe a spiritual experience is impossible. For example two or more people may attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh together. Each will regard His loving-kindness, compassion and bounty as directed to himself alone, and will be moved to declare 'He is my God'. Although all have attained the presence of the same blessed Person, Whose words are not addressed to one alone, yet His Words penetrate the veins and arteries, the hearts, minds and souls. Each

one will be affected in a personal way and will experience inner spiritual feelings which he finds impossible to describe to others. All that can be said is that one may address his friend and say: 'I was intoxicated and in a state of ecstasy.' His friend, who may have experienced similar effects at some time, can only appreciate this feeling to the extent of his own susceptibility ... I mean to say that whatever concerns one's inward feelings, spiritual perceptiveness, inner enlightenment, and all that pertains to the realms of divinity, is far removed from, and exalted above nature, material things, place, time, form and substance. For example, no one can explain the state of maturity or the mental faculties of a mature person to a child who has not come of age, even though these relate to the world of nature. For the child has not yet acquired the capacity to understand. How much less is it possible, then, to explain a spiritual matter, an abstract condition, to an individual.

Should a person be enabled to acquire, through the bounty and assistance of God and His Manifestations, an inner spiritual feeling [as a result of attaining the presence of Bahá'u'lláh], letting it penetrate his soul, not in the form of a temporary flash or vain imagining, but as imbuing his very being, then such an attainment will pave the way for his progress in the realms of spirit, provided it does not become mixed with self-glorification and egotism ...

The import of these words is that it is impossible to describe the effusions of the grace [of Bahá'u'lláh] experienced in His presence or to recount the effulgent glories of the Speaker on the Mount (Bahá'u'lláh) ...

Concerning the power and the authority of Bahá'u'lláh, Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí writes:

A certain man, who was a follower of Azal, once requested the late Hájí Siyyid Javád-i-Karbilá'í ... an early believer and one of the Mirrors of the Bábí Dispensation, to describe the countenance of the Báb ... and its beauty. He said 'He was unsurpassed in beauty and sweetness; I saw in Him all the goodness and beauty ascribed to the person of Joseph.'

Since the questioner was an Azalí (follower of Mírzá Yaḥyá) and a few other Azalís were also present, I felt that these men might deduce from the late Hájí Siyyid Javád's statement that he was also a follower of Azal. Therefore I asked him to tell us about the beauty of the One (Bahá'u'lláh) in Whose holy presence the Kingdom of beauty prostrates itself and at whose threshold the most high realm of omnipotence and majesty raises a song of praise and glory. He replied, 'Know with absolute certainty that if anyone, whether friend or foe, claims that he was able to look directly into the blessed face of Bahá'u'lláh he is a liar. I tested this repeatedly and tried time and again to gaze upon His blessed countenance, but was unable to do so. Sometimes, when a person attains the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, he is so enamoured and carried away that in fact he becomes dumbfounded, awestruck, oblivious of himself and forgetful of the world. And whenever he is not carried away, should he try to look into His blessed face with concentration, it would be like looking into the sun. In the same way that the eye is blinded by the effulgent rays of the sun, causing tears to flow, should one persist in gazing upon

the countenance of the Blessed Beauty, tears will fill the eyes making it impossible to gain any impression of Him.'

I myself had this experience. During the seven months that I stayed in Adrianople, I was so carried away and dazzled [by His presence] that I was completely oblivious of myself and all creation. Fourteen or fifteen years later I arrived in the holy city of 'Akká, the luminous Spot round which circle in adoration the Concourse on High, the Sinai of Revelation unto Moses. I attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh for three months. During all this time I had wanted to know the colour of the blessed *táj* (A tall felt headdress worn by Bahá'u'lláh) He was wearing, and yet I forgot to think of it every time I was in His presence, until one day He adorned, perfumed and illumined the Garden of Riḍván with His blessed footsteps. The realities of the promised gardens of Paradise, both hidden and manifest, lay prostrate at that Garden of Riḍván [Paradise]. He was having a midday meal in the room which pilgrims still visit and where a couch, chair, and some items used by Him are kept. Two or three people were standing inside and several outside the room. They were all enamoured of His peerless, imperishable and glorious Beauty. I saw the *táj* then ... as I stood behind the friends and His companions ... its colour was green ...

Another account which portrays the dazzling glory of the countenance of Bahá'u'lláh is to be found in the memoirs of Ḥájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir-i-Málmírí, who went on pilgrimage to 'Akká about 1878. He remained there for nine months and was permitted by Bahá'u'lláh to attain His presence every other day. During these memorable meetings he longed to gaze fully into the face of Bahá'u'lláh, but every time he came into His

holy presence, he found himself dazzled by His beauty and spellbound by His utterance; until one day he happened to look into the face of Bahá'u'lláh. This is a translation of his own words:

One day, I attained the presence of the Blessed Beauty. Graciously He bade me be seated. When I sat down, He called Khádimu'lláh (Literally 'the servant of God', a designation by which Bahá'u'lláh referred to Mírzá Áqá Ján, His amanuensis) and said, 'Bring tea for Áqá Táhír'. Khádimu'lláh brought a cup of tea and handed it to me. As I took the cup into my hands, my eyes fell upon the face of the Blessed Beauty and I became unconscious. I could not take my eyes from the transcendent beauty of His countenance. He then said to me, 'Oh, look what you have done! You have spilt the tea and spoilt your 'abá! (A cloak worn by orientals) Protect this 'abá, it is going to be your only clothing all the way to Persia. We also had only one shirt and underwear on Our journey to Sulaymáníyyih.' (Hájí Muḥammad- Táhír has written in detail the story of this 'abá, and how on the way back home, all his belongings were stolen from him. The only things he was able to recover were this 'abá and two envelopes. He wore the 'abá, a thin silk material, over his shirt and shivered in the cold of winter, remembering the words of Bahá'u'lláh that it would be his only clothing on his way to Persia, and realizing how much Bahá'u'lláh had suffered from the cold of Sulaymáníyyih.) From these words of the Blessed Beauty, I realized that I held only the saucer in my hand and had dropped the cup. The hot tea had poured over the 'abá and penetrated my clothes, but I had not felt it at all.

Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-‘Alí has recounted a brief story in which he describes the reaction of some government officials in ‘Akká when they saw Bahá’u’lláh for the first time. He writes in his book, the *Bihjatu's-Şudúr*:

... It was the festival of Riḍván, which was celebrated in the home of Jináb-i-Kalím (Mírzá Músá, the faithful brother of Bahá’u’lláh). I was staying in the outer apartment of his house. There were other apartments occupied by non-Bahá’ís; one was the residence of a certain ‘Big’ or ‘Páshá’ who had arrived in ‘Akká as the head of customs and excise.

In the afternoon of the first day of Riḍván Bahá’u’lláh came out of the inner apartment to the place where the head of the customs and his officers were seated. As soon as He arrived, they arose spontaneously and, although it was not their way, they bowed. Lost in bewilderment and filled with wonder, they remained standing. Their hearts were enamoured of His peerless and beauteous countenance. Bahá’u’lláh went to them and spoke words of loving kindness. He then went back to the inner section. Bewildered and perplexed, the officer asked, ‘Who was this distinguished personage? Is He the Holy Spirit or the King of Kings?’ We answered, ‘He is the father of ‘Abbás Effendi’ (‘Abdu’l-Bahá).

These accounts give some impression of the glory of Bahá’u’lláh and His awe-inspiring majesty, and perhaps explain why none of His disciples was able to write a pen-portrait of Him. The only pen-portrait we have was written by the orientalist, Edward Granville Browne, who was not a Bahá’í. This is how he describes his visit to the Mansion of Bahjí in 1890 and his meeting with Bahá’u’lláh:

... my conductor paused for a moment while I removed my shoes. Then, with a quick movement of the hand, he withdrew, and, as I passed, replaced the curtain; and I found myself in a large apartment, along the upper end of which ran a low divan, while on the side opposite to the door were placed two or three chairs. Though I dimly suspected whither I was going and whom I was to behold (for no distinct intimation had been given to me), a second or two elapsed ere, with a throb of wonder and awe, I became definitely conscious that the room was not untenanted. In the corner where the divan met the wall sat a wondrous and venerable figure, crowned with a felt head-dress of the kind called *táj* by dervishes (but of unusual height and make), round the base of which was wound a small white turban. The face of him on whom I gazed I can never forget, though I cannot describe it. Those piercing eyes seemed to read one's very soul; power and authority sat on that ample brow; while the deep lines on the forehead and face implied an age which the jet-black hair and beard flowing down in indistinguishable luxuriance almost to the waist seemed to belie. No need to ask in whose presence I stood, as I bowed myself before one who is the object of a devotion and love which kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain!

A mild dignified voice bade me be seated, and then continued: 'Praise be to God that thou hast attained! ... Thou hast come to see a prisoner and an exile ... We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations; yet they deem us a stirrer up of strife and sedition worthy of bondage and banishment ... That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be

strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled—what harm is there in this? ... Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the ‘Most Great Peace’ shall come ... Do not you in Europe need this also? Is not this that which Christ foretold? ... Yet do we see your kings and rulers lavishing their treasures more freely on means for the destruction of the human race than on that which would conduce to the happiness of mankind ... These strifes and this bloodshed and discord must cease, and all men be as one kindred and one family ... Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind ...’

Such, as far as I can recall them, were the words which, besides many others, I heard from Bahá (Bahá’u’lláh). Let those who read them consider well with themselves whether such doctrines merit death and bonds, and whether the world is more likely to gain or lose by their diffusion.

34. The majesty of Bahá’u’lláh was overwhelming

Some of the disciples of Bahá’u’lláh had discovered for themselves the loftiness of the station of Bahá’u’lláh. When these embodiments of detachment attained His presence, they were carried away to other realms beyond this world. They wanted to express the depth of their devotion to their Lord. But words were not adequate to describe their feelings of utter dedication and self-effacement. Above all, the majesty of Bahá’u’lláh was such that they were unable to utter a word in His presence, unless He empowered them to do so. Therefore, each person demonstrated the measure of his love and his readiness to lay down his

life in His path by some act. Some went down on their knees in His presence, others prostrated themselves at His feet, yet others stood in silence rapt in spiritual communion with Him. Here is a story of Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-‘Alí, in the presence of Bahá’u’lláh in ‘Akká, as he himself recounts:

One day I attained His presence. I was standing and the Blessed Beauty was pacing up and down the room. The ocean of His utterance was surging, and the sun of His bounteous favours was shedding its luminous rays upon my soul. The thought occurred to me, as I found myself in His presence, that I should throw myself on His blessed feet and kiss them, as this had been one of my cherished desires for a long time. Every time He walked towards me, I found myself pinned motionless like a painting to the wall. But when He turned away, I moved one, two or three steps forward with the intention of prostrating myself at His feet. Then as He turned back and walked toward me, the awe and majesty of His glorious person drove me back to the wall where I stood motionless. Three or four times I went forward in this way and then back to the wall. His Blessed Person noticed this and, smiling, said: ‘What happens to you? You keep taking a step forward and then retreating.’ He then signalled to me with His hand to stay in my place.

Although it was the greatest ambition of my life and the most cherished desire of my soul to throw myself at His feet, an act which I was prevented from carrying out, and I should have been disappointed and sad, yet the few words that He uttered and the movement of His hand created in me such joy that till eternity I shall

remain in a state of happiness and feel greatly honoured by what happened on that day.

35. He lived with the utmost simplicity in the path of God

Although many believers, through their devotion, and often by sacrificing their own needs, offered gifts to Bahá'u'lláh, He usually distributed such gifts among the poor. He Himself lived with the utmost simplicity, as this account of the days when He stayed in the house of Amru'lláh in Adrianople shows:

This house [of Amru'lláh] was very large and magnificent. It had a large outer apartment where all the loved ones of Bahá'u'lláh used to gather. They were intoxicated with the wine of His Peerless Beauty ... However, the means of livelihood were very inadequate and meagre. Most of the time there was no food which could be served to Bahá'u'lláh other than bread and cheese. Every day I used to save some meat and oil and store them in a special place until there was enough to cook. I would then invite Bahá'u'lláh to a meal on the lawn....

In the winter there was a brazier (portable fireplace made of cast iron) in each room. It was among my duties to light them. In order to economize I used to measure the amount of coal that I placed in each brazier. Someone had informed Bahá'u'lláh of this. He summoned me to His presence and said: 'I hear you count the pieces of coal which go into each brazier!' Bahá'u'lláh smiled and was very amused. He agreed that such economy was necessary in a large house.

36. He lived a life of austerity

The believers sometimes sent articles such as carpets, clothing and similar items to Bahá'u'lláh, but He seldom used them for Himself. He usually gave all gifts away. One person who coveted them was His amanuensis, Mírzá Áqá Ján. Knowing that Bahá'u'lláh had no interest in keeping the believers' offerings for Himself, he longed to possess these gifts and Bahá'u'lláh sometimes gave them to him. Mírzá Áqá Ján did not realize that this was his test and the cause of his downfall. To be in close contact with Bahá'u'lláh, to serve Him day and night and to abide within such a sacred realm, required utter detachment from all earthly things. The desire for material benefits while serving in His holy presence was fatal.

When Bahá'u'lláh was in Adrianople a certain believer from Káshán by the name of Muḥammad-Báqir presented Him with a small silk carpet. He wrote a Tablet, thanked him for the gift and showered His bounties upon him. He told him that He had accepted the gift, but was now returning it to him as a favour on His part. He stated that He preferred to sit on the ground in that Remote Prison (Adrianople) than to sit on a silk carpet. This is a typical example of how Bahá'u'lláh would respond to gifts presented to Him.

One of the believers, a certain Mírzá Muḥammad-Qulí, presented Bahá'u'lláh with an overcoat. In a Tablet Bahá'u'lláh informed him that He had worn the coat for one day as a bounty on His part.

Hájí Muḥammad 'Alí-i-Afnán, a cousin of the Báb, sent a length of white flannel to 'Akká. According to a Tablet written in the handwriting of Mírzá Áqá Ján, Bahá'u'lláh graciously accepted the gift from him and although since His departure from Baghdád He was in the habit of

wearing coats made only of black flannel, He ordered a white one to be made as a token of His grace and favours towards the Afnán.

According to Hájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir, Bahá'u'lláh would usually wear a long woollen upper garment and a woollen cloak; and in the summer, cotton garments.

These stories depicting some ordinary features of the life of Bahá'u'lláh, reveal His magnanimity and utter detachment from the things of this world. Sometimes Bahá'u'lláh ordered simple gifts to be sent to certain people. For instance, on one occasion Mírzá Áqá Ján wrote on the instructions of Bahá'u'lláh to the same Hájí Muḥammad-'Alí-i-Afnán, who was living in Hong Kong, asking him to send some china dishes which were intended as a gift for 'Abbúd. On another occasion Mírzá Áqá Ján was instructed to ask another of the Afnáns to send a few pairs of spectacles complete with cases for presentation to some of the authorities.

For his own personal use Bahá'u'lláh never ordered anything extravagant. The life of luxury to which He was accustomed in His youth had been denied Him since His imprisonment in the Síyáh-Chál of Ṭíhrán when all His possessions had been confiscated. But He lived a life of austerity in a majesty such that, in the words of Edward Granville Browne of Cambridge University, He was 'the object of a devotion that kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain'. His personal needs were simple and inexpensive. For instance, on one occasion when one of His companions, Hájí 'Alí-i-Yazdí, was going to Istanbul on business, Bahá'u'lláh asked him to purchase a pair of shoes for Him. He gave him an old pair of His slippers for size. Hájí 'Alí later presented the slippers

to the International Archives and they are now kept in the room of Bahá'u'lláh in the Mansion of Mazra'ih.

37. He caused the stars to fall

In November 1866 when Bahá'u'lláh was residing in the house of Ridá Big (Adrianople), a spectacular meteoric shower took place. Thousands of shooting-stars lit up the sky as they blazed their way through the atmosphere. This event, which has been called the 'star-fall' of 1866, was watched by millions in the East and West and for many the experience was terrifying.

According to the Gospels, one of the signs of the coming of Christ in the glory of the Father is the falling of stars. Bahá'u'lláh, in one of His Tablets cited in the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, refers to this:

O thou who hast set thy face towards the splendours of My Countenance! Vague fancies have encompassed the dwellers of the earth and debarred them from turning towards the Horizon of Certitude, and its brightness, and its manifestations and its lights. Vain imaginings have withheld them from Him Who is the Self-Subsisting. They speak as prompted by their own caprices, and understand not. Among them are those who have said: ... 'Have the stars fallen?' Say: 'Yea, when He Who is the Self-Subsisting dwelt in the Land of Mystery (Adrianople). Take heed, ye who are endued with discernment!' All the signs appeared when We drew forth the Hand of Power from the bosom of majesty and might.

Although this fascinating display of falling stars was a literal fulfilment of the prophecies of old, its real significance is to be found in the

Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá where the words of the Gospels are interpreted. Bahá'u'lláh explains that by the falling of stars is meant the fall of religious leaders who, because they denied the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, are losing their influence over mankind. Addressing the Christian ecclesiastics, Bahá'u'lláh in one of His Tablets proclaims:

O concourse of bishops! Ye are the stars of the heaven of My knowledge. My mercy desireth not that ye should fall upon the earth. My justice, however, declareth: 'This is that which the Son (Jesus) hath decreed.' And whatsoever hath proceeded out of His blameless, His truth-speaking, trustworthy mouth, can never be altered.

And again:

The stars of the heaven of knowledge have fallen, they that adduce the proofs they possess in order to demonstrate the truth of My Cause, and who make mention of God in My name. When I came unto them, in My majesty, however, they turned aside from Me. They, verily, are of the fallen.

As far as recorded history shows, every religion has had its leaders. In past Dispensations, the clergy played a major part in conducting the affairs of religion. They became the most vital element in the fabric of human society, and exerted a powerful influence in the life of the community. They gained a great deal of authority which never waned until the coming of Bahá'u'lláh, when by one stroke of His exalted Pen, he stripped them of a power they had enjoyed since the beginning of time. He wrote in one of His Tablets:

From two ranks amongst men power hath been seized: kings and ecclesiastics.

The creative influence of the words of Bahá'u'lláh in this and similar pronouncements has set in motion the process of the disintegration of religious institutions and the progressive downfall of their leaders, who are increasingly becoming aware of their impotence to exercise a meaningful influence upon their communities.

In this Dispensation Bahá'u'lláh has abolished priesthood. He has entrusted the administration of His Faith to the institutions designated by Him as the 'Houses of Justice.'

38. He “chastises with the scourge of loving-kindness and compassion”

Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí recounts the following story:

One evening there was talk of my leaving. Bahá'u'lláh sent a message to find out from me what my aims and intentions were. I entreated 'Abdu'l-Bahá and begged Him to intervene that my affairs might not be left in my own hand nor my wishes sought, but rather that Bahá'u'lláh might indicate His wishes and direct me to carry them out. I beseeched Him to send His confirmation and assistance so that I might be enabled to fulfill what was required of me. I further submitted that I was alone in this world, had no home or family and sought only the shelter of His Providence. Through mediation by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, this plea was accepted and I was told that Bahá'u'lláh would bestow upon me the honour and privilege of serving His

Cause and would send down His confirmations and assistance to succour me.

So it was arranged that I should go to Constantinople and serve as a channel of communication for the believers who travelled to and from that city, as well as despatching letters and Tablets to various places ... I arrived in Constantinople having taken with me books and Tablets in the handwriting of Áqáy-i-Kalím, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and others. I was accompanied by Mírzá Ĥusayn, and we were both happy. Each week some Tablets would arrive for despatch to many parts and I used to read them. I also had the opportunity to meet the believers who arrived with the intention of making the pilgrimage to Adrianople. These had to remain a few days in Constantinople making preparations for the journey or seeking permission from Bahá'u'lláh for pilgrimage. They also stayed a few days on their way back.

I used to receive instructions from the late Áqá Muḥammad-'Alí-i-Tambákú-Furúsh of Işfahán on matters which were connected with worldly affairs such as the purchasing of provisions and other goods, and from Áqáy-i-Kalím on spiritual matters. On one occasion, Áqá Muḥammad-'Alí ordered some tea. I purchased some and sent it off to him. Not pleased with the tea he sent me a very kind letter and lovingly pointed out that since I knew this tea would be served in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and His family, I should have tried it first and been more careful in choosing a good brand.

This advice by an affable counsellor and sincere friend did not please me. My vanity and ignorance played their part here. I showed no regard for his courtesy, love and seniority and instead wrote him a

reply which was wrong and unfair. The letter reached its destination. Soon after this, I received an exalted Tablet from the Ancient Beauty, the All-Bountiful, He Who conceals the faults of men and is the All-Merciful. This Tablet was addressed to me, a sinful, arrogant, rebellious and conceited person. In it He assured me that I and my deeds were praiseworthy and blessed with His good-pleasure.

Upon reading this Tablet, I became aware of my errors and realized that I had made a grave mistake and committed a serious transgression. For in spite of my ignorance and the vanity of my youth, I had, through the study of the holy Tablets and my observations during the seven months that I had attained His presence, understood the way in which God works in this Most Great, this Most Ancient Revelation. And it is this, that in order to educate the sinners, edify the souls of the evil-doers, and teach them human virtues and the way of servitude Bahá'u'lláh chastises them with the scourge of loving-kindness and compassion, of tender mercy and grace. To them He manifests His attributes of the All-Merciful, the Concealer of the faults of men, the Forgiver of sins, and the All-Bounteous,

It was for this reason that I became distressed, sore-perplexed and dismayed. In a state of devotion and with tears I returned to God. I prayed, fervently entreating and invoking Him to accept my repentance. Again I turned to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Mystery of God, to mediate for me. As the rays of the Sun of His Name, 'the Concealer of sins', shone forth with greater intensity, as the waves of the Sea of His Mercy surged with greater fury and as the rains of His loving-kindness and compassion showered more profusely, I became seized

with more fear and trembling. In brief, I was so overtaken with shame that I could not rest. I pleaded that the outpourings of Bahá'u'lláh's tender mercy and loving providence were well-nigh consuming me. I begged Him to direct me clearly to carry out that which was conducive to my serving the Cause and attaining His good-pleasure.

This time, Bahá'u'lláh instructed me to proceed to Egypt and there to teach the Cause with wisdom and utterance, with goodly deeds and lofty character. I knew that my sins were forgiven, I became confident and happy....

39. The “Most Great Separation” between truth and falsehood

The withdrawal of Bahá'u'lláh to the house of Ridá Big, in response to Mírzá Yaḥyá's rejection of His station, and His refusal to meet any of the exiles, created a situation in which some of the unfaithful openly turned against Him and transferred their allegiance to Mírzá Yaḥyá.

Emboldened by the absence of Bahá'u'lláh, Siyyid Muḥammad-i-Isfahání, who until then used to attain His presence and associate with His loved ones, publicly threw in his lot with the arch-breaker of the Covenant of the Báb and, thinking that the arena was now cleared for him, openly rose up in opposition to Bahá'u'lláh and began a vigorous campaign to discredit Him among the people. A period of intense activity ensued in which Mírzá Yaḥyá and Siyyid Muḥammad played a major part. Assisted by their infamous allies and associates they loaded their letters with calumnies and false accusations against Bahá'u'lláh and disseminated them far and wide among the believers in Persia and 'Iráq.

These letters caused much confusion and dissension among some of the Bábí community in Persia. Certain individuals were misled by these slanderous statements and lost their faith altogether. A number of Bábís wrote to Bahá'u'lláh and begged for guidance and enlightenment. Several Tablets in this period were revealed in response to such questions. Other believers had already reached the stage of certitude in their faith. These souls were moved by the dissemination of these evil letters to take action, and they arose, together with others whom Bahá'u'lláh had specifically chosen, such as Nabíl, to champion the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. They defended it most ably against those egotistical personalities in the Bábí community who were determined to bring division within the Cause of God.

It was Mírzá Yaḥyá himself who, by his actions, revealed to the Bábí community his disobedience to the Covenant which the Báb had so irrefutably established concerning 'Him Whom God shall make manifest', a disobedience long concealed by Bahá'u'lláh. The tests and trials which Bahá'u'lláh had foretold in His Tablets were now beginning to descend upon the believers. The news of the opposition of Mírzá Yaḥyá, the nominee of the Báb, created a great commotion among the Bábís, and served as a signal for the permanent rupture between him and his illustrious Brother.

It was during this period that Mírzá Yaḥyá entrusted one of his companions with some papers for distribution among the Bábís in Persia. On learning their contents, this man refused to comply with his orders and instead showed them to some faithful believers. These papers contained many statements misrepresenting Bahá'u'lláh and accusing Him of those very crimes which Mírzá Yaḥyá himself had

already committed. They fell ultimately into the hands of Bahá'u'lláh's friends in Adrianople who were astonished by Yahyá's shameful behaviour when they saw them.

Not satisfied with these perfidious deeds, Mírzá Yahyá decided to carry his rebellion to circles hitherto untouched by these matters. Despite the contents of these letters, Bahá'u'lláh advised the messenger that he should carry out the instructions of Mírzá Yahyá and deliver them, bear every false accusation and any amount of ill-treatment with resignation and forbearance. He sent a petition to Khurshíd Páshá, the Governor of Adrianople, and to the Governor's assistant 'Azíz Páshá. This communication, which the Governor shared with Bahá'u'lláh, was couched in obsequious language, contained false statements about Bahá'u'lláh and was aimed at discrediting Him in the eyes of the Governor, who was one of His most ardent admirers. One of Yahyá's false accusations was that he was not receiving his share of the allowance which the Government had allotted to Bahá'u'lláh and His fellow exiles. To support this claim he sent one of his wives to call on the Governor to complain that her husband's share of allowance was cut off by Bahá'u'lláh and that as a result he had become destitute and his children were on the verge of starvation.

The fact was that Bahá'u'lláh had always supported Mírzá Yahyá and his family. And when He retired to the house of Riḍá Big, He had arranged for Yahyá to receive his full share of the government allowance.

Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-'Alí, who arrived in Adrianople a few months after these distasteful events and attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh many times, has written concerning Mírzá Yahyá's petition to the authorities in these words:

When Azal arose in hostility with his satanic spirit to oppose and challenge the Blessed Beauty, through calumnies and false accusations, he wrote a letter to the Governor of Adrianople. We all saw this letter. It opened with these words: 'May my soul and body be a sacrifice for thee.' It went on to say: 'O thou 'Azíz (the Deputy Governor of Adrianople), we come to you in destitution, grant us some corn.' He continues falsely to accuse the Ancient Beauty of having cut off his livelihood.

The opening sentence of his letter, the statement of his needs, and the complaints all demonstrate that God cannot be confused with man, and that there is no likeness between the two.

The accusations of Mírzá Yaḥyá spread far and wide. Shoghi Effendi writes:

...He [Bahá'u'lláh] was soon after informed that this same brother [Mírzá Yaḥyá] had despatched one of his wives to the government house to complain that her husband had been cheated of his rights, and that her children were on the verge of starvation—an accusation that spread far and wide and, reaching Constantinople, became, to Bahá'u'lláh's profound distress, the subject of excited discussion and injurious comment in circles that had previously been greatly impressed by the high standard which His noble and dignified behaviour had set in that city.

In a Tablet to Shaykh Salmán, Bahá'u'lláh describes the agony of His heart for Mírzá Yaḥyá's shameful deeds. He recounts his calumnies concerning his share of the allowance, stating that it has always been divided between the exiles, and mentions that had it not been for the sake of those who accompanied Him, He Himself would never have

accepted the government allowance in spite of all the hardships which such an action would have entailed. As we shall see later, when the campaign of calumnies was intensified, Bahá'u'lláh refused to draw this allowance and had to sell some of His belongings in order to provide for His livelihood.

Because of the harmful actions of Mírzá Yahyá and Siyyid Muḥammad, Bahá'u'lláh was forced to end His withdrawal, which had lasted about two months, and come forward to protect the Cause of God from the onslaught of the unfaithful. It was at this time that Bahá'u'lláh expelled Siyyid Muḥammad from the gatherings of His followers and soon the 'Most Great Separation', which was a clear division between the followers of Bahá'u'lláh and those of Mírzá Yahyá, became public. The two-months' withdrawal of Bahá'u'lláh acted as a spiritual vacuum for the exiles in Adrianople. It created a great test and as a result each one of them showed the measure of his sincerity and faith. When the time of separation came, each person knew to which side he belonged.

However, the great majority of the exiles remained steadfast in the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. Only a few, who had gathered around Mírzá Yahyá, were expelled from the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. Several ambitious men and egotistical personalities in Persia also threw in their lot with Mírzá Yahyá. They strengthened his hand and, he, instigated by Siyyid Muḥammad-i-Iṣfaháni, intensified his evil activities and spread the seeds of dissension and strife among the authorities in the capital city of the Ottoman Empire.

40. He feared no one

Foremost among those who opposed Bahá'u'lláh was Mírzá Yaḥyá, His half-brother, who was swiftly struck down by the hand of power and might.

During the one-year period that Bahá'u'lláh stayed in the house of Riḍá Big and His subsequent return to the house of Amru'lláh, He never met Mírzá Yaḥyá or Siyyid Muḥammad whom He had expelled from His presence. Mírzá Yaḥyá with his family now lived in a separate house, and Siyyid Muḥammad was living among the Muslims in the city. After a stay of about three months in the house of Amru'lláh, Bahá'u'lláh moved His residence to the house of 'Izzat Áqá which was situated in the same quarter of the city. He remained there till the end of His stay in Adrianople.

Soon after transferring His residence to this house, an event of the utmost significance occurred which toppled Mírzá Yaḥyá to his doom and degraded him in the eyes of his supporters as well as the authorities in Adrianople. This was in September 1867. Having for years observed the exemplary patience with which Bahá'u'lláh had endured all the calumnies and falsehoods which Mírzá Yaḥyá had heaped upon Him while counting on His forbearance, knowing that He did not generally seek to appear in public and assuming that He would never consider meeting His unfaithful brother face to face, Siyyid Muḥammad-i-Iṣfaháni, in order to strengthen his own position, expressed to a few Persians of Muslim faith in Adrianople that, whereas he and Mírzá Yaḥyá were ready to confront Bahá'u'lláh in public he was sure that Bahá'u'lláh would not respond to the challenge.

This form of confrontation, known as *mubáhilih*, had taken place in Islám. For instance, when a deputation of the Christians of Najrán in

Medina were talking of offering a challenge to the Prophet Muḥammad, it was to be a confrontation in the form of *mubáhilih*. This is a challenge between truth and falsehood. The two parties come together, each one invoking God to annihilate the other, and calling on His wrath to strike down the faithless. It is expected in these circumstances that the power of truth will destroy the forces of falsehood.

The person who became instrumental in bringing this matter to its conclusion was Mír Muḥammad-i-Mukárí from Shíráz, a caravan-driver who had accompanied the Báb on His pilgrimage to Mecca, and later Bahá'u'lláh from Baghdád to Constantinople. Although he was uneducated, Mír Muḥammad was a man of great discernment, wisdom and courage. He was a Bábí and, confused with the differences which had arisen in the Faith, he travelled especially to Adrianople in order to investigate the truth for himself. While in that city, he moved freely among the companions of Bahá'u'lláh and the supporters of Mírzá Yaḥyá alike.

Soon after his arrival he heard Siyyid Muḥammad's propaganda about a confrontation with Bahá'u'lláh. This created great interest in Mír Muḥammad who urged Siyyid Muḥammad to induce Mírzá Yaḥyá to meet Bahá'u'lláh in a public place for a *mubáhilih*. He in turn promised personally to invite Bahá'u'lláh to accept the challenge. This is how Shoghi Effendi describes this important event:

A certain Mír Muḥammad, a Bábí of Shíráz, greatly resenting alike the claims and the cowardly seclusion of Mírzá Yaḥyá, succeeded in forcing Siyyid Muḥammad to induce him to meet Bahá'u'lláh face to face, so that a discrimination might be publicly effected between the true and the false. Foolishly assuming that his illustrious Brother

would never countenance such a proposition, Mírzá Yahyá appointed the mosque of Sultán Salím as the place for their encounter. No sooner had Bahá'u'lláh been informed of this arrangement than He set forth, on foot, in the heat of midday, and accompanied by this same Mír Muḥammad, for the aforementioned mosque, which was situated in a distant part of the city, reciting, as He walked, through the streets and markets, verses, in a voice and in a manner that greatly astonished those who saw and heard Him.

'O Muḥammad!', are some of the words He uttered on that memorable occasion, as testified by Himself in a Tablet, 'He Who is the Spirit hath, verily, issued from His habitation, and with Him have come forth the souls of God's chosen ones and the realities of His Messengers. Behold, then, the dwellers of the realms on high above Mine head, and all the testimonies of the Prophets in My grasp. Say: Were all the divines, all the wise men, all the kings and rulers on earth to gather together, I, in very truth, would confront them, and would proclaim the verses of God, the Sovereign, the Almighty, the All-Wise. I am He Who feareth no one, though all who are in heaven and all who are on earth rise up against Me ... This is Mine hand which God hath turned white for all the worlds to behold. This is My staff; were We to cast it down, it would, of a truth, swallow up all created things. Mír Muḥammad, who had been sent ahead to announce Bahá'u'lláh's arrival, soon returned, and informed Him that he who had challenged His authority wished, owing to unforeseen circumstances, to postpone for a day or two the interview. Upon His return to His house Bahá'u'lláh revealed a Tablet, wherein He recounted what had happened, fixed the time for the postponed interview, sealed the Tablet with His seal, entrusted it

to Nabíl, and instructed him to deliver it to one of the new believers, Mullá Muḥammad-i-Tabrízí, for the information of Siyyid Muḥammad, who was in the habit of frequenting that believer's shop. It was arranged to demand from Siyyid Muḥammad, ere the delivery of that Tablet, a sealed note pledging Mírzá Yaḥyá, in the event of failing to appear at the trysting-place, to affirm in writing that his claims were false. Siyyid Muḥammad promised that he would produce the next day the document required, and though Nabíl, for three successive days, waited in that shop for the reply, neither did the Siyyid appear, nor was such a note sent by him. That undelivered Tablet, Nabíl, recording twenty-three years later this historic episode in his chronicle, affirms was still in his possession, 'as fresh as the day on Which the Most Great Branch had penned it, and the seal of the Ancient Beauty had sealed and adorned it,' a tangible and irrefutable testimony to Bahá'u'lláh's ascendancy over a routed opponent.

Mírzá Áqá Ján mentions that when Bahá'u'lláh left for the mosque with Mír Muḥammad, he himself was not in the house, as he had gone to attend to some business in town. He heard the news and hastened back. On his way he saw a large crowd on both sides of the street and they told him that Bahá'u'lláh had just gone to the mosque of Sulṭán Salím. Mírzá Áqá Ján immediately went to the mosque, where he found Bahá'u'lláh uttering the verses of God in majestic tone and in great profusion. None of the companions of Bahá'u'lláh was permitted by Him to accompany Him except Mír Muḥammad and Mírzá Áqá Ján who followed. Those members of the public who were in the mosque were amazed by what they saw. So powerful were the words of Bahá'u'lláh that a Persian man who heard them was awestruck; he was trembling

all over and tears flowed from his eyes. Bahá'u'lláh at one point ordered Mír Muḥammad to go and call Mírzá Yaḥyá to come with all his sins and transgressions and face his Lord. Bahá'u'lláh remained in the mosque till near sunset, while Mírzá Yaḥyá and Siyyid Muḥammad stayed at home and gave some excuses to Mír Muḥammad for not attending.

Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-'Alí, who was in Adrianople at the time, has written the account of that day. This is a translation of some of his reminiscences:

The meeting was to be on Friday at the mosque of Sulṭán Salím at the time of the congregational prayer when the Muslims gather inside in great numbers ... Mír Muḥammad-i-Mukárí from Shíráz who was a Bábí could not imagine that Azal had broken the Covenant. So he begged the Blessed Beauty to enlighten him. Bahá'u'lláh said to him that if ever Azal came face to face with Him at a meeting place, then he could consider Azal's claims to be true. Mír Muḥammad accepted this statement as a criterion for distinguishing between truth and falsehood, and he endeavoured to bring this meeting about.

The news and date of the confrontation became known among the peoples of Muslim, Christian and Jewish religions in the city. All of them had heard of the miracles of Moses and the story of His confrontation with Pharaoh. And now they were expecting the meeting face to face in the mosque between His Holiness the Shaykh Effendi (a designation by which the people called Bahá'u'lláh to express their reverence for Him) and Mírzá 'Alí who had denied Him. (For fear of being recognized, Azal had called himself by this name.) Therefore, from the morning of Friday until before noon, a large multitude drawn from the followers of these three religions had

thronged the area between the house of Amru'lláh...and the entrance to the mosque. The crowd was so large that it was difficult to move about. Bahá'u'lláh, the Day-Star of Glory, emerged from His home ... and as He passed through the crowd, people showed such reverence as is difficult to describe. They greeted Him with salutations, bowed and opened the way for Him to pass. Many of them prostrated themselves at His feet and kissed them. Bahá'u'lláh, the Countenance of majesty and omnipotence, in acknowledgement greeted the crowd by raising His hands (as was customary among the Ottomans), and expressed His good wishes. This continued all the way to the mosque. As soon as He entered the mosque, the preacher, who was delivering his discourse, became speechless or perhaps he forgot his words. Bahá'u'lláh went forward, seated Himself and then gave permission to the preacher to continue. Eventually the preaching and prayers came to an end. But Azal did not turn up. We heard that he had feigned illness and asked to be excused.

In every city in the Ottoman Empire, there are Mawlavís, who are dervishes and followers of Mawlaví (Jaláli'd-Dín-i-Rúmí), the author of *Mathnaví*. Every Friday they hold their services in their *takyih*s (centres of congregation) when they whirl around their master and chant certain words in unison. Inside its chambers some play music and sing delightful melodies. When Bahá'u'lláh was about to leave the mosque He said: 'We owe a visit to the Mawlavís. We had better go to their *takyih*.' As He rose to go, the Governor of Adrianople and other dignitaries, together with the divines, availed themselves of the opportunity to be in His presence and so they accompanied Him. As a token of their humility and courtesy, the Governor, the Shaykhu'l-Islám, the 'Ulamá and other dignitaries walked four or five

steps behind Bahá'u'lláh while the stream of His utterance was flowing. Sometimes, through His grace and loving-kindness, Bahá'u'lláh would stop and beckon the Governor and the others to walk in front. But they would refuse to do so. In this way, with majesty and glory born of God, Bahá'u'lláh arrived in the *takyih*. At that time the Shaykh of the Mawlavís was standing in the centre and the dervishes were circling around and chanting. As soon as their eyes beheld Him, they all stopped their service without any reason. They bowed and showed their respect for Him and became absolutely silent. Bahá'u'lláh then seated Himself, permitted others who were with Him to be seated, and then He gave permission to the Shaykh to resume his service again.

The news was widely circulated in Adrianople that when Shaykh Effendi (Bahá'u'lláh) had entered the mosque the preacher was unable to deliver his sermon and when he went to the *takyih* the dervishes and their leader forgot their words and stopped their service. The following evening some believers attained His presence and I was among them ... Bahá'u'lláh made these remarks: 'When We entered the crowded mosque, the preacher forgot the words of his sermon, and when We arrived inside the *takyih*, the dervishes were suddenly filled with such awe and wonder that they became speechless and silent. However, since people are brought up in vain imaginings, they foolishly consider such events as supernatural acts and regard them as miracles!'

Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-'Alí then describes how much he was touched by these words of Bahá'u'lláh. Through these words he clearly saw the difference between the ways of God and those of man. He recalls his

meetings with men of eminence, leaders of religion and outstanding personalities who, without exception, were eager to publicize their slightest achievements and to exploit every opportunity through which they could enhance their fame and consolidate their positions. But this is not so with the Manifestations of God. Bahá'u'lláh, in this instance, by refuting the claims of the people who attributed miracles to Him, demonstrated that His glory does not depend upon the praise of men and their actions. He stands far above the human world and is its Ruler.

The detailed news of the *mubáhilih* and Mírzá Yaḥyá's failure to appear before Bahá'u'lláh was communicated to the believers in Persia. This event, which established Bahá'u'lláh's ascendancy in the eyes of the public over one who is stigmatized by Him as the 'source of perversion', removed the veil from the eyes of many among the followers of the Báb and enabled them to embrace the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh.

According to Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, the rise and fall of Mírzá Yaḥyá was clearly foretold by St. Paul in the following passages:

Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God ...

And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming ...

Mírzá Yahyá's dramatic fall was accompanied by an unprecedented outpouring of revelation by Bahá'u'lláh which soon afterwards resulted in the proclamation of His Message to the kings and rulers of the world.

41. The Persian ambassador finally saw in Him divine attributes

Those mainly responsible for Bahá'u'lláh's final banishment from Adrianople to 'Akká were the Prime Minister, 'Alí Páshá, the Foreign Minister, Fu'ád Páshá and the Persian Ambassador, Hájí Mírzá Husayn Khán (the Mushíru'd-Dawlih). These three worked together closely until they succeeded in their efforts to banish Bahá'u'lláh to 'Akká and to impose on Him life imprisonment within the walls of that prison city. Bahá'u'lláh prophesied that 'Alí Páshá and Fu'ád Páshá would be struck down by the hand of God as a punishment for their action.

As to the Mushíru'd-Dawlih, Bahá'u'lláh had at one time sent him a strong message through Hájí Mírzá Hasan-i-şafá, saying that if the Ambassador's aim in opposing Him was to destroy His person, there was nothing to stop him from carrying out his intentions against a Prisoner in the land. However, if he was trying to exterminate the Cause of God, then he should know that no power on earth could quench this Fire which God had kindled on the earth. Its flame would soon encompass the whole world.

However, the Mushíru'd-Dawlih did everything in his power to enforce Bahá'u'lláh's imprisonment in 'Akká. The following is a translation of a letter he wrote to his Government a little over a year after Bahá'u'lláh's arrival in 'Akká.

I have issued telegraphic and written instructions, forbidding that He (Bahá'u'lláh) associate with anyone except His wives and children, or leave under any circumstances, the house wherein He is imprisoned. 'Abbás-Qulí Khán, the Consul-General in Damascus ... I have, three days ago, sent back, instructing him to proceed direct to 'Akká ... confer with its governor regarding all necessary measures for the

strict maintenance of their imprisonment ... and appoint, before his return to Damascus, a representative on the spot to insure that the orders issued by the Sublime Porte will, in no wise, be disobeyed. I have, likewise, instructed him that once every three months he should proceed from Damascus to 'Akká, and personally watch over them, and submit his report to the Legation.

As the years went by, however, the Mushíru'd-Dawlih began to realize that the accusations made against Bahá'u'lláh by His enemies were unfounded. He saw in Him divine attributes and was impressed by His integrity and loftiness of purpose. After leaving his post in Constantinople, he spoke highly in Government circles in Persia of Bahá'u'lláh's uprightness and dignity. In Tíhrán he is reported to have said that the only person outside Persia who had brought honour to the nation was Bahá'u'lláh, and later he assured Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh that the followers of Bahá'u'lláh were not, as alleged, working against the interests of the country.

In the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* Bahá'u'lláh has commended him in these words:

His Excellency, the late Mírzá Husayn Khán, Mushíru'd-Dawlih—may God forgive him—hath known this Wronged One, and he, no doubt, must have given to the Authorities a circumstantial account of the arrival of this Wronged One at the Sublime Porte, and of the things which He said and did ... That which was done by his late Excellency—may God exalt his station—was not actuated by his friendship towards this Wronged One, but rather was prompted by his own sagacious judgment, and by his desire to accomplish the service he secretly contemplated rendering his Government. I testify that he

was so faithful in his service to his Government that dishonesty played no part, and was held in contempt, in the domain of his activities. It was he who was responsible for the arrival of these wronged ones in the Most Great Prison ('Akká). As he was faithful, however, in the discharge of his duty, he deserveth Our commendation ...

42. The exile from Adrianople

Mírzá Áqá Ján, Bahá'u'lláh's amanuensis, has described the events leading to Bahá'u'lláh's departure from Adrianople. He states that one evening late at night Bahá'u'lláh instructed Jamál-i-Burújirdí and two believers from Persia who had come for the purpose of attaining His presence, to leave the city immediately and return to Persia. No one understood the wisdom of this action at the time, but it became evident on the following morning, when some Government officials called to ask Jamál's whereabouts, and were told that he had left the city a few hours earlier.

Mírzá Áqá Ján states that the day after Jamál left Adrianople, the members of the community were rounded up early in the morning, and brought to Government headquarters. They were kept in custody while soldiers surrounded the house of Bahá'u'lláh and posted sentinels at its gates. An officer representing the Sublime Porte called and informed 'Abdu'l-Bahá that Bahá'u'lláh and His family were to proceed to Gallipoli. According to Mírzá Áqá Ján's testimony, the officers had indicated that only those twelve companions who had accompanied Bahá'u'lláh to Adrianople were to travel with Him to Gallipoli. But the rest of the believers were extremely agitated by this proposition. They

all wanted to accompany their Lord. Several of them who owned trading establishments in the city gave up their businesses, sold up what they could at very low prices and left many of their goods behind.

Áqá Riḍáy-i-Shírází, known as Áqá Riḍáy-i-Qannád (candy maker), one of the companions of Bahá'u'lláh, who had come with him from Baghḍád, has written about the reaction of the people of Adrianople to these developments:

A great tumult seized the people. All were perplexed and full of regret ... Some expressed their sympathy, others consoled us, and wept over us ... Most of our possessions were auctioned at half their value.

Another believer, Ḥusayn-i-Áshchí, who served Bahá'u'lláh as a cook for many years, has left the following account concerning the events leading to Bahá'u'lláh's departure for Gallipoli:

Orders were issued from Constantinople for Bahá'u'lláh's exile to Syria. Since Khurshíd Páshá failed in his efforts to alter the course of events he felt ashamed to attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and therefore he announced his departure for another city. He left Adrianople leaving the affairs of the Government in the hands of an officer. However, he did not travel to another city; he merely retired to a summer residence on the outskirts of Adrianople. One afternoon after working in the kitchen I went to the bazaar. I visited Áqá Riḍáy-i-Shírází and Mírzá Maḥmúd-i-Káshání at their shop. I had been there only a few minutes when two soldiers called and summoned the two of them to the Government headquarters. I attempted to leave the shop but the soldiers caught me and took me with them. I noticed that all the friends who had shops in the bazaar had been taken to

the headquarters. We were all counted, then each one's particulars were recorded. When they realized that I was a cook in Bahá'u'lláh's household, a soldier was called in and instructed to escort me to the house of Bahá'u'lláh ...

When we came near the house, I noticed that a number of soldiers were on duty and sentinels had been placed outside the gate. I was frightened by what I saw. I was stopped as I attempted to enter the house, even though the soldier who had escorted me had explained the circumstances. I was told that only the officer in charge could issue permission for entry, and he was in the outer apartment conversing with 'Abdu'l-Bahá ... Eventually I was allowed in and was ushered straight into the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. He enquired about the situation in town, but I was so frightened that I could hardly speak. My mouth dried up with fear. I came out of the room and asked for water to drink. Then I felt better and went again to attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. He looked at me, smiled, and jokingly said, 'Was the Kashí frightened?'

I told him the whole story. He then sent me to the house of Áqáy-i-Kalím with a message to come at once...I accompanied Áqáy-i-Kalím to the gate of Bahá'u'lláh's house. I was allowed in, but the soldiers stopped Áqáy-i-Kalím who sent a message to Bahá'u'lláh saying that since he was free to move in the city, was there anything he could do to help? When I conveyed this to Him, He said, 'Tell Áqáy-i-Kalím to come in. We seek help from no one, our affairs are not in the hands of anyone, they are in the hands of God.' I went to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and told Him this, and He asked the officer to let Áqáy-i-Kalím in and he did. It was this officer who had conveyed to 'Abdu'l-Bahá the news

that the Governor, Khurshíd Páshá, was not available and that he was deputized to notify Him of the orders from Constantinople requiring Bahá'u'lláh's departure to Syria within two days ...

Bahá'u'lláh, however, told the authorities that two days were not adequate time to prepare for the journey. He informed them that His household steward owed money to some suppliers in the bazaar. He required the authorities to free his men who were imprisoned in Constantinople and to allow them to sell the three horses so that every creditor in the bazaar might be paid. Then it would become possible to leave ... Each day officers would arrive in the outer apartment and meet 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The soldiers had surrounded the house and were on duty day and night. This situation lasted for eight days ...

Several consuls of foreign powers arrived to attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and the soldiers did not prevent them from entering. They one and all showed genuine respect and humility towards Bahá'u'lláh and offered Him the protection of their respective governments. But Bahá'u'lláh clearly stated that He would not seek help from any government. His sole refuge was God. The consuls came several times, and no matter how much they persisted, Bahá'u'lláh rejected their offers and reaffirmed that He put His trust in God and turned to Him at all times...

On one occasion Bahá'u'lláh counselled some of the friends who had recently arrived to stay away and not to become part of the community of exiles. He spoke to them words of consolation, and told them that His destination was unknown ... Among those whom Bahá'u'lláh counselled to stay away were two brothers, Hájí Ja'far-i-

Tabrízí and Karbilá'í Taqí ... who had come to Adrianople to attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. They were men of courage, tall in stature, enthusiastic and full of excitement. After hearing Bahá'u'lláh's advice that they should not think of accompanying Him, Hájí Ja'far privately decided that he preferred to die than to live away from His Lord. He took a razor with him to the outer apartment of the house which was crowded with military officers and government officials, put his head out of a window which opened onto the street, and cut his own throat. Standing nearby in the room was Áqá Muḥammad-'Alí-i-Tambákú-Furúsh who heard a terrifying shout coming from Hájí Ja'far. He pulled him into the room and found his throat cut.

Immediately they called 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Everyone was appalled at the sight. At that moment I arrived in the outer apartment to count the number of people so that I could bring supper for everybody. The Greatest Holy Leaf was in the kitchen waiting for me to tell her the number. But when I saw Hájí Ja'far in that state staggering all over the place with blood pouring out I was riveted to the scene before me, dazed and in a state of shock. The soldiers were telling Hájí Ja'far that a surgeon would be coming to attend to his wounds, but although he could not speak, he made it clear to them by sign language that even if the surgeon was able to stitch his wounds he would cut his throat again...

As I did not return to the kitchen the Greatest Holy Leaf sent the widow of Mírzá Muṣṭafá to come and fetch me at once. But when she saw Hájí Ja'far in that frightful state she fainted and fell unconscious on the ground. Then from the kitchen they sent another person—a

Christian maid—to come and see what was the cause of delay. She also fainted and dropped beside the widow of Mírzá Muṣṭafá!

In the meantime ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sent me into the inner apartments of the house to bring some of His own clothes so that He could change Ḥájí Ja‘far’s clothes. On my way I found the two women fallen unconscious at the gate; I sprinkled water on their faces and massaged them until they regained consciousness. The three of us entered the kitchen together. When the holy family saw us in such a state, frightened and trembling, they wanted to know what had happened, especially when I asked for the Master’s clothes. I said the Master had perspired a lot in the crowd and wished to change! But the Greatest Holy Leaf did not believe me. She said, ‘Tell me the truth, what is the matter? Why are you all so frightened?’ I still tried to hide the news from her, but she lovingly urged me to tell the truth pointing out that my hiding it would cause distress to everybody in the household. So I told the story ... and suggested that the news be kept from Bahá’u’lláh until after He had had supper. The Greatest Holy Leaf dismissed my idea as a feeble one and admonished me saying that this was not the first time that such a thing had happened; already thousands of lovers had shed their blood in the path of the Blessed Beauty ...

As to Ḥájí Ja‘far, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá urged him to co-operate with the surgeon when he came and promised him that he would be allowed to join Bahá’u’lláh. They placed some cotton over his wound until a competent surgeon by the name of Muḥammad arrived. But Ḥájí Ja‘far was unwilling for his throat to be stitched up. He kept on saying ‘Away from my Beloved this life is useless to me...’ Eventually

the Ancient Beauty came to his bedside ... and with His hands touched Hájí Ja'far's head and face, and assured him that He would summon him to His new place of exile as soon as his wounds were healed. He urged him to remain in Adrianople until he was completely recovered. When Bahá'u'lláh returned to His room the surgeon started to stitch the wound, but the thread kept breaking. He had to repeat the operation several times. During this ordeal Hájí Ja'far remained motionless. He endured the pain with such strength that he did not even screw up his face once!

As to Bahá'u'lláh's departure for Gallipoli, the authorities responded favourably to His demand concerning the release of the prisoners in Constantinople ... and forwarded a sum of money towards the value of the horses. Then preparations began for the journey and the standard of bereavement was hoisted in the city. The souls of many people burnt in the fire of separation from their Beloved and their hearts cried out in their remoteness from Him ... All the furniture was auctioned at a very low price. It took eight days before everything was ready. Then they brought about fifty carriages for all of us. Many people, Muslims, Christians and Jews crowded around the carriages, sobbing and grief-stricken ... The scenes of lamentation were more heart-rending than those of a few years before at the time of Bahá'u'lláh's departure from Baghdád ... Bahá'u'lláh spoke words of comfort to all and bade them farewell ... At Gallipoli we housed all our belongings in a caravanserai while we stayed in a house. Bahá'u'lláh, the holy family and the females among the party stayed upstairs and the rest of us downstairs.'

43. His arrival at 'Akká, the Most Great Prison

Bahá'u'lláh and His companions—seventy in all—disembarked from the ship and were taken ashore in sailing boats. All their belongings were also ferried across with them. There, the prisoners were all counted and handed over to government officials. A few hours later they were all taken aboard a sailing vessel which took them to 'Akká in the afternoon of the same day. As there were no landing facilities at 'Akká, the men had to wade ashore from the boat and it was ordered that the women were to be carried on the backs of men. But at 'Abdu'l-Bahá's insistence the women were carried ashore one by one sitting in a chair which He Himself procured.

When Bahá'u'lláh arrived in 'Akká, that city was a penal colony. Its population in the 1880s was estimated to be about nine thousand. The Turkish Government had consigned to it from its vast empire a great number of criminals, murderers, political detainees and every type of troublemaker. The inhabitants, whom Bahá'u'lláh had stigmatized as 'The Generation of Vipers', had sunk to a very low level. Among these people wild rumours and false accusations were circulating concerning Bahá'u'lláh and His followers as they were about to arrive. The company of exiles, those God-intoxicated heroes who had accompanied their Lord to this most desolate of cities, were considered to be evil men, criminals of the worst type who deserved to be treated most cruelly. It is no wonder, therefore, that great numbers from among the inhabitants of 'Akká had assembled at the landing site to jeer at them and at their Leader whom they referred to as 'The God of the Persians'.

Yet among the crowd there were some endowed with a measure of spiritual perception. These, as they gazed upon the countenance of

Bahá'u'lláh, were struck by His majesty and witnessed a glory they had never seen before. Among them was a certain Khalíl Aḥmad 'Abdú, a venerable old man who used to say to the inhabitants of 'Akká that he could see in the face of Bahá'u'lláh signs of greatness and of majesty and truthfulness. He often said that the people of 'Akká should rejoice and be thankful to God for having ennobled their homeland by the footsteps of this great Personage. He prophesied that through Him the inhabitants would be blessed and prosper, and this of course literally came to pass.

Another man in the crowd watching the arrival of the exiles was known as 'Abdu'lláh Ṭuzih. He saw the radiance, the power, and the glory of Bahá'u'lláh's countenance and was drawn to Him. He later became a believer and his daughter (who was born on the same day that Bahá'u'lláh arrived in 'Akká) was some years later joined in wedlock with Ḥusayn-i-Áshchí, a cook in Bahá'u'lláh's household and one of His devoted servants.

How incomparable is the difference between the vision of those assembled at the sea gate of 'Akká to jeer at and demonstrate their hostility towards the company of exiles and their Leader, and the vision of Bahá'u'lláh Who a few years before, in the Tablet of Sáyyah foreshadowing His arrival in the city of 'Akká, disclosed to those who were endowed with spiritual insight a vastly different spectacle:

Upon Our arrival We were welcomed with banners of light,
whereupon the Voice of the Spirit cried out saying: 'Soon will all that
dwell on earth be enlisted under these banners.'

Bahá'u'lláh and His party entered the prison city through the sea gate and were conducted along the narrow and twisting road of 'Akká to the

barracks. The hardships of the long and arduous journey from Adrianople to 'Akká in the burning heat of the midsummer season, with inadequate and primitive facilities on board the ships crowded by so many, had exhausted everyone. And now added to all this were the appalling conditions of their confinement in the barracks, especially during the first night of their arrival there. Bahá'u'lláh was placed in a filthy room completely bare and devoid of any furniture. Later He was moved into a room on the upper floor of the barracks; this room, the interior of which is now kept in good condition and visited by Bahá'í pilgrims, was in the days of Bahá'u'lláh unfit for habitation. He Himself has recounted in a Tablet that its floor was covered with earth, and what plaster remained on the ceiling was falling.

Bahá'u'lláh's followers were huddled into another room, the floor of which was covered with mud. Ten soldiers were posted at the gate to guard the prisoners. The foul air and the stench in the prison, coupled with the sultry heat of the summer, were so offensive that Bahá'íyyih Khánum, the daughter of Bahá'u'lláh entitled the 'Greatest Holy Leaf', was overcome and fainted on arrival.

There was no water for drinking except that in a small pool which had already been used for washing. The water in this pool was so filthy that the mere thought of drinking it would make one sick. That first night, water was withheld from the prisoners. Everyone was thirsty in those hot surroundings and some of the women and children were overcome by thirst. Mothers with suckling babies were unable to feed them, and for hours the children were crying for food and water. 'Abdu'l-Bahá made several appeals to the guards to show mercy to the children and even sent a message to the Governor of 'Akká, but all was without avail.

At last in the morning some water was given to the prisoners and three loaves of bread to each as a daily ration: the bread was unfit to eat but after some time they were allowed to take it to the market and exchange it for two loaves of a better quality.

44. 'Akká—The most desolate of cities

Long before His departure from Adrianople, Bahá'u'lláh had prophesied the impending calamities which were to befall Him in His forthcoming exile to 'Akká. In some of His Tablets revealed in Adrianople He had alluded to that city, in others He had mentioned 'Akká by name as being the next place of His exile. For instance in the *Lawḥ-i-Sultán*, the Tablet to Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh of Persia, He had clearly prophesied that the next place of His exile would be 'Akká. Concerning that city He writes in that Tablet: 'According to what they say, it is the most desolate of the cities of the world, the most unsightly of them in appearance, the most detestable in climate, and the foulest in water.'

The foul air of 'Akká was often summed up by the proverb that a bird flying over the city would drop dead. But the climate changed soon after Bahá'u'lláh's arrival. To this the inhabitants of 'Akká testified, and many attributed it to the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. To cite one example: Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, the famous Bahá'í scholar, has, in his well-known work *Fará'id*, quoted the testimony of one of the leading men of culture in 'Akká. These are his words:

In the year AH 1313 (1895–6) when the writer was staying in Syria, Ya'qúb-ibn-Betros of Lebanon, who is a learned doctor of divinity and linguistics in those parts and well known amongst the Christian

community of 'Akká, composed the following statements in praise of the Holy Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh in 'Akká and offered this composition to His Holiness 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and presented me with a copy of the composition as a gift.

'Set betwixt the twin mounts of Lebanon and Carmel is the Bahjí,
Therein is the resting place of Bahá, the Lord of Bounty and Mercy,
The Chosen Master, the Lamp of Guidance, Bahá—the Splendour and
the Light of the Sun of Truth,
He Who is the Luminary of all names,
Therein the true joy, the Desire of all hearts, hearts that seek His
lights,
The Solace of the eyes, the Fulfilment and Realization of all hope,

By His beneficent presence, the water that springs from the wells of
those parts was purified (i.e. of 'Akká) and the air and clime of 'Akká
and its environs were changed.'

In these words above there is a definite and clear reference to the transformation that occurred in the city of 'Akká as a result of the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. As this land was well known for its foul water, for its bad weather, for the bitterness and saltiness of its fountains and wells, so much so that it was the prison city for those who had gravely offended the Ottoman Government and it was the penal colony of those condemned to death, its peoples were all usually ill and had a sallow appearance because of its bad weather and climate. But when this territory became the place of exile of Bahá'u'lláh, its bitter waters were changed, its inclement weather transformed.

When Bahá'u'lláh arrived in 'Akká there was no source of fresh water within the city gates fit to drink. There was a well, situated about ten minutes walk from the city, from which most of the people carried water to their homes. But its taste was very unpleasant. Bahá'u'lláh and His companions used this water, which was carried by the believers to the prison. There was one believer in particular, Áqá 'Azím-i-Tafrishí, who served Bahá'u'lláh and His companions as a water-supplier. It was a difficult task, as he had to make numerous trips to the well and carry skinfuls of water on his back to the friends in 'Akká. Later he managed to get water with a better taste from springs at Kabrí, which were situated in the same direction as Bahjí and about half an hour's walking distance from 'Akká.

The water in 'Akká, of which 'Azím was a carrier for Bahá'u'lláh and His followers, improved considerably not merely in its quality but became more easily available through the restoration of a disused aqueduct, bringing fresh water to the city. This also happened through the influence of the word of Bahá'u'lláh.

When Bahá'u'lláh was in the house of 'Abbúd, He prophesied to him that God would raise up a person to restore the aqueduct, which had fallen into disuse, and expressed a desire that 'Abbúd might become the one to carry out this project. 'Abbúd was a Christian merchant of great influence in 'Akká and was highly respected by the people. It is said of him that when he walked through the city people stood up and showed their respect to him. But 'Abbúd did not follow Bahá'u'lláh's advice. Soon after this, Aḥmad Big Tawfíq, the Governor of 'Akká who had become aware of Bahá'u'lláh's greatness and had evinced an ardent admiration for 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and who often sat at His feet for

instruction and illumination, was allowed an audience with Bahá'u'lláh. It was in the course of that audience when the Governor offered to do some service for Him, that Bahá'u'lláh suggested the restoration of the aqueduct for the benefit of the people of 'Akká. To this suggestion, the Governor readily responded and arose to carry it out.

However, the restoration of the aqueduct was not completed until Faydí Páshá became Governor of 'Akká. He was a great personality in government circles in Istanbul and a man of action. It was he who completed this project, although his tenure of office was very short indeed. Husayn-i-Áshchí has left us with an account, summarized below, concerning the aqueduct.

When Faydí Páshá arrived in 'Akká, he noticed that water from the springs at Kabri was now within easy reach of 'Akká but the work of completing the building of the aqueduct was at a standstill. He remonstrated with those responsible and ordered an immediate resumption of work. Municipal workers were drafted to complete this project ... with his tremendous drive and personal supervision, a task which would normally have taken at least six months to accomplish was completed within six days. Fresh water arrived in 'Akká and the people of the city rejoiced. One hundred and one cannon shots were fired to celebrate the occasion.

45. His enemies intended that His imprisonment would destroy the Cause

The high esteem and veneration in which 'Abdu'l-Bahá was held throughout the Holy Land during this period was a reflection of the

majesty of Bahá'u'lláh whom the population had come to regard as a person with superhuman powers and whom they referred to as the 'august leader'. Concerning the influence He exerted on the people of Palestine and the evidences of His spiritual power, Shoghi Effendi writes:

The drastic farmán of Sulṭán 'Abdu'l-'Azíz, though officially unrepealed, had by now become a dead letter. Though Bahá'u'lláh was still nominally a prisoner, 'the doors of majesty and true sovereignty were', in the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 'flung wide open'. 'The rulers of Palestine', He moreover has written, 'envied His influence and power. Governors and mutiṣarrifs, generals and local officials, would humbly request the honor of attaining His presence—a request to which He seldom acceded ...'

'Sulṭán 'Abdu'l-'Azíz', Bahá'u'lláh is reported by one of His fellow-exiles to have stated, 'banished Us to this country in the greatest abasement, and since his object was to destroy Us and humble Us, whenever the means of glory and ease presented themselves, We did not reject them.' 'Now, praise be to God,' He, moreover, as reported by Nabíl in his narrative, once remarked, 'it has reached the point when all the people of these regions are manifesting their submissiveness unto Us.' And again, as recorded in that same narrative: 'The Ottoman Sulṭán, without any justification, or reason, arose to oppress Us, and sent Us to the fortress of 'Akká. His imperial farmán decreed that none should associate with Us, and that We should become the object of the hatred of every one. The Hand of Divine power, therefore, swiftly avenged Us. It first loosed the winds of destruction upon his two irreplaceable ministers and confidants, 'Alí

and Fu'ád, after which that Hand was stretched out to roll up the panoply of 'Azíz himself, and to seize him, as He only can seize, Who is the Mighty, the Strong.'

'His enemies', 'Abdu'l-Bahá, referring to this same theme, has written, 'intended that His imprisonment should completely destroy and annihilate the blessed Cause, but this prison was, in reality, of the greatest assistance, and became the means of its development.' '... This illustrious Being,' He, moreover, has affirmed, 'uplifted His Cause in the Most Great Prison. From this Prison His light was shed abroad; His fame conquered the world, and the proclamation of His glory reached the East and the West.' 'His light at first had been a star; now it became a mighty sun.' 'Until our time,' He, moreover, has affirmed, 'no such thing has ever occurred.'

Little wonder that, in view of so remarkable a reversal in the circumstances attending the twenty-four years of His banishment to 'Akká, Bahá'u'lláh Himself should have penned these weighty words: 'The Almighty ... hath transformed this Prison-House into the Most Exalted Paradise, the Heaven of Heavens.'

46. The fulfilment of the prophecy of His coming to 'Akká

There were inhabitants of 'Akká who either embraced the Faith or became admirers of Bahá'u'lláh and His supporters. Ḥusayn-i-Áshchí has recounted the story of some of these men in his memoirs. The following is a summary of his reminiscences:

After his recognition of the station of Bahá'u'lláh, Shaykh Maḥmúd (a religious leader of 'Akká) went to see a certain Şálih Effendi with

whom he was very friendly. He reminded him that when they were young, they had both been present at a meeting when the old Shaykh, the religious leader of the father of Shaykh Maḥmúd, had prophesied the coming of the Lord to 'Akká, and had stated that they should both seek Him. Shaykh Maḥmúd conveyed to his friend the glad tidings that the prophecy of the Shaykh had been fulfilled and that he had been led to the Lord in 'Akká and had attained His presence. He thus invited his friend to follow his example.

But Şáliḥ Effendi, although he acknowledged the validity of the station of Bahá'u'lláh, did not embrace the Faith because he maintained that he lived a life which was not worthy of the exalted station of Bahá'u'lláh, and his deeds were not in conformity with His teachings. But he always expressed his love for the believers and he did not harm the Faith in any way. Some years later he became ill with tuberculosis, which was incurable in those days, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá provided regular medical help for him till the end of his life.

Another person from 'Akká who became a believer was 'Uṯmán Effendi. When the exiles were residing in the barracks, he had a grocery shop in town. He used to supply Bahá'u'lláh's daily provisions and was paid on a monthly basis. He was attracted to the Cause by the good deeds and honest dealings of the believers. He embraced the Faith and attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh who promised him that he would become a wealthy and influential man. Soon 'Uṯmán Effendi acquired considerable wealth. He owned half the village of Kasra which is one of the Druze villages. He also became a man of considerable influence well respected in government circles in 'Akká.

47. He revealed a healing prayer for the believers

Life in the prison of 'Akká in the early days was extremely difficult and tortuous. For three months, the authorities did not allow Bahá'u'lláh to attend the public bath which in those days was the only place where people could take a bath. The guards had been given strict orders not to allow any person to visit Him. Even when a barber came to attend to Bahá'u'lláh's hair, he was accompanied by a guard and was not allowed to talk to Him, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had to live in a room on the ground floor which had been formerly used as a morgue. Its moist air affected His health for the rest of His life. As for the prisoners, the filthy conditions under which they were living, the lack of proper food and hygiene, and the severity of restrictions, took their toll. Shortly after their arrival in the barracks, all but two fell sick. Nine of the ten guards were also struck down by illness. Malaria and dysentery added to their ordeal. The only two unaffected at that stage were 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Áqá Ridáy-i-Qannád, although both of them were taken ill at a later time. The Master, helped by this believer, attended to the needs of the sick and nursed them day and night. The authorities did not call for a doctor to administer medicine. With the few provisions at His disposal all that 'Abdu'l-Bahá could do was to cook for them a simple broth and some rice each day. But the hygienic conditions were appalling. The heat was severe during the day and there was no adequate water for washing.

In these circumstances three people died. The first victim was a certain Abu'l-Qásim-i-Sulṭán Ábádí. Then two brothers, Ustád Muḥammad-Báqir and Ustád Muḥammad-Ismá'íl, both tailors by profession, died one evening within a few hours of each other. They were locked in each

other's arms as they lay on the floor. Bahá'u'lláh particularly expressed His grief at this tragic death, and stated that never before had two brothers passed away from this dark world and entered the realms of glory in such unity. He, as stated in a Tablet, praised them, showered His bounties upon them, and blessed their parents.

The burial of these three posed a difficult problem for the company of exiles. For the Government refused to allow anyone from among the prisoners to bury them, nor did they provide funds for their burial. The guards demanded payment of necessary expenses for burial before removing the bodies. And as there were very few possessions which could be sold, in order to raise the money Bahá'u'lláh ordered the sale of the only luxury He had, a small prayer carpet used by Him. This was done, and the proceeds were handed to the guards who then pocketed the money and buried the dead in the clothes they wore, without coffins and without the customary Muslim rites of washing and wrapping the bodies in shrouds.

As they were not allowed to be buried inside the Muslim Cemetery they were laid to rest outside it. Some years later 'Abdu'l-Bahá arranged for one of the believers to build their graves, which are joined together. After the death of these three men, Bahá'u'lláh revealed a short healing prayer especially for the believers in the barracks and asked them to chant it repeatedly and with absolute sincerity. This the friends did and soon everyone recovered.

48. His response to attempts on His life

Shaykh Maḥmúd was one of the religious leaders of ‘Akká when Bahá’u’lláh was exiled to that city. He was born into a family of devout Muslims. When he was about ten years of age, an old Shaykh, a religious man revered by Maḥmúd’s father, had a vision of the coming of the Person of the ‘Promised One’ to ‘Akká. He intimated this to Maḥmúd in the presence of his father and told him that his father and himself were old men and would not live to see that day. But he assured Maḥmúd that he would then be a grown-up person and bade him watch out for the coming of the Lord. He even indicated to Maḥmúd that He would speak in the Persian tongue and reside in an upper room at the top of a long flight of stairs.

Some years passed and the young boy grew up into a strong man, learned and pious, well respected by the community and known as Shaykh Maḥmúd. But he seldom thought of the vision, and when Bahá’u’lláh came to ‘Akká it never occurred to him that He might be the One foretold by the old Shaykh. On the contrary, he deeply resented the action of the Government in sending Bahá’u’lláh, whom the authorities had described as an evil man and the ‘God of the Persians’, to the city of ‘Akká. For some time he was in a state of agitation, wanting to do something to rid the city of such a person. It must be remembered that soon after the imprisonment of Bahá’u’lláh in the barracks, the prison authorities relaxed some of the restrictions which had at first been imposed and strictly adhered to. For instance, they agreed to allow a small party of Bahá’í prisoners to visit the city daily for shopping. At times ‘Abdu’l-Bahá went out with them and this is how the people of ‘Akká came into contact with His magnetic personality and began to unbend towards the company of exiles.

Shaykh Maḥmúd was very perturbed one day to see ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the Mosque. He is reported to have grabbed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá by the hand and exclaimed, ‘Are you the son of God?’ The Master with His characteristic charm pointed out that it was he who was saying it, and not ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He then reminded him of the injunction of Islám as stated in one of the Traditions: ‘Be charitable toward the guest even though he be an infidel.’

The impact of these words and the loving personality of the Master affected Shaykh Maḥmúd and he changed his attitude of aggressiveness towards Him. But being a religious leader, he could not remain indifferent to the presence of the group of exiles whom he considered ungodly. He therefore decided to put an end to all this by himself. One day he hid a weapon under his cloak and went straight to the barracks with the intention of assassinating Bahá’u’lláh. He informed the guards at the prison gate that he wished to see Bahá’u’lláh. Since he was an influential personality in ‘Akká, the guards complied with his request and went to inform Bahá’u’lláh of the identity of the visitor. ‘Tell him’, Bahá’u’lláh is reported to have said, ‘to cast away the weapon and then he may come in.’ On hearing this Shaykh Maḥmúd was astounded, for he was sure that no one had seen the weapon under his cloak. In a state of utter confusion he returned home, but his agitated mind could not be at rest. He continued in this state for some time until he decided to go to the barracks again, but without any weapons this time. Being a strong man he knew he could take Bahá’u’lláh’s life by the mere strength of his hands.

So he went again to the prison gate and made the same request to visit Bahá’u’lláh. On being informed of Shaykh Maḥmúd’s desire to meet

Him, Bahá'u'lláh is reported to have said: 'Tell him to purify his heart first and then he may come in.' Perplexed and confused at these utterances, Shaykh Maḥmúd could not bring himself to visit Bahá'u'lláh that day. Later he had a dream in which his father and the old Shaykh appeared to him and reminded him of their vision regarding the coming of the Lord. After this dream Shaykh Maḥmúd went to the barracks again and attained the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The words of the Master penetrated his heart and he was ushered into the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. The majesty and glory of His countenance overwhelmed the Shaykh and he witnessed the fulfilment of the prophecy of the coming of the Lord to 'Akká. He prostrated himself at His feet and became an ardent believer.

After recognizing the station of Bahá'u'lláh, he arose to serve Him and His Cause. He played a significant part in assisting the believers to enter the city and then harbouring them until they were able to attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. On some occasions he even ordered ropes to be lowered so that the Bahá'í visitors might be pulled up the walls which surrounded the city. Another method he sometimes employed was to leave the city and return at night accompanied by one of the believers who would be posing as a servant carrying a lantern in front of his master. After the believer had attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, Shaykh Maḥmúd would enable him to leave the city in the same manner that he had entered it. Shaykh Maḥmúd was loved by the Master and served the Cause with great devotion till the end of his life. He made a compilation of the Islámic traditions related to 'Akká and its glorious future.

Well known among those whom Shaykh Maḥmúd assisted to enter ‘Akká was Mírzá Ḥasan-i-Mázindarání, who was brought into the city by the sea gate. He stayed at first in the Shaykh’s house and later managed to enter the barracks where he stayed for about six months before returning to Persia. Mírzá Ḥasan was a cousin of Bahá’u’lláh and a devoted believer. His father, Mullá Zaynu’l-‘Ábidín, was Bahá’u’lláh’s paternal uncle. He was among Bahá’u’lláh’s kinsmen who had been converted to the Bábí Faith by Bahá’u’lláh Himself in the early days of the ministry of the Báb. He had recognized the station of Bahá’u’lláh and was very devoted to Him. It was this uncle who accompanied Bahá’u’lláh to Ámul and when He was to be bastinadoed, threw himself on the feet of Bahá’u’lláh as a shield. As a result he was beaten so much that he fainted.

Mírzá Ḥasan, who was much loved by Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, made several trips to ‘Akká and each time he carried back many Tablets for the believers living in the northern cities of Persia.

49. The Mufti of ‘Akká, became attracted to Bahá’u’lláh

From the memoirs of Ḥusayn-i-Áshchí:

Shaykh ‘Alíy-i-Mírí, the Muftí of ‘Akká, was a somewhat fanatical man. But later he changed as a result of his association with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. For he discovered that his own knowledge and learning was as a drop when compared with the ocean of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s innate knowledge. He therefore showed signs of humility and gradually became friendly.

One day he conveyed to 'Abdu'l-Bahá his desire to meet Bahá'u'lláh as he had some questions and wished to be enlightened. But in those days Bahá'u'lláh did not grant interviews to people, mainly because He did not wish to act against the orders of the Government. However, because of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's pleading, Bahá'u'lláh gave permission and the Muftí of 'Akká attained His presence in the barracks. He was shown to his seat while 'Abdu'l-Bahá stood by the door. The kitchen in which I was working happened to be opposite the room of Bahá'u'lláh. I could see and hear Him. The Muftí asked some questions and then the Tongue of Grandeur began to speak. At one stage when the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh were still continuing, the Muftí was moved to say something. 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave him an emphatic and commanding signal with his hand that he should not interrupt the words of Bahá'u'lláh. He complied but his pride was hurt.

When the interview was over he left, 'Abdu'l-Bahá accompanying him to the prison gate, but he was annoyed because of the incident, for he was well respected by the inhabitants of the town and as he walked in the bazaars people showed their respect to him and kissed his hands. At that stage he was not aware of the truth of the Cause and the greatness of its Author, therefore he was displeased with the way 'Abdu'l-Bahá had bidden him be silent. But it did not take very long before he realized that in the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá he was as utter nothingness. He used to visit the Master and partake of His knowledge and wisdom. He therefore changed his attitude. In the streets and bazaars, whenever he accompanied 'Abdu'l-Bahá he always walked a few steps behind Him and was never found to be walking in front. When Bahá'u'lláh was moved out of the barracks he

used to come regularly to the outer apartment of the house—a room set aside for visitors—and sit at the feet of the Master. He diligently carried out every service that He referred to him.

As time went on the devotion of the Muftí of ‘Akká towards Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá increased. He became so attracted that once he intimated to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that every time he stood up to pray, the majestic figure of Bahá’u’lláh appeared before him. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá always showered his favours upon the Muftí, as indeed on other prominent people in the land. It is true to say that a time came when the Government of ‘Akká used to revolve around the person of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Every one of the officials was longing to receive His blessings and favours. And because of His qualities and prestige the condition of the believers changed from abasement to honour.

50. The guards saw that the Prisoner was endowed with divine authority

Another person, a resident of ‘Akká who independently recognized the station of Bahá’u’lláh was Aḥmad-i-Jarráḥ, an officer in the Turkish Army. He witnessed the majesty of Bahá’u’lláh in the barracks, but it was some years later that his heart was touched, when Bahá’u’lláh (Who was then residing in the house of ‘Abbúd) was taken to the Governor’s house and kept in custody for about three days. This humiliating treatment resulted from the murder of three Azalís in ‘Akká. Aḥmad-i- Jarráḥ was one of the officers present in the case and it was then that the majesty and glory of Bahá’u’lláh made a deep impression upon his soul. The mighty and powerful words He uttered on that occasion enabled Jarráḥ to realize that the Prisoner in his custody was

not an ordinary man but One endowed with divine authority. After reading some of the Writings and becoming fully conscious of the station of Bahá'u'lláh, he entered the rank of the believers.

Amín Effendi, a brother of Jarráḥ and the head of the municipality of 'Akká, also recognized the truth of the Faith and became a believer. An interesting incident happened which confirmed their faith. One day, Amín and Aḥmad sought permission to attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. Permission was granted and they came. They wanted particularly to complain and seek advice about a certain superior officer by the name of Áqásí who was a bitter enemy of theirs. Before they were able to utter a word, Bahá'u'lláh turned to them and said, 'Praise be to God who has rescued you from the evil doings of Áqásí!' The two brothers were surprised to hear this. Only two days later, the officer was dismissed by the order of the Sulṭán. A third brother of Aḥmad was Khálid. He was a physician, attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, and was attracted to Him and to His Cause. He showed much love to the believers and attended them when they were sick.

51. The death of Mírzá Mihdí, His youngest son

A little under two years after Bahá'u'lláh's confinement in the barracks of 'Akká, when suddenly a most tragic event occurred. It was the untimely death of Mírzá Mihdí, entitled the Purest Branch, the younger brother of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who was fatally wounded when he fell from the roof of the barracks.

In 1848, at a time when the followers of the Báb were engulfed by sufferings and persecutions, a son had been born in Tíhrán to

Bahá'u'lláh and His illustrious wife Ásíyih Khánum, entitled Navváb. He was four years younger than 'Abdu'l-Bahá and was given the name 'Mihdí', after a brother of Bahá'u'lláh who was dear to Him and had died a year before. Later the Pen of the Most High bestowed upon this son the title 'Ghuṣnu'lláhu'l-Aṭhar' (The Purest Branch).

Unlike 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Mírzá Mihdí could not remember much of a life of luxury in Tíhrán, for when he was just over four years of age His Father had been imprisoned in the Síyah-Chál, and all His possessions plundered and seized by the enemies of the Cause. During the four months that Bahá'u'lláh lay in that horrible dungeon, the Holy Family spent their days in anguish and fear, not knowing what would happen to Him. Often frightened and anxious, this child, tender in age and delicate by nature, found his only shelter and refuge within the arms of a loving and devoted mother. But Providence deprived him of this also. As the journey to Baghdád, undertaken in the severe cold of the winter, was laden with hardships and dangers unbearable for a child as delicate as Mírzá Mihdí, he had to be left behind in Tíhrán in the care of relatives. For about seven years he tasted the agony and heartbreak of separation from his beloved parents. It seems that at this early age, his soul was being prepared by the Almighty through pain and suffering to play a major part in the arena of sacrifice and to shed an imperishable lustre upon the Cause of his heavenly Father.

Mírzá Mihdí was taken to Baghdád to join the Family in the year AH 1276 (*circa* AD 1860). It was in that city that this pure and holy youth, noted for his meekness, came in touch with the Divine Spirit and was magnetized by the energizing forces of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. From that time on, he devoted every moment of his life to the service of his

heavenly Father. He was Bahá'u'lláh's companion in Baghdád, Adrianople and 'Akká, and served Him as an amanuensis. The last ten years of his life were filled with the hardship and suffering inflicted on Bahá'u'lláh and His companions in the course of the three successive banishments from Baghdád to 'Akká.

The Purest Branch resembled 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and throughout his short and eventful life he displayed the same spiritual qualities which distinguished his illustrious Brother. The believers loved and venerated him as they did 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

In 'Akká, the Purest Branch lived in the barracks near his Father. Often he attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh late in the afternoon to act as His amanuensis. On 22 June 1870, early in the evening, Bahá'u'lláh informed His son that he was not needed that day to write and that instead he could go up on the roof for prayer and meditation as was his custom. It was a normal practice of the prisoners to go on the roof for fresh air in the evening of a hot summer day. The Purest Branch had often paced up and down that roof chanting prayers and meditating. But on that fateful evening as he chanted the verses of the *Qaṣídiy-i-Varqá'íyyih*, one of Bahá'u'lláh's most moving poems revealed in Kurdistán, he was carried away in a state of utter detachment and joy. As he paced along that familiar space wrapped in his customary meditations with his eyes closed, he fell through an open skylight on to an open crate lying on the floor below. He was badly wounded, and bled profusely. He was so terribly injured that they had to remove his clothes by tearing them from him. The following is a summary of an account given by Ḥusayn-i-Áshchí, the cook in Bahá'u'lláh's household, and a

devoted believer. In this he describes the tragic circumstances of the fall and death of the Purest Branch:

It is not possible for anyone to visualize the measure of humility and self-effacement and the intensity of devotion and meekness which the Purest Branch evinced in his life. He was a few years younger than the Master, but slightly taller than him. He used to act as Bahá'u'lláh's amanuensis and was engaged in transcribing the Writings ... When he had finished writing he was in the habit of going on to the roof of the barracks for prayers. There was a skylight, an opening in the middle of the roof near where the kitchen was situated. As he was pacing in a state of prayer, attracted to the Kingdom of Abhá, with his head turned upwards, he fell through the skylight down on some hard objects. The terrific loud sound of the impact made us all run to the scene of the tragedy where we beheld in astonishment what had happened as decreed by God, and were so shocked as to beat upon our heads. Then the Ancient Beauty came out of his room and asked what he had done which caused his fall. The Purest Branch said that he knew the whereabouts of the skylight and in the past had been careful not to come near it, but this time it was his fate to forget about it.

We carried his precious person to his room and called a medical doctor who was an Italian, but he could not help ... In spite of much pain and agony, and being weak, he warmly greeted those who came to his bedside, showered an abundance of love and favours upon them and apologized to everyone, saying he was ashamed that while they were all sitting, he had to lie down in their presence...

Members of the Holy Family and some of the companions gathered around him and all were so distressed and grief-stricken that 'Abdu'l-Bahá with tearful eyes entered the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, prostrated Himself at His feet and begged for healing. Bahá'u'lláh is reported to have said 'O my Greatest Branch, leave him in the hands of his God.' He then proceeded to the bedside of his injured son, dismissed everyone from His presence and stayed beside him for some time. Although no one knows what took place in that precious hour between the lover and the Beloved, we can be sure that this son of Bahá'u'lláh, whose devotion and love for the Cause of His Father knew no bounds, must have been exhilarated by the outpouring of bounties and love from his Lord.

It must be remembered that the relationship of Bahá'u'lláh and the members of His family who remained faithful to the Cause was not identical to the relationship which exists between members of other families. Normally, a father and a son at home have a very intimate and informal attitude towards each other. But in the case of Bahá'u'lláh and His faithful children, it was very different indeed, although that intimate relationship of father and son did indeed exist. However, the station of Bahá'u'lláh as a Manifestation of God completely overshadowed His position as a physical father. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Greatest Holy Leaf and the Purest Branch looked upon Bahá'u'lláh not merely as their father, but as their Lord. And because they had truly recognized His station, they acted at all times as most humble servants at His threshold. 'Abdu'l-Bahá always entered the presence of Bahá'u'lláh with such genuine humbleness and reverence that no one among His followers could manifest the spirit of lowliness and utter self-effacement as He did. The humility of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as He bowed before His Father, or prostrated Himself at His feet or dismounted His steed when He

approached the Mansion in which Bahá'u'lláh resided, demonstrates this unique relationship which existed between this Father and His faithful sons and daughter.

In the light of all this we can appreciate how the Purest Branch must have felt when his Father went to his bedside. What expressions of devotion, love and thanksgiving must have passed through his lips on that occasion, we cannot imagine. All we know is that Bahá'u'lláh, having the power of life and death in His hands, asked His dying son whether he wished to live. He assured him that if this was his wish God would enable him to recover and grant him good health. But the Purest Branch begged Bahá'u'lláh to accept his life as a ransom for the opening of the gates of the prison to the face of the many believers who were longing to come and enter the presence of their Lord. Bahá'u'lláh accepted his sacrifice and he died on 23 June 1870, twenty-two hours after his fall.

Thus ended the life of one of whom Bahá'u'lláh states that he 'was created of the light of Bahá, whose birth had taken place during some of the darkest hours in the history of the Faith, whose infancy had been spent within the cradle of adversity, whose soul at an early age had been set aglow with the fire of ordeal and separation, whose days of joy had been spent in exile and within the walls of a prison, and whose tragic death had clothed him with the crimson vesture of sacrifice, shedding thereby an imperishable lustre upon the Cause of his glorious Father.

The death of the Purest Branch within the confines of the prison created a bitter commotion among the companions who lamented the

loss of one of the most illustrious among the family of Bahá'u'lláh. The following is a summary of Husayn-i-Áshchí's notes:

When the Purest Branch passed away, Shaykh Maḥmúd begged the Master to allow him to have the honour of washing the body and not to let anyone from the city of 'Akká perform this service. The Master gave permission. A tent was pitched in the middle of the barracks. We placed his blessed body upon a table in the middle of the tent and Shaykh Maḥmúd began the task of washing it. The loved ones of God were wailing and lamenting with tearful eyes and, like unto moths, were circling around that candle which the hands of God had lighted. I brought water in and was involved in washing the body. The Master was pacing up and down outside the tent. His face betrayed signs of deep sorrow ...

The body after being washed and shrouded was placed inside a new casket. At this moment the cry of weeping and mourning and sore lamentation rose up to the heavens. The casket was carried high on the shoulders of men out of the barracks with utmost serenity and majesty. It was laid to rest outside 'Akká in the graveyard of Nabí Sáliḥ ... At the time of returning to the barracks an earth tremor shook the area and we all knew that it was the effect of the interment of that holy being.

Nabíl-i-A'zam has said that he, Siyyid Mihdíy-i-Dahají and Nabíl-i-Qá'íní were in Nazareth when the earth tremor occurred. It lasted for about three minutes and people were frightened. Later when they heard the news of the death of the Purest Branch they realized that it coincided with the timing of his burial and then they knew the reason for it.

Bahá'u'lláh, in one of His Tablets referring to the Purest Branch, confirms the cause of the earth tremor in these words:

Blessed art thou and blessed he that turneth unto thee, and visiteth thy grave, and draweth nigh, through thee, unto God, the Lord of all that was and shall be ... I testify that thou didst return in meekness unto thine abode. Great is thy blessedness and the blessedness of them that hold fast unto the hem of thy outspread robe ... Thou art, verily, the trust of God and His treasure in this land. Erelong will God reveal through thee that which He hath desired. He, verily, is the Truth, the Knower of things unseen. When thou wast laid to rest in the earth, the earth itself trembled in its longing to meet thee. Thus hath it been decreed, and yet the people perceive not ... Were We to recount the mysteries of thine ascension, they that are asleep would waken, and all beings would be set ablaze with the fire of the remembrance of My Name, the Mighty, the Loving.

52. He comforted Navváb

After his tragic death the saintly mother of the Purest Branch mourned the passing of her beloved son and wept almost incessantly. When Bahá'u'lláh assured her that God had accepted her son as a ransom, that the believers might attain the presence of their Beloved and that mankind as a whole be quickened, that noble mother was consoled and her weeping ceased.

The blood-stained clothes of the Purest Branch are among the precious relics gathered by the hands of his devoted sister, the Greatest Holy Leaf, and left to posterity as a silent witness to this great sacrifice.

Soon after the martyrdom of the Purest Branch many restrictions in the barracks were relaxed and several believers who were longing to attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh did so. And about four months after this tragic event, Bahá'u'lláh and His companions left the prison barracks altogether. Bahá'u'lláh resided in a house in 'Akká, and soon many pilgrims from Persia came and attained His presence.

In December 1939 Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Faith, in the face of great dangers and difficulties and in the company of a few friends, with great care with his own hands, removed the remains of the Purest Branch, together with those of his illustrious mother, from two different cemeteries in 'Akká, and at a profoundly moving ceremony on Christmas Day in the presence of a few believers, carried the caskets on his own shoulders and buried those sacred remains on the slope of Mount Carmel, adjacent to the resting place of the Greatest Holy Leaf and in the vicinity of the Shrine of the Báb.

The death of the Purest Branch must be viewed as Bahá'u'lláh's own sacrifice, a sacrifice on the same level as the crucifixion of Christ and the martyrdom of the Báb. Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Faith, states that Bahá'u'lláh has exalted the death of the Purest Branch to the 'rank of those great acts of atonement associated with Abraham's intended sacrifice of His son, with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and the martyrdom of the Imám Ḥusayn.' In another instance, Shoghi Effendi states that in the Bábí Dispensation, it was the Báb Himself who sacrificed His life for the redemption and purification of mankind. In the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, it was the Purest Branch who gave his life releasing thereby all the forces necessary for bringing about the unity of mankind.

Being the sacrifice of Bahá'u'lláh Himself, the Purest Branch by offering his life as a ransom for the opening of the gates of the prison, released incalculable spiritual energies within human society, energies which in the fullness of time, according to Bahá'u'lláh, will bring about the unity of the human race. In a prayer revealed by Bahá'u'lláh on the day that the Purest Branch died, Bahá'u'lláh has made the following statement which Shoghi Effendi described as 'astounding'.

Glorified art Thou, O Lord, my God! Thou seest me in the hands of Mine enemies, and My son bloodstained before Thy face, O Thou in Whose hands is the kingdom of all names. I have, O my Lord, offered up that which Thou hast given Me, that Thy servants may be quickened and all that dwell on earth be united.

53. He opened the prison gates

About four months had passed since the death of the Purest Branch when, as he had wished on his death-bed, the gates of the prison of 'Akká were opened. Bahá'u'lláh, His family and companions left the barracks after being confined there for a period of two years, two months and five days. This transfer, which took place in the autumn of 1870, became necessary as the barracks were needed to accommodate Turkish troops. Bahá'u'lláh and His family were confined in a house while some of His companions took residence in other houses and the rest were consigned to the caravanserai, named the Khán-i-'Avámíd.

Bahá'u'lláh resided in a number of houses, staying a few months in each. First He moved to the house of Malik, and later the nearby house of Manşúr Khavvám was added to it. From there He moved to the house

of Rábi'ih. Eventually His residence was transferred to the house of 'Údí Khammár. This house was attached to the house of 'Abbúd; the partition between the two houses was later removed, and the two houses became one, the whole becoming known as the house of 'Abbúd. The eastern section was the house of Khammár and the western, facing the sea, was that of 'Abbúd. 'Údí Khammár was a Christian, so was 'Abbúd, and they were close relatives. The house of 'Údí Khammár was very inadequate for the needs of Bahá'u'lláh and His household. Bahá'u'lláh occupied the small upstairs room in the eastern side of the house. The other room upstairs was overcrowded—at one time thirteen people of both sexes had to sleep in that room in rows. It is a well-known story that one night the person who used to sleep on a shelf in that room fell down on the top of others while asleep!

As for the Khán-i-'Avámíd (Inn of the Pillars), it was a caravanserai unfit for a dwelling place. Most of the companions of Bahá'u'lláh were consigned to this place, occupying rooms on the upper floor mostly in the western and southern wings of the building. 'Abdu'l-Bahá occupied one room Himself and for some time this was the room in which He entertained guests. The pilgrims arriving from Persia were first received by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in this room. He saw to it that they were ready to attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. Not only did the pilgrims learn from Him, through His courtesy and utter selflessness, lessons of humility before Bahá'u'lláh, but also they were helped to improve their outward appearance—for example by putting on new clothes when they were to attain His presence.

The rooms in the Khán-i-'Avámíd were damp and filthy. 'Abdu'l-Bahá sold a certain gift which had been given to Him in Baghdád and with the

proceeds began to repair the rooms for the companions of Bahá'u'lláh. He left the repair of His own room to the last. The money ran out and as a result His room remained unrepaired and in very bad condition. Not only were its walls damp but the roof leaked and the floor was covered with dust. He sat and slept on a mat in that room. His bed cover was a sheepskin. The room was infested with fleas and when He slept under the sheepskin, fleas gathered and began biting. 'Abdu'l-Bahá had worked out a tactic of defeating the fleas by turning over his sheepskin at intervals. He would sleep for a while before the fleas found their way again to the inner side. He would turn the sheepskin over again. Every night He had to resort to this tactic eight to ten times.

These companions of Bahá'u'lláh had to live in an austerity similar to that when they were in the barracks. Food was scarce and rations far from adequate for each person. Yet they spent their time in the utmost joy. Their greatest longing was to be called to the presence of their Lord. Their attachment to Bahá'u'lláh was the source of their strength. It enabled them to live in the utmost happiness in spite of all the hardships which were heaped upon them in those gloomy surroundings. As time went on, however, the situation changed, the companions of Bahá'u'lláh were able to find other accommodation in town and managed to engage in some humble professions. The Khán-i-'Avámíd then became the first Bahá'í Pilgrim House in the Holy Land. Some individuals remained there and had the task of serving the pilgrims, who stayed for months—and some for years.

54. When He was interrogated, He answered, “My Name is Bahá'u'lláh (Light of God) and My country is Núr (Light)”

When Bahá'u'lláh retired to the house of 'Údí Khammár (in 'Akká) and allowed no one to attain His presence, Siyyid Muḥammad and his associates took advantage of this. On the one hand, they began to mix with some of the faithful followers of Bahá'u'lláh, and on the other, they intensified their campaign to misrepresent the Author of the Faith. Mírzá Riḍá-Qulí had some Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh in his possession. He and Siyyid Muḥammad interpolated these Writings with passages designed to arouse the animosity of the populace, and distributed the falsified texts widely. Mírzá Riḍá-Qulí and his sister Badrí Ján, who had been cast out of the community by Bahá'u'lláh, publicly claimed that they had left the Bahá'ís voluntarily and were now Muslims. Siyyid Muḥammad and Áqá Ján did likewise.

Not long after the revelation of the Fire Tablet Bahá'u'lláh revealed another significant Tablet in which He clearly prophesied the appearance of a great affliction. He described it as the ocean of tribulation surging and its billowing waves surrounding the Ark of the Cause of God. It took only one day for Bahá'u'lláh's prophecies to be fulfilled. For in the afternoon troops surrounded His house, summoned Him to the office of the Governor (Mutaṣarrif) and kept Him in custody there. The reason was that Siyyid Muḥammad, Áqá Ján and Riḍá-Qulí had been slain by seven of Bahá'u'lláh's followers. This frightful act, so contrary to Bahá'u'lláh's admonitions, unleashed the anger and hatred of the inhabitants of 'Akká against the community and its leader.

It was Badrí Jan, the sister of the murdered Mírzá Riḍá-Qulí, who went to Government House and shamelessly accused Bahá'u'lláh of ordering the death of these men. This she did in spite of the fact that she knew well that Bahá'u'lláh always exhorted His followers to avoid any act

which might inflict the slightest hurt upon a fellow human being, how much more such an odious act. She knew that Bahá'u'lláh had expressly forbidden those of his followers who had asked permission to deal with the offenders themselves, from taking any action in the matter. She also knew that He Himself had cut off His association with the believers.

Indeed, Siyyid Muḥammad himself had written several letters to the friends in Persia telling them that Bahá'u'lláh had completely dissociated Himself from all His companions. The seven believers who, against the advice of Bahá'u'lláh and without His knowledge, perpetrated such a ghastly crime, knew well that their action would invoke the wrath of Bahá'u'lláh. They knew that He who had expelled Mírzá Riḍá-Qulí from the community merely on the grounds of misbehaviour in public, would disown them and drive them out of His presence for ever, if they carried out their intention which was far more reprehensible than the misdeeds of Mírzá Riḍá-Qulí. Indeed, some of them had concluded that by committing such a crime and dishonouring the good name of the Faith, they would never be forgiven by God and their souls would be damned in all the world of God. But they could not bear to see Bahá'u'lláh and His loved ones being so mercilessly attacked with slanders and false accusations. They decided that they would rather sacrifice their spiritual existence by committing this reprehensible crime than allow their Lord to suffer in this way.

Bahá'u'lláh Himself has described the details of His imprisonment in a Tablet revealed in the words of Mírzá Áqá Ján, His amanuensis. Shoghi Effendi, writing about this tragic episode, has based part of his narrative on this Tablet. These are his words:

Their strict confinement had hardly been mitigated, and the guards who had kept watch over them been dismissed, when an internal crisis, which had been brewing in the midst of the community, was brought to a sudden and catastrophic climax. Such had been the conduct of two of the exiles, who had been included in the party that accompanied Bahá'u'lláh to 'Akká, that He was eventually forced to expel them, an act of which Siyyid Muḥammad did not hesitate to take the fullest advantage. Reinforced by these recruits, he, together with his old associates, acting as spies, embarked on a campaign of abuse, calumny and intrigue, even more pernicious than that which had been launched by him in Constantinople, calculated to arouse an already prejudiced and suspicious populace to a new pitch of animosity and excitement. A fresh danger now clearly threatened the life of Bahá'u'lláh. Though He Himself had stringently forbidden His followers, on several occasions, both verbally and in writing, any retaliatory acts against their tormentors, and even had sent back to Beirut an irresponsible Arab convert, who had meditated avenging the wrongs suffered by his beloved Leader, seven of the companions clandestinely sought out and slew three of their persecutors, among whom were Siyyid Muḥammad and Áqá Ján.

The consternation that seized an already oppressed community was indescribable. Bahá'u'lláh's indignation knew no bounds. 'Were We,' He thus voices His emotions, in a Tablet revealed shortly after this act had been committed, 'to make mention of what befell Us, the heavens would be rent asunder and the mountains would crumble.' 'My captivity,' he wrote on another occasion, 'cannot harm Me. That which can harm Me is the conduct of those who love Me, who claim to be related to Me, and yet perpetrate what causeth My heart and

My pen to groan.’ And again: ‘My captivity can bring on Me no shame. Nay, by My life, it conferreth on Me glory. That which can make Me ashamed is the conduct of such of My followers as profess to love Me, yet in fact follow the Evil One.’

He was dictating His Tablets to His amanuensis when the governor, at the head of his troops, with drawn swords, surrounded His house. The entire populace, as well as the military authorities, were in a state of great agitation. The shouts and clamour of the people could be heard on all sides. Bahá’u’lláh was peremptorily summoned to the Governorate, interrogated, kept in custody the first night, with one of His sons, in a chamber in the Khán-i-Shávirdí, transferred for the following two nights to better quarters in that neighbourhood, and allowed only after the lapse of seventy hours to regain His home. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was thrown into prison and chained during the first night, after which He was permitted to join His Father. Twenty-five of the companions were cast into another prison and shackled, all of whom, except those responsible for that odious deed, whose imprisonment lasted several years, were, after six days, moved to the Khán-i-Shávirdí, and there placed, for six months, under confinement.

‘Is it proper,’ the Commandant of the city, turning to Bahá’u’lláh, after He had arrived at the Governorate, boldly inquired, ‘that some of your followers should act in such a manner?’ ‘If one of your soldiers,’ was the swift rejoinder, ‘were to commit a reprehensible act, would you be held responsible, and be punished in his place?’ When interrogated, He was asked to state His name and that of the country from which He came. ‘It is more manifest than the sun,’ He answered.

The same question was put to Him again, to which He gave the following reply: 'I deem it not proper to mention it. Refer to the farmán of the government which is in your possession.' Once again they, with marked deference, reiterated their request, whereupon Bahá'u'lláh spoke with majesty and power these words. 'My name is Bahá'u'lláh (Light of God), and My country is Núr(Light). Be ye apprized of it.' Turning then, to the Muftí, he addressed him words of veiled rebuke, after which He spoke to the entire gathering, in such vehement and exalted language that none made bold to answer Him. Having quoted verses from the Súriy-i-Múlúk, He, afterwards, arose and left the gathering. The Governor, soon after, sent words that He was at liberty to return to His home, and apologized for what had occurred.

A population, already ill-disposed towards the exiles, was, after such an incident, fired with uncontrollable animosity for all those who bore the name of the Faith which those exiles professed. The charges of impiety, atheism, terrorism and heresy were openly and without restraint flung into their faces. 'Abbúd, who lived next door to Bahá'u'lláh, reinforced the partition that separated his house from the dwelling of his now much-feared and suspected Neighbour. Even the children of the imprisoned exiles, whenever they ventured to show themselves in the streets during those days, would be pursued, vilified and pelted with stones.

The perpetrators of the crime were sentenced to long imprisonment by the authorities. Others were kept in confinement for six months and were released as it gradually became apparent that they had not been involved. As time went on it became clear to everyone that

Bahá'u'lláh Himself could never have had anything to do with such an odious act, let alone being the motivating force behind it.

55. He waved at believers from the barracks

Another believer in whose heart the fire of love for Bahá'u'lláh burnt very brightly, was an old man, Ustád Ismá'íl. He was a master builder of wide experience who had worked for the government officials in Persia. When he became known as a Bábí, he had to leave his work. He then went to Baghhdád where he was given the honour of carrying out construction work on the house of Bahá'u'lláh. And when the believers in that city were exiled to Mosul, he managed to travel to 'Akká. In spite of old age he walked all the way until he came and stood in front of the Most Great Prison eagerly waiting to behold the face of his Beloved from across the moat.

But alas, because of his old age and the feebleness of his eyesight he failed to see the hand of Bahá'u'lláh waving from one of the windows of the barracks. This was a pitiful scene. He broke into tears which brought tears also to the eyes of the Holy Family and a few others who were watching the sad plight of that devoted believer. Bahá'u'lláh is reported to have said on that occasion that soon through the power of God restrictions would be relaxed and circumstances would make it possible for the believers to attain His presence.

Of course, not until Bahá'u'lláh left the barracks in 1870 was it possible for the Bahá'í pilgrims to come into His presence freely. However, during the time that He was in the prison, it was officially impossible for any outsider to come in and attain His presence, but as restrictions

were gradually relaxed, the officials often turned a blind eye and in some cases they actually helped some of His disciples to enter.

Ustád Ismá'íl eventually succeeded in entering the prison where he stayed for a short while and attained the presence of His Lord. His usual place of residence in the Holy Land was a cave on Mount Carmel. He earned his living as a pedlar, carrying around a small tray on which he set out some needles, thimbles and other trifling articles for sale. He lived in poverty, but in the utmost happiness, his heart filled with the joy of nearness to His Lord.

As he wandered about with his shabby little tray, his heart was in communion with Bahá'u'lláh. Sometimes he would walk around the barracks in order to feel close to his Beloved. On one occasion Bahá'u'lláh was watching him from the prison window. He called His cook Ḥusayn-i-Áshchí, who was a nephew of Ustád Ismá'íl. and asked him if he had ever seen the tray that his uncle carried around. When he replied that he had not, Bahá'u'lláh in an amusing tone told him that if he were to put on a pair of glasses he might see him in the distance carrying a few rusted needles placed on one side of the tray and a few rusted thimbles on the other! Bahá'u'lláh often praised him for his detachment from this world and his thankfulness to his Lord.

56. He directed the believers to leave their affairs in the hands of God

During the time that Bahá'u'lláh resided in the house of 'Abbúd, His fellow exiles had fully settled down in the city of 'Akká, and most of them were successful in their humble professions. During the

governorship of Aḥmad Big Tawfíq, they enjoyed relative peace in their work. But with the arrival of a new Governor, ‘Abdu’r-Raḥmán Páshá, the situation changed. For he proved to be one of the most hostile Governors towards Bahá’u’lláh and His companions. He was very covetous and when his designs to extract money from the company of exiles failed, he submitted an inflammatory report to the authorities in Istanbul. He complained that instead of imprisonment, all the Bahá’ís in ‘Akká were free and working. The response from the Sublime Porte—the office of the Grand Vizir in Istanbul—was that the edict of the Sulṭán must be obeyed, that they were prisoners and had no right to work.

Ḥusayn-i-Áshchí has given a detailed account of this episode in his memoirs. It must be noted that Áqá Ḥusayn was at the time serving a sentence in prison because of his part in the slaying of three Azalís in ‘Akká, but through the goodwill of some of the authorities, he was allowed to go every morning to the house of Bahá’u’lláh where he used to work as a cook and return to the prison at night. The following is a summary of his notes:

When ‘Abdu’r-Raḥmán Páshá received the note from the Sublime Porte condemning the exiles to imprisonment, it boosted his arrogance. He decided to use it as a means of extracting some money for himself ...Having failed to do this, one evening he called on Shaykh ‘Alíy-i-Mírí, the Muftí of ‘Akká (the religious leader of the city who usually wielded greater influence and authority than a governor) who was an admirer of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and shared with him his plan of arresting the Bahá’ís in the morning. His plan was to arrest them as they came to open their shops and send them to prison. He also planned to restrict ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s freedom of

movement in the city. He solicited the support of the Muftí in this plan ... That same night the Muftí went to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, told him the news and strongly urged the Master to bribe the Governor, as otherwise everyone would be arrested in the morning. Disapproving the Muftí's solution, 'Abdu'l-Bahá assured him that God was compassionate and merciful, and that He would leave this matter in the hand of God. He advised him to go home and to rest assured of the outcome. It was late and Bahá'u'lláh had just retired. Nevertheless, 'Abdu'l-Bahá went to Him and gave Him the news. Bahá'u'lláh ordered that the believers be advised not to go to work in the morning. Everyone was informed and they all assembled in the reception room of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the morning.

I was, at the time, confined to prison ... but each morning was permitted to go to the house of Bahá'u'lláh where I worked as a cook and at night I returned to prison. On that morning, on my way, I noticed that the shop of Áqá Muḥammad-Ibráhím, the coppersmith, was closed and so were other shops belonging to the believers. I was very surprised and wondered what had happened. I hastened to the house of Bahá'u'lláh where I found all the shopkeepers assembled in the reception room. I was told the news and went into the kitchen to work. It was approximately two hours after sunrise when a man pushed aside the curtain in front of the door with his walking stick. I looked up and it was Iskandar Effendi, the head of the telegraph office. He was in great haste but signs of joy could be detected in his appearance. He wanted to see the Master who was upstairs at the time. I went up and found that He was in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. I told the Master that Iskandar Effendi had come to see Him and he was in a happy mood. The Blessed Beauty smiled and said 'Go

downstairs, Áqá! He has good news. No one can frustrate God in His purpose.'

'Abdu'l-Bahá went to the reception room where He was shown a telegram just received containing the order of dismissal of 'Abdu'r-Rahmán Páshá. After a few minutes He went hurriedly upstairs. Halfway up, I asked Him if he could tell me the news. He smiled and said in a loud voice, 'God has struck a severe blow at the Páshá.' He then went to convey the news to Bahá'u'lláh.

As to 'Abdu'r-Rahmán Páshá, in the morning, accompanied by a few soldiers, he went to arrest the believers at their shops and send them to prison. To his surprise he found their shops were closed. At first he thought the late opening was perhaps due to the month of Ramaḍán when people were going late to work. Soon after, he went to the Police Station where he waited for the shops to open up. During this time he was unaware of God's intervention ... The above telegram was addressed to Shaykh 'Alí-i-Mírí, the Muftí of 'Akká, who communicated its content to the Páshá ... The Muftí had been truly astonished by this event. For it was late in the evening when the Governor's scheme had come to light, and in the morning the telegram arrived. He considered this incident to have been a miracle. He said to the Master, 'I am almost on the verge of losing my mind over this episode. Please tell me, what did Bahá'u'lláh say late that evening when you informed Him of the plot?' 'Abdu'l-Bahá responded by saying that the Blessed Beauty ordered the believers not to open their shops in the morning and advised them to leave their affairs in the hand of God. Bahá'u'lláh also declared that when a

person leaves his affairs to God, he ought not to take any other measures himself, otherwise he could frustrate the plan of God.

In a Tablet Bahá'u'lláh describes 'Abdu'r-Rahmán Páshá as an embodiment of Satan, one who ruled over God in 'Akká. He asserts that God assisted him in his evil schemes for some time, until suddenly He took hold of him with might and power. Admonishing the ousted Governor, Bahá'u'lláh states that he was unable to prevent God from executing His will, and reminds him that men greater than him did not succeed in frustrating His purpose. He also refers to the fate of other hostile governors and officials who were either dismissed or stricken with disease through the power of God.

57. His confinement in the Most Great Prison ends

In Baghdád where Bahá'u'lláh lived an austere life for many years, He was free to walk along the banks of the Tigris in the open air, or to pitch his tent in certain of the garden parks outside the city, and stay there for some time. And in Adrianople there were occasions when Bahá'u'lláh was able to spend some time in gardens which He rented. But in 'Akká for nine years He did not see even a blade of grass to rejoice His heart. Once He had made a remark to this effect and 'Abdu'l-Bahá knew that through the creative power of His Father's words, it was time for Him to move out of 'Akká. 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells the story of how Bahá'u'lláh's confinement came to an end:

Bahá'u'lláh loved the beauty and verdure of the country. One day He passed the remark: 'I have not gazed on verdure for nine years. The country is the world of the soul, the city is the world of bodies.' When

I heard indirectly of this saying I realized that He was longing for the country, and I was sure that whatever I could do towards the carrying out of His wish would be successful. There was in 'Akká at that time a man called Muḥammad Páshá Şafwat, who was very much opposed to us. He had a palace called Mazra'ih, about four miles north of the city, a lovely place, surrounded by gardens and with a stream of running water. I went and called on this Páshá at his home. I said: 'Páshá, you have left the palace empty, and are living in 'Akká.' He replied: 'I am an invalid and cannot leave the city. If I go there it is lonely and I am cut off from my friends.' I said: 'While you are not living there and the place is empty, let it to us.' He was amazed at the proposal, but soon consented. I got the house at a very low rent, about five pounds per annum, paid him for five years and made a contract. I sent labourers to repair the place and put the garden in order and had a bath built. I also had a carriage prepared for the use of the Blessed Beauty. One day I determined to go and see the place for myself. Notwithstanding the repeated injunctions given in successive firmans that we were on no account to pass the limits of the city walls, I walked out through the city gate. Gendarmes were on guard, but they made no objection, so I proceeded straight to the palace. The next day I again went out, with some friends and officials, unmolested and unopposed, although the guards and sentinels stood on both sides of the City Gates. Another day I arranged a banquet, spread a table under the pine trees of Bahjí, and gathered round it the notables and officials of the town. In the evening we all returned to the town together.

One day I went to the Holy Presence of the Blessed Beauty and said: 'The palace at Mazra'ih is ready for you, and a carriage to drive you

there.' (At that time there were no carriages in 'Akká or Haifa). He refused to go, saying: 'I am a prisoner.' Later I requested Him again, but got the same answer. I went so far as to ask Him a third time, but he still said 'No!' and I did not dare to insist further. There was, however, in 'Akká a certain Muḥammadan Shaykh, a well-known man with considerable influence, who loved Bahá'u'lláh and was greatly favoured by Him. I called this Shaykh and explained the position to him. I said, 'You are daring. Go tonight to His Holy Presence, fall on your knees before Him, take hold of His hands and do not let go until He promises to leave the city!' He was an Arab ... He went directly to Bahá'u'lláh and sat close to His knees. He took hold of the hands of the Blessed Beauty and kissed them and asked: 'Why do you not leave the city?' He said: 'I am a prisoner.' The Shaykh replied: 'God forbid! Who has the power to make you a prisoner? You have kept yourself in prison. It was your own will to be imprisoned, and now I beg you to come out and go to the palace. It is beautiful and verdant. The trees are lovely, and the oranges like balls of fire!' As often as the Blessed Beauty said: 'I am a prisoner, it cannot be,' the Shaykh took His hands and kissed them. For a whole hour he kept on pleading. At last Bahá'u'lláh said, 'Khaylí khub (very good)' and the Shaykh's patience and persistence were rewarded. He came to me with great joy to give the glad news of His Holiness's consent. In spite of the strict firman of 'Abdu'l-'Azíz which prohibited my meeting or having any intercourse with the Blessed Perfection, I took the carriage the next day and drove with Him to the palace. No one made any objection.

This episode alone demonstrates the spiritual supremacy of Bahá'u'lláh, His majesty and greatness. Although the decree of the

despotic Sulṭán condemning Him to solitary life imprisonment was still in force, it was the highest dignitary of the city of ‘Akká who with great humbleness knelt before Him and insisted that He leave the prison city and take up residence wherever His wished. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes this event as one of Bahá’u’lláh’s greatest miracles. These are the words of the Master:

For the Most Great Name was held prisoner and confined nine years in the fortress-town of ‘Akká; and at all times, both in the barracks and afterward, from without the house, the police and farráshes had Him under constant guard. The Blessed Beauty lived in a very small house, and He never set foot outside that narrow lodging, because His oppressors kept continual watch at the door. When, however, nine years had elapsed, the fixed and predetermined length of days was over; and at that time, against the rancorous will of the tyrant, ‘Abdu’l-ḥamíd, and all his minions, Bahá’u’lláh proceeded out of the fortress with authority and might, and in a kingly mansion beyond the city, made His home.

Although the policy of Sulṭán ‘Abdu’l-ḥamíd was harsher than ever; although he constantly insisted on his Captive’s strict confinement—still, the Blessed Beauty now lived, as everyone knows, with all power and glory. Some of the time Bahá’u’lláh would spend at the Mansion, and again, at the farm village of Mazra’ih; for a while He would sojourn in Haifa, and occasionally His tent would be pitched on the heights of Mount Carmel. Friends from everywhere presented themselves and gained an audience. The people and the government authorities witnessed it all, yet no one so much as breathed a word. And this is one of Bahá’u’lláh’s greatest miracles: that He, a captive,

surrounded Himself with panoply and He wielded power. The prison changed into a palace, the jail itself became a Garden of Eden. Such a thing has not occurred in history before; no former age has seen its like: that a man confined to a prison should move about with authority and might; that one in chains should carry the fame of the Cause of God to the high heavens, should win splendid victories in both East and West, and should, by His almighty pen, subdue the world. Such is the distinguishing feature of this supreme Theophany.

58. His life at Mazra'ih was a turning point in His ministry

The departure of Bahá'u'lláh from the prison-city in June 1877 and His transfer to the Mansion of Mazra'ih, a beautiful summer residence of 'Abdu'lláh Páshá in the quiet countryside north of 'Akká, constitute a turning point in the fortunes of His Ministry. The building at Mazra'ih stood in the middle of a garden, situated on a vast plain. From one side the view was of the Galilee hills and from the other, the sea. One room on the ground floor was used as a reception room by Bahá'u'lláh, and many of the believers attained His presence there. His own room was on the upper floor with a nearby balcony overlooking beautiful countryside.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, His Mother the saintly Navváb, and His cherished sister the Greatest Holy Leaf all stayed behind in 'Akká. They visited Bahá'u'lláh from time to time, especially the Master, who attained His presence whenever He could.

In order to appreciate the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's move to Mazra'ih, and why it opened up a new chapter in the annals of the Faith, we may

recall the tumultuous years of His Ministry preceding this historic step. As we survey Bahá'u'lláh's eventful life at this juncture, we note that for over a quarter of a century He was the main target of attack by a relentless enemy.

Prior to the birth of His own Revelation, He suffered greatly through persecutions directed at the Bábí community. The appalling bastinado, which was inflicted upon Him in public in His native province of Mázindarán, is one example. The humiliating circumstances in which He was conducted on foot and in chains with bare feet and bared head in the heat of the summer to the Síyáh-Chál of Tíhrán, His imprisonment in that darksome underground dungeon; the chain of Qara-Guhar which was placed on His neck and which cut through His flesh and left its marks on Him all His life; the hardships He endured during His first exile from His native country to 'Iráq; the deprivations and sufferings during His solitary retirement in the snow-bound mountains of Kurdistán; His further exile to the capital city of the Ottoman Empire, a city described by Him as the 'seat of tyranny'; His humiliating banishment to Adrianople, the 'remote Prison', travelling in horse-driven carts in sub-zero temperatures; the sufferings He endured in that 'Land of Mystery'; the hardships He was exposed to and the restrictions He underwent on His exile to the desolate city of 'Akká; the unbearable conditions of His solitary cell in the barracks of that city, designated by Him as the 'Most Great Prison'; and His confinement for almost seven years within the walls of a small house devoid of any greenery to please the eye—all these tribulations which He, the Wronged One of the world, had endured with such resignation and forbearance, were at long last coming to an end. His departure from the

prison-city signaled the opening of a new era of relative peace and tranquillity in His life.

It was not only the fresh air of the countryside at Mazra'ih and the open fields around it which enhanced the circumstances in which He lived. The major factor which brought about a new phase in His ministry was the unveiling of His greatness, His power and His authority to friends and foe alike. This was made manifest when the highest religious leader in the land knelt before Him in a state of humble adoration and begged Him to leave the prison-city, a move which the Governor of 'Akká, notwithstanding the strict edict of the Sulṭán, had approved.

The establishment of Bahá'u'lláh's residence in the summer mansion of Mazra'ih also created much excitement and joy in the hearts of His companions. The prophecy uttered by Him on His arrival at 'Akká, that the doors of the prison would be opened, had already been fulfilled when He left the barracks. Now that His confinement within the walls of the city had come to an end the prophecy was fully realized.

Bahá'u'lláh loved the beauty of nature and was fond of the outdoor life. Living in the Mansion of Mazra'ih enabled Him to enjoy the scenery after nine years of confinement within the walls of a depressing prison-city. In His Tablets revealed in this period Bahá'u'lláh refers to the beauty of the countryside. In a Tablet to the illustrious Afnán, Áqá Mírzá Áqá, entitled Núru'd-Dín, He writes about the delightful scenery at Mazra'ih. He describes in cheerful language the view of the sea on the one side and the hills on the other, and speaks of the charm of the trees laden with oranges which He likens to balls of fire!

The believers who came on pilgrimage at this time were also rejoicing in Bahá'u'lláh's freedom. There were many who attained His presence

in this Mansion, in an atmosphere far different from that of former times in Adrianople or 'Akká. There was an air of freedom, of victory and ascendancy of the Cause which exhilarated every believing heart. It had been the custom from the days of Baghhdád for some of the believers to hold a feast and beg Bahá'u'lláh to honour them with His presence. This practice, however, depended upon His permission and sometimes He obliged the believers by accepting their invitation. Even when He was in the barracks, some of the believers used to save the very meagre rations they received so that they could hold a feast on a special occasion for Bahá'u'lláh to attend. It is also apparent from some of His Tablets that certain friends in Persia would send funds to Mírzá Áqá Ján, Bahá'u'lláh's amanuensis, and ask him to seek permission to hold a feast in their name for Bahá'u'lláh to attend.

59. Oceans of love, surged in the hearts of the believers who were with Bahá'u'lláh at Mazra'ih

When Bahá'u'lláh moved out of 'Akká, after seeking His permission, the friends held feasts in the countryside in various outdoor locations. The bounty of God to those disciples who had the unique privilege of being in the presence of their Lord is immeasurable. It is not possible for us who live a hundred years later to fully appreciate, or even to imagine, the oceans of love, of ecstasy, of devotion and of thanksgiving which must have surged in the hearts of these God-intoxicated people who sat with the Supreme Manifestation of God in places of beauty, or stood as He mingled among them, speaking to them individually or collectively and even joining them in partaking of the food. To what heights of spirituality these souls were uplifted as a result of such gatherings we

shall never know. Some who attained His presence have tried to describe the life-giving energies which flowed through their hearts as He spoke to them but have admitted their inability to do so adequately, because to attain the presence of One who embodies within Himself the 'Most Great Spirit' of God is not an experience one can ever describe. Hájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir-i-Málmírí attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh around 1878–9. When asked by the friends to describe His impressions of the Blessed Beauty, he always recited in answer a Persian poem:

And wonder at the vision I have dreamed,
A secret by my muted tongue concealed;
Beauty that is beyond the poet's word
By an unhearing world remains unheard.

The same believer has left to posterity an account of one of the feasts at which he had the honour to be present. These are his words recorded in his memoirs:

In the spring season Bahá'u'lláh used to stay at Mazra'ih for some time. To attain His presence I used to go to Mazra'ih in the daytime and at night I stayed at the Pilgrim House. On the first day of the Ayyám-i-Há one of the pilgrims had invited Bahá'u'lláh and all the believers in 'Akká to lunch. I too went to Mazra'ih. Early in the morning a large tent was pitched in front of the entrance to the garden on a delightful open space. That morning all the believers, numbering almost two hundred, consisting of those who were living in the Holy Land and the pilgrims, came to Mazra'ih.

Around the time of noon, the Blessed Beauty came down from the Mansion and majestically entered the tent.

All the believers were standing in front of the tent. Then Mírzá Áqá Ján, standing in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh chanted a dawn prayer for fasting which had been revealed on that day. When the prayer was finished the Blessed Beauty instructed all to be seated. Every person sat down in the place where he was standing. His blessed Person spoke to us and after His utterances were ended He asked, 'What happened to the Feast, is it really going to happen?'

Thereupon a few friends hurried away and soon lunch was brought in. They placed a low table in the middle of the tent. His blessed person and all the Aghsán (the male descendants of Bahá'u'lláh) sat around the table and since there was more room, He called some by name to join Him. Among these my name was called; He said, 'Áqá Táhír, come and sit.' So I went in and sat at the table in His presence. At some point Bahá'u'lláh said, 'We have become tired of eating. Those who have had enough may leave.' I immediately arose and His blessed Person left. At first the food which was left over on His plate was divided among the friends, and then group after group entered the tent and had their meal. Everyone at this feast partook of both physical and spiritual food. I got the prayer of fasting from Mírzá Áqá Ján and copied it for myself. Then in the evening all the friends returned to 'Akká.

60. The Master shielded Him

Following Bahá'u'lláh's departure from 'Akká, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's responsibilities were so heavy that He had to remain in the city and take care of a multitude of problems relating to the believers as well as to the inhabitants of 'Akká and its neighbouring towns. He was busy

from the early hours of the morning until after midnight meeting government officials, religious dignitaries and men of culture and commerce, as well as attending to the needs of the citizens, the poor, the sick, the old, the dying, the widows and the orphans. Governors and officials often sought His advice on matters of great importance to their work. Religious leaders likewise sat at His feet, and all received a measure of His knowledge and wisdom. He was a counsellor to every man, a true and loving father to the poor and the downtrodden. He would spend many hours every day visiting the sick, providing medical treatment, food and clothing for those who needed them. He was indeed the 'Master of 'Akká'.

In doing all this 'Abdu'l-Bahá truly shielded His Father from the outside world so that, freed from any involvement in the affairs of the community, He could devote all His time to the Revelation of the Word of God and meeting the believers. 'Abdu'l-Bahá used to visit His beloved Father whenever He could, and this brought much joy to the heart of Bahá'u'lláh.

Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí, that spiritual giant immortalized by the title 'The Angel of Carmel', has recorded the following reminiscences of one of his memorable audiences with Bahá'u'lláh concerning the important role of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in shielding Him from the pressures of the outside world.

During the days of Baghhdád We ourself used to visit the coffee house and meet with everyone. We associated with people whether they were in the community or outside, whether acquaintances or strangers, whether they came from far or near.

We considered those who were distant from us to be near, and the strangers as acquaintances. We served the Cause of God, supported His Word, and exalted His Name. The Most Great Branch [‘Abdu’l-Bahá] carried out all these services, withstood all the difficulties, and endured the sufferings and calamities to a great extent in Adrianople, and now to a far greater extent in ‘Akká. Because while in Baghhdád, to all appearances We were not a prisoner, and the Cause of God had hardly enjoyed the fame it does today. Those who opposed it and the enemies who fought against it were comparatively few and far between.

In Adrianople We used to meet with some people and gave permission to some to attain Our presence. But while in the Most Great Prison We did not meet with anyone (non-Bahá’ís) and have completely closed the door of association with the people. Now the Master has taken upon Himself this arduous task for Our comfort. He is a mighty shield facing the world and its peoples, and so He has relieved Us from every care. At first He secured the Mansion of Mazra’ih for Us and We stayed there, then the Mansion of Bahjí. He is so occupied in the service of the Cause that for weeks He does not find the opportunity to come to Bahjí. We are engaged in meeting with the believers and revealing the verses of God, while He labours hard and faces every ordeal and suffering. Because to deal and associate with these people is the most arduous task of all.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s staying in ‘Akká served another purpose as well. His brothers, especially Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí and his mother, were highly jealous of Him. It was this brother who, after the passing of Bahá’u’lláh, became the Arch-breaker of His Covenant and rose up with all his

power to destroy ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Cause He was promoting. By staying away from Bahá’u’lláh, Who cherished His eldest Son and extolled His station in glowing terms, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá succeeded in somewhat dampening the fire of jealousy which was fiercely burning within their breasts. As well as this, Bahá’u’lláh’s own practice over the years was, as far as possible, to keep in His company those who were likely to cause trouble or were inwardly unfaithful to Him, so that He could control their mischief and keep them in check. And now that some freedom was given to Him, Bahá’u’lláh chose to live with those members of His household who would prove, in the end, to be disloyal to His Cause.

61. The Mansion of Bahjí was specially built to serve as the Seat of God in His Day

A few miles outside ‘Akká stands a beautiful mansion surrounded by magnificent landscaped gardens. Next to it at the centre of converging avenues bordered by beautiful flowers, shrubs and trees in that same garden, stands a small building, the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh. There His earthly remains are laid to rest, and for the Bahá’ís it is the holiest spot on earth. Today Bahá’í pilgrims from all over the world come to pray at the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh and visit the Mansion.

Bahá’u’lláh moved to this Mansion in September 1879 and lived there almost thirteen years till 1892, the end of His life. But there were no formal gardens in His time; these were created after His ascension. Nevertheless, the Mansion was built in the countryside close to some beautiful pine trees away from the forbidding city of ‘Akká with its narrow gloomy streets and its depressing atmosphere. ‘Údí Khammár,

in whose house Bahá'u'lláh resided for several years in 'Akká, built the Mansion for himself and his family. The appellation Bahjí (Delight) is truly appropriate for this Mansion when one considers the beauty of the open fields around it, the charm of the building itself and the pleasing sight of the pine trees close by, some of which still stand in the grounds.

Towards the end of Bahá'u'lláh's residence in the Mansion of Mazra'ih, an epidemic broke out in the area. People panicked. Many left their homes and many died. 'Údí Khammár died and was buried by the wall of the Mansion of Bahjí. Soon after this 'Abdu'l-Bahá rented the Mansion for Bahá'u'lláh. The inscription in Arabic placed by Khammár over the entrance in 1870 can be seen in no other light than an inspirational sentiment foreshadowing all the wonderful events which were to take place within its walls. It says:

Greetings and salutations rest upon this mansion which increaseth in splendour through the passage of time. Manifold wonders and marvels are found therein, and pens are baffled in attempting to describe them.

Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, writes:

... the palace of 'Údí Khammár, on the construction of which so much wealth had been lavished, while Bahá'u'lláh lay imprisoned in the barracks, and which its owner had precipitately abandoned with his family owing to the outbreak of an epidemic disease, was rented and later purchased for Him—a dwelling-place which He characterized as the 'lofty mansion,' the spot which 'God hath ordained as the most sublime vision of mankind.'

In one of His Tablets Bahá'u'lláh describes the Mansion as the scene of His transcendent glory and asserts that it was specially built to serve as the Seat of God in His Day. He refers to its builder, 'Údí Khammár, stating that during his life he had no idea for whom he was building it. He bestows the bounties of God upon his soul through His loving-kindness. He rebukes His enemies, who through their waywardness and ignorance had condemned Him to life imprisonment in the Most Great Prison. However, as a sign of His sovereignty and power He has transformed the prison into a lofty Mansion. He further states that he who was the ruler (i.e. Sulţán 'Abdu'l-'Azíz) had returned to the fire of hell, while the builder of the Mansion was taken under the canopy of God's mercy and favours.

Before moving to the Mansion of Bahjí, Bahá'u'lláh's residence was at Mazra'ih. But at the actual time of the move to Bahjí He was staying in 'Akká, and it was from the city that He set off for the Mansion. It must be remembered that during the period when Bahá'u'lláh lived in the Mansions of Mazra'ih and Bahjí, He used to go to 'Akká from time to time and stay there for various lengths of time.

62. An episode connected with His arrival at the Mansion of Bahjí

Returning to the story of Bahá'u'lláh transferring His residence to the Mansion of Bahjí, it was 'Abdu'l-Bahá who had rented the Mansion, and prepared it for Bahá'u'lláh's arrival. First, members of His household moved in. This did not include 'Abdu'l-Bahá, His mother or His sister, the Greatest Holy Leaf. They all remained in 'Akká. When all arrangements were completed Bahá'u'lláh moved to the Mansion. He left the House of 'Abbúd, passed through the Land Gate of 'Akká and

arrived at Bahjí in the evening. Hájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir-i-Málmírí, who was in ‘Akká at the time, wrote the following episode connected with Bahá’u’lláh’s arrival in the Mansion.

On the evening that the Blessed Beauty, exalted be His glory, was to move to the Mansion of Bahjí, this servant and Nabíl-i-A‘zam were staying at our residence, which was a room we both shared. It was situated on the upper floor of the Khán-i-Súq-i-Abyaḍ. We were both sitting at the windows looking out, waiting to behold His blessed Person as He passed by. It was nearly two hours after sunset, when we saw Him pass in front of our room riding on a special white donkey. A few steps behind Him, riding on his donkey, was Khádimu’lláh (the Servant of God) Mírzá Áqá Ján. When He passed out of our sight, Nabíl suggested that we follow Him on foot to the Mansion to circumambulate it and then return home. With much enthusiasm I welcomed the suggestion. We both ran down the stairs immediately and walked quickly behind Him, keeping a distance of about fifty steps.

When the Blessed Perfection dismounted and went inside the Mansion, we walked toward the building in order to circumambulate. But when we came a little closer we saw to our amazement that the footpaths around the walls of the Mansion were packed with people, who were standing. Crowds had assembled around the four sides of the Mansion and we could hear their murmuring as well as their breathing. Of course we knew that no one had come from ‘Akká to circumambulate the Mansion, and we two had gone there without permission. Anyhow, since there was no room to walk on the footpath we stepped back, and at a distance of

about thirty steps from the Mansion we circumambulated. To do this we had to walk in some wheatfields and, as it happened, the ground had been recently watered, so we had to walk through muddy fields. As we circled the Mansion we could sense the presence of the multitude on the four sides of the building at some distance from us. In the end we prostrated ourselves on the ground opposite the Gate of the Mansion, and returned to 'Akká. On the way back heavy rain poured down on us, and just as we arrived at the gate of 'Akká, the guards were about to close it. Normally they used to close the gate every night four hours after sunset.

When we arrived home, Nabíl suggested that we ought not to sleep that night and instead keep vigil. He said to me, 'I will compose poems and you make tea.' I made tea several times during the night and Nabíl was engaged in writing poetry. He was a gifted poet, he used to compose extemporaneously. By the morning, he had produced poems written on both sides of a large sheet of paper. We sent a copy of his poems, together with two sugar cones, to the Blessed Beauty.

The two believers had a vision in which they saw images of the company on high circling around the Mansion.

63. "The Lord is near."—The Templers of Haifa

Significantly, many Bible scholars of the nineteenth century concluded that the second coming of Christ was at hand and that, according to many, it would happen around the year 1844. Therefore, it is not surprising that a group of Germans known as the Templers left their

homes in their enthusiasm to meet the Lord when He should come, and sailed to the Holy Land. They had concluded from the prophecies that the Messiah would appear there, that the people of all races would recognize Him and that He would establish His spiritual throne in that land. They began to arrive at the foot of Mount Carmel in the year of Bahá'u'lláh's Declaration in far-off Baghdád (1863), and built a colony (1868) which was located about a mile to the west of the then village of Haifa. On their doorways still remains the inscription 'Der Herr ist Nahe' (The Lord is near).

How significant it is that when in Haifa years later, Bahá'u'lláh even pitched His tent next door to them: God passed them by and they did not recognize Him. A Tablet was even revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in response to a letter from Georg David Hardegg, the head of the Templers in Haifa. This Tablet, known as the *Lawḥ-i-Hirtík* (Tablet of Hirtík), is in Arabic and appears to have been revealed in the house of 'Údí Khammár.

Bearing in mind that the Templers had come to the Holy Land for the sole purpose of witnessing the return of Christ, this Tablet assumes a special significance. Its perusal leads one to think that Hardegg, its recipient, must have been familiar with the language of mystery which is to be found in this Tablet. Bahá'u'lláh states that He had found in Hardegg's letter signs which pointed to his sincerity, and prayers that God may assist him to understand the truths hidden in this Tablet, and enable him to hear the melodies of the Divine Nightingale. He urges him to meditate on the word of God, its power as well as its sweetness, reminds him that it was the power of the word of God which attracted the heart of the first believer in Christ, states that it is through their idle

fancy and vain imaginings that the majority of the peoples have been kept back from recognizing their Lord, asserts that land and sea in this day are proclaiming the truth of God, and that when the appointed time had come, Mount Carmel became exhilarated by the breezes wafting from the direction of its Lord.

Bahá'u'lláh calls the attention of Hardegg to the days of Christ when the divines, the learned and the philosophers of the time denied Him, while a fisherman devoid of knowledge and learning recognized Him. He assures Hardegg that if he were to meditate sincerely on the history of the past while keeping God in his sight, he would behold the light of God manifest before his eyes. Bahá'u'lláh confirms Hardegg's views about the darkness which has fallen upon the earth and explains that darkness is vain imaginings which have enveloped the peoples and prevented them from turning to the Kingdom of God which is manifested in this Day.

Although Bahá'u'lláh in this Tablet speaks generally about the Revelation of God in this age, of the warbling of the Nightingale, of the flowing of the water of life, of the appearance of the Light of God and of His Kingdom, He does not explicitly state His own station nor does He refer to His own person in clear terms. Indeed, He declares that if He were to reveal the sign of the One who is veiled in mystery—meaning Himself—the hearts of the people would be filled with fear and consternation. Perhaps the reason for this is that Bahá'u'lláh, who had already forbidden His followers to teach His Faith to the people living under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, found it unwise to proclaim His station in an explicit manner to the members of the Christian colony living in Haifa.

Needless to say, neither Hardegg nor any other member of the Christian colony was able to recognize the truth of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh. This in spite of the fact that from the early days some members of the colony, including Hardegg himself, had been in contact with the believers and with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and that later, towards the end of His ministry, Bahá'u'lláh Himself visited Haifa and at one time stayed in one of the houses belonging to the Templers. That they failed to recognize Him may seem strange to an observer who is unfamiliar with the history of religions—a history which repeats itself every time a new Manifestation of God is revealed to mankind. Almost two thousand years before the German Templers came to the Holy Land, the inhabitants of that same land expected with much earnestness the coming of their Messiah, and yet when He manifested Himself in the person of Christ and appeared in their midst, they rejected Him.

64. When 'Abdu'l-Bahá visited Bahjí, Bahá'u'lláh evinced great joy

The relationship between Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá is one of the most fascinating features of their lives. 'Abdu'l-Bahá had so fully recognized the station of His Father, that throughout His life He showed the utmost humility and reverence to Him. He never allowed the family relationship of father and son to interfere. No one else in this Dispensation has had the capacity and vision to recognize the true station of His Lord as 'Abdu'l-Bahá did, and it is for this reason that He was able to manifest the most profound measure of self-effacement towards Bahá'u'lláh and consider Himself as utter nothingness in relation to Him.

To cite one example: when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá went to attain the presence of His Father in the Mansion of Bahjí outside ‘Akká, He often rode a donkey. But as soon as He could see the Mansion from a distance, He would dismount as a sign of humility. He was a true servant of Bahá’u’lláh and a servant does not ride into the presence of his Lord. Not only did ‘Abdu’l-Bahá show humility towards Bahá’u’lláh, but by example He taught the companions of Bahá’u’lláh and His disciples lessons in self-effacement and servitude at the threshold of His Father. When pilgrims arrived, it was ‘Abdu’l-Bahá who prepared them in every way for that glorious moment when they were to enter the presence of their Lord. He even arranged their attire and helped them to become selfless when in His presence.

Bahá’u’lláh, on the other hand, always showered His special love and affection upon ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He extolled and glorified the person of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and conferred upon Him exalted titles. Bahá’u’lláh’s adoration for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá knew no bounds. For example, when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was to visit the Mansion of Bahjí, Bahá’u’lláh evinced great joy and yearning to meet His beloved Son. He would often send His other sons and male members of the family some distance from the Mansion to await the coming of the Master, to act as a welcoming party and to escort Him to the Mansion; while sometimes Bahá’u’lláh Himself would stand on the balcony to see Him arrive, and as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá walked, He often pointed to His majesty and praised the beauty of His countenance and the strength of His character. But alas, at times this great adoration for the Master had to be suppressed by Bahá’u’lláh, so that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s brothers and other members of the family who did not have spiritual qualities would not become upset through jealousy.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's life was distinguished by His virtues and perfections. The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, of which He was the recipient, had so filled His soul that He became its perfect mirror reflecting the light of His Father's Faith upon the whole of mankind and manifesting to their eyes the resplendent characteristics of a perfect Bahá'í.

It is one of the unique bounties of God that in this age Bahá'u'lláh vouchsafed to humanity not only His Revelation, but a priceless gift in the person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá who occupies a unique position in His Dispensation. Though not invested with the rank of the Manifestation of God, the authority which Bahá'u'lláh has conferred on Him is such that His words have the same validity as those of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb.

65. They were struck by His majestic presence

In 'Akká Bahá'u'lláh occasionally allowed certain non-Bahá'ís to attain His presence, this was the exception rather than the rule and as the years went by He was less inclined to give audiences to people. There was a time when one of the Governors of the City of 'Akká wanted to attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and for years He would not give him permission to do so. Instead, he was to see 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Some years passed, and in spite of repeated requests permission was not granted, until the Central Government in Syria required the Governor to visit Bahá'u'lláh. This being so, he, in the company of a European General, was admitted into His presence. No sooner had they entered the room than they were both struck by His majestic presence. So much were they awed by His person that they knelt at the door. Although Bahá'u'lláh had indicated seats for them, they did not change their position. It was unbearably difficult for the General to sit in that

posture, especially as he was a stout man. Since Bahá'u'lláh had nothing to say to them and they remained silent throughout the audience, after about ten minutes they asked permission to leave.

66. He returned to 'Akká from time to time

Núru'd-Dín-i-Zayn, the son of one of the Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh, Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín, has left to posterity the following account of Bahá'u'lláh's movements in 'Akká and its surrounding areas.

Normally, during the spring, summer and part of the autumn season, the Blessed Perfection resided in the Mansion of Bahjí and the remainder of the year in the city of 'Akká. He used to ride a white donkey. It was called Barq [lightning] because of its ability to move fast. Any time He went from the Mansion to the Garden of Riḍván, to Mazra'ih, to the Garden of Junaynih, or to 'Akká, He rode on that donkey, and returned in the same way to the Mansion. On these trips a servant always accompanied Him. Later when Barq died they brought another donkey from Persia ... it was called Ra'd [thunder].

In a Tablet Bahá'u'lláh declares that through the power of His sovereignty, He left the prison-city in spite of the Sulṭán's decree. His footsteps ennobled the Mansion and the Garden of Riḍván. But because He had been accustomed to life in the prison-city, He chose to return there from time to time. In several of His Tablets Bahá'u'lláh indicates that through the years He had become attached to calamities and sufferings. In one instance He declares that He was as fond of sufferings as a lover is of his beloved. In another He states that He is attached to

adversities and afflictions as a suckling child is to his mother's milk or a thirsty one longs for a fount of water.

In a Tablet written in the words of Mírzá Áqá Ján, His amanuensis, it is stated that it is beyond man to comprehend the ways of God. For instance, Bahá'u'lláh had been to the Garden of Riḍván and the Mansion, but on one occasion He said that He preferred to be in the Most Great Prison.

67. His companions in 'Akká showed love, devotion and unity

The marriage of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Munírih Khánum took place in the same year that the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* was revealed. 'Abbúd, Bahá'u'lláh's next door neighbour, who had through fear earlier on reinforced the partition between the two houses, was now moved to open a room from his own house to Bahá'u'lláh's in order to provide accommodation for 'Abdu'l-Bahá and His bride. And then the partition between the houses was removed and 'Abbúd left his house to Bahá'u'lláh and went to live elsewhere. In this way more accommodation became available for Bahá'u'lláh and His family.

Bahá'u'lláh Himself moved into a more spacious room with a veranda facing the sea and 'Abdu'l-Bahá moved into the room which Bahá'u'lláh had occupied until then. Compared to the old one, the new room of Bahá'u'lláh was a delightful place. Here He could see the sea as He walked on the veranda. Also the believers could attain His presence in more comfortable and brighter surroundings.

Bahá'u'lláh often walked on the veranda in front of His room where He could be in the open air and gaze out to sea. Usually he did this in the

afternoon. The believers from 'Akká who had shared His imprisonment and sufferings with the greatest joy and fortitude and were now living and working in different parts of the city were immensely delighted by this new development.

Hájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-'Alí, an eye-witness to the events of those days, has left for posterity these reminiscences:

There were about one hundred believers in 'Akká consisting of those who resided there and the visitors. Most of these people were engaged in some trade or business. There was tremendous love and unity among these souls. They derived great joy from associating with each other and were very proud to have the privilege of serving one another. All this made them feel that they were living in paradise.

It had become Bahá'u'lláh's established practice to summon some of the believers to attain His presence. This usually took place from three hours before sunset up to two or three hours after sunset. Therefore, all the believers would leave their work three hours before sunset and assemble in the street outside the house of Bahá'u'lláh. Some would walk around the house, others would stand and some would sit in groups. There were those who were inside the reception room of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as they had some duties to perform ...

The believers were thus able to see their Lord as He walked on the veranda of the house. Many a time through His bounty and loving-kindness, He would, with His blessed hand, signal to some to come up to His presence ... The unity which existed among the believers was such that they were as one body; each one was ready to sacrifice

his life for the other. And when one individual or a group was summoned in this way, the joy which flooded their hearts was indescribable. The person would run inside with such speed that even the door and the walls vibrated with excitement. He would be so thrilled at that moment that he could not recognize anybody, and if someone talked to him, he could not hear it. He would be on his way to meet his Lord, to reach the paradise of Divine Presence which is much more glorious than paradise itself, a paradise which cannot be seen or felt or heard by those who have not experienced it. And, after being dismissed from Bahá'u'lláh's presence, the individual was so carried away that it would take him some time to regain consciousness, when he would be able to recognize his friends and talk to them. Only one out of many could perhaps recount, in a very inadequate way, the words that he had heard in His presence. But no one was ever able to describe the spiritual experiences of his meeting with his Lord.

The devotion and love which Bahá'u'lláh's companions had for Him were beyond measure. There was a believer in 'Akká, Mírzá Muḥammad-Hádiy-i-Şaḥḥáf (bookbinder), who wanted to make sure that the eyes of Bahá'u'lláh would not fall on any unclean sight when He emerged from His room on to the veranda. Although he was an outstanding artist engaged in illuminating the Books and Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, he nevertheless took upon himself the task of cleaning and sweeping the area around the house of 'Abbúd. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written his story in these words:

... among those who emigrated and came to settle near Bahá'u'lláh was the bookbinder, Muḥammad-Hádí. This noted man was from

Işfahán, and as a binder and illuminator of books he had no peer. When he gave himself up to the love of God he was alert on the path and fearless. He abandoned his home and began a dreadful journey, passing with extreme hardship from one country to another until he reached the Holy Land and became a prisoner. He stationed himself by the Holy Threshold, carefully sweeping it and keeping watch. Through his constant efforts, the square in front of Bahá'u'lláh's house was at all times swept, sprinkled and immaculate.

Bahá'u'lláh would often glance at that plot of ground, and then He would smile and say: 'Muḥammad-Ḥádí has turned the square in front of this prison into the bridal-bower of a palace, He has brought pleasure to all the neighbours and earned their thanks.'

When his sweeping, sprinkling and tidying was done, he would set to work illuminating and binding the various books and Tablets. So his days went by, his heart happy in the presence of the Beloved of mankind. He was an excellent soul, righteous, true, worthy of the bounty of being united with his Lord, and free of the world's contagion ...

He was a man short of stature, lofty of station and mind. His heart was pure, his soul luminous. During all those days when he served the Holy Threshold, he was loved by the friends and favoured by God. From time to time, a smile on His lips, the Blessed Beauty would speak to him, expressing kindness and grace ...

The extraordinary love and devotion that the companions of Bahá'u'lláh entertained in their hearts for Him, and their enthusiasm to attain His presence as described by Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-'Alí were mainly due to two things. One was the staunchness of their faith in Bahá'u'lláh as the

Supreme Manifestation of God, and the other their complete surrendering of their own wills to His. To the extent that His disciples acquired these two qualities were they able to draw near to Him. There were also believers who gained admittance into the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, witnessed the outpourings of His Revelation, were awed at His majesty and were filled with the spirit of faith. But as they were not detached from the things of this world and could not subdue their self and ego, they remained remote from His bountiful favours.

68. “Did you see how the Hand of Power ... brought you here?”

Hájí Sháh Khalílu'lláh-i-Fárání was a believer of wide repute who, in company with his illustrious father, Áqá Mír Muḥammad Big, attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh in 'Akká in the year AH 1306 (AD 1889). In his memoirs he describes their arrival in 'Akká and how they attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh:

At last we arrived in the City of 'Akká and were taken to the Bahá'í Pilgrim House situated in the Khán where pilgrims and some resident Bahá'ís were staying. We enjoyed the company of these devoted and sincere believers immensely. 'Abdu'l-Bahá came to visit us.

The following day we were summoned to the presence of the Blessed Beauty. God is my witness as to our state and condition at that time. A flood of tears was flowing from our eyes as we beheld His countenance. Through His all-bountiful favours, the Tongue of Grandeur spoke to us and said 'Did you see how the Hand of Power took you and brought you here? Otherwise, Fárán is situated on one

side of the world and 'Akká on the other...' He spoke to us words of such loving kindness and showered upon us so many bounties that my pen is unable to record them. Each day we attained His presence and were fed from the living waters of His grace. The eyes of His bountiful favours were often directed toward us ... One day we were summoned at the time of revelation and heard the melodies of holiness. Gracious God! at such a time not only was the soul exhilarated, but it seemed as if even the door, the walls, the trees and the fruits were made to vibrate with excitement. The Blessed Beauty was seated upon the throne of utterance, the verses of God were pouring out as a copious rain and the shrill voice of the Pen of the Most High could be heard. Each day we received our portion of bounties from His presence and were in the utmost joy...

69. "If the kings and rulers of the world had embraced the Faith in this day, you people could never have found an entry into this exalted court"

In a spoken chronicle to some friends, Hájí Sháh Khalílu'lláh has recounted a story of Bahá'u'lláh who one day visited them in their residence at 'Akká:

One day Bahá'u'lláh informed my father that He would be visiting us in the afternoon. That day He arrived with a few of His disciples. We were both highly honoured by His presence and immersed in the ocean of His grace and bounties. After some time He arose to depart. We accompanied Him to the door and as He went out, He signalled to us not to accompany Him further. I watched from behind His graceful stature and the majesty of His walk, until He disappeared from my

sight. I was so carried away, and in that state I said to myself: What a pity! If only the kings of the world could recognize Him and arise to serve Him, both the Cause and the believers would be exalted in this day.

The following day when we attained His presence, He turned His face to me and addressed the following words to me with infinite charm and loving kindness. He said: 'If the kings and rulers of the world had embraced the Faith in this day, you people could never have found an entry into this exalted Court. You could never have had the opportunity to attain Our presence, nor could you ever have acquired the privilege of hearing the words of the Lord of Mankind. Of course the time will come when the kings and rulers of the world will become believers, and the Cause of God will be glorified outwardly. But this will happen after the meek and the lowly ones of the earth have won this inestimable bounty.'

70. He helped the believers to feel relaxed in His presence

During His stay in the Mansion of Bahjí, Bahá'u'lláh often visited 'Akká and, sometimes, its neighbouring villages. On all these occasions people spontaneously bowed before Him with the utmost reverence whenever He appeared in public. On His visits to 'Akká He usually stayed at the House of 'Abbúd, and occasionally the homes of His brothers, Mírzá Músá entitled Áqáy-i-Kalím, or Mírzá Muḥammad-Qulí. In one of His Tablets revealed in the home of Áqáy-i-Kalím situated in close proximity to the Súq-i-Abyaḍ (the White Market), Bahá'u'lláh states that on that occasion He had stayed eight days and nine nights in that house as a bounty on His part. During this period Bahá'u'lláh permitted all the

believers to attain His presence. Each day and night these lovers of His Beauty sat in His presence spellbound by His utterances and were exhilarated by the outpouring of His loving favours. In this Tablet Bahá'u'lláh prays for His loved ones who had attained His presence in that house. He prays that their hearts may be illumined, their souls sanctified from all attachments save Him, and their steps made firm so that they may remain steadfast and arise to serve His Cause. He also showers His infinite bestowals and blessings upon Áqáy-i-Kalím who had served His Lord with the utmost devotion and love during those days.

Hájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir-i-Málmírí has described the following episode in his memoirs:

One evening when the Blessed Beauty was staying in the home of Jináb-i-Kalím, He was pacing up and down the courtyard and I was busy watering the small garden with a watering can. His blessed Person came to me, reached for my shawl which was loosely tied around my waist, and said, 'This is loose, a Bábí ought to gird up his loins!' He then stood beside me for a short while and uttered words of loving-kindness to me.

This is an example of how Bahá'u'lláh always made His loved ones feel easy in His presence.

When on a visit to 'Akká, Bahá'u'lláh occasionally visited the homes of His companions. This was a great honour that He bestowed on His loved ones. The same Hájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir has recorded the following story:

My residence, together with that of Nabíl-i-A'zam, was close to the home of Áqáy-i-Kalím which was situated in the Súq-i-Abyad. Since I used to bid beads (it was a custom among the Persians to choose at random a number of beads, and by counting them in a certain manner determine which course of action would be best to follow in a given situation) quite frequently, one day Nabíl seized my prayer beads and hung them high up from the ceiling so that I could not reach them. That day I was staying in his room as his guest when the Blessed Beauty arrived and honoured us with His presence. He asked Nabíl in an amused tone, 'Whose prayer beads are those that you have imprisoned here?' Nabíl said, 'They belong to Áqá Táhír..'

Remarks such as this on trivial matters always helped the believers to feel relaxed in Bahá'u'lláh's presence. Otherwise no one could have uttered one word when standing face to face with the One whom he knew to be the Supreme Manifestation of God. Bahá'u'lláh enjoyed humour; indeed, one of the attributes of God is 'Humorist'. Sometimes Bahá'u'lláh would make humorous remarks to His companions, some of whom were well able to reciprocate in their humble way. Notable among His companions who had a great sense of humour were Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín and Mishkín-Qalam. There was also Mírzá Ja'far-i-Yazdí.

Ḥusayn-i-Áshchí, a cook in the household of Bahá'u'lláh, has recounted many stories about some of Bahá'u'lláh's humorous conversations with Mírzá Ja'far, who was working as a servant in Bahá'u'lláh's household. He was an erudite and learned divine from Yazd, and had been an outstanding *mujtahid* (doctor of Islámic law) in that city. When He embraced the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, He renounced his high office, went to Baghdád, discarded his priestly attire and became a servant in the

household of Bahá'u'lláh. He accompanied Him in His exiles and was engaged in service until the end of his life. The following is a summary of Ḥusayn-i-Áshchí's memoirs:

The Blessed Beauty used to spend much of His time in the countryside ... From the mansion of Bahjí He often went to the Mansion of Mazra'ih, to the garden of Junaynih (Situated on the north side of 'Akká) and the Garden of Ridván. On these occasions He spoke to the believers with delightful humour ... Mírzá Ja'far was a high-ranking *mujtahid* ... but was working as a domestic servant ... One day the Muftí of 'Akká, Shaykh 'Alíy-i-Mírí attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh in the Mansion of Bahjí' and was seeking enlightenment on some religious subjects. Mírzá Ja'far was also there attending to his domestic work. Bahá'u'lláh called him in and said, 'Come and answer the questions of the Muftí.' He resolved the questions so well that the Muftí was surprised at the extent of his knowledge and learning ... Bahá'u'lláh often made humorous remarks to Mírzá Ja'far and he usually responded wittily. One day He said to him jokingly, 'Jináb-i-Mujtahid (your excellency, the *Mujtahid*) do you wish me to reveal to you some of your bad qualities?' Mírzá Ja'far's prompt reply was, 'No thank you.' His response, full of wit and humour, delighted the heart of Bahá'u'lláh.

71. "You considered coming to the Most Great Prison to be of prime importance"

A story recounted in detail by Ḥájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir-i-Málmírí concerns an incident which occurred in the course of his journey to

'Akká, and the words that Bahá'u'lláh addressed to him when he was ushered into His presence for the first time.

From his native city of Yazd, Hájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir went to Kirmán on his way to 'Akká. There he met a devoted believer, Hájí Muḥammad-Khán-i-Balúch, a high-ranking personality of Balúchistán, who was going to 'Akká too. They decided that they would travel together. In his memoirs Hájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir writes:

After a stay of three months in Kirmán we went to Sírján and stayed there for forty days. Muḥammad-Khán was dressed in the garb of a dervish and had flowing hair. Because of this, the dervishes of Sírján used to come to him every night and he had to entertain them and give them food. I suggested to him that he had better cut his hair short and change his head-dress, so that we would get rid of the dervishes in the city. He agreed with my suggestion and changed his attire. After this, whenever the dervishes came, they were told that the leader had gone, and so we were left alone. While in Sírján, a certain believer, Áqá Muḥammad-'Alí ... asked Muḥammad-Khán to take him as his personal servant on the journey. This offer was accepted by the Khán... and he accompanied us to 'Akká ... We set off for the port of Bandar-i-'Abbás ... There we met about one hundred Muslim pilgrims who were natives of Balúchistán and were on their way to Mecca for pilgrimage. When these people heard that the Khán had arrived in the port, they assumed that he was also going to Mecca. So they all came to him, enquired about the details of his journey to Mecca and expressed their happiness that they would travel with him ... Muḥammad Khán then intimated to me that we were now trapped and had no alternative but to accompany the

pilgrims to Mecca, perform the rites of pilgrimage, and from there proceed to 'Akká which is a shorter way than the alternative route of going to Jedda (via Bombay) and Port Said.

I told the Khán that I would not go to Mecca. He again emphasized that it would be a much shorter journey, but I refused. He explained that he had had no intention of going to Mecca either, but circumstances had forced him this way. If he did not go to Mecca on this journey, the news would reach home and it would cause embarrassment for his family ... I reiterated my position and said that in my conscience ... I could not bring myself to go to Mecca on pilgrimage. I suggested that we part company, that I would proceed via Bombay and the Khán via Mecca in the company of his people ... In refusing to go, however, I was not being obstinate or bearing a grudge against the Khán. Indeed I was very bothered to have to disagree with his wishes. I also knew that our journey via Mecca would be shorter, but my heart could not accept such a course of action ... Our stay in Bandar-i-'Abbás lasted for eleven days, and every night the Khán spoke about this and insisted that I change my mind. But I was immovable in my opinion. I used to tell him: 'My intention on this journey is to attain the most holy presence of Bahá'u'lláh, not to go on pilgrimage to Mecca and become a Hájí.'

Eventually the Khán gave in and advised his people to proceed to Mecca on their own.

... After these people left, the Khán and myself set off towards the courts of the presence of the Beloved. We journeyed to Haifa via Bombay, and on arrival we introduced ourselves as Bahá'ís. We were taken to the home of Áqá Muḥammad-Ibráhím of Káshán, the

coppersmith. This believer was directed by Bahá'u'lláh to make his residence in Haifa, to handle the distribution of letters and to give assistance and hospitality to Bahá'í pilgrims. When Bahá'u'lláh was informed that the three of us had arrived, He advised us, through Mírzá Áqá Ján ... that in 'Akká I should stay with my brother Hájí 'Alí. We were driven from Haifa to 'Akká in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's carriage ... that day I was most happy. Joy and ecstasy filled my soul.

The third evening of their arrival, the three pilgrims were summoned to the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and were received by Him with loving-kindness. Hájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir writes about his first meeting with Bahá'u'lláh:

When I attained His presence, I prostrated myself at His feet. After showering His bounties upon me, He said, 'Well done! May God bless you! People were going to Mecca and you did not go there for the love of God. Instead, you considered coming to the Most Great Prison to be of prime importance. Truly your understanding was correct. Pilgrimage to Mecca can have the same reward as in the past only if it is carried out with Our permission; otherwise, it has no value.'

72. "You must live to serve the Cause"

Hájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir-i-Málmírí, who attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh in 'Akká writes in his memoirs:

Whenever I came into the presence of the Blessed Beauty, if there were anything I wanted to ask, I would say it by the way of the heart, and He would invariably answer me. This is because, in His presence, the tongue was powerless to utter one word. I always sat in His

presence spellbound, oblivious of my own self. One of the questions I wanted to ask concerned the station of the Holy Imáms. I wanted to know whether they were equal or, as I thought, some of them were exalted above others. For about six months I wanted to ask this question, but every time I attained His presence I forgot to think of it in my heart. One day, as I was going to the Mansion to attain His presence, I kept on continuously reminding myself about this question so that I might remember to communicate it through the heart to Bahá'u'lláh. Even as I was climbing the steps of the Mansion I was thinking of it. Suddenly I heard the voice of Bahá'u'lláh greeting me saying 'Marḥabá' (Welcome). I looked up and saw Him standing at the top of the stairs. I forgot everything! He went to His room, invited me in, and told me to be seated. I sat by the door. He then paced up and down and revealed a Tablet in my name. The Tablet was in Persian and halfway through it he said, 'The Imáms all came from God, spoke to God and all returned to Him.' This answered my question and I realized that their station was equal.

In another instance, Ḥájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir writes:

In my heart I often begged the Blessed Beauty to enable me to lay down my life as a martyr in His path. Every time that I turned to Him in my heart with this plea, he would smile at me and reveal to me the signs of His pleasure and bounties ... until one day when these thoughts entered my mind, he turned to me and said, 'You must live to serve the Cause ...'

73. "Your pilgrimage is ... accepted by Us"

Áqá Riḍáy-i-Sa'ádatí, a native of Yazd, had a passionate love for God and His Prophet Muḥammad. But he was not satisfied with the form of religion. His greatest ambition was to meet Imám Ḥusayn, one of the illustrious successors of the Prophet, face to face. Driven by a mysterious force, Áqá Riḍá went almost out of his mind for some time and his parents were at a loss to discover the cause. Until one day he came in contact with a follower of Bahá'u'lláh who told him that God had manifested Himself, that Bahá'u'lláh was the return of the Imám Ḥusayn and that he could go and attain His presence in 'Akká. Through the help of some of the believers and the reading of the Kitáb-i-Íqán, Áqá Riḍá recognized the truth of the Cause. But he could not disclose his Faith to his parents. In his memoirs he writes:

They (the Bahá'ís) introduced me to a well known Bahá'í, Ustád Kázim, a builder of wide repute. He used to read the Kitáb-i-Íqán for me ... Through the study of this book, I acquired certitude and assurance and became filled with joy and excitement. Sometimes I used to leave the house with the excuse of going to bring water ... I would carry the pitcher with me but instead of going directly to the public cistern which was about four kilometres away, I used to run all the way to the house of Ustád Kázim, read some passages from the Kitáb-i-Íqán and then go to fetch water home.

Áqá Riḍá eventually left Yazd for 'Ishqábád and from there he received permission to go on pilgrimage to 'Akká where he attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. He writes in his memoirs:

Every time I attained His presence, I would find the portals of His grace and revelation open before my eyes. Each of them was a mighty proof and a precious gift. All those supernatural acts that I

witnessed in His blessed presence and the immense joy which flooded my soul as I sat before Him are indescribable and cannot be recorded here ... In the gatherings of the friends, if the Blessed Beauty turned his face to a person, that individual was unable to gaze upon His countenance and see the effulgent rays of the Sun of Truth. It was therefore Bahá'u'lláh's practice to look to the right side as He spoke, so that the friends might find it easier to look at His face. And if He ever turned His face towards the friends, He would close His eyes and speak...

Once I entered into the presence of Bahá'u'lláh at a time that He was reciting the verses of the Tablet of Visitation of Imám Ḥusayn. At times, He would interrupt and utter some words, or receive the friends as they arrived. Eventually the number reached about forty-five. At this time I began to think of the friends in 'Ishqábád ... I decided to remember them in His presence and dedicate my pilgrimage to them. I thought of Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl and five others ... As soon as I remembered them, He promptly turned His face towards me and smiled. He then mentioned the names of Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl and the other five and said to me: Your remembrance of these people and your pilgrimage on their behalf is accepted by us. He repeated it twice. And so He revealed everything that was in my heart.

I was staggered by this revelation. My sight became blurred and I was close to collapsing. As soon as He saw me in this state, He ordered His servant to bring in some sweetmeats. He brought a plateful and placed it in front of Bahá'u'lláh who handed one sweet to each person. But to me He gave two. After this we were all dismissed from His presence. But I was so overwhelmed by this

experience that when I left I was not in control of my faculties and halfway down the steps I collapsed ...

74. “Yes, We are the One who has sent the Messengers”

A story recounted by Siyyid Mihdy-i-Gulpáygání, an outstanding believer and a nephew of Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, reveals the same truth that Bahá'u'lláh, the Supreme Manifestation of God, was the knower of all things visible and invisible. He used to tell this story to the believers in 'Ishqábád:

An influential person became a Bahá'í in Iṣfahán but he did not live a good life. He went to 'Akká and attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and this is his story: 'On the first day of my attaining the presence of the Blessed Beauty, I was among a number of pilgrims who were standing in His presence. He was pacing up and down speaking words of exhortation and encouragement. I was in a state of enchantment as I watched the majesty of His bearing. I said to myself: I know that the Blessed Perfection is the Supreme Manifestation of God and the Promise of all ages. But in some of His writings He describes Himself as the One who has sent all the Messengers of God and the revealer of all heavenly books. I did not understand this. As soon as this thought flashed through my mind, the Blessed Perfection came toward me, placed His hand on my shoulder, and in a majestic tone said “Yes, We are the One who has sent the Messengers and revealed all the heavenly Books.” I was awestruck.'

75. “Tell me in your own words your own understanding of the subject”

Varqá's two children 'Azízu'lláh and Rúḥu'lláh who accompanied him to 'Akká also had the honour of attaining the presence of Bahá'u'lláh several times. Contact with the Supreme Manifestation of God left an abiding impression on their souls. Though young in age they both became charged with the spirit of faith. Rúḥu'lláh in particular flourished spiritually in those holy surroundings. He may be regarded as one of the spiritual prodigies which the hand of God has raised up in this Dispensation. Although He was only about eight years old when He came into the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, his understanding of the Faith was very profound.

To cite one example: One day Bahá'u'lláh asked Rúḥu'lláh, 'What did you do today?'

He replied, 'I was having lessons from—[a certain teacher].'

Bahá'u'lláh asked, 'What subject were you learning?'

'Concerning the return [of the prophets],' said Rúḥu'lláh.

'Will you explain what this means?' Bahá'u'lláh demanded.

He replied: 'By return is meant the return of realities and qualities.'

Bahá'u'lláh, questioning him further, said: 'These are exactly the words of your teacher and you are repeating them like a parrot. Tell me in your own words your own understanding of the subject.'

'It is like cutting a flower from a plant this year,' answered Rúḥu'lláh.

'Next year's flower will look exactly like this one, but it is not the same.'

The Blessed Beauty praised the child for his intelligent answer and often called him Jináb-i-Muballigh (His honour, the Bahá'í teacher).

On another occasion Bahá'u'lláh asked Rúḥu'lláh how he spent his time at home. He answered, 'We teach the Faith and tell the people that the "Promised One" has come.'

Bahá'u'lláh, obviously enjoying this conversation, then asked him what he would do if it were found that the Message of the Báb was not authentic and the true Promised One appeared. 'I would try to teach him the Faith,' was his prompt reply.

One day the Greatest Holy Leaf noticed that Rúḥu'lláh and his older brother 'Azízu'lláh were playing in the garden. She called them in and they sat in her presence. Also present were Mírzá Badí'u'lláh and Mírzá Díyá'u'lláh, the two sons of Bahá'u'lláh who later joined hands with Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí, the Arch-breaker of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh. The Greatest Holy Leaf, often referred to as 'Khánum,' asked them what they said to people when teaching the Faith.

'We tell them,' Rúḥu'lláh answered, 'that God has manifested Himself.'

Surprised at this remark, Khánum told them that surely they could not say such a thing straight away to people!

'We don't tell this to everybody,' responded Rúḥu'lláh, 'we only say it to those who have the capacity to hear such a statement.'

'How would you know such people?' asked Khánum. 'We look into their eyes and then know whether we can give them the Message,' replied Rúḥu'lláh.

Khánum laughed heartily and then beckoned Rúḥu'lláh to come close and look into her eyes to find out whether she had the capacity for hearing such words. In obedience to her request Rúḥu'lláh sat down opposite the Greatest Holy Leaf, looked intently into her eyes and then said, 'You already believe in these words.' Then it was the turn of the two sons of Bahá'u'lláh. Rúḥu'lláh went close to them, looked searchingly into their eyes and sadly said to Khánum, 'They are not worth looking into!'

Truly, Rúḥu'lláh was no ordinary child. He was an inspired being and acted as a spiritual giant. At a young age he wrote beautiful poetry which clearly demonstrates how deep was his love for Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, how vast his knowledge of the Faith and how profound his understanding of the real purpose of life. He used to speak about the Faith in gatherings of divines and men of learning with such eloquence and knowledge, and produce such irrefutable proofs of the truth of the Faith that many were confounded after hearing him. His answers were profound yet simple and very compelling.

76. "Oh the joy ... when Bahá'u'lláh went to the beautiful Riḍván"

In addition to Mazra'ih 'Abdu'l-Bahá had earlier on rented the Garden of Na'mayn, an island situated in close proximity to the city of 'Akká. He did this in anticipation of Bahá'u'lláh's release from confinement. After His release Bahá'u'lláh often visited this beautiful spot, usually in the spring, the summer and early autumn seasons. It was designated by Him as the Riḍván Garden (Paradise); in some of His Tablets Bahá'u'lláh refers to the garden as the 'New Jerusalem' and 'Our Verdant Isle'.

This garden was made beautiful through the dedication and hard work of the Persian believers and the constant supervision and guidance of the Master. They brought great quantities of soil from neighbouring places to make flower-beds all around, while from Persia and neighbouring countries the friends brought many shrubs, trees and flowering plants, some of them rare species. Crossing mountains and deserts, which took several months, they took such care that the plants arrived fresh and ready to be planted in the garden. The care with which the believers brought these plants by long hazardous journeys is an indication of a devotion and a love which finds no parallel in the annals of any religion and which is clearly demonstrated in the beauty of the garden itself.

The motive for undertaking this unusual task, which at first seemed impossible, was a deep sense of love for Bahá'u'lláh, a love which knew no bounds. The friends desired to offer Him an earthly gift of beauty which they knew He enjoyed so much. They went so far as to bring to 'Akká the plant of a rare white rose which had been one of His favourite flowers in Tíhrán. In some of His Tablets Bahá'u'lláh refers to these plants and expresses warm appreciation of the devotion of those who brought them.

The zeal and devotion of the gardeners who tended the plants and laboured day and night to make the Garden of Riḍván a place of beauty for Bahá'u'lláh to enjoy, was no less striking. The Garden of Riḍván was situated on a very small island. The little river, which emptied into the sea, divided itself into two streams surrounding that small area of land. In the time of Bahá'u'lláh the garden was laid out in flower-beds and there were many ornamental shrubs and fruit trees. There was a

splashing fountain from which water was fed to all parts of the garden. As it flowed, it came rippling down in a broad stream over a stone platform under two large mulberry trees. The stream which flowed by the island was about fourteen to fifteen feet wide and three feet deep; fish were darting about it in abundance. It was fringed with weeping willows, and the fragrance of jasmine and orange blossoms filled the air. Most of these features are preserved today, except that there is no water circling the garden, for the streams have been diverted in recent times.

Whenever Bahá'u'lláh visited the Garden of Riḍván it was a joyous occasion not only for Himself but for the Master and all the friends. The atmosphere in this oasis of beauty brought some relaxation to Bahá'u'lláh as He sat on a rectangular bench placed in the shade of the two large mulberry trees. Many believers attained His presence there, and they too sat on similar benches.

Túbá Khánum, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's daughter, has described her childhood memories of Bahá'u'lláh in the Garden of Riḍván:

Oh the joy of the day when Bahá'u'lláh went to the beautiful Riḍván, which had been prepared for Him with such loving care by the Master, the friends, and the pilgrims!

The Master's heart was gladdened indeed to see the enjoyment of His beloved Father, resting under the big mulberry tree, by the side of the little river rippling by, the fountain which they had contrived splashing and gurgling in sounds refreshing indeed after the long years of confinement in the pestilential air of the penal fortress of 'Akká. Only those who were present there could realize in any degree what it meant to be surrounded by such profusion of flowers, their

colours and their scents, after the dull walls and unfragrant odours of the prison city.

I remember well the greatest of our joys was to go with Bahá'u'lláh for the occasional picnics to the Riḍván.

How happy we were with Him. He was indeed the brightness of our lives in that time of difficulty.

77. “The trees proclaimed: ‘Behold the evidences of God’s Mercy’”

There were many occasions when the believers held feasts in the garden of Riḍván and Bahá'u'lláh honoured them with His presence. Such gatherings engendered indescribable joy and spirituality. The garden became truly a place of celebration and rejoicing. Siyyid Asadu'lláh-i-Qumí, an eminent believer, related that once Bahá'u'lláh entertained all the believers with refreshments in the Garden of Riḍván to celebrate the release of several Bahá'í prisoners in Tíhrán. These included Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, the Hand of the Cause Ḥájí Mullá 'Alí-Akbar, and Siyyid Asadu'lláh himself. In His all-embracing knowledge Bahá'u'lláh had announced their release and celebrated the occasion, whereas the telegram bearing this news reached 'Akká a day later.

There is a little house at the end of the Garden of Riḍván. Here the small room in which Bahá'u'lláh rested, dined and at times revealed Tablets is kept in its original form. A Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh revealed there and translated into English hangs on the wall of that room today. Its perusal enables the reader to see how much Bahá'u'lláh enjoyed the Garden and how much He loved the beauty of nature. Here is a translation of this Tablet:

He is God, Glorified be He,
Grandeur and Might are His!

On the morning of the blessed Friday we proceeded from the Mansion and entered the Garden. Every tree uttered a word, and every leaf sang a melody. The trees proclaimed: 'Behold the evidences of God's Mercy' and the twin streams recited in the eloquent tongue the sacred verse 'From us all things were made alive'. Glorified be God! Mysteries were voiced by them, which provoked wonderment. Methought: in which school were they educated, and from whose presence had they acquired their learning? Yea! This Wronged One knoweth and He saith: 'From God, the All-Encompassing, the Self-Subsistent.'

Upon Our being seated, Rádíyih, upon her be My glory, attained Our presence on thy behalf, laid the table of God's bounty and in thy name extended hospitality to all present. In truth, all that which stimulateth the appetite and pleaseth the eye was offered, and indeed that which delighteth the ear could also be heard as the leaves were stirred by the Will of God, and from this movement a refreshing voice was raised, as if uttering a blissful call inviting the absent to this Feast. God's power and the perfection of His handiwork could enjoyably be seen in the blossoms, the fruits, the trees, the leaves and the streams. Praised be God who hath thus confirmed thee and her.

In brief, all in the Garden were recipients of the choicest bounties and in the end expressed their thanksgiving unto their Lord. O that all God's beloved would have been present on this day!

78. He saw himself standing in the presence of the Lord of the Old Testament

Hájí Yahúdá had an awe-inspiring experience as he gazed upon the face of Bahá'u'lláh in the Garden of Riḍván. He was known by the name of Hájí Yahúdá. He grew up in a Jewish family; his father was the chief Rabbi of the city of Raṣht and its neighbouring towns in the north of Persia. In his youth, he used to work as a pedlar travelling to various cities. On one of his trips to Hamadán, he encountered a few Bahá'ís who acquainted him with the Mission of Bahá'u'lláh and consequently he was converted to the Faith. Around the year 1888–9 He travelled to 'Akká in order to attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. His first meeting with Him took place in the Garden of Riḍván. As soon as he was ushered into His presence, the scene of water flowing from the fountain near Bahá'u'lláh's feet as He sat on the bench surrounded by the two streams, vividly brought to his mind the vision of the Prophets of Israel as recorded in the Old Testament:

There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early.

But there the glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars neither shall gallant ship pass thereby.

He was overwhelmed by this vision so suddenly and vividly revealed to him. It came upon him as a thunderbolt and he was carried away into a different world. His whole being was stirred to its depths as he saw himself, standing with awe and wonder in the presence of the Lord of

the Old Testament. His instant urge was to prostrate himself at the feet of Bahá'u'lláh, and this he did. The effect of this first meeting, and of hearing the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh on that occasion, was to create a fire of love and adoration which continued to burn within his heart till the end of his life. He was transformed into a new creation and was exultant with joy as he left the Holy Land.

On his return to Persia Hájí Yahúdá began to teach the Faith among his people. He emerged as a well-known Bahá'í teacher who succeeded in bringing a number of Jews under the shadow of the Cause, and some of these individuals became prominent Bahá'ís in Persia. Hájí Yahúdá also endured hardship and sufferings as a result of severe persecutions which were inflicted upon him by the Jewish community because of his success in teaching the Cause.

79. This is not the day for asking questions

When Bahá'u'lláh was in 'Akká, four Muslim divines from the village of Manshád in the province of Yazd sent Him a letter introducing themselves as followers of Azal in order to test Him. The divines posed two riddles and promised to accept the Cause if Bahá'u'lláh revealed the correct answers. The questions are as comical as they are pitiful. In their letter it was asked:

The first question is to inform us of the death of a certain man or woman of Manshád, by predicting the exact hour, and the date of death, the cause of death together with the name of the person, the name of his mother, his address, the description of his relatives and family and altogether every detail of his personal status.

The second question is to inform us of the birth of a certain child, by predicting its sex, the name of the mother, and the father, and the exact time and date of birth in this year...

In answer to this a lengthy Tablet was revealed by Bahá'u'lláh. He admonished the writers for their perversity and blindness in testing God. He announces the advent of the Day of God, and states that the outpouring of His Revelation has encompassed the world. How grievous then is the plight of those who are seeking proof when the signs of His power and majesty are evident on all sides. This is not the day for asking questions but for hearkening to the call of God and embracing His Cause. He reminds them, by quoting various passages from the *Qur'án* that the unbelievers of a previous dispensation had demanded the performance of miracles from the Prophet of Islám. They asked Him to send down angels from heaven, to make water gush forth out of the earth, to cause the sky to lie shattered in pieces, to produce a house made of gold, to ascend to the heavens and bring back a book and many similar demands. The study of the *Qur'án* makes it clear that Muḥammad's response to these preposterous requests was that the main proof of His Mission was the revelation of the Word of God.

Bahá'u'lláh warns the four clergymen that by testing God their plight was as grievous as those who denied Him in former dispensations. An interesting aspect of this episode is that since these men introduced themselves as followers of Azal, Bahá'u'lláh addressed them in this Tablet as if they were Azalís. He quoted profusely from the Writings of the Báb in support of His argument. This He did notwithstanding the fact that He knew well who the four were. Apart from His divine knowledge which encompassed all created things, it was well known to

Him and even to His disciples that there were no such followers of Azal in Manshád. Some of the believers living at that time in 'Akká were actually from the village of Manshád and knew the identity of these men very well!

This is where the Manifestation of God tests man by appearing to be ignorant of the truth. This is where he hides His glory and knowledge from the eyes of men so that the bad may not gain admittance into His Court of holiness and become equal with the good. And this is where man's free will to follow whichever path he may choose is not interfered with, and he is not turned into a puppet manipulated from on high. By addressing them as if they were the followers of Azal, Bahá'u'lláh put these four men to the test. Actually one of the four was known to have claimed privately to a few Bahá'ís that he was inclined towards the Faith in his heart. This Tablet, however, was a test for him. He failed in it and lost his faith altogether.

80. The outpourings of His grace and bounty did not cease

Bahá'u'lláh used to associate freely with the public when in Baghdád and to a lesser extent in Adrianople. Now in 'Akká He almost completely dissociated Himself from the people of the city and left it to 'Abdu'l-Bahá to keep in touch with the public. The contrast between His days in Baghdád and those in 'Akká was great indeed. When in Baghdád, Bahá'u'lláh had not yet declared His mission. Officially, He and His companions were regarded by the public as the followers of the Báb. He had freedom and so He moved among the people. At one time in Baghdád, His typical engagements during the day were as follows:

After having breakfast in the inner section of His house, He went to the outer apartment set aside for the reception of visitors. The friends used to gather in that room where they attained His presence for about a half to one hour. During this time He used to either sit or pace up and down the room. He then proceeded to an oriental inn (coffee house) in the old part of the city, accompanied by at least two believers. The inn was owned by a certain Siyyid Ḥabíb, an Arab, who was not a Bábí, but a great admirer of Bahá'u'lláh and one who showed extraordinary reverence towards Him. Many people, both high and low, attained His presence in this inn. Bahá'u'lláh often used to speak to them about the Faith of the Báb and expound some verities of the Cause of God. After the meeting in the inn, which usually lasted over an hour, He used to return to His house, where in the afternoon the believers were able to attain His presence again. He then went back to the inn and returned home about the time of sunset. Then, some evenings, the believers used to come to His house and attain His presence there. Also at times, some eminent personalities, civil and religious dignitaries, Persian princes, and others, came to His presence to seek guidance and sit at His feet, but Bahá'u'lláh never went to their houses although sometimes He visited the homes of the believers.

In Adrianople Bahá'u'lláh did not appear in public as much as He had done in Baghhdád. Occasionally He visited mosques and sometimes received important guests such as the Governor of the city. But as we have already stated, as the years went by in 'Akká, He seldom received anybody outside the circle of the believers. Of course, there were always exceptional cases. For instance, a short time after the slaying of the three Azalís, the Governor, Şálih Páshhá, who was ill-disposed towards Bahá'u'lláh, was dismissed and replaced by Aḥmad Big Tawffíq, who was

much more sagacious than his predecessor. Soon after he was installed as Governor, BadrÍ Ján, the sister of the murdered MÍrzá Ridá-QulÍ went to see him intent upon discrediting Bahá'u'lláh. In an attempt to completely poison the mind of the Governor, she brought false and slanderous accusations against Bahá'u'lláh, representing Him as One who was aspiring to rule over all men, the kings included. To prove her allegations she left him a copy of the *Súriy-i-Mulúk* (Súrih of the Kings) and some other Tablets.

The reading of this Epistle had the opposite effect on the Governor. According to Bahá'u'lláh's own testimony in a Tablet revealed in the words of His amanuensis, MÍrzá Áqá Ján, the Governor himself took the Súrih and other Tablets to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and told Him that as a result of reading those, he had been convinced of the truth of the Cause, and he begged to be allowed to meet Bahá'u'lláh. After some time, 'Abbúd came to Bahá'u'lláh and requested that permission be given for the Governor to attain His presence, a request to which Bahá'u'lláh gave His consent. It was in the course of that meeting that the heart of the Governor was touched with love for Bahá'u'lláh and was deeply impressed with His spiritual powers. He begged to be allowed to perform a service for Him. Bahá'u'lláh declined the offer of a personal service, and instead suggested the restoration of a disused aqueduct for the benefit of the inhabitants of the city, a suggestion to which the Governor responded positively.

It was this same Governor who had recognized the distinguishing qualities of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and had become His ardent admirer. He often came to the Master for guidance on difficult matters which he faced in the course of his duties. And it was he who raised no objection to the

inflow of pilgrims from Persia, although he knew he was acting contrary to the provisions of the edict of the Sulṭán in this regard.

Although in 'Akká Bahá'u'lláh did not associate with the public generally, the outpourings of His grace and bounty upon the people did not cease.

81. The ascension of Bahá'u'lláh

The ascension of Bahá'u'lláh took place in the Mansion of Bahjí on 29 May 1892, and it caused indescribable consternation among His followers. Nabíl-i-A'zam, a true lover of the Blessed Beauty and one of His devoted Apostles, has left to posterity a moving description of this calamitous event. The following is a summary translation of his account:

As attested by the Most Great Branch, nine months before this most grievous event—His ascension—Bahá'u'lláh had voiced His desire to depart from this world. During these nine months, from the tone of His exhortations and remarks to those friends who attained His presence it became increasingly apparent that the end of His earthly life was approaching. He seemed to be arranging the affairs with a sense of urgency. But He never spoke openly about the approaching end of His life.

On the eve of Sunday, the eleventh of the month of Shavvál 1309 AH (8 May 1892), fifty days after Naw-Rúz, He contracted a fever, though He did not mention it to anyone. The following morning a number of the friends attained His presence. Late in the afternoon the fever was intensified. In the evening only one of the companions who had an

urgent demand was admitted to His presence. On Monday (the second day of His illness) only one of the friends admitted. On Tuesday this helpless servant was given the honour of an audience with His blessed Person. At noon He summoned me to His presence alone and spoke to me for about half an hour, sometimes seated and sometimes pacing up and down. He vouchsafed unto me His infinite bounties and His exalted utterances reached the acme of perfection.

I wish I had known that this was going to be my last audience with Him, so that I could have clung to the hem of His holy vesture and begged Him to accept me as a sacrifice in His path, to relieve me from the vanity of this world and admit me into the realm of everlasting joy. Alas! Alas! what had been preordained did come to pass.

In the afternoon of that day Ḥájí Níyáz [a well-known believer] arrived from Egypt and, along with some others, was permitted to attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. Till sunset a number of the friends were admitted into His presence in groups. The following day the door of union with Him was closed to the face of the believers, no one was able to attain His presence, and an atmosphere of gloom and sorrow descended upon the hearts of His forlorn lovers. This situation remained unchanged for a few days, until Monday (the ninth day) which proved to be the day of grief for the friends. On that day the Most Great Branch left the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and went to the Pilgrim House. He conveyed Bahá'u'lláh's greetings to all, and said that the Ancient Beauty had stated: 'All the friends must remain patient and steadfast, and arise for the promotion of the Cause of God. They should not become perturbed, because I shall always be

with them, and will remember and care for them.' On hearing these piercing words the hearts of the believers were crying out with grief, for the tone of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's remarks indicated that the end of the earthly life of the One who was the Lord of all creation was fast approaching. The friends were thrown into such turmoil and dismay that they were about to expire.

This being so, the bounties of the Incomparable Beloved were vouchsafed unto all, and the following day, Tuesday (the tenth day), was turned into a joyful day. The day-star of delight and blissfulness shone forth and the Most Great Branch conveyed at the hour of dawn the joyful news of the well-being of His blessed Person. Happy and smiling, He arrived at the Pilgrim House, and like unto a musk-laden breeze which had wafted from the abode of the Beloved, or as the holy Spirit of the Mercy of the Lord, He awoke the friends one by one, bade them arise, drink their morning tea with the utmost joy, and offer thanksgiving to God, for, Praise be to His Most Exalted and Glorious Being, perfect health had returned to His blessed Person, and the signs of the most great favours were manifested in His countenance. Truly, on that day the joy and happiness of the friends, those who circled around the throne of the Beauty of their Lord, were such that all the inhabitants of 'Akká and indeed the people of Syria were influenced and affected by their condition. All the people both low and high were congratulating each other as in a day of festival.

The reason for this was that on the same day that Bahá'u'lláh contracted the fever, the government rounded up about one thousand farmers and poor people, clad them in military uniforms

and held them against their will as conscripts. They were receiving military training to be dispatched to far-off lands in a few days' time. The tents of these oppressed people were near the grounds of the Mansion of Bahjí, and the cries of their weeping and lamenting and those of their families could be heard by day and by night. However, in the morning of the 'day of joy', a royal telegram was unexpectedly received ordering the release of the conscripts. This news was rapturously received by the people who were filled with delight. The Most Great Branch on that day distributed food among the conscripts, the poor, the inmates of prison and the orphans. Consequently the people of 'Akká and outside were heartily offering thanks to Bahá'u'lláh for His loving favours and gifts. No one among the inhabitants of Syria could remember having seen a day as blissful as that day.

That same day the Most Great Branch went to 'Akká, visited every Bahá'í household and conveyed to every single believer, man and woman alike, loving greetings from the Blessed Beauty. On Sunday (the fifteenth day) afternoon, all the friends who were present at the Mansion, together with pilgrims and resident Bahá'ís, were summoned to Bahá'u'lláh's presence. The entire body of the friends, weeping and grief-stricken, attained His presence as He lay in bed leaning against one of his sons.

The Tongue of Grandeur (Bahá'u'lláh) gently and affectionately addressed them all saying: 'I am well pleased with you all, you have rendered many services, and been very assiduous in your labours. You have come here every morning and evening. May God assist you

to remain united. May He aid you to exalt the Cause of the Lord of being.'

This was the last audience with Him. The birds of the hearts of His lovers were addressed from on high: 'Verily the door of union is closed to all who are in heaven and on earth ...'

On the eve of Saturday (twenty-first day after contracting fever), the 2nd of Dhi'l-Qa'dih 1309 AH (29 May 1892) ... 13th of the month of 'Azamat 49, Bahá'í Era ... seventy days after Naw-Rúz, while there was no sign of fever, the will of the King of Eternity to leave the prison of 'Akká and to ascend to His 'other dominions whereon the eyes of the people of names have never fallen', mentioned in the Tablet of Ru'yá revealed ... nineteen years previously, was at long last realized. Methinks, the spiritual commotion set up in the world of dust had caused all the worlds of God to tremble. Eight hours after sunset on that darksome night when the heavens wept over the earth, what had been revealed in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* was finally realized. My inner and outer tongue are powerless to portray the condition we were in ... In the midst of the prevailing confusion, a multitude of the inhabitants of 'Akká and of the neighbouring villages, that had thronged the fields surrounding the Mansion, could be seen weeping, beating upon their heads, and crying aloud their grief...

For a full week after that great calamity, a great number of mourners, the rich, the poor, the orphans and the oppressed partook of the food that was generously dispensed by the bereaved family ... From the second day of the ascension of the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsistent Lord to His Most Holy and exalted Dominions on high, men of

learning and poets, both Muslim and Christian, began to send telegrams of condolence to the presence of the Most Great Branch. They sent poems eloquently extolling the virtues and lamenting the loss of the Beloved...

STORIES OF
SOME NOTABLE
BELIEVERS

*How great the blessedness that awaiteth him that hath attained the honor of serving the Almighty! By My life! No act, however great, can compare with it, except such deeds as have been ordained by God, the All-Powerful, the Most Mighty. Such a service is, indeed, the prince of all goodly deeds, and the ornament of every goodly act. Thus hath it been ordained by Him Who is the Sovereign Revealer, the Ancient of Days.... Happy is the man that hath heard Our voice, and answered Our call. He, in truth, is of them that shall be brought nigh unto Us.*⁶

Bahá'u'lláh

*Cling, O ye people of Bahá, to the cord of servitude unto God, the True One, for thereby your stations shall be made manifest, your names written and preserved, your ranks raised and your memory exalted in the Preserved Tablet.*⁷

Bahá'u'lláh

*Blessed are they that remember the one true God, that magnify His Name, and seek diligently to serve His Cause. It is to these men that the sacred Books of old have referred.*⁸

Bahá'u'lláh

82. Mírzá Buzurg, surnamed Badí’—He became attracted to Bahá’u’lláh

The person who was created anew and performed the sacred mission of delivering Bahá’u’lláh’s letter to the Sháh was a youth of seventeen by the name of Áqá Buzurg, entitled Badí’. The father of Badí’, Hájí ‘Abdu’l-Majíd-i-Níshápúrí known as Abá Badí’ (father of Badí’) was one of the outstanding believers of the Bábí Faith and later became a devoted follower of Bahá’u’lláh. Although Badí’ grew up in the home of a very devoted believer, he was not touched sufficiently by the spirit of the Faith as to make him believe in the Cause and he remained cold and aloof in relation to it.

Towards the end of His sojourn in Adrianople, Bahá’u’lláh sent Nabíl i-A’zam to Persia to strengthen the faith of the believers, especially because of Mírzá Yahyá’s opposition to the Cause of God. In the course of his journeys, Nabíl went to the city of Níshápúr where he was entertained by Abá Badí’, ‘the father of Badí’’, who expressed to Nabíl great disappointment in his son. Nabíl, in his unpublished history, has recorded that in Níshápúr, Abá Badí’ invited him to his home and himself began to entertain him. Nabíl asked him, ‘Do you not have a grown-up son?’ He replied that he had one but that he was not obedient to him. (The reason behind the question was that Nabíl must have been surprised that Aba Badí’ was entertaining him personally. Because in those days the young generally paid great respect to their parents, and in a case such as this, a young son would not allow his father to serve the guest personally, bearing in mind that it was against the custom of the time for the female members of the family to entertain guests of the

opposite sex.) Nabíl called for the son and he came in. He was a simple-hearted, tall youth, and Nabíl requested that he act as his host.

Gradually, he became attracted to matters pertaining to God and spiritual things and wept throughout the night. In the morning he prepared the tea and went to town; after he had gone Abá Badí' came to talk to Nabíl. He said, 'I have never heard him weep before. I am prepared to serve him if he remains steadfast in the Cause.' Áqá Buzurg insisted that he would like to accompany Nabíl to Mashhad but his father wanted him first to finish his studies, then study the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* and make a copy of it before going on such a journey.

After Nabíl left Khurásán and arrived in Tíhrán, Shaykh-i-Fání, a devoted believer, went to Níshápúr. He disclosed his plans to travel to Baghdád and then to Adrianople, and stated that he had permission from Bahá'u'lláh to take one person with him. Aba Badí' provided his son with funds and a beast of burden for transport to accompany the Shaykh to Baghdád where they could join Nabíl and from there all of them proceed together to the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. Badí' accompanied the Shaykh as far as Yazd. There he parted company with him, gave him all his possessions and alone travelled on foot to Baghdád. The spirit of devotion to the Faith had so touched Badí' that he was longing to gaze upon the countenance of Bahá'u'lláh and partake of His glory in person.

While Badí' was in Baghdád, the enemies of the Cause fatally wounded Áqá 'Abdu'r-Rasúl-i-Qumí an ardent follower of Bahá'u'lláh who had taken upon himself the arduous task of carrying water to the House of Bahá'u'lláh in that city. The supply of water to that House was essential as some believers were living there. When Badí' learned of the tragic

story of the martyrdom of Áqá 'Abdu'r-Rasúl, he volunteered for the job and began to carry skins of water from the river to the House of Bahá'u'lláh and the believers; consequently, he too became a target of assaults by the enemy. He was attacked several times as he was carrying water and each time stabbed with knives or daggers. Undeterred by the malice of the fanatic mob, this youth, whose destiny was to become a new creation of God in this Day and a spiritual giant of this Dispensation, continued in this work.

83. Badí' was created anew

There were eighty-eight believers in all who were exiled from Baghdád to Mosul at the instigation of the Persian Consul in 'Iráq. But Badí' was not among them. He had gone to Mosul before the exiles arrived, and was able to serve them in the same capacity of water carrier. After some time the news reached the believers that Bahá'u'lláh had been exiled to 'Akká. Badí' could wait no longer. He departed from Mosul and walked all the way to 'Akká.

He arrived there early in 1869. Badí' seems to have entered the city without much difficulty. The watchful eyes of Siyyid Muḥammad-i-Işfahání and his accomplice Áqá Ján, who were housed above the gate of the city so that they might report to the authorities the arrival of any person they suspected of being a Bahá'í, failed to recognize the youth carrying his water skins and wearing a long cloak of coarse cotton of the type worn among the Arabs.

Badí' wandered in the city for some time not knowing the residence of his Lord or how to enter it. He went to a mosque and there he sighted a

few Persians and he knew that the one standing in front of them was none other than 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He waited till the prayer was finished and then approached the Master with great reverence and handed him a note containing two lines of a poem he had hurriedly composed on the spot. In it he had, without introducing himself, declared his loyalty to the Master and his faith in Bahá'u'lláh in moving and tender language. 'Abdu'l-Bahá warmly welcomed Badí' and managed to take him to the barracks.

In one of the Tablets written by Mírzá Áqá Ján, it is stated that Badí' was ushered into the Presence of Bahá'u'lláh alone on two occasions. No one knew what was happening in these audiences except that Bahá'u'lláh had said that God was about to create a new creation and Badí' himself was unaware of it. In another Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh states that He created him anew with the hands of power and might and sent him out as a ball of fire. It was in the course of these two meetings that Bahá'u'lláh gave him the name Badí'—Wonderful.

In yet another Tablet Bahá'u'lláh has testified that He took a handful of dust, mixed it with the waters of might and power and breathed into it a new spirit from His presence, adorned it with the ornament of a name (Badí') in the Kingdom of Creation and sent it out to the King with a Book revealed by God.

In a Tablet to the father of Badí', Bahá'u'lláh recounts in moving language the exciting events which took place when his son had attained His presence. He indicates that when He desired to create a new creation He summoned Badí' to come to His room and uttered 'one word' to him, a word which caused his whole being to tremble. He affirms that had it not been for the divine protection vouchsafed to him

at that moment, Badí' would have swooned away. Then the Hand of Omnipotence, according to Bahá'u'lláh's description, began to create him anew and breathed into him the spirit of might and power. So great was the infusion of this might, as attested by Bahá'u'lláh, that single and alone he could have conquered the world through the power of God, had he been ordered to do so.

Bahá'u'lláh states that when this new creation came into being he smiled in His presence and manifested such steadfastness that the Concourse on High were deeply moved and exhilarated and the voice of God was heard calling aloud: 'Hallowed and glorified be Bahá for having fashioned a new and wonderful creation.' Bahá'u'lláh testifies that He disclosed to his eyes the 'Kingdom of Revelation', and as a result his whole being was filled with an ecstasy that rid him of all attachments to this world and made him arise to assist his Lord and bring victory to His Cause.

That Bahá'u'lláh had enabled Badí', while in His presence, to see the Kingdom of Revelation is a unique bounty of which we can have no understanding. The only thing we can deduce from observing this illustrious youth is that whatever had happened to him in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, he was entirely a different person when he left. Before, he was only 'a handful of dust', but after his two audiences with Bahá'u'lláh he became a new creation into which 'the spirit of might and power' had been breathed. And it is for no light reason that this youth of seventeen is named as one of the nineteen Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh.

84. Badí' begged to carry the message to the Sháh

When Badí' learnt that Bahá'u'lláh was looking for someone to deliver a special Tablet to Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh, he begged to be allowed to carry out this service, knowing full well that he would have to lay down his life. Bahá'u'lláh accepted him for this important mission, instructed him to proceed to Haifa where he would be given the Tablet and instructed him also not to associate with any believer, either on the way or in Tíhrán. The Tablet to the Sháh of Persia was not handed to Badí' in 'Akká. Bahá'u'lláh entrusted Hájí Sháh-Muḥammad-i-Amín with a small case and a Tablet to be delivered into the hands of Badí'.

The following is the story as recounted by Hájí Sháh-Muḥammad to Hájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-'Alí and recorded by the latter.

... I was given a small case ... and was instructed to hand it to Badí' at Haifa together with a small sum of money. I did not know anything about the contents of the case. I met him at Haifa and gave him the glad tidings that he had been honoured with a trust ... We left the town and walked up Mount Carmel where I handed him the case. He took it into his hands, kissed it and knelt with his forehead to the ground. I also delivered to him a sealed envelope [a Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh for Badí' himself]. He took twenty or thirty paces, sat down facing the most Holy Court ['Akká], read the Tablet and again prostrated himself to the ground. His face was illumined with the radiance of ecstasy and the tidings of joy. I asked him if I could read the Tablet also. He replied: 'There is no time.' I knew it was all a confidential matter. But what it was, I had no idea. I could not imagine such a mission.

I mentioned that we had better go to the town [Haifa] in order that, as instructed [by Bahá'u'lláh] I might give him some money. He said,

'I will not come to the town; you go and bring it here.' I went; when I returned I could not find him, in spite of much searching. He had gone ... We had no news of him until we heard of his martyrdom in Tíhrán. Then I knew that the case had contained the Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh to the Sháh and the sealed envelope contained a Tablet which imparted the glad tidings of the martyrdom of the one who was the essence of steadfastness and strength.

The same chronicler has written the following account given by a certain believer, Hájí 'Alí, who met Badí' on his way to Persia and travelled with him for some distance:

He was a very happy person, smiling, patient, thankful, gentle and humble. All that we knew about him was that he had attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and was now returning to his home in Khurásán. Many a time he could be seen walking about a hundred feet from the road in either direction, turning his face towards 'Akká, prostrating himself to the ground saying: 'O God! do not take back through Thy justice what thou hast vouchsafed unto me through Thy bounty and grant me strength for its protection.'

The Tablet that Bahá'u'lláh sent to Badí' himself when he was in Haifa is very moving and beautiful. In it He calls him by his new name Badí', exhorts him to put on the new and wonderful robe of the remembrance of God and crown himself with the crown of His Love. He reminds him that earthly life will eventually come to an end, and urges him to sacrifice his mortal frame in the path of the Beloved, so that he may attain everlasting life and eternal glory.

Badí' travelled on foot all the way to Tíhrán. On arrival in the summer of 1869, he discovered that the King was on a camping expedition. He

made his way to the area and sat on top of a rock far away, but opposite the royal pavilion. There he sat for three days and three nights in a state of fasting and prayer, awaiting the passing of the royal escort. What thoughts must have passed through his mind as he communed with his Lord, and what feelings of emotion must have filled his being as he sat so close to fulfilling the sacred mission with which he was entrusted, no one can say. One thing we can be sure of, that he possessed a supreme power and a supreme joy and was confident of victory.

On the fourth day, the Sháh looking through his binoculars spotted a man dressed in a white garb sitting motionless and in a most respectful attitude on a rock opposite. He guessed that he had some demand to make for justice or was seeking help for his difficulties. He sent his men to find out who he was and what he wanted. Badí' told them that he had a letter from a very important personage for the Sháh and must hand it to him personally. The officers searched him and then brought him to the King. It seems very surprising that these officials, drunk with pride, ruthless and cruel in every way, did not grab the letter from him and walk away. The only explanation is that they must have felt the extraordinary power with which Bahá'u'lláh had invested His messenger. Otherwise, it was very unusual to allow an ordinary citizen to come and meet the sovereign face to face.

Only those well versed in the history of Persia in the nineteenth century can appreciate the immense dangers which faced an ordinary person like Badí' wishing to meet a palace official, let alone the King. A despot such as Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh ruled his country with a rod of iron. The government officials showed their authority through tyranny. They were accustomed to deal ruthlessly with anyone who dared to utter a

word, or raise a finger against them or the established regime. The mere sighting of a soldier wearing the military uniform, or of a low-ranking government officer, was sufficient to frighten people away. As these men passed through the streets most people showed their respect for them; sometimes they had to bribe them and the timid often ran away.

To meet the King was far more frightful! When the forward section of the royal escort arrived in the street, the cry of the herald who announced to the public the approach of the King's entourage would strike terror in the hearts of the citizens. It was a familiar term to all when he shouted: 'Everyone die', 'Everyone go blind.' The significance of these instructions was that as the King and his men passed by, everyone must stand still as a dead corpse and all eyes must be cast down as if blind.

Knowing the circumstances which prevailed at the time, we can appreciate the courage and steadfastness of Badí' and the spirit of ascendancy and superhuman audacity which this youth of seventeen manifested as he stood assured and confident, straight as an arrow, face to face with the King. Calmly and courteously he handed him the Tablet and in a loud voice movingly called out the celebrated verse from the Qur'án: 'O King, I have come unto thee from Sheba with a weighty message.'

Badí' was arrested. The Sháh, who must have remembered the attempt on his life by two Bábís about two decades earlier, was taken aback by the courage and fearlessness of Bahá'u'lláh's messenger. Sending the message to Mullá 'Alíy-i-Kání, a well-known Muslim divine, to provide an answer, he ordered his men to get from Badí', first through

persuasion and promises, and then by torture if he refused to cooperate, the names of other Bahá'ís. The officer in charge was Kázim Khán-i-Qarachih-Dághí. When he failed to persuade Badí' to reveal names of other Bahá'ís to him, he ordered that he be stripped of his clothes and branded several times with hot bars of iron. Badí' endured these tortures for three successive days with a fortitude that astonished the officials who were watching him. They saw him utterly joyous while being tortured. It seemed to them that he was not feeling the pain; he often seemed to be laughing. This in spite of the fact that at times the smoke and smell created by the burning flesh was so intense that some officials could not stand it and had to leave the tent. The Sháh, who was usually eager to see the photographs of prisoners, ordered a photograph to be taken of Badí', especially when he had heard the stories of his fortitude under torture. This photograph shows the brazier of fire containing the rods of iron in the foreground and is the best testimony to the spirit of steadfastness and resignation, of calm and assurance which Badí''s face portrays.

As the three successive days of torture by branding yielded no information about the identity of other believers, the Chief Officer, Kázim Khán, threatened Badí' with death unless he cooperated. Badí' smiled at this threat and, as he did not reveal any name, his head was beaten to a pulp with a butt of a rifle. His body was thrown into a pit and earth and stones heaped upon it. This was in July 1869.

85. The tale of the officer who tortured Badí'

In 1913 when 'Abdu'l-Bahá visited Paris, a high-ranking Persian officer by the name of Muḥammad-Valí Khán, a Field Marshal (Sipah-Salár-i-

A'zam), was staying in Paris for medical treatment. Mme Dreyfus-Barney, a devoted American believer, met this man. Mme. Barney had in earlier years attained the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Holy Land and had asked many questions of Him. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's answers were written down and later compiled by her and published under the title *Some Answered Questions*.

In Paris Mme. Dreyfus-Barney, having met the above-named Persian officer, presented him with a copy of that book. When Muḥammad-Valí Khán read the account given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablets to the kings including Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh, he took up his pen and wrote in the margin some first-hand information he had personally heard from the fore-mentioned Kázim Khán, the officer in charge who tortured and eventually martyred Badí'. This is a translation of his notes:

That year, when this letter [Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet] was sent, the messenger came to the Sháh in the summer resort of Lár, and this is the full account of what happened.

The late Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh was very fond of the summer resorts of Lár, Núr and Kujúr. He ordered my father ... and myself (then a youth with the rank of Sarhang [Colonel]) to go to Kujúr and find provisions and victuals for the royal camp. 'I am coming,' he said, 'to the summer resort...' My father and I were in the environs of Manjíl-i-Kujúl when news reached us that the Sháh had arrived at Lár, and that there he had put someone to death, by having him strangled. Then it was reported that this man [who was put to death] was a messenger of the Bábís. At that time the word 'Bahá'í' was not known and we had never heard it. All the people rejoiced over the slaying of that messenger. Then the Sháh came to Baladih of Núr. My

father and I went forth to greet him. Near the village of Baladih ... they had set up the Sháh's pavilion, but the Sháh had not yet arrived. Kázim Khán-i-Turk, the Farrásh-báshí of the Sháh, had brought the advance equipage. ... My father, who had the rank of Mír-Panj [General] and had not yet received the title of Sá'idu'd-Dawlih, was acquainted with this Kázim Khán. He told me, 'Let us go and visit this Farrásh-báshí.' We rode up to the pavilion and dismounted. Kázim Khán was seated with much pomp in his tent. We entered the tent. He received my father respectfully and showed me great kindness. We sat down and tea was served. The talk was about the journey. Then my father said, 'Your Honour the Farrásh-báshí, who was this Bábí and how was he put to death?' He replied, 'O Mír-Panj! let me tell you a tale. This man was a strange creature. At Safíd-Áb-i-Lár, the Sháh mounted to go hunting. As it happened I had not mounted. Suddenly I saw two cavalry-men galloping towards me. The Sháh had sent for me. I immediately mounted, and when I reached the Sháh, he told me that a Bábí had brought a letter. "I ordered his arrest," the Sháh said, "and he is now in the custody of Kishikchí-Bashí [Head of the Sentries]. Go and take him to the Farrásh-Kháníh. Deal with him gently at first, but if not successful use every manner of force to make him confess and reveal who his friends are and where they are to be found—until I return from the hunt." I went, took him from the Kishikchí-Bashí and brought him away, hands and arms tied. But let me tell you something of the sagacity and the alertness of the Sháh. This man was unmounted in that plain and as soon as he raised his paper to say that he had a letter to deliver, the Sháh sensed that he must be a Bábí and ordered his arrest and the removal of any letter he had. He was then detained but had not given his letter to anyone

and had it in his pocket. I took this messenger home. At first I spoke to him kindly and gently; "Give me a full account of all this. Who gave you this letter? From where have you brought it? How long ago was it? Who are your comrades?" He said, "This letter was given to me in 'Akká by Ḥaḍrat-i-Bahá'u'lláh. He told me: 'You will have to go to Írán, all alone, and somehow deliver this letter to the Sháh of Írán. But your life may be endangered. If you accept that, go; otherwise I will send another messenger.' I accepted the task. It is now three months since I left. I have been looking for an opportunity to give this letter into the hands of the Sháh and bring it to his notice. And thanks be to God that today I rendered my service. If you want Bahá'ís, they are numerous in Írán, and if you want my comrades, I was all alone and have none." I pressed him to tell me the names of his comrades and the names of the Bahá'ís in Írán, particularly those of Tíhrán. And he persisted with his denial: "I have no comrade and I do not know the Bahá'ís of Írán." I swore to him: "If you tell me these names I will obtain your release from the Sháh and save you from death." His reply to me was: "I am longing to be put to death. Do you think that you frighten me?" Then I sent for the bastinado, and *farráshes* (six at a time) started to beat him. No matter how much he was beaten he never cried out, nor did he implore. When I saw how it was I had him released from the bastinado and brought him to sit beside me and told him once again: "Give me the names of your comrades." He did not answer me at all and began to laugh. It seemed as if all that beating had not harmed him in any way. This made me angry. I ordered a branding iron to be brought and a lighted brazier. While they were preparing the brazier I said: "Come and speak the truth, else I will have you branded"; and at that I noticed that his laughter

had increased. Then I had him bastinadoed again. Beating him that much tired out the *farrásh*. I myself was also tired out. So I had him untied and taken to the back of another tent, and told the *farrásh* that by dint of branding they ought to get a confession from him. They applied red-hot iron several times to his back and chest. I could hear the sizzling noise of the burning flesh and smell it too. But no matter how hard we tried we could get nothing out of him. It was about sunset that the Sháh returned from hunting and summoned me. I went to him and related all that had happened. The Sháh insisted that I should make him confess and then put him to death. So I went back and had him branded once again. He laughed under the impact of the red-hot iron and never implored. I even consented that this fellow should say that what he had brought was a petition and make no mention of a letter. Even to that he did not consent. Then I lost my temper and ordered a plank to be brought. A *farrásh*, who wielded a pounder used for ramming in iron pegs, put this man's head on the plank, and stood over him with the raised pounder. I told him: "If you divulge the names of your comrades you will be released, otherwise I will order them to bring that pounder down on your head." He began to laugh and give thanks for having gained his object. I consented that he should say it was a petition he had brought, not a letter. He even would not say that. And all those red-hot rods applied to his flesh caused him no anguish. So, in the end, I gave a sign to the *farrásh*, and he brought down the pounder on this fellow's head. His skull was smashed and his brain oozed through his nostrils. Then I went myself and reported it to the Sháh.'

This Kázim Khán-i-Farrásh-Báshí was astounded by that man's behaviour and endurance, astonished that all the beatings and

application of red-hot metal to his body had no effect on him, causing him no distress ... That same letter the Sháh sent to Tíhrán for Mullá 'Alíy-i-Kaní and other mullás to read and to answer. But they said that there was nothing to answer; and Hájí Mullá 'Alí wrote to Mustawfíyu'l-Mamálik (who was the Premier at the time) to tell the Sháh that, 'If, God forbid, you should have any doubts regarding Islám and your belief is not firm enough, I ought to take action to dispel your doubts. Otherwise such letters have no answer. The answer was exactly what you did to his messenger. Now you must write to the Ottoman Sulṭán to be very strict with him and prevent all communications.' Sulṭán 'Abdu'l-'Azíz was living then. It was during his reign...

Tonight I could not sleep. Mme Dreyfus had sent me this book and I had not yet read it. It is early morning. I opened the book and read on till I reached the theme of Letters to the Kings, and to Naṣiri'd-Dín Sháh. Because I had been there on that journey and had heard this account personally from Kázim Khán-i-Farrásh-Báshí, I wrote it down.

A year and a half later, on the journey to Karbilá, this Kázim Khán went mad. The Sháh had him chained and he died miserably. The year I went to Tabríz, as the Govemor-General of Adharbáyján, I found a grandson of his, begging. 'Take heed, O people of insight and understanding.'

The Sháh is reported to have been immensely displeased with the attitude of the divines in refusing to meet the challenge and write an answer to Bahá'u'lláh, but he could do nothing to change their decision.

That Badí' endured such unbearable tortures with joy and seemed not to feel the pain during those sessions of torture is no unique event in the history of the Faith. Numerous were other martyrs during the Dispensations of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh who gave their lives willingly and demonstrated to the public in no uncertain terms that they were longing to attain the crown of martyrdom in the path of their Lord. They demonstrated a heroism and a self-sacrifice unprecedented in the annals of mankind. There are many who endured agonizing tortures and did not appear to feel the pain.

Returning to the story of Badí': after his martyrdom, the Pen of Bahá'u'lláh lamented his sufferings, extolled his act of self-sacrifice and heroism and referred to him as the 'Pride of Martyrs' (Fakhru'sh-Shuhadá). In almost every Tablet revealed in a space of three years, He referred to Badí' in glowing terms, recalling his martyrdom and his indomitable faith. And these Tablets He designated as the 'Salt of My Tablets'.

In these Tablets, Bahá'u'lláh not only glorifies the station of Badí', but also attaches great importance to the proclamation of His message to the Sháh of Persia. In one of these Tablets He states in referring to Badí' that He had offered up the life of one of His servants after having created him anew with the hands of might and power, and sent him straight into the mouth of a serpent, so that the peoples of the world might become assured that the Almighty God stands transcendent and supreme over His creation. Bahá'u'lláh further states that He sent Badí' with a Book in which He had proclaimed His Cause and declared conclusively His proofs to all humanity: He affirms that He had removed from the person of Badí' every trace of fear, adorned him with the

ornament of faith and power, fired his soul with the utterance of a Word and sent him out as a ball of fire to proclaim His Cause.

86. Ḥájí Abu'l-Ḥasan, surnamed Amín—He was completely dedicated to the Faith

Ḥájí Sháh-Muḥammad and Ḥájí Abu'l-Ḥasan were the first believers to succeed in entering the city of 'Akká and attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh in the public bath in the early days of His confinement in the Most Great Prison. Ḥájí Abu'l-Ḥasan—or Ḥájí Amín, as he generally became known—is one of the Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh whose life of self-sacrifice and utter dedication to the Cause has left a shining example for posterity to follow. In his youth he was a staunch Muslim. His parents arranged his marriage to the daughter of a merchant, who had six sons and one daughter. He insisted that Ḥájí Amín, instead of living in the house of his father as was the custom, should live in the bride's home so that she would not live away from her parents. Ḥájí Amín's parents agreed to this request and he took up residence in the home of his father-in-law.

As a result of living in that house, Ḥájí Amín soon discovered that his brothers-in-law were all Bábís. His wife, like himself, was a devoted Muslim and unaware of her brothers' faith. After lengthy discussions at gatherings of the Bábís, Ḥájí Amín became aware of the truth of the Cause of the Báb and embraced His Faith. He then taught his wife who also became a believer.

Some time later he recognized the station of Bahá'u'lláh and this brought about a mighty transformation in his life, a life totally and

completely dedicated to Bahá'u'lláh. So thorough was this transformation of spirit that it is very hard, if not impossible, to attempt to fathom the depth of his dedication to his Lord, or describe in words an adequate appreciation of his outstanding and selfless services to the Cause he loved so much.

No doubt his first attaining the presence of Bahá'u'lláh must have left an abiding impression on his soul and released the necessary forces for the making of one of the greatest spiritual giants of this Faith. His devotion to Bahá'u'lláh knew no bounds and because of this he was truly detached from this world. The flame of love for Bahá'u'lláh that burnt so brightly in his heart illumined the souls of the believers and burnt away the veils of blindness from the faces of the enemies.

He travelled extensively throughout Persia, went to the homes of almost every Bahá'í and poured out so much love and encouragement upon them that they all cherished his companionship. In their homes he was warmly accepted as a true father or brother, one who genuinely cared for the well-being and spiritual development of each. Knowing that he was an intimate and loving friend of everyone, parents (who in those days were in the habit of arranging marriages) often turned to him to suggest suitable partners for their sons and daughters.

Detachment from worldly things and utter self-sacrifice in the service of Bahá'u'lláh were among Hájí Amín's greatest qualities. Ever since he arose to serve the Cause as the assistant and confidant of Hájí Sháh-Muhammad, and later as the Trustee himself, Hájí Amín gave everything he had to the Cause. He kept not a penny for himself; he also made every possible effort to convey to the believers, by word and by deed, that man's most meritorious achievement in life is to offer up

everything he has—his time, his labours, his substance and even his life—in the path of God.

87. Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl—His conversion

In his first interview with the believers, Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl was surprised to find himself unable to cope with a Bahá'í who was not a learned man, and could not refute his arguments. However, he requested his host 'Abdu'l-Karím to arrange a meeting in which one of the learned Bahá'ís would take part, for he desired to have an encounter with a person of his own calibre so that he could establish once and for all his own superiority and demonstrate the falsity of the claims of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh!

The meeting was arranged, but 'Abdu'l-Karím did not invite a learned Bahá'í as Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl had requested. Although uneducated, 'Abdu'l-Karím in his great wisdom knew that a man who was so proud of his knowledge would be blind to the Message of God. He knew that what Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl needed most was someone who could expose his real ignorance of true religion. No one would be better suited to carry out this than a simple believer devoid of academic knowledge but possessed of faith and spiritual understanding.

When Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl arrived for this meeting he found himself again confronted with uneducated people. In the course of discussion he was utterly confounded by the simple yet brilliant proofs which were put forward in support of the Faith and in answer to his questions. He marvelled at these men who were devoid of learning and knowledge

yet possessed such a marvellous understanding of the mysteries of the *Qur'án* and other Holy Books.

In the course of several meetings, discussions between Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl and his unschooled Bahá'í teachers continued. As anticipated by his host, these discussions had a sobering effect on Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl. Since his prime motive in coming to Bahá'í meetings was to disclose the absurdity of the claims of the Bahá'ís, he was remarkably humbled by his inability to refute the arguments presented by those few uneducated souls from among the believers, and his pride was badly hurt by the many humiliating defeats he encountered in the course of discussions with them. Later he met with learned Bahá'ís and conversed with them in numerous gatherings, always finding their arguments irrefutable. Once he entered into discussion with the renowned Mullá Muḥammad-i-Qá'iní (Nabíl-i-Akbar). At the end of that meeting he is reported to have exclaimed in an astonished tone: 'By God! No one could ever be found capable of withstanding the force of argument of this great man of knowledge.'

In one of his writings, Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl describes his early days of contact with the Faith in these words:

In the year AH 1293 (AD 1876) when the writer of these pages [i.e. Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl] was a resident of Tíhrán and steadfast in the faith of Shí'ah Islám, through some incidents he established association with the people of Bahá. The prime object of his endeavours was to compel them to surrender and help stifle their growth. For nearly eight months he held many a debate with the learned of this Faith. At the end of this period he found that all his vain imaginings had been broken down and had vanished. He then began to tread the path of

search after truth. He exerted all his efforts in investigating the proofs of this Faith, established close association in a spirit of brotherhood with the leaders of all religions, the Jewish, Zoroastrian, Christian, Sunní, Shí'ah and Azalí, made extensive enquiries from both friends and foes concerning the history of the Founder of this Faith, studied the Holy Books attentively, meditated on the words of gnostics and divines most carefully, and prayed in the dead of night and at dawn supplicating the Almighty in a state of utter helplessness and anguish to bestow upon him guidance and grant him a seeing eye—until at last, through the operation of the will of God, he acquired a penetrating insight into revealed religions, and his distressed heart was filled with calm and certitude.

But before reaching the final stage of attaining certitude and embracing the Faith, Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl went through a great deal of intellectual struggle. His mind was unable to reject the truth of the Cause but his heart was not touched by the light of faith and assurance. During this period of search he read most of the Writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh that were available.

When Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl found himself utterly confounded by the proofs and arguments which his Bahá'í teachers had put forward, he entertained the idea that not until Bahá'u'lláh performed a miracle for him would his heart be satisfied. The Bahá'ís explained to him that miracles could not be regarded as a conclusive proof of the truth of the Messengers of God, for they were not capable of being witnessed universally and at all times. They were only meaningful for the few who had seen them. Furthermore it was not for man to test God. But Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl insisted. He wrote a few questions on a paper, placed it in an

envelope, sealed it with his own seal and handed it to ‘Abdu’l-Karím for safe keeping. He then placed a blank sheet of paper in another envelope and asked ‘Abdu’l-Karím to forward it to Bahá’u’lláh. He stated that if his questions were answered he would entertain no doubt about the truth of the Cause.

‘Abdu’l-Karím, accompanied by Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl, took the blank letter and the sealed envelope to the home of Ḥájí Muḥammad Ismá’íl-i-Dhabíh so that he could forward the letter to Bahá’u’lláh. Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl later told the story to Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-‘Alí, whose account is summarized in the following translation:

When we arrived we learnt that the Ḥájí was not at home, but his wife, who knew ‘Abdu’l-Karím ... warmly welcomed us and insisted with such love and hospitality that we went inside ... We entered a room in which there were books and a case containing Holy Tablets ... She gave us permission to open the case if we wished and study the Holy Writings. As ‘Abdu’l-Karím was unable to read, he asked me if I would read for him. Through courtesy which was characteristic of me I complied.

There was a Tablet written on blue paper addressed to Sulṭán ‘Abdu’l-‘Azíz. As I read it, I came upon the story of the ‘Show of Sulṭán Salím’ and I was fascinated by it. (As a child, Bahá’u’lláh attended the wedding feast of one of his brothers in Tíhrán. There he saw a puppet-show which he recounts in the *Lawḥ-i-Ra’ís*.) I found the passages to be of the utmost eloquence, lucidity and sweetness. The more I read it, the more I wanted to read. I had never in all my life come across such wonderful utterances, which captivated my mind

and attracted my heart. But I was thinking of everything in my mind except that these were the words of God!

Then I came to these exalted words: 'Soon will We dismiss the one who was like unto him, and will lay hand on their Chief who ruleth the land, and I, verily, am the Almighty, the All-Compelling'.

Upon reading this statement I was awe-struck, and plunged into a state of astonishment and wonder. For about half an hour I became speechless. Immersed in my thoughts, I wondered whether it was great magic or sorcery, and certainly it provided a grave test for me.

Eventually I was satisfied in my thoughts that we were entering the 'time of the end' and not until Godlessness spread would the Promised One come. I contended that Bahá'u'lláh had made these statements and prophecies in order to mislead ordinary people and keep a hold on His followers. Otherwise it would not be possible for a person who was a prisoner by the order of a King to address him in such strong language and denounce him in such wrathful terms, especially when He was single and alone, without a helper in a foreign land ... These vain imaginings and satanic thoughts were flooding my mind and yet I praise God and thank Him for his loving grace that I was never inclined to dislike Bahá'u'lláh or be discourteous to Him.

...Anyhow, in order to rescue myself from 'Abdu'l-Karím, I said to him. 'To possess the power of life over created things is a miracle the like of which has not been manifested by the Prophets of past'. Therefore I took back the sealed envelope and my blank letter addressed to Bahá'u'lláh and tore them up and declared that for me the fulfilment of these prophecies would constitute the proof and a

criterion for truth. I also got a pledge that no one would talk to me about the Faith any more until these prophecies were fulfilled.

I thought to myself that the incident of going to the house of the Hájí was not only an act of providence which relieved me of further discussion with the Bahá'ís, but also provided a way by which I would be able to guide these souls and rescue them from going the wrong way. But the believers did not altogether cut off their association with me. They came from time to time to see me and by their discourses ... tried to rescue me from the fetters of vain imaginings. But I was like a spider. The more they cut the web of my idle fancies the more I continued to make it.

Five or six months passed by [from the day he read the above Tablets]. During this period I often thought of Bahá'u'lláh's prophecy concerning the Sulṭán. Until one day I was passing by the Masjid-i-Sháh (the Sháh Mosque) of Tíhrán. My eyes fell upon Hájí Mírzáy-i-Afnán who was respectable merchant and one of the illustrious believers of this Most Great Revelation. He was accompanied by Mírzá Haydar-'Alíy-i-Ardistání, a survivor of the Fort of Shaykh Ṭabarsi.

These two men were standing in the street and talking together. As I was trying to shun the Bahá'ís and steer clear of them, I pulled my 'abá over my head and began to cross the road away from these two men. But they saw me and called my name, and I had no choice but to respond to their call. They said, 'Now the proof of the Faith of God has been established for you. The news of the dethronement of Sulṭán 'Abdu'l-'Azíz has reached here by telegram.' This news dealt me an enormously heavy blow. Although I knew what they were

aiming at, I flared up with rage and shouted at them angrily, 'It is no concern of mine that the Sultán has been deposed. I am not a relative of his.' 'Did you not make your acceptance of the truth of this Faith', they reminded me, 'dependent upon this event?' I was so convulsed with rage that I walked away without saying farewell. I did not proceed to where I was intending to go; instead I went back home.

Knowing the immensity of this test, I was overcome with emotion and with tears flowing uncontrollably from my eyes I begged God to assist me so that I might not be misled. While I was in this condition, 'Abdu'l-Karím and two others arrived. I was in no state of mind to invite them in, so I left the house and did not return home until late at night. These friends knew that I could not face them and that I had run away. They waited two to three days and then came. I apologized for my behaviour on that evening, and said to them that we must now wait until the prophecy of 'We will lay hand on their Chief' be fulfilled. I explained that the term 'lay hand on' did not mean natural death, for everyone dies. It signified that he must be killed.

My zeal in finding the truth had by now reached its climax. I visited all the learned men whom I trusted and discussed the principles of religion with them but found them helpless, while the proofs put forward by the Bahá'ís were, in my view, overwhelming and far superior. By this time I found myself able to discover the mysteries and understand the reality and significances of the verses of the Qur'án.

A few days passed and the news of the assassination of the Sultán was flashed by telegram. I went out of my mind, and was utterly perplexed. I was so agitated that I even aimed blows at myself. At one

time I would fight with God, at another I would turn unbeliever, then I would repent and beseech God to assist, guide and protect me. I went through such an ordeal that day and night I could not relieve myself from these thoughts. I could neither eat nor sleep. I could not eat. I only drank tea and smoked and wept.

One night I was roused from my slumber and I began to admonish myself in these words: 'It is about one year that you have been associating and arguing with these Bahá'ís. These men are illiterate and uneducated, yet they have asserted their ascendancy over you every time, they have adduced proofs and demonstrated the validity of their Cause. Although you consider yourself to be a learned man and a researcher in the Holy Books, commentaries and traditions, yet you know that these men are much more resourceful than you are. It is as if they are inspired and assisted by God, and the Holy Spirit speaks through them. You have also been a witness to their exalted character and heavenly virtues. Why then should you interpret their words as the breathings of the evil whisperer? You remember how enchanted you were when you read the story of the 'Show of Sulţán Salím' in the *Lawḥ-i-Ra'ís*! How you were attracted by the eloquence and sublimity of those words! Now, you ought to read and investigate the writings of the one who claims to be the revealer of the Word of God with the eye of justice and fairness. If this Cause be untrue, the first to contend it is God. Therefore, its survival is impossible ...

I arose, performed my ablutions and said prayers. I then took the Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh [*Lawḥ-i-Ra'ís*] which, although it had been in my possession for a long time, I had not been moved to read. I opened it,

turned tearfully and with devotion to God, began to read it. It was then that I heard the voice of God ... calling me through the mouthpiece of this Manifestation, 'Am I not your Lord?' To that call reaching me from the Beauty of the All-Glorious, I responded with all my heart, 'Thou art, thou art!' I believed.

I passed from the state of idle fancies and vain imaginings into that of certitude ... I became highly attracted to the Word of God and carried away by its power. I felt such love and devotion towards the Dayspring of Divine Revelation [Bahá'u'lláh] and experienced such joy and ecstasy in myself that I cannot ever describe it. Words cannot express the heights of spirituality to which I had been transformed. I knew that if I served these souls who had become the cause of my guidance to the end of my days, and if I laid down my life in their path, I should never be able to repay them for giving me eternal salvation and spiritual life.

With infinite joy I spent that night. Before dawn I hastened to the house of 'Abdu'l-Karím, kissed the threshold of his door, prostrated myself at his feet and manifested such humility and self-effacement towards him that he was highly embarrassed. He told me that my behaviour was not warranted and it was based on my vain imaginings, for God is the one who guides the souls and not man.

After embracing the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl became an entirely new creation. He acquired keen spiritual insight and a faith seldom seen among the followers of Bahá'u'lláh. Probably the reason for this, in the first instance, was the purity of his heart which enabled him in his arduous journey of search after truth to battle through and tear up many veils of pride, superstition and vain imaginings, until

there was nothing left but a pure spirit attracted to Bahá'u'lláh as a piece of iron would be to a powerful magnet. So complete was this attraction that, like to the iron when it becomes magnetized, he surrendered his will entirely to that of Bahá'u'lláh and as a result became a spiritual giant adorned with such virtues and accomplishments that few, if any, of the Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh have surpassed him in qualities and perfections.

In the second instance, through the influence of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, his vast knowledge of religion, history and philosophy acquired a new dimension, a new quality and a new power. The forces of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh acted as rays of light, and his knowledge as the eye. The combination of the two brought him new vision. This knowledge, now guided by the light of faith and coupled with detachment from all earthly things, bestowed upon him the gift of true understanding of such magnitude that he became a wellspring of divine knowledge. He used this knowledge as a tool to understand, to the extent that it is possible for man to do, the inner reality of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. Through the knowledge of God, detachment from all earthly things, and living the life, he recognized the station of Bahá'u'lláh and the greatness of this Cause to a degree that perhaps only a few have attained.

The recognition of the Manifestation of God (Bahá'u'lláh, in this day) is the first step towards the spiritual development of the soul. And as this recognition is relative and varies from person to person, it is apparent that those who succeed in recognizing the grandeur of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh in depth, and become truly aware of His transcendent glory and awe-inspiring majesty, will be endowed with far greater powers of

spiritual understanding. Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl achieved this to a supreme degree and became the fulfilment of these words of Bahá'u'lláh:

Whoso hath recognized Me, will arise and serve Me with such determination that the powers of earth and heaven shall be unable to defeat his purpose.

That he had perceived with such penetrating insight the significance and greatness of the Day of God ushered in by Bahá'u'lláh is evident from his writings and the example of his life.

88. Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl—He surrendered his intellectual gifts to God

The following story in the life of Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, the outstanding scholar of the Cause and its famous apologist, is one which demonstrates that reading the Word of God with the eye of intellect can lead a man astray. He himself has recounted the story that soon after he came in contact with the believers, they gave him the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* to read. He read it with an air of intellectual superiority and was not impressed by it. He even commented that if the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* was a proof of Bahá'u'lláh's claims, he himself could certainly write a better book.

At that time he was the head of a theological college in Tīhrán. The following day a prominent woman arrived at the college and approached some students asking them to write an important letter for her. The students referred her to Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl saying that he was an outstanding writer, a master of eloquence and a man unsurpassed in the art of composition. Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl took up his pen to write, but found himself unable to compose the first sentence. He tried very hard but was unsuccessful. For several minutes he scribbled in the corner of

the page and even drew lines on his own fingernail, until the woman realized that the learned scribe was unable to write. Losing her patience she arose to go and mockingly said to Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, 'If you have forgotten how to write a simple letter why don't you say so instead of keeping me here while you scrawl?'

Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl says that he was overcome with feelings of shame as a result of this incident, and then suddenly remembered his own comments the night before about his being able to write a better book than the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*. He had a pure heart and knew that this incident was nothing but a clear answer to his arrogant attitude towards that holy Book.

However, it took Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl several years to be convinced of the truth of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. He reached a stage where he accepted the Faith intellectually, but for years his heart was not convinced. The only thing which caused him to recognize the truth of the Cause of God after having struggled for so long was to submit himself and surrender his intellectual gifts to God. One evening he went into his chamber, and prayed with yearning as tears flowed from his eyes, beseeching God to open the channels of his heart. At the hour of dawn he suddenly found himself possessed of such faith that he felt he could lay down his life in the path of Bahá'u'lláh. The same person who once had said he could write a better book than the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, read this book many times with the eye of faith and found it to be an ocean of knowledge, limitless in scope. Every time he read it he found new pearls of wisdom within it and discovered new mysteries which he had not come across before.

89. Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl—“I am only a drop from the vast ocean of Bahá'u'lláh's school”

Notable among those who had attained the station of true knowledge was Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, the great Bahá'í scholar and one of the Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh. He is renowned for his vast knowledge, not only within the Bahá'í community but throughout the East. He was an acknowledged authority on many subjects including history and divine philosophy and was an outstanding master of Arabic and Persian literature. Once in academic circles in Egypt he was referred to as ‘God of the pen, a pillar of history and the corner-stone of knowledge and virtue.’

Dr. Ḥabib Mu'ayyad, who knew him personally, has written a great deal in his memoirs concerning the greatness of this man. Here is one passage:

Once people asked him [Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl] how he had acquired this vast erudition and how he had become the recipient of this God-given knowledge. He became so displeased with his questioners that he angrily remarked ‘Who is Abu'l-Faḍl! What is Abu'l-Faḍl! I am only a drop from the vast ocean of Bahá'u'lláh's school. If you also enter the same school, you will become the master of Abu'l-Faḍl. If you don't believe me go to Gulpáygán, see my relatives and then you will understand.’

The following story gives us a glimpse of his greatness. In the early years of this century, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá sent Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl to the United States of America to teach and help the believers deepen in the Faith. After his return, he and a number of American pilgrims were seated in the presence of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá in ‘Akká. The pilgrims began to praise Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl for the help he had given them, saying that he had

taught many souls, defended the Cause most ably against its adversaries, and had helped to build a strong and dedicated Bahá'í community in America. As they continued to pour lavish praise upon him, Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl became increasingly depressed and dejected, until he burst into tears and wept loudly. The believers were surprised and could not understand this, even thinking that they had not praised him enough!

Then 'Abdu'l-Bahá explained that by praising him they had bitterly hurt him, for he considered himself as utter nothingness in the Cause and believed with absolute sincerity that he was not worthy of any mention or praise.

Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl has truly set an example for Bahá'ís to follow, in that throughout his Bahá'í life he never used the word 'I' to ascribe merit to himself.

90. Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl—Accounts of his service

The teaching activities of Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl began soon after he embraced the Faith. Almost all his Bahá'í career, stretching over a period of well-nigh forty years, was spent in teaching the Cause to members of the public and in deepening the Bahá'ís in the verities of the Faith.

About five years after Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl joined the ranks of the believers, Bahá'u'lláh in a Tablet commanded him to arise in His name and invite the peoples of the world to come to him so that he might recount to them the news of the 'Most Great Announcement', might show them the

vista of the 'Most Exalted Horizon' and might enable them to hearken to the 'Voice of God' in this day.

This Tablet and the command of Bahá'u'lláh exerted a galvanizing influence upon Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl. Some time later, quoting this Tablet and knowing that the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh would surround him from every direction he wrote those challenging words addressed to the peoples of the world:

And lately this servant who considers himself to be the most insignificant among the servants of the Lord of creation, and one who has quaffed only a drop from the ocean of certitude, is prepared, bearing in mind the auspicious utterances of the Lord of Lords quoted above, to inform any person of any nationality in the world of the truth of this great Cause, and to prove to him its authenticity based on the clear proofs by which the truth of that person's religion is also established. If he be of the people of philosophy and logic, to prove by intellectual and rational proofs, and if he belongs to the people of controversy and contention, to convince and silence him by adducing compelling and binding proofs. This is in order that the right path may be distinguished from the path of error, truth from falsehood and health from disease. And, in what we say, we rely entirely upon God, exalted be He.

They were not mere empty words that this great and godly man wrote and published in the *Fará'id*, one of his outstanding works. He lived up to everything he said. Not only did he hold discourses with countless souls of different backgrounds and religions, and converted hundreds of them to the Cause, but he also left for posterity the fundamentals of Bahá'í proofs from every point of view that generations yet unborn

might learn from them and deepen their knowledge and understanding of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl was renowned for his knowledge. His name 'Abu'l-Faḍl' which he had adopted when he was a Muslim, means the father of knowledge. 'Abdu'l-Bahá in a Tablet addresses him as the father of knowledge, its mother and its brother. But those who knew him have testified that as far as his knowledge and understanding were concerned there was a vast difference before and after he was a Bahá'í. He himself has testified that before his coming in contact with the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh he was the embodiment of vain imaginings and idle fancy and his vision was obscured by these. Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-'Alí writes of him:

His honour, the dearly loved Abu'l-Faḍl, ... has adorned the city of Iṣfahán with his presence. Since formerly he was a student in Iṣfahán, he is well known by the scholars and men of learning here. These men have met him and have realized that he is not the same person as in the past. They confess that his vast knowledge, learning and power of utterance puts him in the forefront of all. In the past he was as a drop, now he is as a billowing sea. He was then as a mere atom and now he shines as a brilliant star ...

Soon after embracing the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl was forced to leave his post as head of a theological college in Ṭihrán. The high esteem and honour in which he was held by the public as well as in government and ecclesiastical circles up till then, turned into abasement and persecution. He was twice imprisoned, the last time for about twenty-two months. He lived very modestly and earned a small income, often working as a scribe. His attachment to Bahá'u'lláh knew

no bounds. But he was as detached from this world as he was attached to His Lord, and this alone conferred upon him all his powers and virtues. Prayer and meditation were the cornerstone of his life and through them he polished the mirror of his heart so perfectly that he radiated the light of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh to those who came into contact with him.

When he was in Egypt, he did not disclose his faith at first. This was suggested to him by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. A great many scholars and professors of the famous University of Al-Azhar and others recognized the depth and profundity of his knowledge and were attracted to his person. Since they did not suspect him of being a Bahá'í there was no prejudice and they congregated around him in great numbers. So earnest was their quest for the outpouring of spiritual knowledge from his lips that they sat spellbound at his feet and some of them were enraptured with his explanations of the verities of the *Qur'án* and other spiritual subjects. To cite one example of the homage that men of learning paid to Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, the following is a tribute by 'Abdu'r-Raḥmán-i-Baraḳúqí, a learned scholar and journalist of the time:

About eight years ago we heard that a learned man from Persia by the name of Abu'l-Faḍl was living in Cairo. We were told that he had become a point of adoration for scholars and a centre of pilgrimage for those who yearn after knowledge and understanding. We sought his abode and went to see him. There we saw a man of slender build and of medium height. He was old, more than seventy years of age, but from the point of view of vitality, zest, intelligence and keenness of insight he looked like a man of thirty ... He captivated our minds through the magic of his words and the sweetness of his utterances.

Soon we became his devoted disciples in such wise that there was nothing more enjoyable than to sit at his feet and no story could be found sweeter than that which was recounted by him. The more we associated with him and examined his person, the more we respected him and became conscious of his exalted station.

Among those scholars who venerated Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl there were some who went as far as to believe that he was endowed with divine powers which are bestowed only upon God's chosen ones. One such person was a certain Shaykh Badru'd-Dín-i-Ghazzí who later became an ardent believer, as about thirty other scholars did when they learned that Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl was a Bahá'í.

Shaykh Badru'd-Dín describes how he was enraptured by listening to Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl's discourses. After some time he came to the conclusion that Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl was one of the chosen ones of God, possessed of a great spiritual station and exalted above other men. In a spoken chronicle to a number of friends, he said:

I asked him about his station and he said that he did not have any. One day I told him plainly: 'O Master, why do you hide from me? If you are a chosen one of God and have a station, please tell me, for I will accept and follow you.' He laughed at this statement and deferred the answer to this mystery to a later time. Time passed and I had to depart for Palestine. He then bade me attain the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá while there. I obeyed, attained His presence and discovered the truth of the Cause.

Some years passed and I did not see Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl. When I returned to Egypt, I met him there, and said to him: 'When in the past I came in contact with you, I considered you to be a unique

person and one without a peer in this world, but when I attained the holy presence of the Master, I realized that you are no more than a drop in relation to that billowing ocean.' Hearing this, Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl became filled with joy, and in a state of ecstasy threw his arms around me and said: 'Now I know that you have recognized the truth.'

A striking feature of the life of Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl was his absolute submission to the will of his Lord. His steadfastness in the Covenant and obedience to the wishes of Bahá'u'lláh and the Master knew no bounds. He would rather die than contemplate even a small deviation from the words and teachings of the Cause. The following story recounted by a certain believer, Ḥusayn-i-Rúhí Effendí, who knew Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, illustrates this point clearly.

When I was in 'Akká, I procured a copy of a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá known as *Lawḥ-i-Du Khán* which is written in honour of Muḥammad-Ḥusayn-i-Vakíl ... When I arrived in Egypt I shared the contents of this Tablet which disapproved of smoking with Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl.

I had not yet finished the reading of the Tablet for him when he took his cigar case, threw it out in the street and said that this was the end of smoking for him, although he was a chain-smoker. He used to roll his own cigarettes by hand, light a new one with the old, and smoke non-stop from morning till evening. He said to me: 'O Rúhí Effendí, I have been smoking for fifty-five years and I am addicted to it. And, soon you will see that because of the effect of nicotine a member of my body will be paralysed.'

It did not take very long until one of his arms was paralysed and he could not move it. This lasted for two years. The doctors strongly

urged him to resume smoking but he refused, saying, 'I prefer to die than to disobey 'Abdu'l-Bahá.'

And, finally, the writings of Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl are the best proof that his person was assisted by the powers and confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh. It is no exaggeration to claim that apart from the Holy Writings and those of Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Faith, his are the most inspiring, the most informative, the most challenging and the most voluminous, in the literature of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. He may be described as the most able spiritual diver who immersed himself in the ocean of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and brought out in profusion pearls of infinite preciousness—truths and mysteries which lay hidden in its depths and filled the pages of his numerous books with their verities. Almost all the Bahá'í teachers in the East have used his writings as a basis for deeper study of religion in general, and proofs of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in particular. His explanations and profuse quotations from the Holy Scriptures of the past, as well as the apologies he has written in defence of the Faith have been used by scholars and writers of both East and West.

Whenever the enemies opposed or misrepresented the Faith, his pen was ready to defend it with a vigour and assertiveness that confounded the enemy and strengthened the friends. The book of *Fará'id*, over 800 pages, written without revising or improving his original draft, from which it was printed, is the best example.

In praise of those who arise to defend His Faith, Bahá'u'lláh declares:

If any man were to arise to defend, in his writings, the Cause of God against its assailants, such a man, however inconsiderable his share, shall be so honoured in the world to come that the Concourse on

high would envy his glory. No pen can depict the loftiness of his station, neither can any tongue describe its splendour. For whosoever standeth firm and steadfast in this holy, this glorious, and exalted Revelation, such power shall be given him as to enable him to face and withstand all that is in heaven and on earth. Of this God is Himself a witness.

91. Mírzá 'Alí-Muḥammad, surnamed Varqá—He burned away the idols of vain imaginings

Mírzá 'Alí-Muḥammad, entitled Varqá, is one of the Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh. He was about twenty-two-years old when he left his native city of Yazd. He was a poet of outstanding calibre, knowledgeable in the science of ancient medicine and well-versed in religious subjects. He was an erudite and eloquent teacher of the Cause, one who had truly recognized the station of Bahá'u'lláh; he was filled with His love and radiated the power and the beauty of the Faith to those who came in contact with him.

On his first pilgrimage in AH 1296 (AD 1878-9) when he lost his father, Varqá came in contact with the divine spirit and was utterly magnetized by the onrushing forces of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. He truly became a new creation and emerged as one of the spiritual giants of this age. The first time he gazed upon the face of His Lord he was surprised, because he thought that he had previously seen Him somewhere, but he could not remember the occasion or the place. He was puzzled by this until one day after several times coming into His presence, Bahá'u'lláh said to him, 'Varqá! Burn away the idols of vain imaginings!' On hearing these words, Varqá immediately recalled a dream he had had when he was a

child. He was in a garden playing with some dolls when 'God' arrived, took the dolls from him and burned them in the fire. When he told this dream to his parents they pointed out to him that no one can see God. However, he had completely forgotten this dream until that day when the words of Bahá'u'lláh exhorting him to burn the idols aroused his memory, and he knew that he had seen Bahá'u'lláh in his dream as a child.

Varqá has told the story that on one occasion a thought entered into his mind as he gazed in adoration upon the countenance of Bahá'u'lláh. He said to himself, 'I know that Bahá'u'lláh is the supreme Manifestation of God, but I wish He would give me a sign to this effect.' At that same instant the following verse from the *Qur'án* flashed into Varqá's mind:

Thou seest the earth barren and lifeless, but when We pour down rain on it, it is stirred to life, it swells, and it puts forth every kind of luxuriant growth in pairs.

In that very moment, he wished in his heart that Bahá'u'lláh might repeat this verse to fulfil the sign he was looking for.

After some time, in the course of His utterances Bahá'u'lláh recited that same verse from the *Qur'án*. Varqá's wish was fulfilled, but he said to himself, 'Could this have been a mere coincidence?' As soon as this thought occurred to Varqá, Bahá'u'lláh turned and said to him abruptly, 'Was this not a sufficient proof for you?' Varqá was dumbfounded. He was shaken but assured in his heart of the truth of these words of Bahá'u'lláh:

O heedless ones!

Think not the secrets of hearts are hidden, nay, know ye of a

certainty that in clear characters they are engraved and are openly manifest in the holy Presence.

Certainly Varqá, as a result of this and other experiences in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, reached the highest level of certitude and assurance. He was so carried away into the realms of the spirit that this mortal life was of no value to him any longer. He begged Bahá'u'lláh to enable him to lay down his life in the path of God, and this he did.

Varqá returned to Persia as a flame of fire, a tower of strength, a mine of knowledge and virtues. He served the Faith with heroism and wisdom. He chose the city of Tabríz as his main place of residence, but in the year AH 1300 (AD 1882-3) he went to his native city of Yazd to meet his only sister, Bábí Túbá, who was very lonely after the exile of her father and brothers from Yazd. However, Varqá was arrested and imprisoned there. He was kept in custody for about one year and later transferred to the prison of Işfahán where he succeeded in converting certain tribal leaders to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. When released he returned to Tabríz.

Varqá was granted the privilege of a second pilgrimage to the presence of His Lord. This was about a year before the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh. This time, however, he was accompanied by two of his sons, 'Azízu'lláh and Rúhu'lláh, and his father-in-law Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh-i-Núrí, a devoted believer of note who was prominent among the government officials in Tabríz.

This time, as on the first occasion, Bahá'u'lláh showered upon Varqá much praise and admiration for his services to the Faith. The blessings and bounties that he received from His Lord were indeed boundless. He and his sons, though young in age, basked in the sunshine of

Bahá'u'lláh's presence. They all became filled with the spirit of joy and certitude, and intoxicated with the wine of His presence.

In order to please Varqá, Bahá'u'lláh once told him that since he was knowledgeable in medicine he ought to prescribe a remedy for Him, as He did not feel well; later He told him that He had taken the medicine.

Once Varqá asked Bahá'u'lláh, 'How will the Cause of God be universally adopted by mankind?' Bahá'u'lláh said that first, the nations of the world would arm themselves with infernal engines of war, and when fully armed would attack each other like bloodthirsty beasts. As a result, there would be enormous bloodshed throughout the world. Then the wise from all nations would gather together to investigate the cause of such bloodshed. They would come to the conclusion that prejudices were the cause, a major form being religious prejudice. They would therefore try to eliminate religion so as to eliminate prejudice. Later they would realize that man cannot live without religion. Then they would study the teachings of all religions to see which of the religions conformed to the prevailing conditions of the time. It is then that the Cause of God would become universal.

Once Bahá'u'lláh spoke to Varqá about the station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and extolled His virtues and heavenly qualities. He said that in this world of being there was a phenomenon which He had referred to in some Tablets as the 'Most Great Elixir'. Any person who possessed this power would be able to exert enormous influence in the world through his work and could do anything he desired. Consider Christ after His crucifixion: the Jews had completely ignored Him. They had not even mentioned His name in their books. But since He possessed this power, He could not remain unrecognized. He revolutionized the world. Yet

Christ used to avoid fools. And now, look at the Master. Observe with what patience and compassion He dealt with all types of people. He possessed this power, therefore immeasurable was the extent of the influence He would exert upon the world of humanity.

When Varqá heard this, he was so filled with joy and excitement that he fell prostrate at Bahá'u'lláh's feet and begged Him to make it possible for him and one of his sons to lay down their lives in the path of the Master. Bahá'u'lláh favoured him with His acceptance. When he returned to Persia, Varqá wrote to Bahá'u'lláh and renewed his plea for martyrdom, a plea to which He again favourably responded. He was martyred during the Ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

92. Mullá 'Alí-Akbar, Hájí Akhund—He stood on the shore of Truth

This great Apostle of Bahá'u'lláh came from the village of Shahmírzád in the province of Khurásán. As a youth he was so eager to acquire religious knowledge that he went to the city of Mashhad where he received the usual religious education in various theological schools. But the more he searched for truth the less he found it in those circles. 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes this period of his life so eloquently:

Yet another Hand of the Cause was the revered Mullá 'Alí-Akbar, upon him be the glory of God, the All-Glorious. Early in life, this illustrious man attended institutions of higher learning and labored diligently, by day and night, until he became thoroughly conversant with the learning of the day, with secular studies, philosophy, and religious jurisprudence. He frequented the gatherings of philosophers, mystics, and Shaykhís, thoughtfully traversing those

areas of knowledge, intuitive wisdom, and illumination; but he thirsted after the wellspring of truth, and hungered for the bread that comes down from Heaven. No matter how he strove to perfect himself in those regions of the mind, he was never satisfied; he never reached the goal of his desires; his lips stayed parched; he was confused, perplexed, and felt that he had wandered from his path. The reason was that in all those circles he had found no passion; no joy, no ecstasy, no faintest scent of love. And as he went deeper in the core of those manifold beliefs, he discovered that from the day of the Prophet Muḥammad's advent until our own times, innumerable sects have arisen: creeds differing among themselves; disparate opinions, divergent goals, uncounted roads and ways. And he found each one, under some plea or other, claiming to reveal spiritual truth; each one believing that it alone followed the true path—this although the Muḥammadic sea could rise in one great tide, and carry all those sects away to the ocean floor. 'No cry shalt thou hear from them, nor a whisper even.' (*Qur'án* 19:98.)

Whoso ponders the lessons of history will learn that this sea has lifted up innumerable waves, yet in the end each has dissolved and vanished, like a shadow drifting by. The waves have perished, but the sea lives on. This is why 'Alí Qabl-i-Akbar could never quench his thirst, till the day when he stood on the shore of Truth and cried:

Here is a sea with treasure to the brim;
Its waves toss pearls under the great wind's thong.
Throw off your robe and plunge, nor try to swim,
Pride not yourself on swimming—dive headlong.

He was about nineteen years of age when he came in contact with the Bábís of the time. Bahá'u'lláh was then in Baghhdád, and a few copies of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* were circulating among the believers. It appears that a perusal of that heavenly Book in about the year 1861 ignited the fire of faith in his pure heart. This fire of the love of Bahá'u'lláh began to burn within him fiercely, and as time went on its heat could be felt by those who came in contact with him; indeed, he became the fulfilment of the words of Bahá'u'lláh revealed in a Tablet to Ibn-i-Aşdaq describing the quality of a true Bahá'í:

O Friends! You must all be so ablaze in this day with the fire of the love of God that the heat thereof may be manifest in all your veins, your limbs and members of your body, and the peoples of the world may be ignited by this heat and turn to the horizon of the Beloved.

'Abdu'l-Bahá describes him as a fountain:

Like a fountain, his heart welled and jetted forth; meaning and truth, like soft-flowing crystal waters, began to stream from his lips. At first, with humility, with spiritual poverty, he garnered the new light, and only then he proceeded to shed it abroad. For how well has it been said,

Shall he the gift of life to others bear
Who of life's gift has never had a share?

A teacher must proceed in this way: he must first teach himself, and then others. If he himself still walks the path of carnal appetites and lusts, how can he guide another to the 'evident signs' (*Qur'án* 3:91) of God?

Rank and fortune never came Mullá 'Alí-Akbar's way. Instead, sufferings and persecution were his lot from the early days of his conversion to the Faith. Soon after embracing the Cause of God he was forced out of the city of Mashhad by the fanatical theological students. He returned to his native village and began to teach the Cause there. Again the enemies became alarmed and attacked him in every way. Eventually he left his family and settled in Ṭíhrán. Soon he became known as a Bahá'í there, and his teaching exploits evoked great opposition from the clergy. 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes of him in these words:

This honored man was successful in converting a multitude. For the sake of God he cast all caution aside, as he hastened along the ways of love. He became as one frenzied, as a vagrant and one known to be mad. Because of his new Faith, he was mocked at in Ṭíhrán by high and low. When he walked through the streets and bazaars, the people pointed their fingers at him, calling him a Bahá'í. Whenever trouble broke out, he was the one to be arrested first. He was always ready and waiting for this, since it never failed.

The first time he was imprisoned was by order of Hájí Mullá 'Alí-i-Kaní, the highest religious dignitary of Ṭíhrán. It is not known exactly how long Mullá 'Alí-Akbar was kept in this prison, but some years later in 1872 he was again taken to prison by the orders of Kámrán Mírzá the Náyibu's-Salṭinih, the Governor of Ṭíhrán. (He was a son of Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh, and an influential personality.) This imprisonment, which lasted seven months, began only three days after his marriage to a certain Fáṭimih Khánum who became his devoted consort throughout his eventful life. It is reported that at the time of his marriage he was living

in a dilapidated room and his earthly possessions consisted of a sheepskin and a kettle!

Mullá 'Alí-Akbar endured the hardships of imprisonment in a spirit of joy, of pride and of thankfulness to his Lord. He was kept in a narrow dark prison cell with a chain around his neck and stocks on his feet. He suffered greatly in this prison. In a Tablet Bahá'u'lláh describes how the inmates of the highest Paradise have raised their voices and announced the glad-tidings that 'Alí-Akbar had entered the prison in the path of God. He showers upon his soul His blessings and His love, and denounces the actions of the oppressors. In another Tablet He states that the Concourse on High have lamented for his sufferings, and urges him to become exhilarated with an abiding joy for he has endured severe hardships in the path of his Lord. Soon after his release from this prison he travelled to northern parts of Persia, where he was able to enthuse the believers and galvanize them into action. Bahá'u'lláh, in a Tablet revealed after this journey, praises his work, states that God has chosen him for the service of His Cause, and asserts that the greatest service to His Threshold is that of uniting the souls and causing them to love each other. He directs him to be engaged in this type of activity at all times, and assures him of divine assistance in his life.

Mullá 'Alí-Akbar went on pilgrimage and attained the presence of his Lord for the first time in 1873. He basked in the sunshine of Bahá'u'lláh's unfailing love and bounties for about six months. Then he returned to Tíhrán and resumed his devoted services to the Cause he loved so much. He was constantly teaching receptive souls, deepening the believers, and encouraging them with the utmost love to serve the Faith of God. Mullá Ali-Akbar was taken to prison six times altogether

and spent about seven years bound with chains and fetters in the gloomy surroundings that were the Persian jails. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá speaks of this in these words:

Again and again he was bound with chains, jailed, and threatened with the sword. The photograph of this blessed individual, together with that of the great Amín, taken of them in their chains, will serve as an example to whoever has eyes to see. There they sit, those two distinguished men, hung with chains, shackled, yet composed, acquiescent, undisturbed.

Things came to such a pass that in the end whenever there was an uproar Mullá ‘Alí would put on his turban, wrap himself in his ‘abá and sit waiting, for his enemies to rouse and the farráshes to break in and the guards to carry him off to prison, but observe the power of God! In spite of all this he was kept safe. ‘The sign of a knower and lover is this, that you will find him dry in the sea.’ That is how he was. His life hung by a thread from one moment to the next, the malevolent lay in wait for him; he was known everywhere as a Bahá’í —and still he was protected from all harm. He stayed dry in the depths of the sea, cool and safe in the heart of the fire, until the day he died.

One of his imprisonments, which lasted about two years, was noteworthy in that Náyibu’s-Salṭanih arrested a number of outstanding personalities among the Bahá’ís in 1882 and interrogated them extensively about the Faith. Another imprisonment was around the year 1887 and finally his two-year imprisonment which began in 1891, the first part in the prison of Qazvín for about eighteen months in company with Hájí Amín and the remainder in the prison of Tīhrán. It was on the

occasion of their imprisonment in Qazvín that Bahá'u'lláh revealed the celebrated prayer for the Hands of the Cause.

Soon after the martyrdom of Badí' a severe famine swept over Persia. Mullá 'Alí-Akbar begged Bahá'u'lláh for it to come to an end. One of his great achievements was the transportation and protection of the remains of the Báb in Tíhrán.

Mullá 'Alí-Akbar attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh for the second time around the year 1888. When in His presence he would continually receive a share of the bounties of Bahá'u'lláh, and when away he used to write to him regularly and receive various exalted Tablets. Once he wrote to Mírzá Áqá Ján, Bahá'u'lláh's amanuensis, and complained somewhat. When Bahá'u'lláh was informed He wrote that he had no right to complain, for so much spiritual food and imperishable benefits had been showered upon him from the heaven of divine bounty that he would be unable to reckon them. Therefore he ought to thank, and thank and thank (Bahá'u'lláh repeats the word nine times!) his Lord for the blessings He has vouchsafed to him.

'Abdu'l-Bahá pays a glowing tribute in this context to the memory of this great and godly man, who passed away in March 1910:

After the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, Mullá 'Alí continued on, loyal to the Testament of the Light of the World, staunch in the Covenant which he served and heralded. During the lifetime of the Manifestation, his yearning made him hasten to Bahá'u'lláh, Who received him with grace and favor, and showered blessings upon him. He returned, then, to Irán, where he devoted all his time to serving the Cause. Openly at odds with his tyrannical oppressors, no matter how often they threatened him, he defied them. He was never

vanquished. Whatever he had to say, he said. He was one of the Hands of the Cause of God, steadfast, unshakeable, not to be moved.

I loved him very much, for he was delightful to converse with, and as a companion second to none ...

His last resting-place is in Tīhrán. Although his body lies under the earth, his pure spirit lives on, 'in the seat of truth, in the presence of the potent King.' (*Qur'án* 54-5)

93. Mullá Muḥammad-i-Qá'iní, surnamed Nabíl-i-Akbar—His search for truth

Of those who travelled to Baghdád and attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, unquestionably the most learned and erudite was Mullá Muḥammad-i-Qá'iní, later surnamed Nabíl-i-Akbar by Bahá'u'lláh. This great man was endowed with extraordinary qualities and spent about six years in 'Iráq studying theology and various other subjects associated with Islámic jurisprudence. His teacher was the renowned *Mujtahid* of Karbilá, Shaykh Murtidáy-i-Anşarí, the head of the Shí'ah community, who was well disposed towards the Faith. He was a divine whose standards were so exacting that he reputedly gave the title of *mujtahid* to only three people during his entire life. One of these three was Nabíl-i-Akbar.

Nabíl-i-Akbar was acknowledged as one of the most outstanding men of learning in Persia. His fame had spread throughout the country to such an extent that once, when he spoke incognito to a number of divines in far-off Kirmán, his listeners were lost in admiration of his superb discourse and some were heard saying that the only person in the

whole country who could rival such a man in the field of learning and knowledge would be the famous Mullá Muḥammad-i-Qá'iní (that is, Nabíl-i-Akbar himself).

He embraced the Bábí Faith about the year 1853. Some six years later, while in Baghdád, he went to visit Bahá'u'lláh. There he was warmly received by Him, and was accorded the honour of staying in the outer apartments of His house, normally reserved for the reception of visitors. The following is an extract from the spoken chronicle of Nabíl-i-Akbar relating the events of those few days that he spent in the house of Bahá'u'lláh:

One afternoon I was seated in the room talking with Mullá Muḥammad-Şádiq-i-Khurásání, known as Muqaddas. He was a learned man of great dignity and stature. As we were talking together, Bahá'u'lláh, who had just returned from the town, arrived in the outer apartment accompanied by Prince Mulk-Árá whose hand He was holding. Mullá Şadiq, who was the embodiment of dignity and solemnity, immediately rose to his feet and prostrated himself at the feet of Bahá'u'lláh. This action did not please Bahá'u'lláh Who angrily rebuked Mullá Şadiq and ordered him to rise immediately, after which He went out of the room followed by the Prince.

I was amazed and bewildered at such behavior on the part of Mullá Şadiq as I had never expected such an important person to act in this manner. Having witnessed Bahá'u'lláh's reaction also, I expressed my disapproval of Mullá Şadiq's behaviour and admonished him for it, saying: 'You are a man who occupies an exalted position in the realm of knowledge and learning and, above all else, you had the honour of attaining the presence of the Báb Himself. Your rank is next to the

Letters of the Living and you are one of the Witnesses of the Dispensation of the Báb. It is true that Bahá'u'lláh is an eminent person Who belongs to the nobility and His ancestors have occupied high positions in the government. It is also true that He has suffered persecution and imprisonment as a result of embracing the Cause of God, that all His possessions have been confiscated and that He has finally been exiled to this land. Yet, your behaviour towards Him this afternoon was like that of an unworthy servant towards his glorious Lord.'

Mullá Şadiq refrained from answering me. He was in a state of spiritual intoxication, his face beaming with joy; he merely said to me, 'I beseech God to tear asunder the veil for thee and shower His bounties upon thy person through His abundant grace.'

After this incident, I decided in my heart to investigate and began to observe the person of Bahá'u'lláh and His actions very carefully. The more I observed the less I discovered any sign which could point to His claiming a station. On the contrary, I observed in Him nothing, either in word or deed, except humility, self-effacement, servitude and utter nothingness. As a result, I was led into grievous error, believing that I was in every way superior to Bahá'u'lláh, and preferred my own self to Him.

It was through my vain imagining that in the gatherings of the friends I always used to occupy the seat of honour, assume the functions of the speaker and would not give an opportunity to Bahá'u'lláh or anyone else to say anything. One afternoon, Bahá'u'lláh arranged a meeting in His house and a number of friends had gathered, as usual, in the same large room, a room around

which, according to the Pen of the Most High, circle in adoration the people of Bahá. Again, I occupied the seat of honour. Bahá'u'lláh sat in the midst of the friends and was serving tea with His own hands.

In the course of the meeting, a certain question was asked. Having satisfied myself that no one in the room was capable of tackling the problem, I began to speak. All the friends were attentively listening and were absolutely silent, except Bahá'u'lláh Who occasionally, while agreeing with my exposition, made a few comments on the subject. Gradually He took over and I became silent. His explanations were so profound and the ocean of His utterance surged with such a power that my whole being was overtaken with awe and fear. Spellbound by His words, I was plunged into a state of dazed bewilderment. After a few minutes of listening to His words—words of unparalleled wonder and majesty—I became dumbfounded. I could no longer hear His voice. Only by the movement of His lips did I know that He was still speaking. I felt deeply ashamed and troubled that I was occupying the seat of honour in that meeting. I waited impatiently until I saw that His lips were no longer moving when I knew that He had finished talking. Like a helpless bird which is freed from the claws of a mighty falcon I rose to my feet and went out. There three times I hit my head hard against the wall and rebuked myself for my spiritual blindness.

The eyes of Nabíl-i-Akbar were at last opened. He attended another meeting, this time in Kázimayn in the house of a certain Hájí 'Abdu'l-Majíd-i-Shírází. Bahá'u'lláh was present at this meeting. He spoke about the mysteries and origin of creation. Here a new world, full of fresh significances, dawned upon Nabíl-i-Akbar who considered every word

of Bahá'u'lláh to be like a priceless gem. All that Nabíl-i-Akbar had heard and studied during his life appeared to him to be but the talk of children.

At this point he decided to find out directly from Bahá'u'lláh Himself what His station was and wrote a letter to Him which he begged 'Abdu'l-Bahá to deliver. The next day he received a Tablet in which Bahá'u'lláh alluded to His lofty station. This was the end of Nabíl-i-Akbar's search for truth, for he wrote a second letter to Bahá'u'lláh, this time humbly acknowledging Him as the Supreme Manifestation of God and begging Him to guide his steps in His service. Bahá'u'lláh instructed him to return to Persia and teach the Cause of God there.

He died in 1892 soon after the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh and was buried in the city of Bukhárá. 'Abdu'l-Bahá asked that a delegation of nine believers visit his grave on His behalf and there chant a Tablet of visitation which He had written especially for him. A few years later He instructed the nephew of Nabíl-i-Akbar to transfer his remains from Bukhárá to 'Ishqábád—a move which proved providential as the graveyard was demolished soon after by the authorities.

94. Mullá Muḥammad-i-Qá'iní, surnamed Nabíl-i-Akbar—He was possessed of a new heart

Another story which demonstrates the dangers of being labelled as a Bábí is that of Mullá Muḥammad-i-Qá'iní, surnamed Nabíl-i-Akbar. It is extracted from his spoken chronicle as recorded by his illustrious nephew Shaykh Muḥammad-'Alíy-i-Qá'iní. The story took place when Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned in the Siyáh-Chál of Tīhrán and a great

campaign to exterminate the Bábís had been mounted by the Government. Nabíl-i-Akbar, a very learned and erudite divine, was not a Bábí at that time. He had arrived in Tīhrán at the height of persecutions against the Bábís and was on his way to the cities of Karbilá and Najaf in 'Iráq. While in Tīhrán he took up residence in a theological school headed by a certain Shaykh 'Abdu'l-Husayn. This is how he describes his days in Tīhrán:

Shaykh 'Abdu'l-Husayn [the head of the school] was not informed of divine philosophy and metaphysics. But being interested in these subjects he used to invite me to dinner in the evenings in order to find out my views and those of other learned philosophers.

It was during this period that one of the Bábís made an attempt on the life of the Sháh. Consequently the fire of the King's anger spread and the order to exterminate the Bábís was issued by him. In Tīhrán two officers were made responsible for carrying out this order. They were 'Azíz Khán -i-Sardar and Maḥmúd Khán-i-Kalántar. Each day a number of people were captured and executed. The situation was so serious that any person who was falsely accused of being a Bábí would suffer the same fate and had no way of escape.

It happened that some of the students who were against my involvement in philosophy and disliked philosophers altogether ... had gone to Maḥmúd Khán to vilify me and had accused me of being a Bábí. I was spending the night in the district of Sangilaj in the home of a physician who was a friend and well-wisher. While I was there some soldiers arrived in the early morning and took me to the home of Maḥmúd Khán-i-Kalántar. However, I managed to write a few lines to Shaykh 'Abdu'l-Husayn and apprise him of my situation.

In the house of the Kalántar, I was taken to the upstairs quarters where I met an old man ... who was arrested for the same reason. He became very sad when he saw me, expressed sympathy for me and with tears in his eyes begged God for my deliverance.

Then a strange commotion started elsewhere in the house. We heard the cries and groaning of people and realized that some others who had been arrested were being tortured and beaten by the Kalántar. Afterwards, the Kalántar came upstairs to a room opposite ours. A few minutes later, without seeking his permission I walked up to him, and uttered words of salutation. He did not reciprocate my greetings; instead he became angry and ignored me. I asked, 'What is the reason for summoning me here?' He said, 'To carry out the orders of the Sháh.' 'What am I guilty of?' I enquired. 'Is there a greater crime', he replied, 'than being a Bábí, an enemy of religion and government?' 'This is a false accusation against me', I pleaded, 'whoever has reported me as a Bábí is my enemy and had no intention other than harming me.' I saw that my words did not make any impression upon him. Therefore I did not pursue the matter any further and submitted myself to my fate.

In the midst of all this, the secretary of Shaykh 'Abdu'l-Husayn arrived and handed him a letter. After reading it, he became relaxed and happy, and began to apologize. He said 'The Shaykh wants to see you. You had better go at once.' As I rose to go, he also arose and accompanied me to the door and several times expressed his apologies.

I went to the school. The Shaykh and others were waiting for me. He was delighted to see me arrive. Curious about my arrest, he wanted

to know what had caused the incident. I said, 'Ask this question from your arrogant students who wrongfully made false accusations and, without any justification, vilified me.' On hearing this, Shaykh 'Abdu'l-Husayn became very angry. Addressing his pupils sternly, he rebuked them and promised severe punishment and expulsion for the culprit.

However, this incident, though without foundation, resulted in my becoming known as a Bábí among the divines and the theological students. In the end they came to the conclusion that I was a Bábí. and had been arrested, but had been released as a result of intervention by Shaykh 'Abdu'l-Husayn. I became so well known as a Bábí that the people in the streets and bazaars were pointing at me. Some of the theological students shunned me in the streets and kept their distance so that their cloaks would not touch mine.

One evening, after I had become known as a Bábí, a certain Siyyid Ya'qúb, a native of Qá'in, who was living in the same school, came to visit me. Later it became apparent that he was a Bábí who had been hiding his faith. Jokingly, he said to me, 'Do you realize that you have become known in this city as a Bábí? The divines and the students call you by the name Bábí, and consider you a member of that community.' I replied, 'But these rumours are without foundation. I know nothing about this community except a mere name, have not read even one line of their writings, and have not met with any of them.' He said, 'In any case you have now become known as a Bábí. People's opinion about you is not going to change whether you read the Writings of the Báb or not. I have come across some of these Writings, but I don't understand them. Since I have found you to be

without prejudice and a trustworthy person, endowed with discernment and good taste, I have brought them here with me so that you may read them. I would be grateful if you would tell me your findings and conclusions.' He then took some papers from his pocket, handed them to me and left.

I glanced through the papers carelessly and only for amusement. Because my mind was full of the words of philosophers and accustomed to their terminology, these Writings did not impress me in the least. I found them weak and devoid of any truth or wisdom. Therefore I hid them underneath my books.

Siyyid Ya'qúb came the following evening to enquire about my findings. I said, 'I had a cursory glance at the Writings, but did not find any subject worthy of attention. These poor people [i.e. the Bábís] place themselves in perilous situations in vain, and sacrifice their lives in the path of error. The common people may be excused, for they are unable to distinguish between right and wrong. But why should some men of learning tread this path and become the cause of misleading the common people? It is clear and evident that the claims of the Báb are false, and there is no need to prove that the Bábís have erred.'

Siyyid Ya'qúb became disturbed by hearing these words. For some time he remained silent and did not look at me ... then as he arose to go he recited this poem:

How often knowledge and intelligence
Turn into a monstrous thief and rob the wayfarer.

He then addressed me in these words:

'... Turn thy gaze upon the inner significances and truth of these Writings so that you may see what no eye has seen, and hear what no ear has heard and feel what no heart has felt.' Then looking disappointed, Siyyid Ya'qúb left the room. For a while I meditated upon the state of the Siyyid and his thoughts. I became perturbed by his disappointment. I suspected that he was a Bábí and was aiming to mislead me ...

In order to demonstrate to the Siyyid the falsity of the claims of the Báb and to save him from following the path of error, I took out the Writings of the Báb and began to read them carefully in order to prove the invalidity of His claims from His Own Writings. Although this was my reason for reading these Writings, nevertheless my inner being was overtaken with fear and trembling and I was disturbed. I found myself to be placed on the Şirát at the crossroads between death and deliverance. However, this time as I read them, to my amazement I found that each line opened a new door of knowledge before my face and a new world appeared in front of my eyes. I could not sleep that night. My astonishment increased every moment as I read and re-read these Writings. I immersed myself in that billowing sea, and like a diver acquired gems of great value. It came to pass that the truth of the Cause of the Primal Point became as clear to me as the sun in its midmost point in the sky. I found myself possessed of a new heart, a new eye, a new soul and a new strength. All the knowledge and philosophy that I had previously learned and which were a source of pride to me, appeared as utter nothingness ...

The following evening Siyyid Ya‘qúb arrived. He became so filled with ecstasy and rapture when he heard my story that he prostrated himself on the ground. He was captivated and stunned by the news. Tears flowed down his cheeks and his laughter resounded through the room. After that he kept bringing more Writings to me...

95. Ḥájí Mírzá Muḥammad-Taquí—He erected the first Mashriqu’l-Adhkár in the Bahá’í world

Ḥájí Mírzá Muḥammad-Taquí, entitled the Vakílu’d-Dawlih, was one of the most eminent believers among the Afnán. As soon as he read the Kitáb-i-Íqán, which was revealed in honour of his father, he recognized the truth of the Cause and hastened to Baghdád to attain the presence of Bahá’u’lláh. He was accompanied on this journey by his elder brother Ḥájí Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí, who also embraced the Faith and became a most outstanding believer.

This meeting with Bahá’u’lláh exerted a tremendous influence upon Ḥájí Mírzá Muḥammad-Taquí. His whole being was magnetized by love for Bahá’u’lláh and he became filled with a new spirit which enabled him to realize the station of Bahá’u’lláh before His Declaration and to arise in His service. His devotion and enthusiasm in the Cause of God were exemplary and, as he walked in the streets of Baghdád, he radiated such heavenly joy that the believers in that city used to refer to him as the ‘delightful Afnán’. It seemed as if the flame of divine love kindled by the hand of Bahá’u’lláh had completely burned away all his attachments to this world.

In this state he returned to Yazd, where he continued his work as a merchant and was highly esteemed by its citizens. Although from the beginning of this Dispensation the people of Yazd have been fanatical enemies of the new-born Faith and have ruthlessly persecuted its followers in that city, yet the family of the Afnán were not involved in this. Government officials and other dignitaries treated them with consideration and respect. In particular, they had a high regard for Hájí Mírzá Muḥammad-Taquí whose deeds and personality endeared him to the authorities.

Towards the close of Bahá'u'lláh's ministry, the nucleus of a Bahá'í community began to grow rapidly in 'Ishqábád in the province of Turkistán. Several Bahá'í families from Persia migrated to this city where they enjoyed a measure of freedom in their Bahá'í activities.

At one stage, Hájí Mírzá Muḥammad-Taquí arranged for the purchase of some properties in 'Ishqábád and, upon informing Bahá'u'lláh of this, he was instructed to use a certain portion of these properties for the building of a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. After the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, Hájí Mírzá Muḥammad-Taquí, as directed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, travelled to 'Ishqábád and undertook the task of supervising the construction of this House of Worship. He dedicated all his efforts towards, and expended all his financial resources in, the execution of this vast undertaking. With the help of other Bahá'ís, he erected this noble edifice, the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in the Bahá'í world.

When the building of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár was completed and the interior ornamentation was well on the way, 'Abdu'l-Bahá summoned Hájí Mírzá Muḥammad-Taquí to the Holy Land. He left 'Ishqábád in 1325 AH (AD 1907), committing all his affairs and those of the House of

Worship to his eldest son, Ḥájí Mírzá Maḥmúd, and spent his last days in the presence of the Master. He passed away in the Holy Land and is buried on the slopes of Mount Carmel, in the shadow of the Shrine of the Báb and in the vicinity of the Cave of Elijah.

No account of Ḥájí Mírzá Muḥammad-Taqí would be complete without referring to his early days when, as a youth of fifteen, he would sit in the presence of the Báb listening to His melodious voice as He revealed prayers and the verses of God. In his brief memoirs, which he wrote in 'Ishqábád, Ḥájí Mírzá Muḥammad-Taqí speaks of those days:

I remember that every Sunday I used to go to the house of my illustrious aunt, the mother of the Báb, where I had the great privilege of attaining His presence ... I remember especially on one occasion He permitted me to sit in His presence, and graciously cut a slice of melon which He gave to me. He was busy writing some prayers and verses. He then handed me one of the prayers He had revealed during the week and asked me to chant it in His presence ... The Báb left Shíráz for Mecca via Búshihr that same week or the week after... Two or three months later I went to Búshihr to join my father... On His return from Mecca the Báb came to our house in Búshihr where I spent several days in His presence. During those days every moment of His time was spent in revealing the verses of God and writing prayers ... One evening with tearful eyes I begged Him in all sincerity to pray for me so that I might spend my days in the service of God and in the end attain to His good pleasure. He assured me that it would be so.

Ḥájí Mírzá Muḥammad-Taqí was an embodiment of detachment, humility and servitude. His only aim in life was to serve the Cause he

loved so much. He often communed with Bahá'u'lláh in spirit and through prayer. Of him it is reported that every day at home he would put on his best clothes, sit for a few hours in a room by himself and with the utmost devotion and sincerity turn his heart and soul to Bahá'u'lláh, regarding himself as being in the very presence of the Blessed Beauty.

'Abdu'l-Bahá has said that whenever He was overtaken by grief, His meeting with Hájí Mírzá Muḥammad-Taquí would cause His sadness to disappear and His heart to be filled with joy.

In his devoted services Hájí Mírzá Muḥammad-Taquí brought victory and honour to the Cause of God. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has designated him as one of the '... four and twenty elders which sat before God on their seats...', mentioned in the Revelation of S. John the Divine.

96. Hájí Mírzá Muḥammad-Taquí (Ibn-i-Abhar)—The flame of the love of Bahá'u'lláh burned brightly in his heart

Mírzá Muḥammad-Taquí, addressed by Bahá'u'lláh as Ibn-i-Abhar (the son of Abhar) embraced the Cause through association with his father Mírzá Ibráhím-i-Abharí, who was one of the divines who became a believer in the early days of the Faith. After Bahá'u'lláh's declaration in Baghdád many Bábís were confused about the position of Mírzá Yaḥyá and his claims. Ibn-i-Abhár, then a young man, sought clarification from his father on this point. His father, who had already recognized the station of Bahá'u'lláh, advised his son to investigate the truth for himself by studying the Bayán carefully. The perusal of that book enabled Ibn-i-Abhar to discover and believe that Bahá'u'lláh and no one else was the Promised One of the Bayán, and he joyously embraced His

Cause. From that time onwards he grew spiritually and was transformed into a new creation by the potency of the Words of Bahá'u'lláh.

Ibn-i-Abhar went through a turbulent period soon after the death of his father in 1874. In 1876 he sent a letter to the presence of Bahá'u'lláh asking whether it was more meritorious to lay down one's life for the love of God or to teach the Cause with wisdom and the power of utterance. In a Tablet Bahá'u'lláh counselled him that the latter was preferable. He states that after the martyrdom of Badí' He had advised the believers to act with prudence and care and not volunteer to give their lives. He urges Ibn-i-Abhar in this Tablet to engage himself in teaching the Cause with great wisdom.

Because of the opposition to him in his native village of Abhar, Ibn-i-Abhar moved to Zanján. There he succeeded in converting some souls to the Faith and also in reviving the faith of the many believers who had fallen prey to doubts raised by the Azalís. He created such a spirit of enthusiasm and devotion among the believers that the divines of the city of Zanján rose up against him and consigned him to prison. The conditions of prison life were extremely cruel, yet this godly man endured dire hardships in a spirit of resignation and forbearance. According to his own statement, his imprisonment lasted fourteen months and fifteen days.

He attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh about the year 1886. In a Tablet revealed in his honour Bahá'u'lláh reminds him of the time he attained His presence when He showered his bounties upon him and enabled him to hearken to His sweet voice, a voice to which were attracted all created things. In the same Tablet Bahá'u'lláh directs Ibn-i-Abhar to

pass through the cities, and even as a breeze that stirs at the break of dawn to shed upon whomsoever will turn to him the sweet savours of His loving-kindness and favours. This Ibn-i-Abhar did for the rest of his life. He chose Tīhrán as his residence and travelled far and wide throughout Persia. His teaching exploits and loving care for the believers contributed in a large extent to the growth and consolidation of the Bahá'í community in that country. In one of His Tablets Bahá'u'lláh states that Ibn-i-Abhar was created to extol God and magnify His name, to teach His Cause and to serve Him. #

Early in 1891 the Persian government became suspicious of certain political activists and had them imprisoned. As was the usual practice, the authorities found it convenient to accuse the Bahá'ís of anti-government activities at the same time. Among those arrested were Hájí Abu'l-Hasan-i-Amín and Mullá 'Alí-Akbar, the Hand of the Cause, who were despatched to the prison of Qazvín. Ibn-i-Abhar was consigned to the dungeon in Tīhrán and kept in prison for about four years. During this period he was subjected to so much ill-treatment and torture that the full story, if written, would become very lengthy indeed. He took great pride in the fact that the same chains which had been once placed around Bahá'u'lláh's neck were put around his neck. A photograph of him in chains, standing with poise and dignity while guarded by the gaolers reached the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He wrote this Tablet to Ibn-i-Abhar:

He is God!

The Hand of the Cause of God, Jináb-i-Ibn-i-Abhar upon him be
the Glory of God

O thou who art steadfast in the Covenant,
A few days ago I was glancing at some photographs of the friends. By chance I came across thy photograph. As I beheld thy person standing poised and in the utmost dignity with chains around thy neck, I was so affected that all sorrow was turned into joy and radiance, and I praised God that the world's Greatest Luminary hath nurtured and trained such servants who, while tied in chains and under the threat of the sword, shine forth in the utmost exultation and rapture. And this is but a token of the grace of thy Lord, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

Because the food in prison was inadequate, a few Bahá'ís sent food to him regularly. Two Bahá'í women, who devoted their time and energy to serving him, posed as his sisters and brought food and other necessities for him every day. As there was no paper available for prisoners to write on, Ibn-i-Abhar used to write letters in very small characters on the wrappers of sugar cones, tea or candles, and send them out with the two ladies. He even wrote some long letters in the same fashion for non-Bahá'ís in answer to their questions and proving the truth of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh for them. These letters were later compiled in their original form, producing a small book. In spite of all the hardships he underwent, he succeeded in teaching the Faith to a few people in the prison and enabled them to recognize the station of Bahá'u'lláh and embrace His Faith.

One form of torture usually inflicted upon victims in Persian prisons was the bastinado. The victim is made to lie on his back while his feet, inserted in a loop, are held up and the soles beaten with a cane or a whip. The soles of the feet were beaten so hard that the person could

not move for days. At times Ibn-i-Abhar was subjected to this form of brutal flogging. On one occasion he was so badly injured that he decided not to appear before the ladies who usually brought food for him. Soon they found out what had happened, and the friends were plunged in deep sorrow. He then wrote the following letter to his loved ones, a letter which clearly demonstrates the spirit of utter sacrifice which dominated his whole being:

May my life be sacrificed for your true loving-kindness and for the tears you have shed in the path of the Incomparable Friend.

However, the situation did not justify weeping and lamenting.

Because the first abode to which the wayfarer arrives in the path of love is that of renouncing life, possessions, rank and position. Was there ever an evening that I spent in your presence when you did not hear, the next morning, the reciting of the prayer, 'O Thou whose tests are a healing medicine unto such as are nigh unto Thee?' Now that this prayer has been answered, we must glorify God and render our thanks to Him.

Would it be fitting for He who is the Ruler of all the nations and the Lord of all creation to accept tribulations in order that mankind might be freed from the fetters of prejudice, liberated from attachments to this mortal world and disentangled from animalistic evil passions, while this insignificant being, who considers himself as one of His servants, be exempt from similar sufferings?

I swear by God, the Exalted, the Glorious, that while my legs from knee to toe were in great pain, my soul was communing with my Beloved in the utmost joy, and my inner being was engaged in conversing with the loved ones of God, His chosen ones and

yourselves who are considered as leaves (Bahá'u'lláh designated women believers as 'leaves') of the tree of the Cause. I did not pay any attention to the pain and suffering. For pain and bodily swellings will die down in a few days' time; only their mention will remain in this world but their bounty will last in the world of the spirit till eternity.

Therefore this is an occasion for the utmost rejoicing, not for lamentation and weeping. I had asked the guards not to divulge my condition to you so that you might be spared sorrow and grief. And now I request you not to inform the rest of the friends, because some are tender-hearted and will become emotionally excited. There are others who are weak and may become perturbed ...

God knows that in order to hide this from you, I did not avail myself of meeting with you that day. The night before, I kept applying the yoke of an egg to my swollen feet so as to heal them. Now the pain has subsided. Please do not be sad, these hardships are not important. I was never caned in my school days. Instead, I receive beatings now in the path of the True Friend. But they have no effect upon the heart and the soul. The physical injuries are healed in a relatively short time...

Ibn-i-Abhar was still in prison when the news of the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh reached him. He was heartbroken and filled with grief. For days he was unable to calm his emotions. He wrote a letter to 'Abdu'l-Bahá seeking His help in overcoming his heavy-heartedness. 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote a Tablet to him which brought great comfort and consolation in this bereavement. He advised Ibn-i-Abhar to read the

Qur'án during his confinement; it was the only book available in the prison.

Soon after his release from prison in 1895, Ibn-i-Abhar travelled to the Holy Land and attained the presence of the Master. From there, 'Abdu'l-Bahá directed him to proceed to 'Ishqábád. During the Ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Ibn-i-Abhar travelled extensively throughout Persia, the Caucasus and India, visiting the Bahá'í communities, converting many souls to the Faith, and meeting high-ranking officials in various localities. On his journey to India which took place in 1907 he was accompanied by two American Bahá'ís, Hooper Harris and Harlan Ober, and by Maḥm'úd-i-Zarqání and his brother. They travelled to many parts of the subcontinent, and were able to further the achievements of the earlier teachers who had been despatched to that vast country during Bahá'u'lláh's and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Ministries. It must also be noted that Ibn-i-Abhar travelled altogether eleven times to the Holy Land and attained the presence of the Master.

An interesting episode in the life of Ibn-i-Abhar is the story of his marriage to Muniríh Khánum, the daughter of the Hand of the Cause Mullá 'Alí-Akbar. After the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, Ibn-i-Abhar (who was then in prison) made a vow to devote his whole life to the service of the Cause. A certain Persian lady by the name of Fá'izih Khánum suggested to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in person that it was time Ibn-i-Abhar got married, and suggested the above-named Muniríh Khánum. 'Abdu'l-Bahá asked one of His sons-in-law to approach Ibn-i-Abhar and convey to him the timeliness of his getting married. But Ibn-i-Abhar was adamantly opposed, saying that if he married he would become involved with obligations which would result in the breaking of his vow.

At last ‘Abdu’l-Bahá summoned Ibn-i-Abhar to His presence and directed him to return to Tīhrán and marry the daughter of Mullá ‘Alí-Akbar. Ibn-i-Abhar brought up the subject of the vow. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá went close to him, nudged him with His shoulder and said, “My good man! I am the Centre of the Covenant; when I say you will not break your vow by marrying, you will not!”

When Ibn-i-Abhar arrived in Tīhrán, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá directed the Hand of the Cause Mírzá Ḥasan-i-Adíb to arrange the wedding within nine days of receiving His message. The Master sent a sum of money for the marriage feast, and the Greatest Holy Leaf a simple dress for the bride.

A special service rendered by Ibn-i-Abhar was the promotion of the education of women. He and his wife played an important part in the advancement of women in Persian society. In 1909 a special committee was formed for the liberation of women, and Ibn-i-Abhar and his wife were both members of this committee. Around the year 1910, an assembly formed exclusively of women was established, and became known as the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’í Women. The wives of Mullá ‘Alí-Akbar and Ibn-i-Abhar were both members. This Assembly, which lasted for seven years, turned to the Spiritual Assembly of Tīhrán, whose members were exclusively men, for guidance on basic issues. With the encouragement of Ibn-i-Abhar, his wife Muniríh Khánum founded the first Bahá’í school for girls in Tīhrán. Ibn-i-Abhar passed away in Tīhrán in 1917.

97. Mullá Muḥammad, surnamed Nabíl-i-A’zam—The chronicler of the Cause

No account of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh would be complete without referring to Mullá Muḥammad-i-Zarandí, surnamed Nabíl-i-A'zam, one of His outstanding Apostles who played a great role in the propagation of His Message and the dissemination of His words. He is immortalized by his detailed narratives, a part of which, *The Dawn-Breakers*, mainly dealing with the story of the Báb, has been translated into English by Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Faith. The other part dealing with the ministry of Bahá'u'lláh remains to be published.

In his early days Nabíl was a shepherd. He had a great love of nature and would often spend the night lying on the ground in contemplation of the stars and in solitary communion with his Creator. While following his flock over the fields he would chant the verses of the *Qur'án* and pray to God that He might enable him to find the truth during this life.

One day in 1847 he overheard two men telling the story of the Báb. His heart was immediately attracted to the new Message and soon afterwards he came in contact with a believer who taught him the Faith. He became an ardent follower of the Báb and, in spite of many obstacles which were placed in his path, remained active in the promotion of His Message.

His first meeting with Bahá'u'lláh was in Ṭihrán around the year 1850. At that stage, however, Nabíl did not appreciate the loftiness of His station. Later, when the Bábí community seemed leaderless and the believers dispirited and confused, Nabíl in his delusion claimed to be 'Him Whom God shall make manifest', and disseminated some of his own writings among the Bábís. Then he came to Bagḥdád and attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. This time his inner eyes beheld the glory of

His Revelation and his soul was quickened by His mighty Spirit. He prostrated himself at His feet and begged forgiveness for his presumption. As an act of repentance and in order to demonstrate the measure of his humility towards Bahá'u'lláh, he cut his beard, which in those days was the symbol of a man's dignity, made a brush and with it swept the approaches to the house of Bahá'u'lláh.

Animated by an ardent desire to serve Bahá'u'lláh and fortified by His unfailing grace, Nabíl was enabled to render notable services to His Cause. His loyalty and devotion to Him were exemplary. He stands out among all the companions of Bahá'u'lláh as one who was dominated by a passionate love for Him. So intense was this love that those who came in contact with him could not fail to detect its fire burning within his soul.

Nabíl was a gifted poet, an inspired genius who wrote most fluently. Some of his narratives are actually composed in verse. These poems reveal the intensity of his faith, and the ardour of his love.

Bahá'u'lláh sent him on many important missions to Persia. In these travels, wherever he went he imparted the news of Bahá'u'lláh and inspired the believers to arise and serve Him. When Bahá'u'lláh left Baghhdád for Constantinople, Nabíl could not stay behind. He dressed in the garb of a dervish and followed the route to Constantinople on foot and incognito, joining Bahá'u'lláh's party on the way. From Constantinople Bahá'u'lláh directed him to Persia, to teach and to spread the news of the Cause there. From Persia he proceeded to Adrianople, the scene of the proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh's Message. Again Bahá'u'lláh sent him to Persia to disseminate His Writings and help the believers to appreciate the significance of His Revelation. With

great zeal and enthusiasm he travelled far and wide and assisted in establishing the basis of a growing Bahá'í community, distinct from the very small number who in their blindness followed Mírzá Yahyá. The latter community, known as the Azalís, in future years declined into insignificance and oblivion. It was during this period, also, that the word Bahá'í denoting the followers of Bahá'u'lláh came to replace the term Bábí.

Another mission with which Nabíl was entrusted by Bahá'u'lláh after this journey was to proceed to Egypt to appeal to the Khedive on behalf of seven fellow believers who had been committed to prison at the instigation of one of the enemies of the Faith, the Persian Consul-General in that country. Soon after his arrival, however, Nabíl himself was cast into a prison in Alexandria. There he came in contact with Fáris Effendi, a Christian physician and clergyman who was also a prisoner. Nabíl taught him the Faith and Fáris Effendi became a deep and devoted believer, probably the first Christian to do so.

When Bahá'u'lláh was exiled to 'Akká, the ship that carried Him anchored in Alexandria close to the prison. By a strange coincidence Nabíl was informed of this. He and Fáris Effendi sent a letter to Bahá'u'lláh on the ship informing Him of their fate. Bahá'u'lláh sent a Tablet in reply, expressing His pleasure at receiving their letter and assuring them of His loving-kindness. He especially wrote words of encouragement to Fáris Effendi, who, addressing Bahá'u'lláh as his glorious Lord, begged that he might be accepted as one of His devoted servants.

One of his last contributions was to write an account of the passing of Bahá'u'lláh which stirs the heart. He was, moreover, chosen by 'Abdu'l-

Bahá to select from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh those passages which now constitute the text of the *Tablet of Visitation*.

Nabíl's contribution to Bábí and Bahá'í history is enormous in its scope. The believers find his already published narratives not only informative, but also a source of inspiration and deepening in the Faith. He has left behind a treasure-house which the passage of time shall never destroy, and from which generations yet unborn will reap their own harvest of knowledge and inspiration.

98. Shaykh Kázim, surnamed Samandar—A flame of the love of God

Shaykh Kázim-i-Samandar, a native of Qazvín, was one of the Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh and has been described by Shoghi Effendi as a flame of the love of God. Later he went to Baghdád and attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. He suffered persecution and his home in Qazvín was the centre of the activities of the early Bábís.

Shaykh Kázim-i-Samandar, born a few months before the Declaration of the Báb, grew up in such a home and from his earliest days associated with the early disciples of the Báb, among them some of the Letters of the Living and the uncle of the Báb. Even in childhood Shaykh Kázim showed a great enthusiasm for Bábí affairs and when he grew up he was a knowledgeable and devoted believer. Later he recognized the station of Bahá'u'lláh and became one of His outstanding followers, succeeding in diffusing the light of His Faith throughout Persia in general and in Qazvín in particular.

When the news of the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh and the claims of Mírzá Yahyá reached him, he made an exhaustive study of the Writings of the Báb. His conclusions that Bahá'u'lláh alone was the Promised One of the Bayán were clear and unmistakable. In AH 1283 (AD 1866–67) he wrote a treatise in Arabic denouncing Mírzá Yahyá's rebellion, refuting his arguments and demonstrating his claims to be utterly false.

Bahá'u'lláh refers to this treatise in the *Lawḥ-i-Siráj* and states that God had inspired Shaykh Kázim in writing it. It is reported that Bahá'u'lláh conferred the title of Samandar (A legendary bird supposed to live in fire) upon Shaykh Kázim after the writing of this challenging treatise.

Shaykh Kázim-i-Samandar was an outstanding teacher of the Faith. Many early believers of Qazvín in particular owe their allegiance to the Cause to his indefatigable labours in propagating the Message of Bahá'u'lláh. His enthusiasm and faith, his zeal and devotion, deeply affected the hearts of his listeners and made them attentive to the Call of God in this age. He also played an important part in defending the Cause of God from the misrepresentations of the followers of Mírzá Yahyá and those who at a later date during the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá were misled by Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí, the Arch-Breaker of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh. The believers in Qazvín, who from the early days of the Faith were affected by the spirit of division, of controversy and Covenant-breaking, were greatly helped by the presence of Shaykh Kázim in their midst. Mainly through his steadfastness and perseverance, the community was transformed.

Shaykh Kázim paid special attention to the education and upbringing of his children. A certain Mullá 'Alí entitled 'Mu'allim' (teacher) whom he had converted to the Faith and who was a man of learning, took up residence in the house and volunteered the work of educating the children. This he did after reading Bahá'u'lláh's exhortation in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*:

Unto every father hath been enjoined the instruction of his son and daughter in the art of reading and writing and in all that hath been laid down in the Holy Tablet. He that putteth away that which is commanded unto him, the Trustees are then to take from him that which is required for their instruction, if he be wealthy, and if not the matter devolveth upon the House of Justice. Verily, have We made it a shelter for the poor and needy. He that bringeth up his son or the son

of another, it is as though he hath brought up a son of Mine; upon him rest My Glory, My loving kindness, My Mercy, that have compassed the world.

Shaykh Kázim-i-Samandar went twice on pilgrimage to attain the presence Bahá'u'lláh in 'Akká. Among those who accompanied him on his second pilgrimage in AH 1308 (AD 1891) were Mullá 'Alí 'the teacher', and the Shaykh's son, Mírzá Tarázu'lláh-i-Samandarí who served the Faith as an eminent Bahá'í teacher for many years. Shoghi Effendi was later to confer upon the latter the rank of Hand of the Cause of God.

99. Mírzá Ḥusayn, surnamed Mishkín-Qalam—He dedicated his life wholly to the Cause

A person of outstanding qualities who performed distinguished services in the field of transcription was the celebrated calligrapher Mírzá Ḥusayn, surnamed Mishkín-Qalam, a native of Iṣfahán who was endowed with the gift of humour.

Before embracing the Faith, Mishkín-Qalam was closely associated with the court of Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh in Tíhrán where he held a position of some eminence. Once the Sháh allowed him to pay a short visit to his home in Iṣfahán; it was on this occasion that he met a Bahá'í and as a result accepted the Faith. He did not return to the court of the Sháh, but travelled instead to Adrianople where he attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. From that time he dedicated his life wholly to the Cause. Later, Bahá'u'lláh sent him on an important mission to Constantinople to counter the misrepresentations which had been spread abroad in

royal circles by the notorious Siyyid Muḥammad-i-Iṣfahání. (A Bábí who was the embodiment of wickedness. He opposed Bahá'u'lláh and was the 'Antichrist of the Bahá'í Revelation'.) After some time, through the intrigues of Siyyid Muḥammad and his associates, Mishkín-Qalam and a few other Bahá'ís were imprisoned in Constantinople. They were later sent to Gallipoli to await the arrival of Bahá'u'lláh and His companions on their way to 'Akká. It was in Gallipoli that the fate of Mishkín-Qalam was determined by the authorities; he and three other disciples of Bahá'u'lláh were sent to Cyprus in company with Mírzá Yaḥyá, the breaker of the Covenant of the Báb and the arch-enemy of Bahá'u'lláh.

Mishkín-Qalam was an exile in Cyprus for about nine years, but the influence of Bahá'u'lláh had so permeated his soul that, notwithstanding his long association with the perfidious Yaḥyá, he remained steadfast in the Cause, indomitable in faith, and unswervingly loyal to his Lord.

As soon as freedom came to him in 1294 AH (*circa* AD 1878), he left for 'Akká; there he attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh Who permitted him to reside in that city. He was a companion, a devoted servant and one of the Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh, an artist of remarkable talent, unsurpassed as a calligrapher, and a genius in the creation of exquisite designs from letters and words. Among his works of art are some which have been made merely by the impression of his finger-nails on a sheet of blank paper.

Mishkín-Qalam spent many years of his life transcribing the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. There are several volumes of these in his beautiful handwriting, and his name is immortalized by his signs and symbols and his design of the 'Greatest Name'.

100. Mírzá Ḥasan, surnamed Adíb—All his learning and erudition were now harnessed to the Faith

Mírzá Ḥasan-i-Adíb was a distinguished and learned man who combined the knowledge of Islámic theology, as a divine, with literary erudition. Before embracing the Faith he ranked high in the literary circles surrounding the royal family, and made important contributions to the production of various literary works. He was at one time installed as the Imám-Jum'ih (a high religious post) and a teacher at Dáru'l-Funún, the only school established on the pattern of a western educational institution. The school was usually attended by members of royalty and the sons of influential people. In recognition of his outstanding literary accomplishments he was given the title of Adíbu'l-'Ulamá (Literary man of the Ulama). He also taught religious subjects to a number of would-be divines.

Through various circumstances Mírzá Ḥasan met a believer who gave him a book of Bahá'í Writings and also introduced him to some well-known Bahá'í teachers. He came into particular contact with the renowned Nabíl-i-Akbar, and eventually saw the truth of the Faith, recognized the greatness of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and acknowledged the awe-inspiring station of its Author. In the year 1889 he became a devoted believer; he was in his early forties at the time.

All his learning and erudition were now harnessed to the new powers which the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh had conferred upon him. Soon his heart became a wellspring of divine melodies. The soul-stirring poems he wrote proclaim the advent of the Day of God and, in offering up his all in the path of his Lord, serve as ample testimony to the intensity of his

faith and the exaltation of his rank. No wonder that soon after his entering under the shadow of the Cause, Bahá'u'lláh designated this great spiritual being as one of the Hands of His Cause. Mírzá Ḥasan-i-Adíb did not have the bounty, as the other Hands had, of meeting Bahá'u'lláh. However, he had the honour and the privilege of attaining the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

During the Ministry of the Master, he dedicated all his being to the service of the Cause. He became a tower of strength for the believers and a great teacher of the Faith. His pen was no less active. He wrote several books on proofs of the Faith and its history. His poems were soul-stirring and the friends were inspired and uplifted by them. He had a major role in the formation of the Spiritual Assembly of Tíhrán, and served on that body as its chairman.

Mírzá Ḥasan-i-Adíb was deeply interested in the education of Bahá'í youth. About the year 1904 a learned Bahá'í known as Şadru'ş-Şudúr had established the first teacher-training class for Bahá'í youth in Tíhrán. It was a daily class which lasted for several years, and the students became well-versed in various aspects of the Faith and other religions. When Şadru'ş-Şudúr died about five years after the foundation of the youth class, Mírzá Ḥasan decided to teach in his place. Assisted by a few other knowledgeable Bahá'ís, he supervised the youth class for some time.

Another great achievement was the founding of the Tarbíyat Boys' School in Tíhrán. Mírzá Ḥasan-i-Adíb played a significant part in creating this prestigious institution, which was considered for years the foremost educational establishment in the country. This school was also the forerunner of several other Bahá'í schools in various parts of Persia.

The Tarbíyat Boys' School and the Girls' School by the same name, together with all the other Bahá'í schools in major cities, were closed down in December 1934 by order of the government for not heeding a warning by the Ministry of Education (headed by 'Alí-Asghar-i-Hikmat, a well-known Azalí) that the schools would officially be closed if they failed to remain open during Bahá'í holy days. Despite several representations by the National Spiritual Assembly, the authorities remained adamant and all the Bahá'í schools in Persia were closed down after closing on a Bahá'í holy day.

In 1903 'Abdu'l-Bahá directed Mírzá Ḥasan-i-Adíb to make a teaching trip to Iṣfahán. This journey took place at a time when a great upheaval was about to take place in Yazd through the machinations of the *Mujtahid* of Iṣfahán, Shaykh Muḥammad-Taquí (the Son of the Wolf). The presence of Mírzá Ḥasan in Iṣfahán put fuel to the fire; a serious upheaval took place in the city resulting in great sufferings for the Hand of the Cause. He at last succeeded in departing from the city without being noticed by the many guards whom the wicked *mujtahid* had especially posted in various quarters for the sole purpose of arresting him. From there Mírzá Ḥasan went to Ábádih and Shíráz, where he was able to teach the Cause to several people. Then he travelled to India, and eventually to the Holy Land where his soul was exhilarated by coming in contact with the Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh. There his whole being was illumined with the effulgent rays of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's presence. He returned to Persia as a flame of fire ignited by the hand of the Master, and continued in his highly meritorious services until his death in 1919. His resting-place is in Tíhrán, in common with the resting-places of the other three Hands of the Cause.

101. Mullá Zaynu'l-Ábidín, surnamed Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín—The questions he asked Bahá'u'lláh became a supplement to the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*

Mullá Zaynu'l-Ábidín, an Apostle of Bahá'u'lláh, was surnamed Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín (the Ornament of Them that are Nigh Unto God) by Bahá'u'lláh. Before his conversion to the Bábí Faith, he was a learned *mujtahid* (doctor of Islámic law) and an outstanding figure in his native town of Najaf-Ábád. He became an ardent Bábí about the time of the imprisonment of Bahá'u'lláh in the Síyáh-Chál, and was bitterly opposed and persecuted by those very people who were once his admirers and followers. Later he travelled to Baghdád and eventually attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh after His return from the mountains of Kurdistán. As a result of this meeting and of receiving some Tablets from Bahá'u'lláh, his soul was transformed and attained such heights of faith and dedication that he is numbered among the outstanding Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh. After his release from a long period of exile and imprisonment in Mosul, 'Iráq, he made his way to 'Akká where he spent the rest of his days in Bahá'u'lláh's service, mostly as a scribe.

He was meticulous in transcribing the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and took great pains to ensure that they were correctly recorded. Any Tablet in the handwriting of Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín is considered accurate. He has left to posterity, in his exquisite hand, many volumes comprising most of Bahá'u'lláh's important Tablets; today Bahá'í publications in Persian and Arabic are authenticated by comparison with these.

Another work associated with his inquisitive and brilliant mind is the book *Questions and Answers* by Bahá'u'lláh. Being a *mujtahid* and thus highly qualified in the application of Islámic laws, Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín received permission from Bahá'u'lláh to ask any questions he might have regarding the application of the laws revealed in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. The answers given by Bahá'u'lláh provide further elucidation and expansion of His laws and this book is regarded as a supplement to the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

Another account of the services of Mullá Zaynu'l-Ábidín relates to the establishment of the community of Mosul. After the wave of persecution of the believers, the Consul-General of Persia continued to plot against the community in Baghhdád. He tried very hard until the Governor of Baghhdád agreed to banish them to Mosul. Consequently about seventy men, women and children were exiled from Baghhdád amidst scenes of public derision. The Governor did everything in his power to protect the company of exiles from the onslaught of the enemy. He provided a military escort to protect them on the way to Mosul.

These refugees were subjected to severe hardships in Mosul. When they arrived, some of the inhabitants crowded on to the rooftops and threw stones at them. The shopkeepers refused to sell them food and no one would give them shelter. It took a long time for them to settle in Mosul. After much privation and difficulties most of them managed to engage in some work, sharing their modest income with each other. They remained in Mosul for about twenty years. During this period Bahá'í pilgrims going to 'Akká and returning to Persia often travelled *via* Mosul, bringing much joy and spiritual upliftment to the refugees. They

also delivered gifts such as clothing and other goods from Bahá'u'lláh who wished to alleviate some of the hardship of their lives.

Notable among those who sent generous contributions were the two illustrious disciples of Bahá'u'lláh, designated by Him the 'King of the Martyrs' and the 'Beloved of the Martyrs'. Their financial aid played an important part in bringing relief to the community. The pilgrims became carriers of divine love and bounty from Bahá'u'lláh. Through receiving many Tablets which He revealed for them, and through the visits of the pilgrims, the believers in Mosul remained faithful to Bahá'u'lláh and steadfast in His Cause.

Mullá Zaynu'l-Ábidín was one of the exiles to Mosul. For about eighteen years he acted as a shepherd to the community. Under his supervision a 'charity fund' was established—the first fund of that kind in any Bahá'í community. His knowledge and learning, his understanding of the Faith, his intelligent and well-balanced personality, together with a delightful sense of humour, endeared him to the believers and made him the focal point of the community. Bahá'u'lláh had also instructed him in His Tablets to gather the friends together, exhort them to unity and love, encourage them to deepen in the Faith, and help them to attain heavenly qualities. He spent most of his time transcribing the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and making them available to the friends. In particular he had to make several copies of those Tablets which were addressed to some or all of the believers in Mosul, and give each one a copy.

In the course of one of his journeys, Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí visited Mosul. These few lines extracted and translated from his narrative describe the state of the community there.

...I attained the presence of Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín and other loved ones of God in Mosul including Áqá Mírzá Muḥammad-i-Vakíl. The latter, owing to destitution, had to work as a cobbler in spite of old age... The friends in Mosul, together with the person of Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín, made one remember the days spent in Bahá'u'lláh's holy presence in the holy city of 'Akká. These believers were living in the utmost unity and harmony. They vied with each other in their efforts and their services. They had no desire except first, to gain the good pleasure of the Blessed Beauty, and secondly, to attain His presence.

Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín carried the weight of the community on his shoulders with great zeal and devotion until in 1885 Bahá'u'lláh advised him in a Tablet to proceed to 'Akká provided such a move did not jeopardize the state of the community. Responding to this call, he left Mosul in 1303 AH (1886), and with great joy entered the presence of his Beloved. He spent the rest of his life in that holy spot.

About the same time that Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín left, Bahá'u'lláh advised the friends in Mosul to proceed towards Persia or other parts of 'Iráq; He particularly stipulated that they should not go to the Holy Land. They were to be cautious and leave gradually and in small numbers. So the believers left Mosul and it ceased to be a Bahá'í centre.

102. Mírzá 'Alí-Muḥammad (Ibn-i-Aṣḍaq)-Bahá'u'lláh urged him to be as a flame of fire

Mírzá 'Alí-Muḥammad was a son of one of the most illustrious of the believers, Mullá Ṣadiq-i-Khurásání, who was entitled by Bahá'u'lláh

Ismu'lláh'u'l-Aşdaq (The name of God, the most truthful). As he grew up it became clear that this son had inherited many of the outstanding qualities and virtues of his father. He became known among the believers as Ibn-i-Aşdaq (The son of Aşdaq) and became an Apostle of Bahá'u'lláh and Hand of the Cause of God. He had the great honour as a young boy of accompanying his father to Bagħdád, where they both attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. In several interviews this youth came face to face with the Supreme Manifestation of God. These meetings left an abiding impression upon his soul and magnetized his whole being with the love of his newly-found Lord. While they were in Bagħdád, Bahá'u'lláh revealed a prayer in which He supplicates God to feed the young boy with the milk of His bounty so that he may be enabled to raise the standards of victory in His Name and arise to serve His Cause when he is older. In this prayer Bahá'u'lláh describes him as one who in his tender years had travelled a long distance seeking to meet his Lord, and this he had achieved when he attained His presence.

Soon after his return home he tasted the agony of imprisonment and torture when, in the company of his illustrious father, he was consigned to the dungeon of Tīhrán. As he grew up Ibn-i-Aşdaq often accompanied his father on his teaching tours throughout Persia. Thus he became imbued with the spirit of service to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, and eventually developed a passionate love for Him, a love that knew no bounds.

He was about thirty years of age when he sent a letter to the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and, among other things, begged Him to confer upon him a station wherein he might become completely detached from such

realms as 'life and death', 'body and soul', 'existence and nothingness', 'reputation and honour'.

The gist of everything Ibn-i-Aşdaq requested in this letter was the attainment of the station of 'utter self-sacrifice'; a plea for martyrdom, a state in which the individual in his love for his Beloved will offer up everything he possesses. It is an interesting thought that in one's quest for 'self-sacrifice' it is inappropriate for the soul to seek the station of utter nothingness and complete non-existence, for even these can become the means of attachment to oneself.

In response Bahá'u'lláh revealed a Tablet to Ibn-i-Aşdaq. This was in January 1880. In this Tablet He confers upon him infinite blessings and prays that he may become fully sanctified and detached from earthly things, that he may conduct himself in such wise as befits the Day of God, and that he may attain the station of the most great martyrdom. He states that service to the Cause is the greatest of all deeds, and that those who are the symbols of certitude ought to be engaged in teaching with the utmost wisdom. He further explains that martyrdom is not confined to the shedding of blood, as it is possible to live and yet be counted as a martyr in the sight of God. In this Tablet Bahá'u'lláh showers upon him His blessings, for he had offered up his all to his Lord.

Two years later Ibn-i-Aşdaq again asked for martyrdom. Bahá'u'lláh assured him in a Tablet that God had bestowed upon him the station of a martyr, and addressed him as Shahíd-ibn-i-Shahíd (martyr, son of the martyr). In this way both father and son, without physical martyrdom, were given this lofty station. Ibn-i-Aşdaq attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh once more in 'Akká. In a Tablet Bahá'u'lláh asserts that on

this visit his ears were blessed to hear the shrill voice of His exalted Pen, his eyes to behold His Countenance, and his heart to turn to Him. He bids him illumine the hearts of men through the effulgent rays of His utterance, and brighten their eyes by the light of His countenance. In every Tablet revealed in his honour by Bahá'u'lláh, one finds words of praise and appreciation for his devoted services, as well as counsels and exhortations for the living of a saintly life.

Ibn-i-Aşdaq married a princess, a great-granddaughter of Fath-'Alí Sháh who was a devoted believer. This brought him close to people of high position and wealth and so he was able to teach those who could use their influence in assisting the oppressed community. He often used the phrase, 'one ought to hunt a lion, not a fox'. Ibn-i-Aşdaq travelled extensively throughout the length and breadth of Persia, and Bahá'u'lláh always urged him to be engaged in this meritorious service. In a Tablet revealed in his honour, Bahá'u'lláh counsels him in these words:

The movement itself from place to place, when undertaken for the sake of God, hath always exerted, and can now exert, its influence in the world.

In another Tablet Bahá'u'lláh exhorts Ibn-i-Aşdaq to be as a flame of fire among the loved ones of God, so that every soul may sense the heat of the love of their Lord from him.

After the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh Ibn-i-Aşdaq continued in his devoted services to the Cause. Along with the other Hands of the Cause, he promoted the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh among the believers, instructed them in its significance and assisted them to remain steadfast in the face of the Covenant-breaking that occurred at that time. The range of

his travels was extended during ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Ministry. He visited India and Burma, ‘Ishqábád and even Europe where in 1919, accompanied by another believer, he personally presented a Tablet addressed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to the Central Organization for a Durable Peace at The Hague. He also attained the presence of the Master several times in his life.

Among his other outstanding services was that of helping to organize a teacher-training institute for Bahá’í women in Tíhrán for the first time. He also delivered to the Sháh a treatise penned by the Master during the lifetime of Bahá’u’lláh and known as *Risáliy-i-Síyásíyyih* (Treatise on Politics). His contribution as a writer was no less significant. For instance, in 1919 he produced, with the assistance of other Hands of the Cause, a refutation of false accusations against the Faith published by Professor Edward Browne in his books. He also wrote various papers on the subject of the Covenant, in which he explained the station of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the Centre of the Covenant and the authorized interpreter of Bahá’u’lláh’s Writings, refuted the misrepresentations and false accusations of the Covenant-breakers and exposed their malicious intention to subvert the edifice of the Cause of God. He wrote this material during his last pilgrimage in the Holy Land and sent it to the friends in Tíhrán. Ibn-i- Aşdaq lived longer than all the other Hands, and passed away in Tíhrán in 1928.

103. Hájí Sháh-Muhammad-i-Manshádí—He was on fire with love

Among all those who attained the presence of Bahá’u’lláh while He was in the barracks of ‘Akká, the first two were Hájí Sháh-Muhammad-i-Manshádí, entitled Amínu’l-Bayán (Trusted of the Bayán), and Hájí Abu’l-Hasan-i-Ardikání, entitled Amín-i-Iláhí (Trusted of God). The

former was the first trustee of Bahá'u'lláh, and the latter was appointed to the same position after the death of Hájí Sháh-Muḥammad in 1298 AH (AD 1881). Both men were from the province of Yazd.

In the early days of the Faith Hájí Sháh-Muḥammad embraced the Cause and became an ardent believer. He first attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdád. As a result of this he became a new creation on fire with the love of Bahá'u'lláh, a love that sustained him throughout his life and enabled him to render notable services to His Cause.

He owned some farm land in his native village of Manshád, but it did not earn him enough to live on, so he engaged in cattle dealing. He used to buy cattle in the province of Fárs and sell them in Yazd. But after embracing the Faith he gave up this work. He gave a portion of his estate to each of his four daughters, sold the rest, and faithful to the specific injunction of the Báb to his followers to offer priceless gifts in their possession to 'Him Whom God shall make manifest', he presented the proceeds of the sale to Bahá'u'lláh whom he had recognized as 'Him Whom God shall make manifest'.

This action, prompted by the purity of his heart and the intensity of his devotion for the Faith, evoked the good pleasure of Bahá'u'lláh, who, while accepting the gift, handed it back to him, conferred upon him the title 'Amín' (Trusted One), and appointed him as His Trustee. In this way, it was made possible for the believers to fulfil their spiritual obligation of Huqúqu'lláh through him.

Hájí Sháh-Muḥammad used to travel frequently from Persia to attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and receive His instructions. He would then set out to carry them out on his return.

As the years went by he discovered in Hájí Abu'l-Hasan-i-Ardikání (Amín-i-Iláhí) a zealous and devoted co-worker. So, as he became older, he took Hájí Abu'l-Hasan with him on his journeys as an assistant.

It was soon after Bahá'u'lláh's arrival in the Most Great Prison that Hájí Sháh-Muhammad, accompanied by Hájí Abu'l-Hasan, entered the city. The two had bought a few camels on the way and disguised themselves as Arabs seeking to sell their merchandise which was carried on the camels. This was a common scene in those days. They were not suspected of being followers of Bahá'u'lláh and were admitted.

They succeeded in sending a message to Bahá'u'lláh informing Him of their arrival and expressing their eagerness to attain His presence. Bahá'u'lláh allowed them to see Him in the public bath, but they were advised to show no sign of recognition. On the appointed day the two men entered the public bath. But no sooner did Hájí Abu'l-Hasan behold the majestic person of Bahá'u'lláh that he was seized by such emotion that his body shook, and he stumbled and fell to the ground. The floor being made of stones, he injured his head very badly and had to be carried out with blood pouring on his face and body.

Hájí Sháh-Muhammad rendered notable services to the Faith as the Trustee of Bahá'u'lláh. One of the major missions with which Bahá'u'lláh entrusted him was the transfer of the casket containing the remains of the Báb when its whereabouts in Persia, for several years unknown to the mass of the believers, became public knowledge.

In the year AH 1298 (AD 1881) Hájí Sháh-Muhammad was caught up in a massacre by the Kurds of the people of Míyánduáb and fatally wounded. His assistant Hájí Abu'l-Hasan, who was accompanying him as usual, was shot in the leg but managed to escape. It was after this

event that Bahá'u'lláh appointed Hájí Abu'l-Hasan as His Trustee, and conferred on him the title 'Amín' (Trusted One), in place of Hájí Sháh-Muhammad, Amínu'l-Bayán.

Of Hájí Sháh-Muhammad we have the following eulogy from the pen of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

Amín, that is, Sháh-Muhammad, was honoured with the title of the Trusted One, and bounties were showered upon him. Full of eagerness and love, taking with him Tablets from Bahá'u'lláh, he hastened back to Persia, where, at all times worthy of trust, he laboured for the Cause. His services were outstanding, and he was a consolation to the believers' hearts. There was none to compare with him for energy, enthusiasm and zeal, and no man's services could equal his. He was a haven amidst the people, known everywhere for devotion to the Holy Threshold, widely acclaimed by the friends.

104. Mullá Sádiq-i-Khurásání, surnamed Ismu'lláhu'l-Aşdaq—He stood out as a tower of strength

Notable among the visitors to 'Akká was Mullá Şádiq-i-Khurásání. 'Şádiq' meaning 'truthful', Bahá'u'lláh entitled him Ismu'lláhu'l-Aşdaq (the Name of God, the Most Truthful). He was instrumental in confirming the first Jewish convert to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

It was Bahá'u'lláh who, unasked, had sent a Tablet to Ismu'lláhu'l-Aşdaq in Khurásán and invited him to travel to 'Akká for the purpose of attaining His presence. He was one of the most outstanding and devoted believers in this Dispensation. He was a man of learning. Prior to his conversion to the Faith of the Báb he had been a Muslim divine

esteemed for his uprightness and dignity, and renowned throughout the province of Khurásán for his piety and truthfulness. A Shaykhí, he had had the unique privilege of meeting the Báb several times in the city of Karbilá prior to His declaration. He had been deeply impressed by the radiance and gentleness mingled with majesty which the youthful Báb evinced as He prayed most tearfully at the Shrine of Imám Ḥusayn. Ismu'lláhu'l-Aṣdaq is reported to have exclaimed when his eyes first fell on Him, 'Glorified be our Lord, the Most High!' He had become a devoted admirer of that Youth while in Karbilá, in spite of the fact that the Ismu'lláh was a learned divine, one who was held in high esteem by the people, while the Báb was a youth with little education. He had also witnessed the extraordinary reverence shown to that Youth by Siyyid Kázim-i-Raṣhtí, the celebrated leader of the Shaykhí community, who knew that He was none other than the Qá'im Himself, the Promised One of Islám.

Soon after the Declaration of the Báb in 1844, when Mullá Ḥusayn was on his way to Tíhrán, he met Ismu'lláhu'l-Aṣdaq in the city of Isfáhán, informed him of the advent of the Báb and gave him some of His Writings to read. Upon reading a few pages he became an ardent believer. But Mullá Ḥusayn, as bidden by the Báb, was not allowed to reveal the identity of the Báb as yet.

In his narratives, Nabíl-i-A'zam records the circumstances in which the Ismu'lláh became an ardent believer:

Mullá Ṣádiq-Khurásání, formerly known as Muqaddas, and surnamed by Bahá'u'lláh, Ismu'lláhu'l-Aṣdaq, who according to the instructions of Siyyid Kázim, had during the last five years been residing in Isfáhán and had been preparing the way for the advent of

the new Revelation, was also among the first believers who identified themselves with the Message proclaimed by the Báb. As soon as he learned of the arrival of Mullá Ḥusayn in Işfahán, he hastened to meet him. He gives the following account of his first interview, which took place at night in the home of Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí-i-Nahrí: ‘I asked Mullá Ḥusayn to divulge the name of Him who claimed to be the promised Manifestation. He replied, “To enquire about that name and to divulge it are alike forbidden.” “Would it, then, be possible,” I asked, “for me, even as the Letters of the Living, to seek independently the grace of the All-Merciful and, through prayer, to discover His identity?” “The door of His grace,” he replied, “is never closed before the face of him who seeks to find Him.” I immediately retired from his presence, and requested his host to allow me the privacy of a room in his house where, alone and undisturbed, I could commune with God. In the midst of my contemplation, I suddenly remembered the face of a Youth whom I had often observed while in Karbilá, standing in an attitude of prayer, with His face bathed in tears at the entrance of the shrine of Imám Ḥusayn. That same countenance now reappeared before my eyes. In my vision I seemed to behold that same face, those same features, expressive of such joy as I could never describe. He smiled as He gazed at me. I went towards Him, ready to throw myself at His feet. I was bending towards the ground, when, lo! that radiant figure vanished from before me. Overpowered with joy and gladness, I ran out to meet Mullá Ḥusayn, who with transport received me and assured me that I had, at last, attained the object of my desire. He bade me, however, repress my feelings. “Declare not your vision to anyone,” he urged me; “the time for it has not yet arrived. You have

reaped the fruit of your patient waiting in Iṣfahán. You should now proceed to Kirmán, and there acquaint Ḥájí Mírzá Karím Khán with this Message. From that place you should travel to Shíráz and endeavour to rouse the people of that city from their heedlessness. I hope to join you in Shíráz and share with you the blessings of a joyous reunion with our Beloved.”

Soon after he embraced the Faith of the Báb, persecutions and sufferings descended upon the Ismu’lláh and he bore them with exemplary patience and joy. He was one of the three believers who were severely tortured for the first time in the history of the Faith in Persia. The other two were Quddús (The last but the greatest of the company of the Báb’s disciples. See *The Dawn-Breakers*) and Mullá ‘Alí-Akbar-i-Ardistání. The scene of these harrowing persecutions was the city of Shíráz. Nabíl recounts the following story concerning Ismu’lláhu’l-Aṣdaq, whom he refers to as Mullá Ṣádíq:

An eye-witness of this revolting episode, an unbeliever residing in Shíráz, related to me the following: ‘I was present when Mullá Ṣádíq was being scourged. I watched his persecutors each in turn apply the lash to his bleeding shoulders, and continue the strokes until he became exhausted. No one believed that Mullá Ṣádíq, so advanced in age and so frail in body, could possibly survive fifty such savage strokes. We marvelled at his fortitude when we found that, although the number of the strokes of the scourge he had received had already exceeded nine hundred, his face still retained its original serenity and calm. A smile was upon his face, as he held his hand before his mouth. He seemed utterly indifferent to the blows that were being showered upon him. When he was being expelled from the city, I

succeeded in approaching him, and asked him why he held his hand before his mouth. I expressed surprise at the smile upon his countenance. He emphatically replied: “The first seven strokes were severely painful; to the rest I seemed to have grown indifferent. I was wondering whether the strokes that followed were being actually applied to my own body. A feeling of joyous exultation had invaded my soul. I was trying to repress my feelings and to restrain my laughter. I can now realise how the almighty Deliverer is able, in the twinkling of an eye, to turn pain into ease, and sorrow into gladness. Immensely exalted is His power above and beyond the idle fancy of His mortal creatures.” Mullá Şádíq, whom I met years after, confirmed every detail of this moving episode.

This episode may be considered only as a prelude to many more agonizing persecutions that this man of God went through till the end of his life. Many times in the course of his travels throughout the length and breadth of Persia where he was engaged in teaching the Faith, he was surrounded by the enemies who inflicted all kinds of tortures and afflictions upon him and were intent on taking his life. He was one of the companions of Quddús and Mullá Ĥusayn in the Fortress of Shaykh Ṭabarsí. After going through harrowing experiences of pain and suffering in that fortress, his life was providentially spared so as to manifest, at a later time, yet greater heroism and self-sacrifice in the path of the One who was the object of the adoration of the Báb and His disciples.

Ismu’lláhu’l-Aşdaq recognized the station of Bahá’u’lláh as readily as he had the Báb’s. He attained the presence of Bahá’u’lláh in Baghdád and became fully convinced of His exalted station as ‘Him Whom God shall

make manifest' long before Bahá'u'lláh made His Declaration in the Garden of Riḍván. For about fourteen months he basked in the sunshine of Bahá'u'lláh's loving-kindness in that city, and then, as bidden by Him, returned to Persia, ablaze with the love of his new-found Master. He stood out as a tower of strength among the believers and became an instrument for guiding countless souls into the Cause of God. Among them were many people who became renowned in the Faith, such as Aḥmad-i-Yazdí, the recipient of the celebrated Tablet of Aḥmad, and Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥasan-Alí, the youngest uncle of the Báb.

The journey to 'Akká, the scene of his second pilgrimage, was undertaken at an advanced age. The sufferings and hardships of well-nigh thirty years had taken their toll and left him frail, laden with infirmities and weakness. When Bahá'u'lláh summoned him to 'Akká, He instructed him to leave his son at home and travel in the company of a believer (He was 'Alí-Muḥammad, known as Ibn-i-Aṣdaq, later appointed by Bahá'u'lláh as a Hand of the Cause of God.) who could take care of him throughout the journey. He arrived in 'Akká probably in the early part of 1874. This pilgrimage to the presence of his Lord was the crowning glory of the life of Ismu'lláhu'l-Aṣdaq. After staying several months in 'Akká, during which he was ushered into the presence of Bahá'u'lláh many times, he was bidden, in a Tablet revealed for him in 'Akká, to return home.

In this Tablet Bahá'u'lláh showers His blessings upon him and affirms that in both this visit and his previous one to Bagħdád, he had drunk deep of the waters of everlasting life from the hands of his Lord. He then commands him to convey His counsels to the friends so that they may be enabled to adorn themselves with the ornament of goodly

character and live a saintly life. He states that the most meritorious of all deeds in this day is to remain steadfast in the Cause of God in such wise that the vain imaginings of the people may be powerless to influence them.

The following words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá paying tribute to this noble and outstanding believer, Ismu’lláhu’l-Aṣḍaq, upon whom He conferred posthumously the rank of Hand of the Cause of God, stand out as a eulogy to his cherished memory:

He was like a surging sea, a falcon that soared high. His visage shone, his tongue was eloquent, his strength and steadfastness astounding. When he opened his lips to teach, the proofs would stream out; when he chanted or prayed, his eyes shed tears like a spring cloud. His face was luminous, his life spiritual, his knowledge both acquired and innate; and celestial was his ardour, his detachment from the world, high righteousness, his piety and fear of God.

105. Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-‘Alí—He was filled with a new spirit

Notable among those who travelled to Adrianople and attained the presence of their Lord was Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-‘Alí, one of the most illustrious of Bahá’u’lláh’s disciples. Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-‘Alí has written in his book, the *Bihjatu’s-Ṣudúr* (Delight of the Hearts) some reminiscences of Bahá’u’lláh and of some events which he witnessed in Adrianople and later in ‘Akká as well as in Persia and ‘Iráq. He travelled to Adrianople in the year 1283 AH (1866–7) and was permitted by Bahá’u’lláh to remain there for about seven months. During this period he attained the presence of Bahá’u’lláh almost every day. As a result of

this personal contact with Bahá'u'lláh, Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí was set on fire and was filled with a new spirit. He was an embodiment of detachment, humility and self-effacement. Having truly recognized the august station of Bahá'u'lláh, his whole being was dominated by a passionate love and adoration for Him.

He writes an interesting story of his own spiritual awakening and struggles:

In the early days of the Faith in Işfahán, when I began to study the Tablets and Writings of the Báb, and listen to the explanations of the friends, I found the proofs of His Revelation convincing and conclusive and the testimonies supremely sound and perfect. So I was assured in myself that this Cause was the Cause of God and the Manifestation of His Grandeur, the dawning of the Day-Star of Truth promised to be revealed by the Almighty. But when I was alone with no one to talk to, I was often overtaken with doubts. The idle fancies of my past life and the whisperings of the evil one were tempting me ... God knows how much I wept and how many nights I stayed awake till morning. There were days when I forgot to eat because I was so immersed in my thoughts. I tried by every means to relieve myself of these doubts. Several times I became steadfast in the Cause and believed, but later I would waver and become perplexed and dismayed.

Then one night I had a dream that a town-crier in ... Işfahán was announcing this message: 'O people, the Seal of the Prophets is here in a certain house and has given permission for anyone who wishes to attain His presence to go there. Remember that a mere glance at His countenance is more meritorious than service in both worlds.'

On hearing this, I hastened and entered the house. I had never seen such a building. I went upstairs and arrived in an area which had a roof over it and was surrounded by rooms and chambers. The Manifestation of the All-Glorious was pacing up and down and some people were standing motionless. I arrived and spontaneously prostrated myself at His feet. Graciously He lifted me up with His own hands and, standing, said 'A person may claim that he has come here wholly for the sake of God, and has truly attained the presence of His Lord, when he is not held back by the onslaught of the peoples of the world, who with drawn swords attack him and intend to take his life because he has embraced the Cause of God. Otherwise, he cannot truthfully say that his motive was to seek God.'

On hearing these words, I woke up from my dream and found myself assured, joyous and thankful. All my doubts had completely disappeared. I learned the mysteries of martyrdom, persecution and sufferings which were inflicted upon the believers in every Dispensation. I was amazed as I looked back upon the doubts I had entertained, my ignorance, low-mindedness, weakness of faith and shallowness of thought. I used to laugh at myself also, because in my wakeful hours, I had heard many similar statements and also read them in the Tablets and holy Books of the past, and was not assured by them. And now, through this dream, I had acquired faith and assurance...

However, time passed, and about fourteen years later I was in the 'Land of Mystery' (Adrianople) where I stayed for seven months. Every day, through His bounty, I used to attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh once, twice and sometimes more. But during this period,

I never thought of my dream. One evening about four or five hours after sunset I was sitting with Áqá Mírzá Muḥammad-Qulí and Áqá Muḥammad-Báqir-i-Qahvihchi, in the tea-room [a room set aside for Bahá'u'lláh's companions and visitors]. That day I had not attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and was most eager for an opportunity to do so. Although I could never bring myself to ask for permission, in my innermost heart I was entreating and invoking Him for this honour. But there was no hope, for it was far too late. Suddenly, the door opened and the Most Great Branch, Who in those days was known as Sirru'lláh [the Mystery of God] entered and summoned me to follow Him. When I came out of the room, I saw the Ancient Beauty pacing in the roofed area of the house. The stream of His utterance was flowing and a few souls were standing. I prostrated myself at His feet, whereupon He lifted me up with His blessed hands. He turned to me and said:

'A person may claim that he has arrived here wholly for the sake of God, and has truly attained the presence of His Lord, when he is not held back by the onslaught of the peoples of the world, who with drawn swords attack him and intend to take his life because he has embraced the Cause.' These were exactly the words I had heard fourteen years before, and I saw the same incomparable Beauty and the same building as in my dream. I stood by the wall, awe-struck and motionless. Gradually I recovered and in a state of full consciousness attained His presence. My purpose in telling this story was not, God forbid, to attribute any miracles, but rather to state the facts as they had happened...

106. Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar ‘Alí—“We were freed from this world...”

Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-‘Alí was one of the outstanding disciples of Bahá’u’lláh and foremost among His trusted teachers who travelled extensively throughout Persia. He is to be forever regarded as one of the most able defenders of the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh, one who championed the Cause of God during the Ministry of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, helped to protect it from the onslaught of the Covenant-breakers and rallied the believers around the Centre of the Covenant.

Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-‘Alí was born into a Shaykhí family in Iṣfahán. He spent his youth in Kirmán in the service of Ḥájí Mírzá Karím Khán, the arch-enemy of the Faith of the Báb. But soon he discovered that the man he was serving was devoid of spiritual qualities. Disillusioned, he returned to his native town of Iṣfahán. In that city, a few years after the martyrdom of the Báb, he came across one of the Báb’s followers who familiarized him with the Faith. Through study of the Writings and especially through the steadfastness of the believers in the face of persecution and martyrdom, he recognized the truth of the new-born Faith of God.

Soon after his recognition of the Faith, Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-‘Alí was introduced to other believers including Zaynu’l-Muqarrabín. But meeting the friends demanded the utmost caution, otherwise their lives would be endangered. Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-‘Alí himself recounts the story of how he used to go at the dead of night to the house of one of the Bábí friends. To ensure that no one would see him leave his house, he had to climb out through a window and return the same way. At the home of his friend, they used to hide their lamp in a hole inside a room, then

hold the Writings of the Báb beside the hole, read the verses of God and receive spiritual sustenance through them.

Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí travelled around Persia, visited the believers and spoke to them about the advent of 'Him Whom God shall make manifest'. In the course of these visits he suffered persecution from the enemies and sometimes opposition from those friends who had set their affections upon Mírzá Yahyá.

From the early days, Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí became attracted to Bahá'u'lláh, especially when he read the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*. Then he acquired new vision and was further confirmed in his faith. He regarded Bahá'u'lláh as the source of Divine Revelation and championed His cause after His declaration. He travelled to Adrianople, attained His presence and as a result became a new creation and a spiritual giant of this age.

After spending about fourteen months in the capital of the Ottoman Empire, where he served the Faith acting as a channel of communication between Bahá'u'lláh and the friends, he was directed by Bahá'u'lláh to proceed to Egypt to teach His cause. He was particularly advised to be very discreet and cautious in his teaching work and not to arouse the antagonism of fanatics. In a Tablet to him Bahá'u'lláh had prophesied that he would be afflicted by ordeals and persecutions, had counselled him to be thankful and joyous when sufferings were inflicted upon him in the path of God, had exhorted him to remain steadfast and immovable as a mountain in His Cause and had assured him of ultimate deliverance and protection. Bahá'u'lláh had also promised Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí, both in person and in writing, that his eyes would once again behold the beauty of His Lord and that he would

attain His presence. These prophetic words were fulfilled. Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí went through the most harrowing afflictions during his life in Egypt and the Sudan, afflictions that lasted almost ten years.

He succeeded in teaching the Faith to a number of Persians resident in Egypt, but soon news of his activities spread among that community. Mírzá Hasan Khán-i-Khú'í, the Consul General and a vicious enemy of the Cause, disguised himself as a seeker of truth and invited Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí. to his home. After several meetings at which Hájí spoke openly about the Faith, the Consul arrested him along with two other friends and imprisoned them in the Consulate. Their feet were placed in stocks and chains put on their necks. Later the number of prisoners was increased to seven Persians who were charged with being followers of the new Faith and one Egyptian who had befriended Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí, but was not a believer.

In the meantime the Consul succeeded in arousing the anxiety of the Egyptian authorities by introducing the prisoners as subversive elements teaching a new religion and working against the security of the state. He managed to secure an order condemning them to an indefinite period of imprisonment in the Sudan. The story of the ordeal of this journey to the Sudan and their imprisonment there is recorded in detail by Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí and is one of the most heart-rending episodes in the history of the Faith.

The prisoners, chained and fettered, endured many hardships in the Consulate. Their daily food consisted of a slice of bread each and a small cup of water. The Consul did everything possible to humiliate them in the eyes of the public.

Eventually they were handed over to the Egyptian authorities and placed in a government jail. Later they were transferred to another jail, and were tied together with a chain and placed inside a dark cell. Into this locked cell no light could enter, nor was there a lamp. The end of the chain was brought out through a hole in the door and was held by a guard.

Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí decided that this was an occasion for rejoicing. He taught his companions to chant the *Lawḥ-i-Náqús*. The voice of the prisoners chanting this aloud and in unison echoed through the building. The guards who heard those soul-stirring verses were attracted by them and soon they realized that the prisoners were men of God and not criminals. They opened the cell, took the chains away, gave them a light and would only lock the door when an officer was coming. The prisoners stayed in this prison for about fifty days during which time their bodies recovered from the effects of malnutrition and their souls were in the utmost joy. Hájí writes:

We were very happy because we were freed from this world and willing to lay down our lives in His path.

However, they were then transferred to yet another jail where they faced the hardest ordeal of their life. One day, the authorities called blacksmiths and carpenters to the jail to chain the prisoners permanently for their journey to the Sudan. Four of the prisoners each had their right foot inserted in a huge iron collar and the other four their left foot. Each collar had a large iron loop attached to it. Then they were tied in pairs by joining the two loops with a heavy chain of about two yards long. Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí writes:

The fastening of the iron collars and their connecting chains was such a painful operation that we could not control ourselves. We yelled, screamed and also laughed. The guards, officers, blacksmiths, carpenters, and all the others who were present wept over us and condemned their own jobs and professions for forcing them to torment the servants of God.

Then came the turn of the carpenters. They were to make stocks for the prisoners' hands. A heavy piece of timber about one yard in length and very thick was constructed having two grooves in which the right and left hands of the same couple were placed. Then another piece of timber was securely nailed on the top thus closing the grooves. Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí writes:

The stocks caused greater hardship than the chain and the collar upon our feet. For we might have been able to lighten the burden on our feet by lifting the chain with our hands when walking. But the stocks had tied each pair so inflexibly that our movements became extremely restricted and difficult. The placing of chains and stocks took a long time to complete. It started about two hours before noon and ended soon after sunset.

Immediately after this, the prisoners were moved to a ship and were accommodated in an enclosed quarter which served as a store.

The Persian Consul had so wickedly misrepresented the prisoners to the Egyptian authorities that the Government had become alarmed. They had been led to believe that these men were the most vicious criminals, whose aim was to wipe out the religion of Islám, assassinate the king and overthrow the Government. Therefore orders were issued that the prisoners must be kept in chains, and guarded all the time. The

journey, which involved travelling by ship and crossing the desert, sometimes on foot and sometimes by camel, lasted about five months.

Until the prisoners arrived in the Khartoum prison where the chains and stocks were removed and replaced with smaller chains, Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-‘Alí and his companions bore the weight of these gruesome tools of torture. They suffered agony and hardship beyond description. Tied in pairs in this appalling fashion, they sat, slept, and were forced to walk for miles together. During this period the rigours of the journey, the agony of being in chains and fetters, the effects of starvation, malnutrition and gross ill-treatment, the pains of associating with the vilest of men, criminals and murderers, and the crushing force of many other unspeakable sufferings which were inflicted upon them, reduced them to such physical frailty that several times they were brought to the verge of death.

But because of the spiritual powers of Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-‘Alí the prisoners were content and happy. It was also through the influence of his radiant personality that the authorities were charmed by his character and recognized his greatness.

It so happened that as the prisoners were travelling to the Sudan, Ja‘far Páshá, the Governor of the Sudan was on his way to Khartoum. He met Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-‘Alí at Aswan and was so struck by his spirituality and greatness that he ordered the officers to extend more consideration towards the prisoners. Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-‘Alí writes:

He [Ja‘far Páshá] assured us that he would see that we were more comfortable, and he instructed the guards to show as much kindness as was in their power. The Páshá left us and we stayed in that spot for three days. On the day that we were to resume the journey we

were handed to new soldiers who brought camels for us to ride. But as we were tied together, it was difficult to mount ... They placed both tied feet and hands of each couple on the saddle, one person hanging on one side of the camel, the other on the other side, and tied the hanging bodies to the camel with the help of cotton sheets. Remaining in this position was extremely difficult. One cannot think of a torture more agonizing than this. But the fact is that there was no alternative. This journey took five or six hours, during which time they halted five or six times. They untied us, and helped us to dismount to have a rest. The guards expressed their sympathy and apologized, saying that previously they had escorted thieves and murderers to the Sudan similarly chained, but they had to walk. In our case, however, Ja'far Páshá had ordered that we ride and they could not think of a better way...Although we were in great pain and torture, nevertheless as we watched each other hanging, we used to laugh very heartily, and managed to reach the Nile alive...

After these and many more grievous experiences, the prisoners arrived in Berber in the Sudan and were transferred to a prison which was so overcrowded with thieves and murderers that it was difficult to find a place to sit without being attacked by the inmates or stung by the scorpions. For about forty-five days they stayed in that area until they embarked in a sailing ship on the last leg of their journey. This lasted no less than thirty-six days, during which they endured many more afflictions. At last they arrived in Khartoum and were placed in a prison which was more crowded than the one in Berber. Later, by the orders of Ja'far Páshá, mentioned above, the prison authorities removed the ghastly chains and stocks and replaced them with a lighter chain. They

were also allowed to sleep in a small hut made of reed and timber which was especially erected for them.

For about nine-months the prisoners remained in the Khartoum jail, but soon people recognized the heavenly qualities and spiritual gifts of Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí. He wrote a letter to the Shaykhu'l-Islám of Khartoum, proclaimed the mission of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh to him, described their sufferings, expatiated on Bahá'u'lláh's glory and majesty, His loftiness and grandeur, extolled in glowing terms the qualities of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, explained all the circumstances of his own imprisonment and that of his companions and demanded the intervention of the Shaykhu'l-Islám in order to secure the release of the prisoners. The Shaykhu'l-Islám shared the letter with Ja'far Páshá who was moved by the story. He went to the prison and issued orders to remove the chains from the prisoners, to issue wheat flour to them instead of corn and to supply them with meat and other necessities to which they were not entitled. He permitted them to leave the prison during the day and return at night. He also requested the authorities in Egypt to relax their restrictions and allow the prisoners to live freely in Khartoum. Two of the prisoners engaged in work as engravers, one practised medicine, and Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí was asked by the Governor to become a scribe. Soon many of the inhabitants of Khartoum became aware of the wonderful character and qualities of Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí. Some even attributed miracles to him. Many officials flocked to see him in the evenings in the prison where he spent all his earnings and entertained them. His prison chamber became the centre of attraction for the learned and wise who sat at his feet and enjoyed his company.

Then Ja'far Páshá's term of office came to an end and a new Governor arrived. It was during the latter's reign that the Egyptian authorities agreed to the request by the former Governor to allow the prisoners to leave the jail and live freely in the city. At this time so great was the prestige of Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí that the new Governor would turn to him for guidance and enlightenment when in serious difficulties about personal matters affecting his career. Another Governor who admired Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí was Ismá'íl Páshá. He had known him since his early days of imprisonment, and had a greater appreciation of Hájí's wisdom and spiritual gifts than his predecessors had done. He often used to call on Hájí for companionship and visit him in his home.

From the early days of his arrival in Khartoum, Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí kept on writing to Bahá'u'lláh. For some time, not knowing that Bahá'u'lláh had been exiled to 'Akká about the same time that he was imprisoned in Egypt, Hájí continued to send his letters to Adrianople and these never reached Bahá'u'lláh. However, soon after His arrival in the prison of 'Akká, Bahá'u'lláh established contact with the believers. He sent a special messenger to the Sudan to find Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí and the other prisoners and assure them of His bounties and confirmations. The messenger was Hájí Jásim-i- Baghdádí who disguised himself as a dervish, travelled on foot to Khartoum and succeeded in contacting Hájí during the period that the latter was still a prisoner but free to move about. The arrival of Bahá'u'lláh's special messenger brought indescribable joy and assurance to the prisoners in general and to Hájí in particular. For forty days, Hájí heard everything about Bahá'u'lláh's whereabouts, His imprisonment and other afflictions from Hájí Jásim. Later a Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh reached Hájí

Mírzá Ḥaydar-‘Alí and over this he rejoiced more than over his meeting with Bahá’u’lláh’s messenger.

After this initial Tablet about four to five Tablets a year would be revealed for the prisoners and sent to them in the Sudan. It was also arranged that copies of Tablets and various Writings of Bahá’u’lláh would be sent from Alexandria to them, and some years later Bahá’u’lláh sent another messenger to meet the believers in Khartoum.

Concerning his release from the Sudan, Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-‘Alí writes:

When Bahá’u’lláh sent me away from His presence in the land of mystery [Adrianople], He promised that I should attain His presence again. Similarly, in His holy and blessed Tablets which through His bounty were despatched to Constantinople, Egypt and the Sudan, He clearly gave the joyous tidings of attaining His presence. Therefore, I was assured and confident of my deliverance.

The release of Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-‘Alí from the Sudan was due to the recommendations and influence of General Gordon, known as Gordon Páshá, the British Governor of the Sudan who succeeded Ismá‘íl Páshá. When Gordon Páshá arrived, Ḥájí presented him with a beautiful gift which was made under his supervision and with his help. It was a large mirror (about two and a half metres by one and a half) on which a complimentary phrase was inscribed in gold in English. This pleased the General so much that he sent him an order to make a similar one for his sister in England. Ḥájí complied and one day brought the mirror to Gordon Páshá. This is how Ḥájí describes the story:

He [Gordon Páshá] thanked me for the article and said ‘It is so beautiful that I cannot pay enough for this gift. You yourself fix the

price.' I knew this was the opportunity to say something about freedom, so I told him that I did not want anything except to be released and allowed to leave the Sudan. He said 'Write a letter [addressed to the Khedive of Egypt] and plead that you have been imprisoned here without your case being investigated, that you are far from being guilty of the crime they ascribe to you, and that matters relating to one's conscience are not within the jurisdiction of kings. They are concerned with God, the King of Kings. Then beg him to set you free so that you may return to your home and be thankful.'

Six of Hájí's companions, including the Egyptian, decided to remain in the Sudan. Only Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí and Mírzá Husayn-i-Shírází made this application. The text of the letter was cabled to the Khedive. Gordon Páshá described this imprisonment and exile as unlawful and recommended the release of the prisoners. Soon orders arrived for their freedom, but they were not allowed to enter Egypt.

Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí, accompanied by Mírzá Husayn, set off on the journey to 'Akká via Mecca and Beirut. This was in the year 1877. Concerning their departure from Khartoum Hájí writes:

On the day of our departure from Khartoum, the dignitaries and authorities of the city, along with great multitudes, came to the ship to bid us farewell. The signs of affection and faithfulness were manifest in the faces of all. A few Muslims and Christians escorted us all the way to Berber. Thus the meekness and abasement of our entry into that city were turned into glory and honour ... whereas Mírzá Hasan Khán, the cruel Consul, was swiftly punished by God. We had not yet arrived in the Sudan when the Persians resident in Egypt complained to the Sháh about his acts of cruelty and injustice.

Strangely, orders were given to investigate the allegations. The result was that his wickedness and evil character were exposed. He was forced to pay everything he had acquired through extortion ... and co-incidentally he was taken to Tīhrán in chains and fetters where he tasted the fruits of his actions.

After all these sufferings the most rewarding moment was when Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-‘Alí was ushered into the presence of His Lord in ‘Akká. The ecstasy and contentment that he evinced on those memorable occasions when he sat in the presence of Bahá’u’lláh are indescribable. After a stay of about three months in ‘Akká, he left at the behest of Bahá’u’lláh for Persia via ‘Iráq. As a result of his attaining the presence of Bahá’u’lláh, he had become like a flame burning with His love, which he radiated to friend and foe alike. For several years he journeyed throughout the length and breadth of Persia strengthening the believers in their faith and imparting to them a measure of the glory of the Cause and the majesty of its Author. Then he returned to ‘Akká once again and basked in the sunshine of Bahá’u’lláh’s presence. On his second pilgrimage to ‘Akká, as on earlier ones, Ḥájí was so enamoured of the glory of Bahá’u’lláh that he was utterly unaware of his own self and it seemed as though he lived in the realms of the spirit, oblivious to the world and all who dwelt in it. However, this pilgrimage was short-lived and lasted only about two months. Bahá’u’lláh sent him again to Persia, where he continued with unflinching loyalty and zeal to invigorate the faith of the believers and teach the Cause to those who were ready to embrace it.

107. Ḥájí ‘Abdu’l-Majíd—He would not recant his faith

Ḥájí ‘Abdu’l-Majíd, addressed by Bahá’u’lláh as Abá Badí’ (Father of Badí’) embraced the Faith during the ministry of the Báb. He was among those early believers in the province of Khurásán taught by Mullá Ḥusayn-i-Bushrú’í. He took part in the struggles at Shaykh Ṭabarsí and was one of the survivors of that bloody upheaval.

On his way to that fortress, Abá Badí’, who was a wealthy man, was also the first to obey the exhortation of Mullá Ḥusayn calling on his companions to discard their earthly possessions and leave behind everything except their swords and horses. He flung by the roadside a satchel full of turquoise which was worth a fortune. When the news of the Declaration of Bahá’u’lláh reached him, Abá Badí’ joyously acknowledged His station and with great devotion spent his days in serving His Cause. In 1876, at an advanced age, longing to attain the presence of Bahá’u’lláh, he travelled to ‘Akká where he basked in the sunshine of His glory. He has left to posterity the following spoken chronicle concerning one of his memorable interviews with Bahá’u’lláh:

One day I had the honour to be in the presence of the Blessed Beauty when He was talking about Badí’ who had attained His presence, carried His Blessed Tablet to Ṭihrán [for Náṣiri’d-Dín Sháh] and won the crown of martyrdom. As He was speaking, my tears were flowing profusely and my beard became wet. Bahá’u’lláh turned to me and said ‘Abá Badí’! A person who has already spent three-quarters of his life should offer up the remainder in the path of God ...’ I asked ‘Is it possible that my beard which is now soaked in my tears may one day be dyed crimson with my blood?’ The Blessed Beauty replied ‘God willing...’

Abá Badí' returned to his native land of Khurásán, his heart glowing with the fire of the love of Bahá'u'lláh and his soul radiant with the light of His glory. He used to attend the gatherings of the friends at Mashhad where he enthused and encouraged them to steadfastness in the Cause of God and also read to them passages from the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, the first copy of which he had brought to Khurásán. One of the subjects he often discussed was the then imminent fulfilment of the prophecy of Bahá'u'lláh concerning the downfall of Sulţán 'Abdu'l-'Azíz mentioned in the Tablets of Ra'ís and Fu'ád. He spent most of his time transcribing the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh.

The enthusiasm with which Abá Badí' taught the Faith soon aroused the animosity of the enemies of the Cause. Foremost among them were his own brother and sister who reported his activities to a certain *mujtahid*, Shaykh Muḥammad Taqíy-i-Bujnúrđi. They informed him that their brother, a Bábí for many years, had been one of the disciples of Mullá Husayn and had fought at Shaykh Ṭabarsí, and that his son had been put to death by order of the Sháh. They disclosed all his activities including his recent visit to Bahá'u'lláh and his open teaching of the Bahá'í Faith. The *mujtahid* was alarmed by these reports and despatched two of his men to question Abá Badí' who openly spoke to them about his beliefs and proclaimed the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to them. This open confession of faith meant that there was no difficulty then in issuing his death warrant. This was in 1877, one year after Abá Badí' had attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh in 'Akká. He was then eighty-five years of age.

As the machinations of the clergy and the people were beginning to bear fruit, an implacable enemy of the Cause, Shaykh Muḥammad-Báqir

of Işfahán, stigmatized by Bahá'u'lláh as 'Wolf', arrived in Mashhad, and played a major part in this heinous crime. At first he ordered that Abá Badí' appear before him. When the latter did not pay any attention to his orders, he joined hands with the fore-mentioned Shaykh Muḥammad-Taquí and a certain Shaykh 'Abdu'r-Raḥím who was foremost among the divines of Khurásán. These three *mujtahids* sent a petition to Prince Muḥammad-Taquí Mírzá, the Rukni'd-Dawlih, a brother of the Sháh and the Governor of Khurásán, demanding the execution of Abá Badí'. The Prince was good-natured and very reluctant to harm the Bahá'ís, but could not resist the enormous pressures which were brought to bear by the clergy. He issued orders for the arrest of Abá Badí' who was taken into custody. But the Rukni'd-Dawlih, unwilling to harm the prisoner, did not pursue the matter any further. The divines became impatient with him and took their complaint to Náşiri'd-Dín Sháh. The King issued orders that the victim should be freed only if he denied allegiance to the new Faith.

After this, Shaykh Muḥammad-Báqir kept on pressing the Prince for execution. He went to the home of the Governor and discussed his evil plans with him. These involved tying Abá Badí' to an airborne balloon which had just been brought to Mashhad as a novelty, and letting him fall to his death. As discussions were proceeding, a tragedy struck the home of the Prince. His young daughter, to whom he was very attached, fell into a pool in the house and was drowned. The grief-stricken Prince left the meeting and Shaykh Báqir's plans had to be abandoned. The wife of the Prince was convinced that the tragic death of her daughter had come about as a punishment from God for inflicting imprisonment upon the aged Abá Badí'. She rebuked her husband very sternly and the

only thing he could do was to order the transfer of Abá Badí' to other quarters whose officer in charge was friendly to the Bahá'ís.

Shaykh Muḥammad-Báqir, who could no longer tolerate the passive attitude and delaying tactics of the Prince, sent another complaint to the Sháh. For the second time, the monarch instructed the Prince to release the prisoner if he recanted, otherwise to deal with him in accordance with the law of religion. The Prince, who was very anxious to save Abá Badí' from execution, sent two prominent men to talk to him and induce him to recant his faith. One was Mírzá Sa'íd Khán, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs; the other was Prince Abu'l-Ḥaṣan Mírzá, the Shaykhu'r-Ra'ís, who was a follower of Bahá'u'lláh. These two men pleaded with him on behalf of the Governor, that for his own protection he should make a statement that he bore no allegiance to the Cause. Only then would the Governor be able to defend his case and save his life. They explained to him that there was no other way, because the hands of the Governor were tied and he could do nothing else to avert this situation.

Abá Badí' stood firm and resolute. He could not barter his Faith for this transitory world. The love of Bahá'u'lláh had so magnetized him that there was no fear in his heart. He told them to convey to the Rukni'd-Dawlih that he could neither recant nor dissimulate his Faith, and that he would be prepared to give his life if necessary. The Governor did not give up. He persevered in his plan to induce Abá Badí' to recant. He is reported to have sent about twelve men at different times, all of whom were reckoned among the dignitaries of the Province of Khurásán, to persuade him to change his course of action. But they all failed. One of these men reported that instead of paying heed to the exhortations of

the Rukni'd-Dawlih, Abá Badí' was engaged in teaching him the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. Eventually the end came. The Prince had no choice but to carry out the wishes of the clergy and therefore issued orders for the execution of Aba Badí.

One day before his martyrdom, Abá Badí' asked a certain believer, Khadíjih Khánum, who used to visit him every day in jail and was a link between him and the believers, not to come again, for he knew that the next day was to be his last in this world. He had a dream that they brought a horse on which to take him away; he mounted the horse, but when he arrived at Maydán-i-Arg (a public square at Mashhad) he fell from the horse. He told Khadíjih Khánum that this public square would be the scene of his martyrdom.

The following day, the jailer secretly informed the believers that the fateful hour had arrived and the execution would take place that day. The friends, grief-stricken, gathered in the House of Bábíyyih praying and waiting for news. In the meantime a number of government officials, the executioners and a large crowd of people had gathered outside the prison. After a few hours, the old but imposing figure of Abá Badí' emerged from the prison. His radiant face and white beard gave him a dignified bearing, while the heavy chain around his frail neck made him the very picture of meekness and resignation. He was conducted amid the jeers and insults of a hostile crowd to the court of the Governor. On the way he faced the spectators and, beaming with joy, recited these two lines of a celebrated Persian poem:

To God's pleasure we are resigned;
A chained lion feels no shame.

To my neck the Beloved's cord is tied;
He leads me whither His will ordains.

In the government house, he appeared before three people: the Governor, the fore-mentioned Mírzá Sa'íd Khán and Shaykh Muḥammad-Báqir. The latter, addressing Abá Badí', said: 'We have no doubt about your being a Bahá'í, but if you are not, you must now execrate and denounce the Founders of this Faith.' Abá Badí' refused to do so. The Shaykh then asked him: 'What was wrong with Islám that you became a Bahá'í?' Aba Badí' spoke about the beliefs of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh and concluded his statement by saying that the reality and the essence of Islám was within this Faith. Next the Governor pleaded with Abá Badí' to comply with the Shaykh's orders, but he again reiterated his refusal. The Shaykh insisted that unless he uttered words of execration against Bahá'u'lláh, he must be put to death. Mírzá Sa'íd Khán, who had previously interviewed Abá Badí' in the prison, was perturbed by the attitude of the Shaykh and stated that he found nothing in the prisoner's statements to indicate that he was an infidel and blasphemous, deserving of death. The Shaykh, angered by these remarks, merely pointed out to Mírzá Sa'íd Khán that he could not hope to secure the prisoner's freedom with these words, and thus deal a blow to the Faith of Islám. Addressing the Governor, the Shaykh then reiterated his verdict of death and the former ordered his men to carry it out.

Abá Badí' was led by the executioners to Maydán-i-Arg where great crowds had gathered to watch him die. One of the friends pushed his way through the people, until he came close to him. There he pleaded with him to recant at the last moment, saying it would save his life and

would do no harm to his Faith. In reply Abá Badí' recited this Persian poem:

Set thy trap for another bird;
This is the phoenix and it nests high.

The Governor, who was very reluctant to shed the blood of a holy and innocent man, hoped that the fierce scene of execution might frighten Abá Badí' and induce him to recant. Just as the execution was about to take place a special envoy from the Governor arrived at the scene and for the last time pleaded with him in vain to save his own life. But Abá Badí' was the embodiment of steadfastness in the Cause of God. Neither the clamour of the people, their insults and persecutions, nor the dreadful sight of the executioner, who stood dagger in hand beside him, were able to deter him from the path of God. Most probably at the height of his ordeal his soul was communing with Bahá'u'lláh, longing to take its flight to the realms of the spirit. His thoughts must also have been focused on those memorable hours he had spent with His Lord in 'Akká, and the martyrdom of his beloved son at the age of seventeen, 'The Pride of the Martyrs of the Faith'. Surrounded by thousands who were steeped in prejudice and hatred, hurling abuse and curses at him, this great hero, this old man of God glowed with the fire of faith and certitude. He stood serene and calm, unperturbed by the ferocity and brutality of his persecutors.

At last the officer in charge gave the signal and the executioner, dressed in red, stepped forward. He removed Abá Badí's head-dress, shawl and cloak, brought him a bowl of water, turned him to face the Qiblah of Islám and with a powerful stroke of the dagger ripped him open from waist to throat. His head, exposed for the public to see, was placed on a

marble slab and his body dragged through the bazaars until it was abandoned at the city morgue. Many ruffians stayed near the corpse and prevented his family from approaching it. His inconsolable daughter (the sister of Badí'), with tears streaming from her face and holding her baby son in her arms, stood for hours at a distance along with her husband in order to visit the battered remains of her illustrious father. But the mob kept on hurling stones at them and she was forced to leave the scene in an agony too heart-rending to describe. The believers, who were watching these developments with great concern, worked out a plan to rescue the remains of Abá Badí'. Since his body was placed in the morgue in front of the mosque of the Sunnís, it was only natural for a Sunní to remove it. So one of the Bahá'ís, dressed in the garb of a Kurd and accompanied by two others, managed to take the body, carry it out of the city gate and bury it in the dead of night at a disused cemetery.

Thus ended the life of one who, till the end, stood firm and immovable as a mountain in the Cause of his Lord, and with his own life-blood testified to its truth. He amply demonstrated the power of Bahá'u'lláh Who, through a single word, had created a new race of men, and instilled into them such faith that they became the embodiments of these words: 'And be thou so steadfast in My love that thy heart shall not waver, even if the swords of the enemies rain blows upon thee and all the heavens and the earth arise against thee.'

108. Shaykh Salmán—He disseminated the Tablets of God with love and wisdom

He was from the village of Hindíyán in south-west Persia. The Tablet of Madínatu't-Tawhíd (The City of Unity) was revealed by Bahá'u'lláh for him, one of His staunch and faithful disciples. He was originally called Shaykh Khanjar, but Bahá'u'lláh conferred upon him the name of Salmán, reminiscent of Rúz-bih, the Persian disciple of Muḥammad whom the Prophet loved so much and whose name He had changed to Salmán.

Bahá'u'lláh spent forty years of His ministry in exile away from His homeland where the great majority of His followers resided. It was most important, therefore, to establish a channel of communication through which His Tablets and Messages could reach the friends. Often, believers who had attained His presence were entrusted by Him with the task of taking back some of His Tablets to deliver them to their destinations. But this was not always an easy mission to accomplish, for the enemies of the Cause were vigilant both in Persia and in the neighbouring countries. They kept a careful watch not only along the borders of Persia but also within the country itself, and confiscated any material connected with the Faith.

Shaykh Salmán played a major part in the dissemination of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings among the believers in Persia, became renowned among the friends, and is immortalized in the annals of the Faith by the designation 'Messenger of the Merciful' conferred upon him by Bahá'u'lláh. He was the first messenger to arrive in 'Iráq shortly after Bahá'u'lláh's arrival in that country, From that time until the end of Bahá'u'lláh's ministry, for a period of forty years, he carried the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh to the believers in Persia and brought back their letters and messages to Him. Each year he visited Bahá'u'lláh, travelling

thousands of miles, often on foot. During these years he never remained in one place, but travelled continuously from one town to another, where he would meet the friends, give them news of Bahá'u'lláh and deliver His Tablets and Messages to them. And after the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, he continued these journeys for many years in the service of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In all his travels he acted with such prudence and wisdom that none of the Tablets in his care ever fell into the hands of enemies.

Shaykh Salmán had great physical stamina. Many times in the course of his journeys he was subjected to bitter persecution, but through the power of faith he endured such hardships with fortitude and resignation. He lived in poverty. His daily food was simple and often consisted of a loaf of bread and raw onions. He was illiterate, but the knowledge of God was bestowed upon him by Bahá'u'lláh. Through this bounty he had acquired a deep understanding of the verities of the Cause of God and a clear vision of the worlds of spirit.

Believers who wished to attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh would seek permission from Him to do so, and in this matter Bahá'u'lláh relied so much on Shaykh Salmán's judgement that at one stage He delegated to him the authority to give permission, on His behalf, to those upon whom this great privilege was to be conferred.

There are many anecdotes connected with the life of Shaykh Salmán. His simple and unsophisticated nature, his clear insight, his wisdom and tact when confronted with dangerous or difficult situations, above all his faith in Bahá'u'lláh are all vividly portrayed in these narratives. An interesting incident is recorded in the memoirs of Hájí Muḥammad-

Ṭáhir-i-Málmírí which demonstrates Shaykh Salmán's sound judgement and understanding.

Before our arrival in Shíráz, in the village of Zarqán, Shaykh Salmán sent a letter to Ḥájí Siyyid Ismá'íl-i-Azghandí [a Bahá'í] requesting him to come and meet us outside the city. The reason for this was that Shaykh Salmán had a number of Tablets and other Bahá'í relics with him and as a precaution he wanted this man to take them to Shíráz, because each passenger travelling with the caravan would be searched by officials before entering the city.

In response to this letter, Ḥájí Siyyid Ismá'íl came on his donkey to Zarqán and took the Tablets and other articles with him to Shíráz. We ourselves followed him in due course and after being searched at the check-point went straight to his house in Shíráz. Our host used to spend much of his time in the company of Mushíru'l-Mulk. The latter had recently retired from his government post and his nephew had succeeded him in this high office. Since his retirement Mushíru'l-Mulk used to spend most of his time in his country home. It was through his gardener there ..., a Bahá'í, that he was attracted to the Faith.

Soon after his conversion, Mushíru'l-Mulk deputed his friend Ḥájí Siyyid Ismá'íl to attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and present to Him, on his behalf, the sum of one thousand túmáns and an exquisite pen-case. Bahá'u'lláh graciously accepted the pen-case but declined the money which He gave to the bearer. He revealed a Tablet for Mushíru'l-Mulk which was brought to Shíráz by Shaykh Salmán and delivered to him through his friend Ḥájí Siyyid Ismá'íl.

On hearing that Shaykh Salmán was in Shíráz, Mushíru'l-Mulk intimated his desire to meet him and asked his-friend to bring Shaykh Salmán to his house the next day. But Shaykh Salmán did not wish to meet Mushíru'l-Mulk. He declined the invitation, giving the excuse that he had no time as he was in a hurry to leave Shíráz. Mushíru'l-Mulk, however, was very eager for this meeting and responded to this message by saying: 'Now that Shaykh Salmán is in such a hurry to go, I shall come instead to his place of residence in the morning.'

When this message was conveyed to Shaykh Salmán he turned to me and said, 'Let us collect our belongings and leave this place.' We left the home of Hájí Siyyid Ismá'íl and took residence in a caravanserai in the town.

Hájí Siyyid Ismá'íl could not understand Shaykh Salmán's reason for refusing to meet Mushíru'l-Mulk and begged him to change his mind. But he refused, saying: 'If Mushíru'l-Mulk meets me he will lose his faith and will leave the Cause.' When pressed to give his reasons Shaykh Salmán replied, 'Mushíru'l-Mulk has heard many traditions and stories about Salmán, the disciple of Muhammad. For instance, he has heard the fantastic story that fire had no effect upon the feet of Salmán, and that he used to put his own feet instead of wood into a fireplace and heat the pots up with them. No doubt, Mushíru'l-Mulk expects to see similar things from me or he thinks that I have a face radiant and beautiful as an angel's. When he sees my ugly face and rough appearance he will leave the Faith.' Later on this story was mentioned to Bahá'u'lláh, Who confirmed that Shaykh Salmán had

been right and that Mushíru'l-Mulk would have left the Faith had that meeting taken place.

Shaykh Salmán, through his long association with the friends and his intimate knowledge of the spirit of the Faith, had acquired an unusual insight into the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. For instance, the same Hájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir is reported to have said that on their journey together Shaykh Salmán was carrying many Tablets for distribution among the believers in Persia. But none of those Tablets carried the name or address of the one for whom it was destined. This was possibly for the protection of the friends. When, in the course of this journey, Shaykh Salmán reached a place of safety he would take out these Tablets and, being himself illiterate, would ask Hájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir to read them for him. From the contents and the tone of Bahá'u'lláh's words Shaykh Salmán knew for whom the Tablets were intended. He would then ask Hájí Muḥammad- áhir to inscribe their names upon them.

These and many other instances in the life of Shaykh Salmán illustrate the purity of his heart and the clarity of his vision. Although unlettered, he had been endowed with a deep understanding of spiritual verities and divine mysteries and stands out as one of the spiritual giants of this Dispensation.

Bahá'u'lláh has revealed many Tablets for Shaykh Salmán, which often deal with weighty and profound subjects.

109. Shaykh Salmán—“I do not consider anybody great except the Ancient Beauty and the Master”

On one occasion when Shaykh Salmán realized that he was about to be searched by the authorities in a Persian town, he ate the few Tablets he was carrying in order to protect the Cause and the believers for whom they were intended!

Salmán was pure-hearted and very simple. The believers always enjoyed his company but there were some friends in high positions who were embarrassed and sometimes afraid to meet him because of his simplicity and frankness. Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí writes of this in his *Bihjatu's-Şudúr*:

I spent some time in Shíráz where I used to attain the presence of the celebrated Salmán ... I was filled with infinite joy by associating with him. He was truly a brilliant lamp. Outwardly he was an illiterate person and very simple, but inwardly he was the essence of wisdom and knowledge who could solve difficult problems and explain abstruse questions in simple language. Salmán was the essence of selflessness, he had no ego whatsoever. He was in no way able to flatter people or to deal deceitfully with them. It was for this reason that the pure in heart among the believers were truly devoted to him. But those who were sophisticated and conventional were not keen to associate with him. For they feared that he might ruin their prestige in the gatherings of the friends. It is commonly known and is true, that once the Ancient Beauty told Salmán to show respect towards important people in the meetings, and not to speak unkindly about them. Salmán replied, 'I do not consider anybody great except the Ancient Beauty and the Master. The so-called great are nothing but pompous men.' This remark amused Bahá'u'lblh.

In the *Lawḥ-i-Salmán* (Tablet of Salmán) Bahá'u'lláh bids him to journey throughout the land with feet of steadfastness, wings of detachment and a heart ablaze with the fire of the love of God, so that the forces of evil may be powerless to prevent him from carrying out his mission.

110. Ḥájí Mullá Mihdiy-i-'Aṭri—He shed abroad the attar of the love of God

While Bahá'u'lláh resided in the Mansion of Mazra'ih, many Bahá'ís came on pilgrimage and attained His presence. Notable among them was Ḥájí Mullá Mihdiy-i-'Aṭrí, a native of Yazd, accompanied by two of his sons—the eldest, Mírzá Ḥusayn, and the youngest, 'Alí-Muḥammad, later surnamed Varqá by Bahá'u'lláh. The latter became one of the luminaries of the Faith, an Apostle of Bahá'u'lláh who in the end laid down his life in His path.

In his unpublished 'History of the Faith in the Province of Yazd', Ḥájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir-i-Málmírí gives the following account:

Ḥájí Mullá Mihdí used to produce quantities of rose water and attar of rose each year in Yazd, hence he was known as 'Aṭrí (distiller of attar) ... One day he held a large meeting in his house in Yazd and invited the Bahá'ís, including the members of the Afnán family, to attend. About two hundred believers attended this meeting. Among them was a certain Dervish Miḥdí, who was a Bahá'í and had a melodious voice. He chanted Bahá'í songs in a very loud voice and a few others chanted Tablets. No such meeting had ever been held in Yazd since the Cause began in that city.

The next morning Shaykh Muḥammad-Ḥasan-i-Sabzivárí (a leading *mujtahid* of Yazd and an inveterate enemy of the Cause) summoned Ḥájí Mullá Mihdí to his office and there ordered his men to flog him brutally in his presence. Then he issued orders for his exile from Yazd. Mírzá Ḥusayn and Mírzá ‘Alí-Muḥammad (Varqá), his sons, went into hiding at the time of their father’s arrest. The other son, Mírzá Ḥasan, fled to a neighbouring town.

Ḥájí Mullá Mihdí, accompanied by his two sons Mírzá Ḥusayn and Mírzá ‘Alí-Muḥammad-i-Varqá, left Yazd on foot and eventually travelled to the Holy Land via Baghdád. Because of old age and fatigue, Ḥájí became ill on the way. They arrived at Mazra‘ih by way of Beirut and Sidon. But Ḥájí died on arrival and was buried alongside the road to ‘Akká. Whenever the Blessed Beauty passed by his grave on His way to ‘Akká or Mazra‘ih, He would pause there, put His blessed foot on the grave and stop beside it for a few moments.

Although Ḥájí did not attain the presence of Bahá’u’lláh this time, he had, on a previous occasion, visited Baghdád with his eldest son Mírzá Ḥusayn where he met his Lord face to face. Bahá’u’lláh had revealed Tablets for him for many years, all indicative of his deep love and devotion to the Cause. The outpouring of Bahá’u’lláh’s blessings upon him were indeed boundless. In a Tablet addressed to Varqá, Bahá’u’lláh, in the words of His amanuensis, describes the way in which He and some of His companions once on their way to Mazra‘ih stopped at the grave of his father and revealed such exalted verses in his honour that no pen could describe the glory with which his soul was invested. Bahá’u’lláh has revealed for him a Tablet of Visitation which clearly

indicates how exalted was his rank among the Concourse on High. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has affirmed that He built his grave with His own hands.

The following is a tribute paid by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to this noble soul:

...With his two sons, one the great martyr-to-be, Jináb-i-Varqá, and the other Jináb-i-Husayn, he set out for the country of his Well-Beloved. In every town and village along the way, he ably spread the Faith, adducing clear arguments and proofs, quoting from and interpreting the sacred traditions and evident signs. He did not rest for a moment; everywhere he shed abroad the attar of the love of God, and diffused the sweet breathings of holiness. And he inspired the friends, making them eager to teach others in their turn, and to excel in knowledge.

He was an eminent soul, with his heart fixed on the beauty of God. From the day he was first created and came into this world, he single-mindedly devoted all his efforts to acquiring grace for the day he should be born into the next. His heart was illumined, his mind spiritual, his soul aspiring, his destination Heaven. He was imprisoned along his way; and as he crossed the deserts and climbed and descended the mountain slopes he endured terrible, uncounted hardships. But the light of faith shone from his brow and in his breast the longing was aflame, and thus he joyously, gladly passed over the frontiers until at last he came to Beirut. In that city, ill, restive, his patience gone, he spent some days. His yearning grew, and his agitation was such that weak and sick as he was, he could wait no more.

He set out on foot for the house of Bahá'u'lláh. Because he lacked proper shoes for the journey, his feet were bruised and torn; his

sickness worsened; he could hardly move, but still he went on; somehow he reached the village of Mazra'ih and here close to the Mansion, he died. His heart found his Well-Beloved One, when he could bear the separation no more. Let lovers be warned by his story; let them know how he gambled away his life in his yearning after the Light of the World. May God give him to drink of a brimming cup in the everlasting gardens; in the Supreme Assemblage, may God shed upon his face rays of light. Upon him be the glory of the Lord. His sanctified tomb is in Mazra'ih, beside 'Akká.

111. Khátún Ján—A protector of Ṭáhirih

Khátún Ján was a devoted believer. Her father, Ḥájí Asadu'lláh-i-Farhád, was one of the followers of Siyyid Kázim-i-Rashtí. As Ṭáhirih was also one of the disciples of the Siyyid, there was a great friendship between Ṭáhirih and the daughters of Ḥájí Asadu'lláh. When the Báb revealed Himself, Ṭáhirih, who was then in Karbilá, acknowledged the truth of His Message and was named as one of the Letters of the Living. Soon after this news of the Báb's declaration reached Qazvín. Ḥájí Asadu'lláh and his family were among the early believers in that town. When Ṭáhirih returned to Qazvín, the bond of love and union between herself and the Farhádí family grew much stronger. Khátún Ján, in particular, became an ardent admirer of Ṭáhirih. She used to sit at her feet and was enthralled by Ṭáhirih's devotion and love for the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

During the time that Ṭáhirih was confined in her home, the only person who managed to keep in touch with her was Khátún Ján. She went to her house almost every day, sometimes disguised as a beggar and sometimes as a washer-woman who would do her washing in the

public waterway nearby. By this regular contact she performed an important function in bringing news to and from Ṭáhirih. She also managed to smuggle in food during the time that the enemies were bent upon taking the life of Ṭáhirih, and there was every possibility that they might attempt to poison her food. And finally she played a significant role, together with her husband Muḥammad-Ḥádí, in rescuing her beloved lady from imprisonment.

Khátún Ján, who had performed such heroic deeds during the life of Ṭáhirih, was plunged into grief and consternation when her beloved heroine was martyred. Some time after this she also lost her husband, Muḥammad-Ḥádí. But these calamities did not quench the fire of faith which was burning within her breast. She continued to serve the Cause of God with fervour and enthusiasm. The seed of the love of Bahá'u'lláh had been sown in the heart of Khátún Ján by the hand of Ṭáhirih, who had recognized His station from the early days. Consequently Khátún Ján turned to Bahá'u'lláh with stainless faith and devotion throughout her life. Her sisters and some other members of the family also remained steadfast in His Cause. From the days of Baghdád, Khátún Ján used to receive Tablets from Bahá'u'lláh. This great bounty continued and when in Adrianople, at a time of greatest crisis, when He was so viciously attacked by the unfaithful, Bahá'u'lláh revealed the *Lawḥ-i-Bahá* in her honour, and poured out His heart to her.

112. Fáṭimih-Bagum—She pleaded the case of the prisoners

Although in those days women lived a sheltered life, seldom left the confines of their home and never took part in public affairs, Fáṭimih-Bagum, a maiden, twenty-seven years of age, was determined to walk

with the Bábí prisoners from Yazd to Işfahán. The friends tried very hard to dissuade her from going, pointing out the hazards of the journey by foot in the heat of the summer and under such difficult circumstances. But their pleas brought no result. She is reported to have told the believers: 'How can I allow them to take my brother ... and five other beloved of God to Işfahán, while I stay here! I shall go with these six persons to Işfahán. If they decide to kill them, they must first take my life and then proceed to execute the rest ... My life is not more precious than theirs.'

With a courage and steadfastness that amazed the officials and onlookers, Fátimih-Bagum, walking barefoot and wearing her veil, led the party of prisoners to Işfahán. She carried the end of the chain and the spike, which the authorities placed on the shoulders of Áqá Siyyid Muḥammad who had become ill, on her shoulder all the way.

These men were sent to prison on arrival in Işfahán. Through the efforts of Fátimih-Bagum, who managed to plead their case to Prince Zillu's-Sultán, they were freed and sent back to Yazd. But the persecutions did not stop here. Some years later these valiant souls were martyred. Fátimih-Bagum herself was dragged out of her home and done to death in such humiliating circumstances as no pen can describe. The indignities to which her body was subjected after her martyrdom constitute one of the most shameful episodes in the history of the Faith.

113. Ustád Muḥammad-'Alí—A flame of the love of Bahá'u'lláh

Ustád Muḥammad-'Alí was one of Bahá'u'lláh's disciples and had the honour to be His attendant in the bath since the Baghdád days; he

continued this service in 'Akká. He was one of the servants of Bahá'u'lláh and a man of great courage and faith. He had recognized the station of Bahá'u'lláh with such depth and conviction that his whole being was dominated by a passionate love for Him, a love that knew no bounds.

Bahá'u'lláh had bestowed upon him the knowledge of God. He became the recipient of such divine gifts that in spite of his illiteracy and humble origins, he was enabled to make a valuable contribution to Persian literature through his poems. In the history of the Faith we come across many distinguished Bahá'í poets, most of whom were men of learning and knowledge. Yet some claim that Ustád Muḥammad-'Alí's poems are endowed with a special power which makes them outstanding. Those who appreciate poetry have acknowledged the beauty, lucidity and profundity of his composition. The believers who recite his soul-stirring poems often become uplifted and inspired, transported from this mortal life into the world of realities. His words, deep and full of significances, move the soul and open before one's eyes vistas of love and adoration for Bahá'u'lláh.

Those who are as yet unaffected by the potency of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh may find it hard to believe that such a man, unlettered and unaccomplished, could ever rise to such heights as to make a notable contribution to human knowledge and literature. And when we study the life of Ustád Muḥammad-'Alí closely, and take into account his daily encounters with people, his manners and his language which at times were harsh and offensive, we realize that not only was he uneducated but he was also a somewhat unrefined person.

Nevertheless, when the heart is pure and the soul turns with sincerity and devotion to Bahá'u'lláh, it becomes the recipient of the knowledge of God referred to in Islám as 'a light which God casteth into the heart of whomsoever He willeth.' Ustád Muḥammad-'Alí was an example of this; he may be described as a flame of the love of Bahá'u'lláh. His poems are likewise songs of love and rapture and we cannot find even one line in which he has deviated from this theme. The object of his adoration is none other than Bahá'u'lláh and this is made clear in his poems. He extols and glorifies Him in beautiful language and lays bare the fire of love which burns within his heart. Most of his poems were composed extemporaneously as he attended to Bahá'u'lláh's hair. When he came in contact with his Beloved he was carried into the realms of the spirit and became oblivious of all that was around him. It was in this state that these beautiful poems flowed forth in an uncontrollable fashion.

Ustád Muḥammad-'Alí was a native of Iṣfahán. His father sent him to a barber's shop when he was nine years old. At the age of fifteen he began to work on his own. Soon after, he came in contact with the Bábís in Iṣfahán and about three years after the martyrdom of the Báb, he embraced the Bábí Faith. Together with some others, Ustád Muḥammad-'Alí was persecuted in Iṣfahán for being a Bábí. Later he worked in Baghhdád as a barber where he was given the honour of attending Bahá'u'lláh in the bath.

For the sake of honouring Bahá'u'lláh and the Cause of the Báb, the companions of Bahá'u'lláh in Baghhdád and Adrianople had always shown consideration and regard for Mírzá Yaḥyá who, after all, was the nominee of the Báb and a brother of their Lord. This attitude, which was shown purely for the exaltation of the Cause of God, was

misinterpreted by Mírzá Yaḥyá and led him to imagine that these men would be willing to carry out his orders regardless of their import. However, he soon discovered how gravely he had erred in his judgement by asking Ustád Muḥammad-‘Alí, one of the most faithful servants of Bahá’u’lláh, to carry out his sinister design to murder Bahá’u’lláh.

Ustád Muḥammad-‘Alí in his memoirs has recounted in detail this shameful episode and the events leading to it. The following is a translation of some of his words:

One day I went to the bath and awaited the arrival of the Blessed Beauty. Azal (Mírzá Yaḥyá) arrived first. I attended to him and applied henna. He began to talk to me. For some time he was trying hard to make me his follower, but he was doing this in a secret way. He said to me: ‘Last night I dreamt that someone had a sweeping brush in his hand and was sweeping the area around me.’ He gave me to understand that this person was the Blessed Beauty. From the tone of his conversation, I knew that he wanted me to do something for him, but he did not tell me anything and soon left the bath.

Then the Blessed Beauty came in. There was a mirror on the wall, and as his image appeared in it, He recited this line of poetry, ‘Thou art great, and the mirror too small to reflect Thy beauty.’

I was deep in my thoughts concerning the words of Azal. I did not understand his purpose in implying that the Blessed Beauty was sweeping the floor around him. However, it was quite clear that he wanted me to carry out a special task for him. At the same time I noticed that Ḥájí Mírzá Aḥmad was trying to convert me to follow

Azal. During the course of several days he persisted in trying to win me over.

Ustád Muḥammad-‘Alí stood firm and immovable as a rock. He rejected Ḥájí Mírzá Aḥmad’s arguments and at the end used such harsh and unspeakably offensive language that his opponent went to Bahá’u’lláh and complained. The following day, Mírzá Áqá Ján, as instructed by Bahá’u’lláh, gathered the believers together and in order to help them resolve their differences read out some Tablets including the *Lawḥ-i-Aḥmad* (Persian) which was addressed to the same Ḥájí Mírzá Aḥmad. Ustád Muḥammad-‘Alí continues in his memoirs:

One day I was waiting at the bath for the arrival of Bahá’u’lláh. Azal came in first, washed himself and began to apply henna. I sat down to serve him and he began to talk to me. He said ‘A certain Mírzá Na’ím, the former Governor of Nayríz, killed many believers and perpetrated many crimes against the Cause’. He then praised courage and bravery in glowing terms. He said that some were brave by nature and at the right time they would manifest that quality in their actions. He then continued the story of Mírzá Na’ím. ‘From the persecuted family of the believers there remained a young boy aged ten or eleven. One day, when Mírzá Na’ím went into the bath, this boy went in with a knife. As he was coming out of the water, the boy stabbed him and ripped his belly open. Mírzá Na’ím screamed and his servants who were in the ante-room rushed in. They went for the boy, attacked and beat him. Then they went to see how their master was. The boy, although wounded, rose up and stabbed him again.’ Azal praised courage again and said ‘How wonderful it is for a man to be brave. Now, see what they are doing to the Cause of God.

Everybody harms it, everyone has arisen against me, even my Brother. I have no comfort whatsoever and am in a wretched state.' His tone and implications were that he, the successor of the Báb, was the wronged one, and his Brother (I take refuge in God!) was the usurper and aggressor. Then he once more praised courage and said that the Cause of God needed help. In all this talk, the tone of his remarks, the story of Mírzá Na'ím, the praise of courage and his encouragement to me, he was in fact telling me to kill Bahá'u'lláh.

The effect of all this upon me was so disturbing that in all my life I had never felt so shattered. It was as if the whole building was falling upon my head. I was frightened; without uttering a word I went out to the ante-room. My mind was in a state of the utmost agitation. I thought to myself that I would go inside and cut his head off regardless of consequences. Then I thought, to kill him is easy, but perhaps I would offend the Blessed Beauty. One thing which prevented me from carrying out my intention was the thought that if I killed him and then went into the presence of the Blessed Beauty, and He asked me why I had killed him, what answer could I give?

I returned to the bath and being extremely angry, I shouted at him 'Go and get lost, clear off!' He whimpered and trembled and asked me to pour water over him. I complied. Washed or unwashed he went out in a state of great trepidation, and I have never seen him since.

My state of mind, however, was such that nothing could calm me. As it happened, that day the Blessed Beauty did not come to the bath, but Áqá Mírzá Músáy-i-Kalím [Bahá'u'lláh's faithful brother] came. I told him that Azal had set me on fire with his sinister suggestion.

Áqá Mírzá Músá said: ‘He has been thinking of this for years, this man has always been thinking in this way. Do not pay any attention to him.’ He counselled me to disregard the whole thing and went inside the bath.

However, when my work was finished in the bath, I went to the Master and reported to Him what Mírzá Yahyá had told me, and how I was filled with rage and wanted to kill him ... the Master said, ‘This is something that you alone know. Do not mention it to anyone, it is better that it remain hidden.’ I then went to Mírzá Áqá Ján, reported the details of the incident and asked him to tell Bahá’u’lláh. He returned and said ‘Bahá’u’lláh says to tell Ustád Muḥammad-‘Alí not to mention this to anyone.’

That night I collected all the writings of Azal and went to the tea-room of Bahá’u’lláh’s house and burnt them all in the brazier. Before doing so, I showed them to seven or eight of the believers who were present. They all saw that they were the writings of Azal. They all protested to me and asked me the reason for doing this. I said, ‘Until today I esteemed Azal highly, but now he is less than a dog in my sight’.

In the end Ustád Muḥammad-‘Alí found himself unable to keep this matter to himself. Soon the news spread and created much fear and anguish in the hearts of the believers in Adrianople.

114. “O Aḥmad! ... Remember My days during thy days”

The *Lawḥ-i-Aḥmad* (Tablet of Aḥmad) is one of the best known Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh, translated into English and many other languages. It was

revealed around 1282 AH (1865) in honour of Aḥmad, a native of Yazd. A cursory glance at the original Tablet makes it clear that Bahá'u'lláh wrote this before He was poisoned by Mírzá Yaḥyá.

The life story of Aḥmad is very interesting. An account of his life is recorded in the annals of the Faith prepared by the Bahá'í community of 'Ishqábád. According to this account he lived to be one hundred and died in the year 1320 AH (1902). In his unpublished 'History of the Faith in the Province of Yazd', Hájí Muḥammad-Táhir-i-Málmírí has also written a brief account of Aḥmad's life. In it he states that Aḥmad died at the age of one hundred and thirteen!

Aḥmad was born into a rich and influential family in Yazd. From his early days, when he was still in his teens, he felt a great attraction towards mysticism. At that age he often secluded himself in a room in order to commune with God. His greatest hope in life was to come face to face with the promised Qá'im (Promised One of Islám). He listened to any person who would show him the way, and often sat at the feet of ascetics and dervishes who claimed to possess the divine light within them.

However, his father and the family, who were orthodox Muslims, were perturbed by the way Aḥmad was inclined towards mendicancy and asceticism. They brought much pressure upon him to relinquish his ideas, but Aḥmad's indomitable spirit could not be fettered by orthodoxy. Knowing that the atmosphere of his homeland was not conducive to his spiritual development, Aḥmad took the unusual step of leaving his home. In those days it was a rare occasion for a young person to leave his native town, especially without the consent of his

parents. But Aḥmad was driven by an irresistible force to find the essence of Truth and attain the presence of the Qá'im.

Pretending that he was going to the public bath, one morning Aḥmad took a bundle of clothes and disappeared. He travelled towards the south until he reached India where he hoped he might find a clue leading him to his Beloved. This was possibly around 1242 AH (1826), some twenty years before the Declaration of the Báb.

According to Ḥájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir-i-Málmírí, Aḥmad was over twenty years of age when he left Yazd. He writes:

I was with him [Aḥmad] for about four years during the latter part of his life when he lived in Munj-i-Bavánát [in the province of Fárs]. He was twenty years of age during the reign of Fath-'Alí Sháh when Prince Khánlar Mírzá was the Governor of Yazd. He was then leading an ascetic life, spending his time in prayer and meditation. He was inclined to be a dervish, and left Yazd for India in the garb of a dervish. On his way, in Búshihr [Bushire] he came in contact with a baker, and he remained there for some time. He used to recount some stories about this baker, saying that he [the baker] had a great station in the spiritual realms, was aware of the divine presence and was reputed to be undergoing spiritual experiences. However, Aḥmad left Búshihr for Bombay where he continued his ascetic life and was engaged in prayer and meditation.

Aḥmad has said that throughout these journeys he came in contact with many mystics, Şúfís and other leaders of thought. But he became disappointed and disillusioned. In spite of imposing upon himself a rigorous self-discipline, and carrying out many prayerful exercises such

as prostrating himself and repeating a certain verse of the *Qur'án* twelve thousand times, he did not find the object of his quest in India.

Dismayed and disheartened, he retraced his steps to Persia. He made his home in Káshán where he married and worked as a hand-weaver. The following is an extract from his spoken chronicle to some believers.

Some time passed, and the news of the Báb from Shíráz reached many areas including Káshán. A strong urge was created in me to investigate this message. I made enquiries through every channel, until one day I met a traveller in the caravanserai. When I enquired of him, he said 'If you are a seeker of truth proceed to Mashhad where you may visit a certain Mullá 'Abdu'l-Kháliq-i-Yazdí who can help you in your investigations.'

After hearing this, I set off on my journey early next day. I walked all the way to Tíhrán and from there to Mashhad. However, upon arrival I became ill and had to convalesce for two months in that city. On recovering, I called at the home of Mullá 'Abdu'l-Kháliq and informed the servant that I wished to meet his master. I met the Mullá and acquainted him with my quest. On hearing this, he became very angry with me and threw me out. However, I called again the next day, cried aloud and implored him to guide me. When he saw I was earnest and steadfast in my search for truth, he then told me to meet him that night in the mosque of Gawhar-Shád where he would put me in touch with someone who could tell me the whole truth.

I went to the mosque in the evening, but after attending the prayers and listening to him preach, I lost him because of the crowds. The next morning, I arrived at his house and explained what had happened. He instructed me to go to the mosque of Pír-Zan that

evening and promised that he would send someone there to meet me and take me to the appointed place. Guided by the man who met me in the mosque, after walking some distance I passed through a corridor into the courtyard of a house and went upstairs into a room. I saw a venerable figure who occupied the seat of honour. Mullá 'Abdu'l-Kháliq, who was standing at the door, intimated to me that this great man was the one he wanted me to meet. This was no less a person than Mullá Şádiq-i-Khurásání.

After attending a few meetings I was enabled to recognize and acknowledge the truth of the Message of the Báb. Afterwards, Mullá Şádiq instructed me to return to my wife and family in Káshán and resume my work. He also advised me not to teach the Faith unless I found a hearing ear.

Thereupon, I returned to Káshán and soon discovered that Hájí Mírzá Jání of Káshán was also a believer. The two of us were the only Bábís in that city.

When the Báb was conducted from Işfahán to Ṭihrán, Hájí Mírzá Jání paid the sum of two hundred túmáns to the officers [in charge of conducting the Báb to Ṭihrán] who allowed him to entertain the Báb in his house where He stayed for two nights. Hájí Mírzá Jání also invited me to go there and attain the presence of our beloved Lord.

Aḥmad then describes his meeting with the Báb and talks about His majesty, dignity and beauty as He conversed with a few of the divines of Káshán. Soon after this the number of believers in Káshán increased and persecutions started. Aḥmad continues his story:

One day, a number of ruffians attacked the believers and took all our possessions, they even broke all doors and windows. I hid myself in the wind tower of the house and remained there for forty days. The friends brought me food and water in secret.

Since it became difficult to live in Káshán, I set off for Baghdád. It was about five years since Bahá'u'lláh had taken up residence in that city. On the way, I met a stranger who was also travelling. Both of us indicated that our destination was Karbilá. Throughout the journey we conducted ourselves as Muslims and prayed according to Muslim rites. On our arrival in Baghdád, I walked in the direction of the house of Bahá'u'lláh. I found that my friend was also going in the same direction, and soon I discovered that he was also a Bábí! We had both dissimulated our faith.

After being admitted to the house of Bahá'u'lláh, I attained His presence. He turned to me and said 'What a man! He becomes a Bábí and then goes and hides in the wind tower!' I remained in Baghdád for six years and worked as a hand-weaver. During this period my soul was bountifully nourished from His glorious presence and I had the great honour to live in the outer apartment of His blessed house.

One day, they brought the news of the death of Siyyid Ismá'íl of Zavárih. Bahá'u'lláh said: 'No one has killed him. Behind many myriad veils of light, We showed him a glimmer of Our glory; he could not endure it and so he sacrificed himself.' Some of us then went to the bank of the river and found the body of Siyyid Ismá'íl lying there. He had cut his own throat with a razor which was still held in his hand. We removed the body and buried it.

However, I was basking in the sunshine of Bahá'u'lláh's presence until the Sulṭán's decree for Bahá'u'lláh's departure to Constantinople was communicated. It was thirty-one days after Naw-Rúz that the Blessed Beauty went to the Garden of Najíb Páshá. On that day the river overflowed and they had to open the lock gates to ease the situation. On the ninth day the flooding subsided and Bahá'u'lláh's family left the house in Baghdád and went to the Garden. Immediately after their crossing, however, the river began to swell again and the lock gates had to be re-opened. On the twelfth day Bahá'u'lláh left for Constantinople. Some of the believers accompanied Him and some including this servant had to remain in Baghdád. At the time of His departure, all of us were together in the Garden. Those who were to remain behind were standing on one side. His blessed Person came to us and spoke words of consolation to us. He said that it was better that we remain behind. He also said that He had allowed some to accompany Him, merely to prevent them from making mischief and creating trouble.

One of the friends recited the following poem of Sa'dí in a voice filled with emotion and deep sorrow:

'Let us shed tears as clouds pour down in the spring;
Even the stones wail when lovers part.'

Bahá'u'lláh responded, 'These words were truly meant for today.'

These few stories of Bahá'u'lláh which Aḥmad has left to posterity, together with this brief account of his own life, constitute the major part of his spoken chronicle. In it he has not described in detail the tremendous impact which his attaining the presence of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh had upon him. Nor has he spoken about those six glorious

years that he lived in such close proximity to Bahá'u'lláh. But we know that there were very few among the companions of Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdád who acquired such faith and spiritual insight as Aḥmad did. He was vivified by the potency of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, and had the capacity and worthiness to acquire from Him such great spiritual magnetism and radiance that they dominated his being throughout his long life.

Of him, Ḥájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir-i-Málmírí writes:

Aḥmad stayed in Baghdád for some years and attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh there. He became the recipient of His bounties and favours. Once he told me that he had beheld the innermost Beauty of the Blessed Perfection. He was speaking the truth, because he had a Tablet in the handwriting of Bahá'u'lláh which testified that Aḥmad had gazed upon His hidden Beauty.

After Bahá'u'lláh's departure for Constantinople, Aḥmad remained in Baghdád and served the Faith in that city with great devotion. However, in his heart he was longing to attain the presence of His Lord again. After some time, he could no longer bear to stay away and so he set off for Adrianople. When he arrived in Constantinople, Bahá'u'lláh sent him a Tablet which is now universally known as the Tablet of Aḥmad. On reading this Tablet, Aḥmad knew what was expected of him. He surrendered his own will to Bahá'u'lláh's and instead of completing his journey to Adrianople and attaining the presence of His Lord, he returned to Persia with the sole purpose of teaching and propagating the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to the Bábí community.

Following the example of Muníb and Nabíl-i-A'zam who were sent by Bahá'u'lláh to teach His Cause, Aḥmad travelled extensively throughout

Persia and gave the glad-tidings of the coming of 'Him Whom God shall make manifest' to many of the Bábís. Through his dedicated efforts a great many recognized the station of Bahá'u'lláh and became His ardent followers. The Bábí community at that time was in such a state of deprivation and perversity that sometimes the Bábís showed hostility towards Bahá'í teachers. In his spoken chronicle Aḥmad has recounted one such incident in Khurásán. He says:

I left Tíhrán for Khurásán and spoke to many concerning the advent of 'Him Whom God shall make manifest'. I went to Furúgh (Province of Khurásán) in the garb of a dervish, and spoke about 'Him Whom God shall make manifest' to Mullá Mírzá Muḥammad and his brothers. In the course of our discussions they became aggressive and fiercely assaulted me. In the struggle which ensued they broke my tooth. When the fighting had stopped and emotions subsided, I resumed the discussion, saying that the Báb had specifically mentioned that 'Him Whom God shall make manifest' would appear by the name of Bahá. They promised to accept the claims of Bahá'u'lláh should I be able to verify my statement. I asked them to bring the Writings of the Báb to me. They made an opening in the wall and took out all the Writings which were hidden for fear of the enemy. As soon as I opened one of them, we found a passage which indicated that 'He Whom God shall make manifest' would bear the name of Bahá. They happily embraced the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh and I left them and travelled to other towns.

Concerning Aḥmad and his latter days, Hájí Muḥammad-Táhir-i-Málmírí has written the following:

For some time Aḥmad lived and worked in Káshán. The Tablet of Aḥmad (Arabic) was revealed in his honour and he used to carry with him the original Tablet which is in the handwriting of the Blessed Beauty. However, his wife died in Káshán and his daughter was married to a man who held the post of Saqqá-Báshí [water supplier] to the court of Nasiri'd-Dín Sháh in Ṭíhrán. Soon after this he went to Shíráz and then to Nayríz where he married again and lived in that area for about twenty years. He also spent some time at Sarvistán (province of Fárs). He was a very simple man, pure and truthful. The reason for his coming to Munj was that he wanted to go to Ṭíhrán. His daughter ...had written repeatedly to Áqáy-i-Bashír-i-Iláhí, requesting him to arrange for her aged father to go to Ṭíhrán, as she longed to see him once again. However, Aḥmad was not much inclined to go. He was ninety-six years of age when he arrived at Munj, but was in the utmost health and vigour. He spent most of his time in reading the Holy Writings, especially his own Tablet which he chanted very often. He stayed for four years in Munj until the Afnán arranged for him to travel to Ṭíhrán in the care of his trusted servant. He stayed for some time in Ṭíhrán and went for a visit to Qazvín.

115. Siyyid Ashraf, Abá-Başir and Umm-i-Ashraf—“I will disown you as my son ... if you ... allow them to turn you away from the Truth”

Siyyid Ashraf, a youth from Zanján, attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh in Adrianople and later drank the cup of martyrdom in his native city. His father, Áqá Mír Jalíl, a man of courage and considerable influence in the city, had been one of the companions of Ḥujjat in the struggle of

Zanján, and was martyred. His mother ‘Anbar Khánum, known in the Writings as Umm-i-Ashraf (Mother of Ashraf) is reckoned as one of the immortal heroines of the Faith.

Siyid Ashraf was born during the siege of Zanján in the fortress of ‘Alí-Mardán Khán. Neither the hardships and sufferings of that cruel and mournful struggle nor the martyrdom of her beloved husband succeeded in breaking down the fortitude of Umm-i-Ashraf. On the contrary, they served to steel her faith and reinforce her physical endurance. In spite of many privations and trials she reared that infant and two young daughters with great affection and care.

When the Message of Bahá’u’lláh reached Zanján, Umm-i-Ashraf and her children embraced His Faith, recognized His station and turned to Him with the utmost devotion. As a youth, to meet his Lord face to face, Siyyid Ashraf travelled to Adrianople and attained his heart’s desire. There he basked in the sunshine of Bahá’u’lláh’s bounties, became filled with a new spirit and returned home with a renewed zeal and enthusiasm. The fire of the love of Bahá’u’lláh which was burning within his heart prompted him to make yet another pilgrimage to the abode of his Beloved. This time, accompanied by Hájí Ímán, one of the survivors of the Zanján upheaval, he took one of his sisters with him to Adrianople. Bahá’u’lláh showered His favours upon them, and after a short stay directed them to return to Zanján.

The circumstances of their dismissal from the presence of Bahá’u’lláh are described by a grand daughter of Umm-i-Ashraf. When Siyyid Ashraf and his sister left Zanján, there was a good deal of speculation about their whereabouts, especially among Ashraf’s paternal uncles who were not Bahá’ís. They were anxious to prevent Ashraf and his

sister from becoming involved in the Faith, so they put a great deal of pressure on their mother. They blamed her for having been the driving force behind her husband's activities in the Faith, activities which had resulted in his martyrdom, and now for being the major factor in her children's involvement in the Faith. About four months after the party had left Zanján, three of the uncles came on one occasion to rebuke Umm-i-Ashraf for sending her children away to attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. They became very aggressive and at one point even suggested immoral intentions on the part of her daughter. Umm-i-Ashraf could no longer bear their malice and evil suggestions. She left the room crying bitterly, raised her hands in supplication to Bahá'u'lláh and prayerfully beseeched Him to send her children home.

Later, Siyyid Ashraf, by checking the date with his mother, was able to verify that it was the morning after this night that Bahá'u'lláh summoned him, his sister and Hájí Ímán to His presence. He told them that the night before Umm-i-Ashraf had prayed to Him to send them back. Therefore they were to leave at once. That morning He particularly showered His praise and bounties upon Umm-i-Ashraf. Ashraf is reported to have said to Bahá'u'lláh, 'Adam ate the forbidden fruit and was cast out of heaven, in our case it is our mother who has done this to us!'

On their way home it was very clear to many that Ashraf had been transformed into a new creation. He could not help but display such radiance of spirit that, as attested by Hájí Ímán, all those who travelled with the caravan were deeply moved. Along the way he used to chant, in a beautiful voice, some poems and Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh he knew by heart. Whenever he wanted to chant, he used to unwind his green

turban, the sign of his lineage, and place it around his shoulder. On these occasions he radiated such love, and he conveyed such power and beauty through his voice that the caravan drivers would often leave their duties and walk beside him instead, slowing down the speed of the caravan. Once Hájí Ímán asked one of them to go away, and attend to his work, so that the pace could be speeded up. 'How can I go,' he replied. 'Can't you hear the exhilarating voice of the descendant of the Prophet. He is undoubtedly a holy man. I have never seen such a radiant face before.'

Siyyid Ashraf was directed by Bahá'u'lláh to teach His Cause to the sincere among the people of the Bayán. He began this work with unbounded zeal and enthusiasm. He built a room in the grounds of his estate outside the city and made it a centre of Bahá'í activities, praying, reading the Writings and meeting the believers. Having come in contact with the Source of divine power, and being transformed into a spiritual giant, Siyyid Ashraf radiated the love of Bahá'u'lláh to the friends, and enabled many of them to recognize Him as the Promised One of the Bayán.

A group of Bábís came to talk to Ashraf soon after his arrival from Adrianople. They were misguided by Mírzá Yaḥyá. One of them asked Ashraf about the station of Mírzá Yaḥyá. He simply replied that Bahá'u'lláh was the Sun of Truth resplendent and radiant in His glory, but Mírzá Yaḥyá acted as a thick dark cloud in front of it. These words caused the insincere and the unfaithful among the believers in Zanján to be separated from the true followers of Bahá'u'lláh in that city.

In his teaching work, Siyyid Ashraf was ably supported by Abá-Baṣír, whose name is forever linked with the former. The original name of

Abá-Başır was Áqá Naqd-‘Alí. His father, a certain Hájí Muḥammad-Ḥusayn, was martyred in the struggle of Zanján. Áqá Naqd-‘Alí was born blind but possessed such insight and understanding that Bahá’u’lláh gave him the title of Başır (Seeing). He was one of the most steadfast followers of Bahá’u’lláh in Zanján. When it became clear to some members of his family that he had embraced the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh and was actively teaching it, they drove him out of his home. It was after this incident that Abá-Başır went to live with Siyyid Aşraf. The spiritual ties which united these two souls were further strengthened when Abá-Başır married the sister of Hájí Ímán, Aşraf’s brother-in-law, and settled in that household permanently. Abá-Başır, in spite of his blindness, was a man of great capacity. He had memorized many verses of the *Qur’án* and the traditions, and had such a deep understanding of their meanings that many students of theology used to seek enlightenment from him.

The activities of Aşraf, Abá-Başır and a few others, in promoting the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh, aroused the fears and antagonism of an enemy who vividly remembered the bloody struggle of Zanján only two decades before, when thousands of men and women had fought and died for their Faith with courage and heroism. The fire of hatred and fanaticism, which for some time had remained dormant, was now beginning to blaze, engulfing in its fury the most active and dedicated adherents of a revived and re-animated Faith. The divines issued the death warrant of Abá-Başır and Aşraf and handed it to the Governor of Zanján for implementation. As a result, orders were given that unless they recanted they must be put to death. Accordingly these two were arrested, and Abá-Başır was conducted to a meeting of the divines where he was asked to recant his Faith. Instead, he openly spoke about

the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh and proved its divine origin most eloquently. This audacious confrontation only served to evoke the wrath of the clergy who unhesitatingly demanded his execution.

The executioner conducted Abá-Başír to the public square in front of the government house and beheaded him as he knelt in prayer, watched by thousands of men and women who had gathered to see him die. In the meantime, as these heart-rending afflictions were going on, Siyyid Ashraf was being cruelly persecuted in the prison. Yet there were some people, including Siyyid 'Abdu'l-Vási', the Imám-Jum'ih of the city and a relative of his, who were anxious to save him from his fate, for he was dear to many because of his marvellous qualities and good conduct. They tried very hard to persuade him to recant and, when they failed to achieve their object, they sent for his mother to come and make him recant.

The divines clamoured for Ashraf's death. He was beaten so hard that blood flowed from under his nails, and was taken to the same public square where the body of Abá-Başír lay on the ground, exposed to the eyes of the onlookers. As soon as he beheld the decapitated body of his companion, he ran towards it and held it in his arms. His mother, Umm-i-Ashraf, arrived when he was covered in blood. It is reported by one member of the Ashraf family that she went forward, threw her arms around her son, kissed him on the cheeks, wiped away the sweat and blood from his face, took his bloodstained skull cap as a souvenir and urged him again not to barter his precious faith for the fleeting days of a mortal life. "I will disown you as my son," cried the mother, when brought face to face with him, "if you incline your heart to such evil whisperings and allow them to turn you away from the Truth."

Although his mother exhorted him to remain faithful to the Cause of God, Ashraf, who had attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh twice, was by himself a tower of strength. He had reached the stage of certitude in his faith and could not entertain the thought of compromise.

As his friends were putting pressure upon him to recant, the aforementioned Imám-Jum'ih is reported to have taken Ashraf into his arms, whispered a few words into his ears, and then, as he stood on a high platform, falsely proclaimed to the teeming multitude that Ashraf had recanted his Faith and should no longer be considered a Bahá'í. When he heard this false declaration, Ashraf, who was standing beside him, raised his hands and in a loud voice denied the allegation and announced that he had never recanted, nor would he ever do so. He remained steadfast in his love for Bahá'u'lláh until the executioner moved forward and ruthlessly dealt him a deadly blow. He was beheaded as he held the body of Abá-Bašír in his arms.

Of Ashraf and his mother, Nabíl writes:

Faithful to his mother's admonitions, Ashraf met his death with intrepid calm. Though herself a witness to the cruelties inflicted on her son, she made no lamentation, neither did she shed a tear. This marvellous mother showed a courage and fortitude that amazed the perpetrators of that shameless deed. 'I have now in mind,' she exclaimed, as she cast a parting glance at the corpse of her son, 'the vow I made on the day of your birth, while besieged in the fort of 'Alí-Mardán Khán. I rejoice that you, the only son whom God gave me, have enabled me to redeem that pledge.'

Bahá'u'lláh has revealed a Tablet of Visitation jointly for Ashraf, Abá-Bašír and Áqá Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí-i-Ṭabíb, who also laid down his

life in the path of Bahá'u'lláh in the city of Zanján. He has also extolled the station of Ashraf and his mother in other Tablets. In one, He has revealed these exalted words concerning Umm-i-Ashraf and her son:

Call thou to mind the behaviour of Ashraf's mother, whose son laid down his life in the Land of Zá (Zanján). He, most certainly, is in the seat of truth, in the presence of One Who is the Most Powerful, the Almighty.

When the infidels, so unjustly, decided to put him to death, they sent and fetched his mother, that perchance she might admonish him, and induce him to recant his faith, and follow in the footsteps of them that have repudiated the truth of God, the Lord of all worlds.

No sooner did she behold the face of her son, than she spoke to him such words as caused the hearts of the lovers of God, and beyond them those of the Concourse on high, to cry out and be sore pained with grief. Truly, thy Lord knoweth what My tongue speaketh. He Himself beareth witness to My words.

And when addressing him she said: 'My son, mine own son! Fail not to offer up thyself in the path of thy Lord. Beware that thou betray not thy faith in Him before Whose face have bowed down in adoration all who are in the heavens and all who are on the earth. Go thou straight on, O my son, and persevere in the path of the Lord, thy God. Haste thee to attain the presence of Him Who is the Well-Beloved of all worlds.'

On her be My blessings, and My mercy, and My praise, and My glory. I Myself shall atone for the loss of her son—a son who now dwelleth within the tabernacle of My majesty and glory, and whose face

beameth with a light that envelopeth with its radiance the Maids of Heaven in their celestial chambers, and beyond them the inmates of My Paradise, and the denizens of the Cities of Holiness. Were any eye to gaze on his face, he would exclaim: 'Lo, this is no other than a noble angel!'

In the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, Bahá'u'lláh refers to Ashraf and his mother in these words:

Ponder upon the conduct of Abá-Baṣír and Siyyid Ashraf-i-Zanjání. They sent for the mother of Ashraf to dissuade her son from his purpose. But she spurred him on until he suffered a most glorious martyrdom.

116. Sulaymán Khán—He carried the Faith to India

To the vast subcontinent of India, whose inhabitants were mainly non-Muslim, Bahá'u'lláh despatched the zealous, untiring and renowned travel-teacher Sulaymán Khán-i-Tunukábání, surnamed by Him Jamálu'd-Dín and usually referred to as Jamál Effendi. He came from the province of Mázindarán in northern Persia. His Bahá'í career began in Tíhrán, where he had moved in order to obtain an important position in government circles. There he found the Faith and became an ardent believer. The fire of the love of Bahá'u'lláh began to bum brightly within his heart, so he changed his plans completely. The first thing he did was to dress as a dervish, which was the most convenient appearance for a person who wished to roam around the country with freedom. Sulaymán Khán had a strong urge to travel to 'Akká and attain the presence of His Lord. So he set off on the journey and travelled to the

Holy Land via Tabríz. He achieved his heart's desire and basked for some time in the sunshine of Bahá'u'lláh's presence.

When the time of his pilgrimage came to an end, he did not return to Persia, but instead travelled extensively and for a long time in the Ottoman territory. Being a man of culture and dressed as he was in the garb of a dervish, he hoped to become a centre of attraction for many souls in that vast country, so that he could teach the Faith to them.

Shaykh Kázim-i-Samandar states that he met Sulaymán Khán in Istanbul in the year AH 1291 (AD 1874) when the latter was travelling around the country after his pilgrimage to the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. Samandar writes:

His [Sulaymán Khán's] intention in putting on the garb of a dervish was to be able to diffuse the divine fragrances and teach the Cause of the Lord of Revelation in those regions. Gradually, after his association with the public, he realized that these people for the time being did not have the capacity to embrace the Faith, and also his activities were not conducive to wisdom. Therefore he returned to 'Akká and attained the presence of the Blessed Perfection. From there he went to India.

Some years before this episode, a few members of the Afnán family had established a trading company and later a printing press bearing the trade mark 'Násirí' in Bombay, India This was the first printing press in the Bahá'í world to produce several volumes of Bahá'í writings. As a result of this enterprise Bombay became a place where Bahá'ís would congregate and to which Persian Bahá'í pilgrims travelled on their way to and from 'Akká. When the Afnáns realized that there was receptivity towards the Faith among the Indians, they sent a petition to Bahá'u'lláh

for a Bahá'í teacher with knowledge and experience to go to India, and offered financial assistance towards this meritorious enterprise.

Their request coincided with the time that Sulaymán Khán was in 'Akká. Bahá'u'lláh chose him for this purpose and instructed him to go to India and teach the Cause of God in that vast subcontinent. With a happy heart and radiant countenance, this old man of God set off for India in his dervish dress, his dignified bearing enhanced by a long cloak and a special headdress which immediately put him in the category of men of culture and leaders of thought. He took with him a relative of his, Mírzá Ḥusayn, as his companion. He arrived in Bombay in 1878, around the time Bahá'u'lláh was in Mazra'ih, and from there began his teaching activities. He travelled extensively throughout India, then went to Ceylon where he encountered great opposition from Buddhist leaders. His companion died in Ceylon. He travelled to Burma for a short visit and continued travel teaching for over ten years. During this period he met many leaders of thought and men of culture from every background and religion. He associated with people with genuine friendship and love; his pleasant manners and good character, his attractive talks and dignified way of listening, all contributed to his success in the teaching field.

People from all walks of life turned to Sulaymán Khán, whom they knew as Jamál Effendi, for enlightenment and spiritual blessing. He published *The Seven Valleys* in Persian and disseminated it among certain people. He attracted many souls to the Cause; some became ardent believers, others remained admirers of the Faith till the end of their lives. Bahá'u'lláh addressed several encouraging Tablets to him, showering His confirmations upon his work and assuring him of His good-

pleasure. To others who had embraced the Faith in India, Bahá'u'lláh also addressed some Tablets.

For over ten years Sulaymán Khán travelled throughout the subcontinent; then he departed for the Holy Land to attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. He was accompanied by two believers whom he had brought under the shadow of the Cause of God. He also took with him a young lad to work as a domestic helper in the household of Bahá'u'lláh. He attained the presence of His Lord in 'Akká for the third time, but his sojourn in the Holy Land was cut very short, for Bahá'u'lláh instructed him to return to India and continue his teaching exploits in that vast country. This time he again took one of the believers to accompany him in his travels, arriving back in India on the eve of Naw-Rúz 1888.

In some of his letters Siyyid Muṣṭafáy-i-Rúmí has named a number of countries and provinces that were visited by Sulaymán Khán. In each place he had sown the seeds of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh in many hearts. Among the places he visited were Ceylon, Punjab, Burma, Malaya, Siam, Java, and the islands of Celebes and Bali. On one of his trips, which lasted one and a half years, he visited Lahore, Punch, Yarkand, Kashmir, Laddakh (Ladakh), Tibet, Balkh and Badakhshán. Siyyid Muṣṭafá has written a brief account about this journey, a summary of which is translated below:

On this journey, according to Jamál Effendi's own account, his feet became frost-bitten so severely owing to the extreme cold that for about six months he was confined to bed in Yarkand. When recovered, he went to Balkh and Badakhshán (both in Afghanistan) but his feet were still wounded and he walked with difficulty. The road between Kashmir and Tibet. where one has to climb high

mountains, was extremely difficult for him to negotiate. All his luggage containing many Bahá'í books and Tablets, which was carried on the backs of bullocks, fell into a river and could not be recovered.

Between Kashmir and Tibet, Jamál Effendi had to encounter great numbers of the Ismá'ílí sect, followers of Áqá Khán-i-Maḥallátí. The majority of these people were bloodthirsty and savage. Because of much ill-treatment, he was disappointed and with a heavy heart ... went to Balkh and Badakhshán in Afghanistan. The people in that area also treated him very badly, so he returned to Kashmir in 1889. From there he resumed his customary trips to various parts of India and later went to Burma ...

After the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, Sulaymán Khán was instructed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to remain on the subcontinent and continue his meritorious activities. As the years went by his achievements became clearly visible, and the foundations he laid in those vast countries and islands remained unassailable with the passage of time. Through his travel teaching many people were attracted to the Cause, especially in the islands of Java where some rulers and dignitaries were influenced by his teaching work. In Burma he achieved greater success. In the city of Mandalay, it is reported that no less than six thousand Muslims were converted to the Faith. But he did not disclose to them that Bahá'u'lláh had ushered in a new Dispensation with new laws and teachings, because they were not ready for them at the time. These people, according to the testimony of some local believers, acknowledged the truth of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, but at the same time were

practising Muslims and carried out the religious laws and rituals of Islám.

In the early days of His Ministry, some time after Sulaymán Khán had ended his services on the subcontinent and had returned to the Holy Land, 'Abdu'l-Bahá sent Mírzá Maḥram, a teacher of the Faith, to Mandalay with clear instructions to announce the independence of the Faith to these people and acquaint them with the laws of the new Dispensation and the abrogation of the laws of Islám. Mírzá Maḥram carried out this mission faithfully. But on hearing such far-reaching deviations from Islámic laws, almost two-thirds of this community angrily rejected the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh and later some of them came together to kill Mírzá Maḥram. One day a great crowd assembled outside his residence and had it not been for the prompt action of a British police officer, they would have succeeded in putting him to death. It is reported that the British officer, who was a Christian, asked Mírzá Maḥram, 'What did you say to these people who have now assembled to take your life?' 'I said', Mírzá Maḥram replied, 'the same thing that Christ said in His day.' Mírzá Maḥram nonetheless succeeded in remaining in Mandalay for some time. He deepened the knowledge of the remainder of the community and enabled them to embrace the Cause of God fully and to carry out its laws and teachings in their daily lives.

As to Sulaymán Khán, he spent altogether about twenty years continually teaching the Cause of God in India and adjoining countries. He succeeded in converting peoples of various religions to the Faith. Among them were Muslims of the Sunní and Shí'ah sects, Ismá'ílís, Hindus and Buddhists. However, the hardships he underwent during

these years, his travelling in climates of extreme heat and cold, riding on bullocks and elephants, passing through so many inhospitable regions and encountering some inhuman opposition, all took their toll on his strength and he returned to 'Akká. This was about five years after the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh.

117. Sulaymán Khán's mission to Persia

After some time in the Holy Land, 'Abdu'l-Bahá sent him on an important mission to Persia. The background to this story goes back to the days of Bahá'u'lláh when two outstanding believers, the Hand of the Cause of God Mullá 'Alí-Akbar, known as Hájí Ákhúnd, and Hájí Abu'l-Hasan, known as Hájí Amín, the Trustee of Bahá'u'lláh, were both cast into the prison of Qazvín in 1891 for about two years. The prime minister at the time was 'Alí-Aşghar Khán, the Amínu's-Sulţán. He was sympathetic to their case, knew that they were unjustly imprisoned, and made kind remarks about them. Bahá'u'lláh was pleased about this and wished 'Abdu'l-Bahá to send a message to him. 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes this in these words:

Not long before His passing, Bahá'u'lláh had said: 'Should someone go to Persia, and manage to convey it, this message must be delivered to Amínu's-Sulţán: "You took steps to help the prisoners; you freely rendered them a befitting service; this service will not be forgotten. Rest assured that it will bring you honor and call down a blessing upon all your affairs. O Amínu's-Sulţán! Every house that is raised up will one day fall to ruin, except the house of God; that will grow more massive and be better guarded day by day. Then serve the Court of God with all your might, that you may discover the way to a home in Heaven, and found an edifice that will endure forever."

Soon after this the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh took place. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was able to carry out Bahá'u'lláh's wishes shortly after the following incident took place in Persia. Early on during the Ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Siyyid Asadu'lláh-i-Qumí, who was then in 'Akká, had a dream: in his dream Bahá'u'lláh placed a few Tablets inside some envelopes,

wrote on them in red ink, handed the envelopes to Siyyid Asadu'lláh and directed him to proceed to Persia. In the morning the Siyyid recounted his dream to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and asked permission to leave for Persia. 'Abdu'l-Bahá warned him that on this journey he would be severely persecuted in a special manner. This prophecy was fulfilled when Siyyid Asadu'lláh reached the city of Ardabíl in the province of Ádhirbáyján. A few of the clergy became aware of his teaching activities in the city and plotted to take his life. One day he was conducted to a place where several men surrounded him and beat him so severely that they thought he was dead. They dragged his body into a disused stable. After some time he regained consciousness but was taken into prison by the orders of the governor. Later he was sent to the prison of Tabríz in which he languished for a few days. Eventually orders arrived that he should be sent to Tìhrán under escort. However, instead of taking him to a prison there, the Prime Minister gave instructions that the Siyyid should be brought to his own home, where he was received with kindness and consideration.

On his way to Tìhrán, while escorted by the soldiers, Siyyid Asadu'lláh recalled the words of Bahá'u'lláh a few years earlier when on a certain occasion he had attained His presence in the Mansion of Mazra'ih in AH 1306 (AD 1888–9). He said to him, 'Asadu'lláh, I want to send you to visit Nasiri'd-Dín Sháh, but remember that he does not kill Bahá'ís any more. Do you wish to go?' And Siyyid Asadu'lláh bowed as a sign of his submission to his Lord. Now he was a prisoner on his way to the capital and he knew that somehow he was going to meet the Sovereign:

Amínu's-Sulṭán came to the prisoner's assistance and, in his own office, provided Asadu'lláh with a sanctuary. One day when the

Prime Minister was ill, Nasiri'd-Dín Sháh arrived to visit him. The Minister then explained the situation, and lavished praise upon his captive; so much so that the Sháh, as he left, showed great kindness to Asadu'lláh, and spoke words of consolation. This, when at an earlier time, the captive would have been strung up at once to adorn some gallows-tree, and shot down with a gun.

The Prime Minister's act of kindness in harbouring Siyyid Asadu'lláh prompted 'Abdu'l-Bahá to carry out the wishes of Bahá'u'lláh and send him a message. The person to whom 'Abdu'l-Bahá entrusted this task was Sulaymán Khán.

After a time Amínu's-Sultán lost the Sovereign's favor. Hated, in disgrace, he was banished to the city of Qum. Thereupon this servant dispatched Sulaymán Khán to Persia, carrying a prayer and a missive written by me. The prayer besought God's aid and bounty and succor for the fallen Minister, so that he might, from that corner of oblivion, be recalled to favor. In the letter we clearly stated: 'Prepare to return to Tíhrán. Soon will God's help arrive; the light of grace will shine on you again; with full authority again, you will find yourself free, and Prime Minister. This is your reward for the efforts you exerted on behalf of a man who was oppressed.' That letter and that prayer are today in the possession of the family of Amínu's-Sultán.

From Tíhrán, Sulaymán Khán journeyed to Qum, and according to his instructions went to live in a cell in the shrine of the Immaculate. The relatives of Amínu's-Sultán came to visit there; Sulaymán Khán inquired after the fallen Minister and expressed the wish to meet him. When the Minister learned of this, he sent for Sulaymán Khán. Placing all his trust in God, Sulaymán Khán hastened to the

Minister's house and, meeting him in private, presented the letter from 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The Minister rose, and received the letter with extreme respect. Then addressing the Khán he said: 'I had given up hope. If this longing is fulfilled, I will arise to serve; I will preserve and uphold the friends of God.' Then he expressed his gratitude, indebtedness and joy, and added, 'Praise be to God, I hope again; I feel that by His aid, my dream will come true.'

In brief, the Minister pledged himself to serve the friends, and Sulaymán Khán took his leave. The Minister then desired to give him a sum of money to defray the expenses of his journey, but Sulaymán Khán refused and, despite the Minister's insistence, would accept nothing. The Khán had not yet reached the Holy Land on his return journey when Amínu's-Sultán was recalled from exile and immediately summoned to the Premiership again. He assumed the position and functioned with full authority; and at first he did indeed support the believers, but toward the end, in the case of the Yazd martyrdoms, he was neglectful.

He neither helped nor protected the sufferers in any way, nor would he listen to their repeated pleas, until all of them were put to death. Accordingly he too was dismissed, a ruined man; that flag which had flown so proudly was reversed, and that hoping heart despaired.

Before embarking on this journey Sulaymán Khán was advised by 'Abdu'l-Bahá not to divulge to anyone the nature of the mission with which he was entrusted. It took only a month after receiving 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablet before Amínu's-Sultán was again installed as Prime Minister and the promise of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was fulfilled. Soon after this happened, Sulaymán Khán in his enthusiasm made a mistake and

intimated the whole story to the proud and egotistical Jamál-i-Burújirdí, the notoriously unfaithful Bahá'í teacher who soon after became a Covenant-breaker. When Jamál heard of the success of the mission and the reverence shown by Amínu's-Sultán for the Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the fire of jealousy raged in his heart and prompted him to establish contact with the Prime Minister in order to claim credit for himself. He made preparations and soon a meeting took place between the two. The satanic influence which Jamál-i-Burújirdí exerted upon the Prime Minister in this interview was fatal.

There is nothing more damaging to a soul than meeting a person who is infected with the disease of Covenant-breaking. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated that the reason for Amínu's-Sultán's failure to keep his promise of support for the Faith was twofold. One was the chilling effect of meeting Jamál-i-Burújirdí, the other was pride in his position of supreme authority.

As for Sulaymán Khán, he returned to the Holy Land, but it did not take long before he passed away to the realms above. This was in the year AH 1316. He was buried in 'Akká, having achieved everlasting renown as the spiritual conqueror of the subcontinent of India and of Burma.

118. Siyyid Muştafáy-i-Rúmí—He served the Cause with distinction in Burma

In the city of Madras Sulaymán Khán came across Siyyid Muştafáy-i-Rúmí, a youth of about twenty years whose parents were originally from 'Iráq. He was deeply attached to Islám and diligently observed every religious rite. This youth became greatly attracted to Sulaymán

Khán whose charming personality and radiance of spirit had left an abiding impression on him. Siyyid Muṣṭafá listened with great interest to Sulaymán Khán's explanations about religion in general and the Bahá'í Faith in particular. He became highly attracted to the Person of Bahá'u'lláh as he sat spellbound, listening to the discourses of his new-found teacher. Soon Siyyid Muṣṭafá recognized the truth of the Cause and became filled with excitement at the knowledge that the Supreme Manifestation of God had at last revealed Himself to mankind. He was the most illustrious of Jamál Effendi's converts in the sub continent of India. He served the Cause with distinction, mainly in Burma, and was posthumously named by Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Faith, as one of the Hands of the Cause of God. After his death, Shoghi Effendi, in a cable to the Bahá'í world, referred to him as a 'DISTINGUISHED PIONEER' of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, a 'STAUNCH AND HIGH-MINDED SOUL', the record of whose 'SUPERB SERVICES IN BOTH TEACHING AND ADMINISTRATIVE FIELDS SHED LUSTRE ON BOTH THE HEROIC AND FORMATIVE AGES OF BAHÁ'Í DISPENSATION', and whose resting-place 'SHOULD BE REGARDED FOREMOST SHRINE IN THE COMMUNITY OF BURMESE BELIEVERS'.

119. Ḥakím Masíḥ—The first Jewish believer

The first of the Jewish community to recognize the truth of the Mission of Bahá'u'lláh in Persia was a notable physician named Masíḥ (Messiah) referred to as Ḥakím Masíḥ. Being highly skilled in his profession, he was appointed as a physician to the court of Muḥammad Sháh, and when the Sháh made a journey to 'Iráq, Ḥakím Masíḥ accompanied him. When in Baghḍád, he learnt that Ṭáhirih was staying in the home of one

of the early believers, and was holding discussions with the divines in the city. He went there to see what was being said. No sooner had he heard the utterances of Ṭáhirih addressed to the company of divines, and witnessed their helplessness to refute her proofs in support of her newly found Faith, than he was captivated by her powerful arguments and sheer personality. Although he was not allowed to enter into any discussions, Ḥakím Masíḥ was very curious to find out how Ṭáhirih had acquired such eloquence and powers which bordered on the supernatural.

Shaykh Kázim-Samandar has recorded the following in his memoirs:

I met Ḥakím Masíḥ who was of Jewish descent. He was the first among the Jews to enter the community of the friends (i.e. Bahá'ís). It surprised me when I discovered that he was friendly, faithful, full of enthusiasm and love; and so said to him, 'There is a large gap between the Faith of Moses and this great Cause, how did you make this long and glorious journey and arrive at this abode?' He said, 'My visit to Baghdád coincided with the time that Ṭáhirih was in that city. Through some circumstances I was present at some of the meetings where she conversed with the divines. I was astonished and awestruck by the way she talked, by the manner in which she conducted her conversations, and by the power of her utterances. I became attracted and began to meditate and decided to investigate this Cause and deepen my knowledge of it. I made some enquiries in Baghdád and later in other places, until I attained my heart's desire.

Some years after meeting Ṭáhirih in Baghdád, Ḥakím Masíḥ met Ismu'lláhu'l-Aṣdaq, a meeting brought about by Providence. The Ismu'lláh had been arrested because of his allegiance to the Faith, put in

chains and brought to Ṭīhrán under escort. This cruel act was carried out by order of the Governor of Khurásán who was enforcing an edict issued by no less than eighteen divines of Islám in that province. The Ismu'lláh was forced to take with him his youngest son, Ibn-i-Aşdaq, who was a mere child at the time. Two other believers were also chained and taken to Ṭīhrán with him.

The intention was to execute them in the capital city. Instead, the Government ordered that they be imprisoned in the Síyah-Chal. Father and child were chained together and kept in that terrible dungeon for about two years and four months.

The hardships of prison life took their toll and the young child became seriously ill. The chief gaoler, a certain Mashhadí 'Alí, was a kind person and sent for a physician. But no physician could be found who would be willing to treat a patient who was a Bábí. In desperation he called on Hakím Masíh who was Jewish. He accepted and immediately went to the prison.

For a period of two months he regularly attended the child until he recovered from his illness. At the same time, having been so deeply impressed by Ṭáhirih, this gave him the opportunity to learn about the Faith from an illustrious believer. Even after his patient had fully recovered he used to spend hours in the prison, sitting at the Ismu'lláh's feet and learning about the Faith. Soon after, he became a believer fully aware that the Promised One of the Old Testament, the 'Everlasting Faith', the Lord of Hosts, had manifested Himself. When Bahá'u'lláh was informed of His conversion, He revealed an exalted Tablet in his honour. He has revealed other Tablets for him too, but unfortunately most of these were destroyed. This is because in those

days the believers used to protect their Bahá'í materials by hiding them underground or inside the walls, so that they might not fall into the hands of the enemy. Sadly, when unearthed, the Tablets of Ḥakím Masíḥ were found to have been destroyed by moisture.

In one of these Tablets, Bahá'u'lláh urges Ḥakím Masíḥ to be steadfast in the Cause of God so that he may not be shaken by the winds of opposition which were blowing from the direction of the enemies. He states that the people were following the dictates of their passions and corrupt desires, and directs him to counsel such people to abandon their evil ways and turn to their God. Bahá'u'lláh, in this Tablet, showers His favours upon Ḥakím Masíḥ and affirms that He has bestowed upon him a great station. Ḥakím Masíḥ taught the Faith to his family who became ardent believers. Notable among his descendants was Dr. Luṭfu'lláh Ḥakím, his youngest grandson, who served the Master and Shoghi Effendi with exemplary devotion and was elected to the Universal House of Justice in 1963 when that Supreme Body of the Faith came into being for the first time.

The light of the new Faith of God which shone forth in the heart of Ḥakím Masíḥ illumined many more among his co-religionists in Persia. At first, a few embraced the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh in Hamadán and Káshán and soon great numbers from the Jewish community joined the Faith and swelled the ranks of the believers in Persia. There are many Tablets revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in honour of the believers of Jewish background.

120. Fáris—The first Christian believer

A certain Christian physician, a Syrian by the name of Fáris, who had been put in the prison in Alexandria, Egypt for financial reasons, became attracted to Nabíl-i-A'zam, who had been sent to Egypt by Bahá'u'lláh on a mission. The Iranian Consul-General in Cairo brought false accusations against him and had him arrested. At first Fáris tried to convert Nabíl to Christianity. But instead Nabíl gave his companion the tidings of the coming of the Father and the advent of the Day of God. He disclosed to his eyes the light of the new-born Faith and imparted to him the knowledge of His revelation.

Soon, as a result of Nabíl's teaching work inspired by his spirit of detachment from this world, and aided by his profound and intimate knowledge of the message of Bahá'u'lláh, Fáris became assured of the truth of the Cause. The fire of faith began to burn fiercely in his heart, and the love of Bahá'u'lláh possessed his whole being. He was filled with joy and ecstasy, the gloom of the prison life vanished and he found himself for the first time in the midst of paradise.

While Nabíl was in Cairo prison, one night Bahá'u'lláh appeared to him in a dream and assured him that after eighty-one days the hardships of prison life would come to an end. That day fell on Thursday, 27 August 1868, and it was on that day that the significance of Nabíl's dream came to light. Around the time of sunset he went on the roof of the prison and began to watch people passing by. Not long after he had settled in a corner on the roof, to his amazement Nabíl sighted Áqá Muḥammad Ibráhím-i-Názir (caterer) among the passers-by, escorted by a guard; Áqá Muḥammad Ibráhím used to do the work of catering for Bahá'u'lláh and His companions in Adrianople. Now in Alexandria he had left the ship to purchase provisions for the journey. Not knowing anything

about Bahá'u'lláh's exile to 'Akká, the astonished Nabíl called out to Muḥammad Ibráhím who succeeded in persuading his guard to allow him to visit his friend in the prison. There he told him of the fate of Bahá'u'lláh and His companions and pointed to the ship which carried the exiles and could be seen from the prison.

This amazing incident caused great agitation in the heart of Nabíl, for he found himself so close to his Beloved and yet so far. When Fáris Effendi was informed, he too became highly excited but frustrated at not being able to attain the presence of His Lord.

That night neither of the two could sleep. Both decided to write a letter to Bahá'u'lláh and the next morning Fáris Effendi made arrangements with a certain Christian youth, Constantine, who was a watch-maker in the city, to deliver their letters to Bahá'u'lláh on board the ship. They both stood on the roof of the prison to watch the ship, turned their hearts to Bahá'u'lláh and communed with His spirit with much devotion and love.

After a short while they were heartbroken to see the ship steaming away before Constantine could gain admittance. But amazingly, after a few minutes the ship stopped and Constantine, who was in a rowing boat, reached it and went aboard. He handed the envelope to one of the attendants who took it to Bahá'u'lláh. The news of Nabíl's whereabouts, and especially the letter of Fáris, which was read aloud by Bahá'u'lláh to those who had assembled in His presence, created great excitement on board the ship. Bahá'u'lláh revealed a Tablet in honour of Nabíl in which He bestowed His bounties and blessings upon Fáris, and assured him that soon he would be released from the prison. He then called the messenger to His presence, and handed him the Tablet with loving

kindness and affection. 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Purest Branch also sent some gifts to Nabíl.

This short visit made an abiding impression upon Constantine. Having come face to face for a brief period with the Supreme Manifestation of God, and seen a glimpse of His glory, he left the ship overwhelmed and awestruck. When he came to deliver the parcel to Fáris Effendi, he was in such a state of excitement that he was heard shouting aloud, 'By God, I have seen the face of the Heavenly Father.' In a state of ecstasy and rapture Fáris embraced Constantine and kissed his eyes which had gazed upon the countenance of his Lord.

The Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh was in the handwriting of His amanuensis Mírzá Áqá Ján in the form of 'Revelation Writing'. It imparted a new spirit of love and dedication to Fáris; it fanned into flame the fire of faith which had been ignited in his heart by Nabíl in that gloomy prison. As promised by Bahá'u'lláh, Fáris was released from prison three days later. After his release he arose in the propagation of the Faith among the people. Nabíl was also freed soon after, but being ordered to leave Egypt he proceeded to the Holy Land in pursuit of his Lord.

Bahá'u'lláh became so happy on receiving Fáris's moving letter that He wanted to share it with the believers. On His instructions, therefore, part of Fáris's letter was copied and sent to some individuals in Persia, that they might read and ponder upon the creative power of the Word of God which is capable of transforming the human heart and leading it to the world of the spirit.

This is a summary of part of Fáris's letter:

O Thou the Glory of the Most Glorious and the Exalted of the Most Exalted! I write this letter and present it to the One who has been subjected to the same sufferings as Jesus Christ ... It is incumbent upon us to offer praise and thanksgiving to God, the All-glorious, the All-bountiful. And now I beseech Thee to grant me and my kindred a portion of the ocean of Thy bounty, O Thou who art the Ever-living, the Self-subsisting and the Wellspring of Purity and Sanctity.

I entreat Thee by the mystery of Thy most joyful Being, by Thy Prophet who conversed with Thee (Moses), by Thy Son (Jesus), by Thy Friend (Muḥammad) and by Thy Herald (The Báb) who for the love of Thee offered up His life in Thy path, not to deprive me and my family, these poor ones, from beholding the glory of Thy countenance.

O Thou who hast endured for our sake sufferings and tribulations. Strengthen our faith, choose us for Thy service and accept us as martyrs in Thy path so that our blood may be shed for the love of Thee. We are weak and ignorant, confer upon us Thy glory so that we may not be among the losers. Grant us the distinction of love and faith, and cleanse our hearts from whatsoever runs counter to Thy good pleasure. Aid us to forget our own selves so that we may seek no rest in Thy service except by Thy leave and pleasure.

O Thou who knowest the secrets of the hearts! Art Thou sailing in an ark made of wood? O how I long to be a part of that vessel, for it is blessed to be a carrier of the Lord. O, the surging sea! is thy restlessness because of the fear of the glorious Lord? O Alexandria! art thou grief-stricken because He who is the Ever-living, the All-wise, is leaving thy shores? O, the desolate city of 'Akká! Thou art

clapping thy hands in fervent joy and art in a state of rapture and ecstasy, for the Lord in His great glory will bless thy land with His footsteps...

Referring to Fáris's recognition of His station, Bahá'u'lláh states that God transformed his heart and created him anew, and that such a creation is greater in the sight of God than the creation of earth and heaven.

Fáris was probably the first Christian to embrace the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. Through the radiance of Nabíl's indomitable faith, and helped by his own knowledge of the Arabic language and of the Bible, Fáris became a faithful believer with a deep understanding of the station of Bahá'u'lláh.

Fáris devoted his time to teaching the Cause among his own people. The *Lawḥ-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Tablet) otherwise known in the West as the 'Tablet to the Christians', is reputed to have been revealed in his honour, but this cannot be substantiated. Up till now, it has not been possible to ascertain for whom this Tablet was revealed.

After this extraordinary contact which was made at Alexandria between Bahá'u'lláh and the two Bahá'í prisoners, the steamer headed towards its destination, and after three days it arrived at Haifa in the early morning of Monday 31 August.

121. Suhráb-i-Púr-Kávús and Kay-Khusraw-i-Khudádád—The first Zoroastrian believers

The introduction and growth of the Cause among the followers of Zoroaster was no less spectacular and far-reaching. The following story

is related by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

. . . they relate that the possessions of a certain Bábí in Kashan were plundered, and his household scattered and dispersed. They stripped him naked and scourged him, defiled his beard, mounted him face backwards on an ass, and paraded him through the streets and bazaars with the utmost cruelty, to the sound of drums, trumpets, guitars and tambourines. A certain guebre (Zoroastrian) who knew absolutely naught of the world or its denizens chanced to be seated apart in a comer of a caravansaray. When the clamour of the people rose high he hastened into the street, and, becoming cognizant of the offence and the offender, and the cause of his public disgrace and punishment in full detail, he fell to making search, and that very day entered the society of the Bábís, saying, 'This very ill-usage and public humiliation is a proof of truth and the very best of arguments. Had it not been thus it might have been that a thousand years would have passed ere one like me became informed.'

Hájí Mu'ínu's-Salṭanih, a historian from Tabríz, has stated that the believer who was persecuted in the above account was a certain Hájí Muḥammad-Riḍá, a merchant of Káshán, and that the Zoroastrian who acknowledged the truth of the Faith of the Báb was Suhráb-i-Púr-Kávús. Unfortunately, there is not much information available about him.

The first to believe among the Zoroastrians during the ministry of Bahá'u'lláh is reputed to be Kay-Khusraw-i-Khudádád and the story of his becoming aware of the truth of the Faith is similar to that of Suhráb-i-Púr-Kávús. Kay-Khusraw, a native of Yazd, was also living in Káshán as a merchant. He saw one of the believers tortured and put to death. This harrowing scene evoked in him an urge to investigate the Cause and as

a result he became a follower. Some early believers among the Zoroastrians who came in contact with him in Káshán owe their allegiance to the Cause through his teaching work.

Kay-Khusraw-i-Khudádád was well-known in the Zoroastrian community and was a member of a special 'Council of Zoroastrians' set up by Mánikchí Şáhib. The latter went from India to Persia with a view to helping his co-religionists in that country and obtaining more freedom for them. He met Náşiri'd-Dín Sháh and succeeded in securing a royal decree absolving Zoroastrians from payment of a certain religious tax which for years had been imposed upon religious minorities in Persia. He also invited a number of prominent Zoroastrians to serve on the above Council which was recognized by the Sháh.

The Council of Zoroastrians which was set up by Mánikchí Şáhib consisted of the most prominent Zoroastrians of Yazd. At one time there were nineteen councillors, six of whom became Bahá'ís. As we have already mentioned, Kay-Khusraw-i-Khudádád, the first believer, was among them. Others who joined the Faith were men of learning or people held in high esteem by the community. Notable among them was the renowned Ustád Javán-Mard, the Secretary of the Council. He was a teacher by profession and became a devoted believer.

Shír-Mard was the first Zoroastrian Bahá'í to be buried instead of having his body disposed of in the Dakhmih as was the custom among his people. Other Bahá'ís from the Zoroastrian background followed his example and built a special Bahá'í Cemetery. This action provoked fierce opposition from the community. The Bahá'í Cemetery was attacked and some of the graves were desecrated. This opposition was

not over the issue of burials only. The mere act of conversion to a new Faith, something which had never happened to Zoroastrians since the early days of Islám, provoked the wrath of the high priests against the newly converted Bahá'ís who openly proclaimed to the community that the Sháh-Bahrám, the Promised One of the Zoroastrians, had been manifested in the person of Bahá'u'lláh. Soon persecutions began, sometimes with the tacit approval of the Muslim clergy. A certain Master Khudábakhsh, a distinguished member of the Council of Zoroastrians and a school teacher of wide repute, although not officially a Bahá'í, was shot dead because of his sympathy and generous support for the Bahá'ís. Others were persecuted in different ways. But soon the number of converts to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh grew, and to the astonishment of both Muslims and Zoroastrians, a great many families acknowledged the station of Bahá'u'lláh and swelled the ranks of the believers especially in Yazd and its surrounding villages.

122. Mírzá 'Azízu'lláh—“I heard the announcement that the Lord of Hosts ... hath appeared”

The story of the life of Mírzá 'Azízu'lláh and his services to the Cause of God are interesting and inspiring indeed. He was of Jewish descent. His father, living in the city of Mashhad, was a learned man and well versed in the Old Testament and other religious books. He used to teach the Old Testament to the Jewish youth. Pure-hearted and with great insight into religious matters, he recognized the truth of the Faith of Islám and secretly declared his conversion to the Muslim authorities. With the exception of his wife, no other members of the Jewish community, not even his own children, were aware of his conversion to Islám. This was

about sixteen years before the birth of the Bábí Faith. In particular, he advised his family to watch for the coming of the Lord of Hosts, as he had discovered according to the Holy Books that His advent was at hand.

A few years later, in 1838, some tragic incident resulted in the massacre of about thirty-five Jews in the city of Mashhad by the Muslims. All the surviving Jews took refuge in the homes of Muslim clergy and in order to save their lives, agreed to accept the Faith of Islám. They were officially converted by the clergy, but, of course, in secret they practised the Jewish Faith. Although their lives had been saved, the Jews newly converted to Islám continued to live in a separate quarter of the city and were not fully integrated with the Muslim community. They were referred to as the 'newcomers' and were still persecuted by the Muslims.

Mírzá 'Azízu'lláh lived in this community. He went to a Muslim school as a child, but soon left it. Instead, he learnt the Old Testament, became fully acquainted with the Jewish Faith, and practised it in secret. Although his education was elementary, he became a successful merchant and emerged as a man of ability and enterprise.

The first time he heard the word 'Bahá'u'lláh' was when one of his brothers, who had become a Bahá'í, mentioned the story of the martyrdom of Badí' to him. But Mírzá 'Azízu'lláh, being very staunch in the Jewish Faith, did not show any interest, and the brother did not pursue the matter any further.

Some time passed and the two brothers had to undertake a series of journeys together on business. In the course of these journeys Mírzá 'Azízu'lláh decided to polish up his elementary knowledge of reading

and writing Persian. Being a talented man, it did not take him very long to become proficient as a reader.

One day when his brother was out he took a Bahá'í book and began to read it. He was moved by what he read, but discounted the whole idea of a new Faith. Then one night he had a dream, of which he has written this account in his memoirs:

In my dream, I heard the announcement that the Lord of Hosts, the Promised One of all ages, had appeared, and that He was inspecting the company of the Prophets and all their followers. I went along immediately to the appointed place. I saw a vast place on which multitudes of people were assembled in lines. Each prophet along with his followers was seated facing the Qiblih. I was surprised by the extraordinary light and vision which was given to my eyes, as I could easily see all the people lined up in that vast area.

Opposite the multitudes and facing them, a venerable figure was seated upon a chair uttering some words. I was standing at the end of a line. His blessed Person was over fifty years of age, had a long black beard and was wearing a green Táj sewn with green silk thread. With His blessed head-dress similar to the one that Bahá'u'lláh used to wear. With His blessed hand He signalled me to go to Him. With my hands I gesticulated to say, how can I come with all these crowds in front of me? He waved His hands to the multitudes and they all prostrated themselves on the ground. He then beckoned me to go forward. I was not sure at this point whether it was to me or someone else that He was signalling. He then repeated His command. This time I went forward immediately, stepping on the backs of people who lay prostrate in front of me,

until I reached Him. I prostrated myself at His feet and kissed them. He then helped me up to my feet with His hand and recited the verse of the *Qur'án*: 'Blessed be God, the most excellent Creator!'

Although this dream made a great impression on Mírzá 'Azízu'lláh, he still remained steadfast in his Jewish faith until some time later when he was converted to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh by Hájí 'Abdu'l-Majíd, the father of Badí'. Soon after embracing the Faith, Mírzá 'Azízu'lláh and his brother journeyed to 'Akká to attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. This was in the year 1876, his first pilgrimage to the Holy Land. When the appointed time arrived, Mírzá 'Azízu'lláh was ushered into the room of Bahá'u'lláh in 'Akká. As soon as his eyes saw the person of Bahá'u'lláh he was awestruck to find himself in the presence of the One whom he had seen some years before in that memorable dream, wearing the same clothes and the same green head-dress. With all the devotion and love in his heart Mírzá 'Azízu'lláh promptly prostrated himself at the feet of his Lord. Bahá'u'lláh bent down, helped him up to his feet and recited the verse of the *Qur'án*: 'Blessed be God, the most excellent Creator!'

During his stay in 'Akká, Mírzá 'Azízu'lláh attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá many times. As a result, he became endowed with a new spirit of faith and assurance. The first time that he attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, he witnessed the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablets and heard His voice as He revealed them. This experience left an abiding impression upon him. The only regret he had was that he could not read Arabic and hence was unable to fully appreciate the Holy Writings. This was because he had left school so young and had missed the opportunity to learn Arabic. He felt

remorseful over this. Someone in 'Akká volunteered to teach him Arabic, but he declined the offer as he had no time or patience to learn a language so vast in vocabulary and so complex in grammar.

The next day when he attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, he approached Him by way of the heart and begged that through His bountiful favours, He might enable him to understand Arabic without going through the usual method of learning the language. His wish was granted, and Mírzá 'Azízu'lláh one day became very excited when he found himself reading and understanding the *Qur'án* and the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh in Arabic.

123. Mírzá 'Azízu'lláh—He gave the message to Baron Rothschild and Leo Tolstoy

Concerning the special mission given him by Bahá'u'lláh during his last pilgrimage to 'Akká, to proclaim the Faith to Baron Rothschild, who could be considered as the leader of the Jewish people at the time, Mírzá 'Azízu'lláh has recorded the following in his memoirs:

After leaving the Holy Land in 1891, I arrived in Istanbul. There I knew a certain broker who had the knowledge of the French language. I asked him if he would teach me a little French every day, so that on my journey to meet Rothschild I would be able to converse a little in that language. In the meantime, I composed a letter to Rothschild which was rendered into French. In this communication I informed him of the coming of Bahá'u'lláh and of the fulfilment of the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the advent of the Lord of Hosts who had revealed Himself on Mount Carmel at this time. I

explained that the followers of Bahá'u'lláh were inviting us to embrace His Cause, adducing proofs and demonstrating that prophecies have been fulfilled. I reminded him that he was considered as the head of the Jewish People. Therefore, I asked him to refer this matter to the Jewish divines in Jerusalem so that they might respond to this question. I explained further that either one had to nullify the proofs and the prophecies of the Old Testament or to accept this blessed Cause. After sending this communication I began to learn French. In those days, Áqá Siyyid Aḥmad-i-Afnán was in Istanbul. (A member of the Afnán family who ran a business in Istanbul.) He was very curious to find out the reason for my learning French at this time in my life, and for what purpose I was thinking of going to Paris and London. But since the visit to Rothschild was a confidential matter I did not disclose it...

Unfortunately the memoirs of Mírzá 'Azízu'lláh are not conclusive in that there is no mention of whether he succeeded in meeting the Baron or not.

Another interesting mission which Mírzá 'Azízu'lláh undertook during 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ministry was to visit Leo Tolstoy, the famous Russian philosopher and writer. Tolstoy was already informed of the Revelations of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, and had praised Their teachings. Mírzá 'Azízu'lláh succeeded in meeting him in September 1902 and in the course of an interview spoke to him at length on the history and the teachings of the Faith and explained the station of Bahá'u'lláh as the Promised One of all ages. The detailed discussions, questions and answers in this interview and the favourable response of Tolstoy, who

believed that the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh would spread throughout the world are all recorded in his memoirs.

124. Ḥájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir-i-Málmírí—Teacher of the truth of the Revelation

The news of the conversion of Mullá Muḥammad-i-Manṣhadi, a mujtahid of Yazd, to the Faith by Ḥájí Muḥammad-Tahir-i-Málmírí created a sensation in Manṣhád. Some were dismayed, some bewildered, and many were angered. The chiefs of the village who were Mullá Muḥammad's admirers and friends asked him to help them overcome their perplexity and confusion. In response to their request, he arranged a meeting to be held in the house of one of the chiefs and asked Ḥájí Muḥammad-Tahir to go with him and speak to them about the Faith.

In his memoirs Ḥájí Muḥammad-Tahir writes:

...Jináb-i-Mullá Muḥammad came and told me what had happened. He said that he had promised them [the chiefs of the village] that tomorrow afternoon he and I would go to the home of Ḥájí Qurbán-'Alí ... to speak about the Faith. I agreed to go, although I knew that such an action was unwise. But since he had promised to attend, I felt that I had to go, otherwise he might become somewhat shaken in his faith. In the meantime Mullá 'Alí-Akbar had become informed of this arrangement and had advised the chiefs that it was not wise for them to take part in discussions on their own. He told them that he intended to attend ... and bring with him a number of clergymen.

The next day we went to the appointed place where we found about thirty-five people present. They included a number of 'ulamá and dignitaries of Manshád, all of them opposed to the Faith ... After a short while they suggested that we might begin discussion. I said to that gathering, 'You had better appoint one person from among yourselves to take part in the discussions and the rest just listen.' Unanimously they chose Mullá 'Alí-Akbar. I was absolutely sure that this meeting would bring about great trouble because a meeting such as this had never been held in Yazd or perhaps in any other place.

Knowing that the spokesman for the divines was an argumentative person who distorted the truth and had no regard for logic or fairness, Hájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir approached the subject in a manner that completely discomfited his opponent and confounded him throughout. He spoke for over four hours during which he recounted the history of past religions and demonstrated the truth of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh through rational proofs as well as the *Qur'án* and traditions of Islám. Concerning that meeting Hájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir writes:

That day God vouchsafed such confirmation and ascendancy that the Cause of God was proclaimed and its proof established for all. On that day Jináb-i-Mullá Muḥammad was transformed into a ball of fire. He was so enraptured that it is impossible for me to describe it...

That same evening, when the meeting was ended, a number of divines ... prepared a document, put their seals to it and sent it to Shaykh Muḥammad-Hasan-i-Sabzivári in Yazd. In this document they testified that Hájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir had come to Manshád and converted Mullá Muḥammad who had openly proclaimed ... the truth

of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh from the pulpit and had now withdrawn altogether from the mosque. They also stated that Hájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir had been openly teaching the Bahá'í Faith in a public meeting at the home of Hájí Qurbán-'Alí. They expressed the view that the situation in Manṣḥád was out of hand and asked for instructions.

Upon receiving this news Shaykh Muḥammad-Ḥasan wrote the death warrant of this servant, and took it along with the sealed document to Hájí Mu'addilu's-Salṭanih, the Governor of Yazd. Consequently two officials were sent to Manṣḥád to arrest this servant. It was, however, providential that I had left for Mihríz a day before the officials arrived...On hearing the news, the believers in Manṣḥád immediately dispatched a messenger...who reached Mihríz in time to warn me. Together with this friend we set off for the city [Yazd] ...There I stayed for some time...out of sight...in the home of Ustád 'Alí-'Askar-i-Shá'-Báf...

During the time that he stayed in this house an event of great consequence took place. Concerning this he writes:

One day Ustád 'Alí-'Askar said to me 'There is a Zoroastrian youth by the name of Bahrám [later known as Mullá Bahrám] who comes to the door periodically to sell beetroot to us. He is a very nice young man. If it meets with your approval, I will bring him in to talk with you next time he calls here.' I said, 'Very well' ... A few days later Jináb-i-Mullá Bahrám came... and Ustád 'Alí-'Askar brought him to me.

Up to that time no one from among the Zoroastrians [in Yazd] had accepted the Faith. Indeed, the Bahá'ís could not even imagine that these people would embrace the Faith, because they were not

involved in the early history and events associated with the Manifestations of God and were not included in any discussions concerning the Faith. However, that day I spoke about the Faith to Mullá Bahrám. He came the next day, and after a few days he acknowledged the truth of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. As a result, his blessed person attained such a state of joy and eagerness that it is difficult to describe. He became restless, and every time he visited us he showed much tenderness and often wept aloud. He then brought with him [a fellow Zoroastrian] Jináb-i-Áqá Rustam-i-Khursand, who also embraced the Faith after several meetings.

Soon after his conversion to the Faith, Mullá Bahrám rose up with heroism and devotion to teach his fellow Zoroastrians. It was through his dedicated efforts that a great many from among his co-religionists joined the Faith. Later, 'Abdu'l-Bahá conferred upon him the title of Akhtar-i-Khávarí (Star of the East).

After three months of seclusion in the home of Ustá-'Alí-'Askar, Hájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir left for the village of Mihríz. But somehow the enemies discovered his whereabouts and made another attempt to arrest him and have him executed. But the hand of Bahá'u'lláh protected him, and he left just in time. Eventually he had to leave the Province of Yazd until the situation had changed.

125. Hájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir-i-Málmírí—The crowning glory of his life was attaining the presence of Bahá'u'lláh

Hájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir-i-Málmírí lived, laboured, and passed away in the ancient town of Yazd, Írán, a town notorious for its religious

fanaticism and its large number of mullás. He was born there about the year 1852, which witnessed the inception of the mission of Bahá'u'lláh, and lived there long enough to see the centenary celebration of that Holy Year. Known to almost every citizen, no other Bahá'í in Yazd was so dearly loved and admired by the friends, and so bitterly denounced and insulted by the foes.

Fortified by his staunch faith, animated by his intense desire to serve the Cause, sustained by the guiding Hand of Bahá'u'lláh, undaunted in the face of dire sufferings, his life and conduct served to perpetuate the spirit of the apostolic age to which he belonged. His life was wholly dedicated to the Cause. The idea uppermost in his mind always was that of teaching. No power, no preoccupation, no conventional matter of daily life could ever deflect him from this high purpose. His teaching exploits were so intensive that today, a large section of the Bahá'í community of Yazd owes to his life-long effort its allegiance to the Cause.

Hájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir was a brilliant debater and speaker. It is difficult to convey the pleasure one derived from his inspiring conversation which ranged from humorous trifles to weighty pronouncements. His knowledge of the history and literature of the great world religions was prodigious. He could recite almost half the *Qur'án* by heart, as well as hundreds of recorded Muslim traditions. Also he was extremely well-versed in the Bible and the books of other religions. The source from which he drew his energy seemed to be inexhaustible. He could speak for hours about religious matters without either feeling tired himself or boring his listeners. Rather they were fascinated by the gaiety of his conversation and by the ripple of his ready and eloquent tongue. Even

the enemies of the Cause were silenced and subdued by his charm and dignity. On several occasions fanatical persons, intent on carrying out sinister plots against his life, came to his fireside meetings in the guise of seekers of truth, carrying weapons in their pockets. After coming in contact with his dominating personality, however, they changed their minds altogether, and strangely enough, a couple of them eventually became ardent believers.

But Ḥájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir's talks were not always honeyed. There are few, if any, among the leading Muslim priests in Yazd who, at one time or another, have not felt the sting of his taunts and retorts or were not drawn into his entangling net, only to emerge with their wings clipped, utterly confounded by the amazing force of his argument.

At the height of his teaching career, almost every evening he used to attend fireside meetings which usually lasted till after midnight. Whenever he was free at night or returned home rather early, he would keep awake well into the small hours of the morning, either pacing the compound of his modest house in prayer and meditation or sitting up to read or write.

His pen was as ready and able as his tongue, and his voluminous writings are direct, lively and inspiring. Famous among his works is the *History of the Martyrs of Yazd*, a moving portrayal of one of the most revolting episodes in Bahá'í history. His *Memoirs*, written during the second World War and containing a wealth of choice reminiscences, has been designated by the beloved Guardian an interesting storehouse of information for future Bahá'í historians. Another enduring work, undertaken at the behest of the National Spiritual Assembly of Írán, is the history of the inception and growth of the Faith in his native

district. Compiled in two volumes, it depicts the lives, achievements, sufferings and martyrdom of the early heroes and pioneers in that area. Also his *Fusul Arbá'ih* is a masterly exposition of proofs demonstrating the prophetic mission of the Founder and Herald of our Faith with profuse quotations from various religious books used in support of his thesis.

The crowning glory of his life was the rare privilege of attaining the presence of Bahá'u'lláh in the year 1878 in 'Akká, where he stayed for about nine months. The wonderful events and experiences associated with this momentous pilgrimage, no less than his contact with the mysterious power emanating from the person of Bahá'u'lláh, made a deep and abiding impression upon his whole being and served him as a source of inspiration and spiritual enlightenment, enabling him to steer his way steadily and triumphantly amid the perils and cross currents of his eventful life.

The remarkable feature of his interviews with Bahá'u'lláh is the fact that overcome by His dazzling greatness, he seldom dared to look at His Face or to utter a single word. Rather he would approach Him in a sense of spiritual discernment. In his thrilling *Memoirs* he states: 'Whenever I came into the presence of the Blessed Beauty if there were anything I wanted to ask, I would say it by way of the heart and He would answer me invariably. I was so deeply impressed by His supreme power that I always sat in His presence spell-bound, oblivious of myself.' Once he entreated Bahá'u'lláh that he might be granted the privilege of laying down his life for the Cause as a martyr. 'You shall live long to teach the Cause,' was His prompt reply. In fact he did live long—a hundred years—and did distinguish himself in teaching and serving the Cause with

exemplary devotion. The wonderful Tablets revealed in his name by both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the letters from the beloved Guardian, all bear ample testimony to his noble life of service.

Early in 1914 Hájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir went on his second pilgrimage to the Holy Land where he basked for four months in the sunshine of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's unbounded blessings and love.

Rank and fortune, in the material sense, never came Hájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir's way. He used to earn his modest living mainly by working as a hand weaver. Yet, whenever he managed to secure some bushels of grain or other provisions for our daily use, nobody was allowed to touch them until he had set aside a substantial portion for the poor of the town as well as the needy among the martyrs' widows and orphans.

After the terrible Bahá'í massacre in Yazd which occurred soon after the turn of the century, 'Abdu'l-Bahá appointed Hájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir to look after the hapless, terror-stricken remnants of the martyrs' families. For several years he devoted himself to the arduous task of organizing help for the poor, comforting the bereaved, tending the sick, and rearing and educating the children. He derived ample pleasure from giving food, money and clothing to the needy and distressed. Everybody was welcome to his home and his table. The words of praise and admiration which streamed from the Pen of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in appreciation of his beneficent work stand as a glowing testimony to his sense of love and devotion to the downtrodden.

Throughout the rugged years of his life Hájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir seems to have joined in permanent wedlock with adversity. The lifelong sufferings he bore at the hands of the enemies, the insults and indignities to which he was subjected at every turn, the perilous

adventures he went through, the grievous loss of three children who perished during the Bahá'í massacre in Yazd, the weight of chains and imprisonment he joyfully accepted towards the end of his life in company with the fellow-members of the Spiritual Assembly of Yazd—these together with many other distressing events, far from dampening his spirits, served to steel his energies and to reveal the true measure of his indomitable faith.

The evening of his life was dimmed by years of declining faculties and infirmity. Sinking beneath the gathering weight of old age and ill health, he laid down the burden he carried so worthily for nearly eighty years and passed away peacefully at his home on June 4, 1953. In his will he bequeathed all his possessions to the Cause.

126. Ḥájí Siyyid Javád-i-Karbilá'í—He immediately recognized the greatness of Bahá'u'lláh

Notable among the companions of Bahá'u'lláh in 'Iráq, one who rendered memorable services to the Faith is Ḥájí Siyyid Javád-i-Karbilá'í.

He was one of the outstanding disciples of Siyyid Kázim-i-Rashtí, and in his early youth had met the renowned Shaykh Aḥmad-i-Aḥsá'í, who was the founder of the Shaykhí sect of Islám. He was distinguished by his learning and knowledge, his piety and uprightness. He was reserved in his speech and very gentle in his manners, and had a dignified bearing which endeared him to people.

Ḥájí Siyyid Javád was one of the early believers of the Bábí Dispensation. He had known the Báb from the days of His childhood,

years before His Declaration, and was fascinated by the remarkable qualities which were so strikingly apparent in Him. Some years later, he went to Búshihr and for almost six months lived in the building where the Báb and His uncle had their business premises. There he became attracted to the Báb and attained His presence many times, but never did it cross his mind that the Promised One of Islám could be any other than one of the divines or men of learning.

In a spoken chronicle recorded by Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, the outstanding scholar of the Faith, Ḥájí Siyyid Javád recalls with excitement the circumstances which led him to embrace the Faith of the Báb in Karbilá:

... It was in 1844 that Mullá 'Alí-i-Bastámí returned to Karbilá from Shíráz, bringing the news of the appearance of the Báb and announcing that he himself together with other disciples had already attained His presence. This news, which spread rapidly, created a great excitement among the divines who trusted Mullá 'Alí and had regard for his dignity and pious life.

Mullá 'Alí only mentioned the title of the Báb, however, and refused to disclose His identity. He used to say: 'The Báb has appeared and some of us have attained His presence, but He has forbidden us to mention His name or disclose His identity or that of His family at the present time. Soon however His Message will be noised abroad and His name will be disclosed to all.'

This news brought about an amazing sensation in 'Iráq. In all the gatherings the appearance of the Báb was the topic of discussion. Many people speculated as to His identity, but no one ever suspected that Mírzá 'Alí-Muḥammad could be the Báb. The possibility never crossed anyone's mind, owing to the fact that He was only a youth

and a merchant by profession. The people without exception thought that the Báb, the Gate of the knowledge of God, would appear from among the learned and not from the trading and professional classes. The Shaykhís, in particular, thought that He would be one of the leading disciples of Siyyid Kázim.

One day I invited Mullá 'Alí to my home ... We talked about this wonderful event, but in spite of the strong bonds of love and friendship which existed between us, I could not extract from him any clues by which I could recognize the person of the Báb. In the end I became desperate. Jokingly I gripped his arms and pushed him hard against the wall ... There I held him, demanding that he disclose the name of that wondrous Being. But Mullá 'Alí calmly reminded me that he was forbidden to do so ... In the midst of all this, Mullá 'Alí quite inadvertently mentioned that the Báb had requested him to collect any letters He had written to people in Karbilá and send them back to Shíráz.

On hearing this, the thought of Mírzá 'Alí-Muḥammad suddenly flashed through my mind. Although it seemed very unlikely, I wondered whether it could be He. So I rushed to my room and fetched some of His letters which were addressed to me. As soon as Mullá 'Alí's eyes fell upon the seal of the Báb, he burst into tears. I was so filled with emotion that I too wept. Between his sobs Mullá 'Alí's constant plea to me was: 'I did not mention His name. Please do not disclose it to anyone...'

It was not long after this that the Báb declared His station in Mecca and the news of this was widely spread throughout the Muslim world and His identity disclosed.

Soon after this interview, Hájí Siyyid Javád travelled to Shíráz and attained the presence of the Báb, this time as an ardent believer. He dedicated his life to the service of the Cause in Karbilá. It was in this city in the year 1851 that he met Bahá'u'lláh for the first time. He immediately recognized the greatness of Bahá'u'lláh, but did not appreciate His glorious station until some time later.

The following is a translation of his spoken chronicle as he describes his first meeting with Bahá'u'lláh:

...I was in Karbilá when the news of the arrival of Bahá'u'lláh in that city reached me. The first person who gave me this information was Hájí Siyyid Muḥammad-i-Iṣfahání (The Antichrist of the Bahá'í Revelation).

Before I attained His presence I expected to find Him a youth of noble lineage, the son of a vizir, but not one endowed with immense knowledge or wisdom. Together with some friends I went to meet Bahá'u'lláh. As was their custom, my friends would not enter the room before me; so I went in first and occupied the seat of honour in that gathering.

After we had exchanged greetings Bahá'u'lláh turned to those present and asked them what subjects they, the disciples of the late Siyyid, usually discussed when they gathered in a meeting. Did they discuss the topics of religion as current among men? What would they do if God manifested Himself to man, rolled up the old doctrines and philosophies, revealed a new set of teachings and opened up a new page in divine knowledge? What then would be their position?

Bahá'u'lláh spoke for some time in this vein. It was not long before I realized that we, known to be men of learning and knowledge, dwelt in the depths of ignorance, whereas He, whom we considered to be only a youth, the son of a vizir, stood upon the highest pinnacle of understanding and wisdom.

After this experience, whenever I entered His presence, I would sit at His feet in absolute humility and refrain from speaking. I always listened attentively to Him in order to benefit from His knowledge and understanding. This attitude of mine, however, used to annoy my friend Hájí Siyyid Muḥammad. Once he rebuked me, saying: 'Assuming that all agree that Jináb-i-Bahá is one of the same calibre as ourselves, why do you sit in silence and show so much humility towards Him?'

I pleaded with my friend not to be angry with me. I told him that I could neither specify a station for Him nor, God forbid, consider Him as one of us. I regarded Him as incomparable and unique.

Early in 1852 Bahá'u'lláh returned from Karbilá to His native city and was imprisoned a few months later in the Síyáh-Chál of Tíhrán. Hájí Siyyid Javád was in Karbilá when Bahá'u'lláh was exiled to 'Iráq after His release from that dungeon. During the ten years of Bahá'u'lláh's sojourn in 'Iráq, he was a faithful companion, one who truly recognized the station of Bahá'u'lláh before His Declaration.

When Bahá'u'lláh was exiled to Adrianople, Hájí Siyyid Javád travelled to Persia and lived in various parts of the country, serving the faith with great distinction. He remained a loyal and steadfast believer until his death in Kirmán about 1882.

127. Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí-i-Nahrí—A leading exponent of the Faith

Another distinguished believer who came on pilgrimage to Adrianople and attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh was the devout Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí-i-Nahrí, who had had the privilege of meeting Him some years before in Baghhdád. Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí came from a prominent family in Iṣfahán with material wealth and spiritual gifts. He and his brother Mírzá Hádí spent some years in Karbilá where they joined the Shaykhí sect and used to sit for hours at the feet of Siyyid Kázim-i-Rashtí in order to receive spiritual enlightenment.

It was in Karbilá that these brothers met the Báb for the first time. As they watched Him pray at the shrine of Imám Ḥusayn, they became deeply attracted to His person, and recognized in Him extraordinary powers. They became aware, too, of the profound reverence and high esteem in which He was held by Siyyid Kázim. No wonder that when the news reached them that a youth in Shíráz had declared Himself to be the Báb, they immediately recognized His identity.

Obedient to the behest of the Báb, Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí and his brother proceeded to Iṣfahán. On the way to that city they met Mullá Ḥusayn who acquainted them fully with the Cause. The zeal and enthusiasm of Mullá Ḥusayn, the staunchness of his faith and the ardour of his love for the Báb greatly inspired the two brothers and assisted them to recognize the truth of the new-born Faith of God. They attained the presence of the Báb in Shíráz at the time when he was under house arrest by order of the Governor of the province. This meeting created a new spirit of dedication and certitude in Mírzá

Muḥammad-‘Alí and Mírzá Hádí and from that time on they ranked as foremost among the early disciples of the Báb.

From Shíráz, Mírzá Hádí went to Karbilá while Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí returned to Iṣfahán. Soon after his arrival in that city, the latter learned that his wife had died in Karbilá. He remarried and remained in Iṣfahán until the Báb arrived there on His way to Tīhrán. Up to that time Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí had no children. His first wife, who had died after a few years of marriage, had borne him no child. His second wife was also childless until an event of great significance took place.

Nabíl-i-A‘zam describes this joyous episode:

Ere the Báb had transferred His residence to the house of the Mu‘tamid, Mírzá Ibráhím, father of the Sulṭánu’sh-Shuhadá and elder brother of Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí-i-Nahrí, to whom we have already referred, invited the Báb to his home one night. Mírzá Ibráhím was a friend of the Ímám-Jum‘ih, was intimately associated with him and controlled the management of all his affairs. The banquet which was spread for the Báb that night was one of unsurpassed magnificence. It was commonly observed that neither the officials nor the notables of the city had offered a feast of such magnitude and splendour. The Sulṭánu’sh-Shuhadá, and his brother, the Mahbúbu’sh-Shuhadá, who were lads of nine and eleven respectively, served at that banquet and received special attention from the Báb. That night, during dinner, Mírzá Ibráhím turned to his Guest and said: ‘My brother, Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí, has no child. I beg You to intercede in his behalf and to grant his heart’s desire.’ The Báb took a portion of the food with which He had been served, placed it with His own hands on a platter, and handed it to His host, asking him to take it to Mírzá

Muḥammad-‘Alí and his wife. ‘Let them both partake of this,’ He said; ‘their wish will be fulfilled.’ By virtue of that portion which the Báb had chosen to bestow upon her, the wife of Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí conceived and in due time gave birth to a girl, who eventually was joined in wedlock with the Most Great Branch, a union that came to be regarded as the consummation of the hopes entertained by her parents.

The new-born daughter was named Fátimih by her parents. Bahá’u’lláh, later on, conferred upon her the name of Munírih (Illumined). Her birth took place around the time that her father and her uncle Mírzá Ḥadí had gone to take part in the conference of Badasht. It is interesting to note that at that conference the two brothers were among those who became extremely agitated when Ṭáhirih removed her veil. They reacted by leaving the scene of the conference and taking residence in the ruins of an old castle. Bahá’u’lláh sent for them, calmed their emotions and pointed out that it was unnecessary for them to desert their companions. When the conference of Badasht ended, the believers were attacked in the village of Níyálá. Mírzá Ḥadí died on the way home as a result of these persecutions, and Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí returned to Iṣfahán. Through the potency of his belief, he became a leading exponent of the Faith in that city. It was mainly through his help and guidance that those two of his nephews referred to by Nabíl and entitled the ‘King of the Martyrs’ and ‘Beloved of the Martyrs’ were confirmed in the Cause. They became the most illustrious among the martyrs of the Faith.

When Bahá’u’lláh was in Baghdád, Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí conducted his two youthful nephews to that city where they attained His presence.

They saw the Glory of God hidden behind many veils of concealment; their souls were magnetized by His love and transformed into a new creation. They truly detached themselves from this world and returned home in a spirit of joy and steadfastness.

Some years later Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí travelled to Adrianople. Once again, he was privileged to attain the presence of His Lord and achieve his heart’s desire. But he did not live long enough to witness the honour which was conferred upon his daughter Munírih Khánum in becoming the consort of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

128. Ḥájí Naṣír—A brilliant light that shone forth above the horizon of resignation

Ḥájí Naṣír was a well-known merchant and held in high esteem by his fellow citizens until he embraced the Bábí Faith. From that time onwards, he suffered persecutions and was bitterly opposed by the people. He recognized the divine origin of the Message of the Báb through Mullá Jalíl-i-Urúmí, one of the Letters of the Living. It is reported that when Ḥájí Naṣír had acknowledged the authenticity of the claims of the Báb, Mullá Jalíl warned him that a mere acknowledgement was not sufficient in this day, that he could not call himself a Bábí unless he were prepared to lay down his life willingly in the path of God, should the enemy rise up against him. He bade him go home and search his heart to see whether he had sufficient faith to remain steadfast in the face of tortures and martyrdom. If he did, he was a Bábí, and otherwise not. Ḥájí Naṣír responded to the words of Mullá Jalíl by spending the whole night in prayer and meditation. At the hour of dawn, he felt possessed of such faith and detachment as to be ready to

sacrifice his life in the path of his Beloved. Overnight, he became endowed with a new zeal and radiance which sustained him throughout his eventful life.

Soon the persecutions started; the first onslaught began when Hájí Naşír became the target of attacks by a blood-thirsty mob in Qazvín. They plundered all his possessions and he was temporarily forced to leave his native city. When the situation calmed down he returned home. From there, in obedience to the call of the Báb, he proceeded to Khurásán. He was privileged to attend the conference of Badasht where, some historians have stated, he acted as a guard at the entrance of the garden which was reserved for Bahá'u'lláh's residence. From Badasht he proceeded to Mázindarán and was one of the defenders of the fortress of Shaykh Ṭabarsí. As history records, hundreds of his fellow disciples were massacred in that upheaval, but the hand of divine power spared Hájí Naşír's life and enabled him to render further services to the Cause of God.

He returned to Qazvín and engaged in his work once again, but soon another upheaval engulfed the believers. The attempt on the life of Náşiri'd-Dín Sháh in 1852 unleashed a wave of persecution against the Bábis. Hájí Naşír was arrested in Qazvín and put in prison. But after some time he was released. Another imprisonment he suffered was in Ṭihrán, where he was chained and fettered. When released from his ordeal, he found that all his possessions were gone. It was through the help and co-operation of Shaykh Kázim-i-Samandar (One of the Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh) that, in spite of much harassment by the enemy, Hájí Naşír continued to earn a living, but he had to move his residence to the city of Rasht.

The crowning glory of his life was to attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh in 'Akká. On this pilgrimage he was accompanied by the above-named Shaykh Kázim. Bahá'u'lláh showered His bounties upon him and assured him of His loving-kindness. He spent the latter part of his life in the city of Rasht and was engaged in teaching the Cause of God by day and night. The enemies once again cast him into prison. This time, because of old age, he could not endure the rigours of prison life and his soul, after so many years of toil and suffering, took its flight to the abode of the Beloved. He died a martyr's death in the prison of Rasht in the year 1300 AH (1882-3).

When the news of Hájí Naşír's death reached the enemies of the Cause, many of them, including children, attacked his corpse and pelted it with stones. As soon as his remains were brought home a number of ruffians forced their way in and attempted to dismember it. It is impossible to describe the feelings of horror and consternation which befell his family and loved ones as they stood helplessly watching the cruel atrocities perpetrated by the mob of heartless fanatics. They had Hájí Naşír's nose cut off and his eyes gouged out before they were stopped by the neighbours who, in a humiliating manner, threw his body into a disused brick furnace in that vicinity and covered it with stones.

Bahá'u'lláh has paid glowing tribute to Hájí Naşír for his steadfastness in the Cause of God and has revealed a Tablet of Visitation for him. In the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* He remembers him in these words:

Among them was his honour, Hájí Naşír, who, unquestionably, was a brilliant light that shone forth above the horizon of resignation. After he had suffered martyrdom, they plucked out his eyes and cut off his

nose, and inflicted on him such indignities that strangers wept and lamented, and secretly raised funds to support his wife and children.

129. Ḥájí Siyyid ‘Alí—An embodiment of servitude

Ḥájí Siyyid ‘Alí Akbar-i-Dahájí was an embodiment of faith and servitude and very much loved by Bahá’u’lláh. Concerning this believer, Ḥájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir-i-Málmirí writes in his unpublished 'History of the Faith in the Province of Yazd':

The late Ḥájí Siyyid ‘Alí-Akbar-i-Dahájí was one of the early believers. Seldom has there been a soul so distinguished and pious as he ... Physically he was very handsome and had a sweet melodious voice. One might say that whenever he chanted the Words of God, even the Concourse on high and the Denizens of the Kingdom of Abhá were exhilarated by his voice...I have never heard anyone chant so beautifully as he did. He attained the presence of the Blessed Beauty several times and became the recipient of Bahá’u’lláh’s infinite favours and bounties. His relationship with Him was truly that of a lover and the Beloved. There are many Tablets revealed in his honour. Notable among them is the Tablet of Iḥtiráq...Ḥájí Siyyid ‘Alí-Akbar passed away in Ṭíhrán on his way back from the Holy Land after having attained the presence of Bahá’u’lláh for the last time. After his death, Bahá’u’lláh indicated that He was so attached to Ḥájí Siyyid ‘Alí-Akbar that He wished the name of this believer mentioned in His presence. He thereafter instructed that henceforth his uncle Siyyid Mihdí, the Ismu’lláh, be called Siyyid ‘Alí-Akbar.

130. Ḥájí Mírzá's vision of Bahá'u'lláh

Mírzá Áqáy-i-Halabí Sáz was a devoted believer and had had the privilege of attaining the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. He was a tinsmith and had a shop in one of the bazaars of Yazd. In 1891, seven Bahá'ís were put to death by the order of Maḥmud Mírzá, the Jalálu'd-Dawlih, the Governor of Yazd. They are known as the first seven martyrs of Yazd, the story of whose martyrdom Bahá'u'lláh wrote to *The Times of London*. The seven were chained together and conducted towards the bazaar amid scenes of jubilation, and at each major crossroads one of them was executed in a most barbaric fashion. The other believers who were shopkeepers or merchants were ordered to stay at their premises and were forced to join others in decorating their shops to celebrate the event.

Ḥájí Mírzá was sitting in his shop, his heart filled with grief owing to the tragic turn of events. Then came the tense moment when the few remaining of the seven, chained together, passed in front of his shop. The next junction where one of them was to be beheaded was not far away and could be easily sighted. Ḥájí Muḥammad-i-Ṭáhir-i-Málmírí has recounted that Ḥájí Mírzá used to tell the believers in Yazd of his unusual experience on that occasion. He saw to his great surprise that Bahá'u'lláh Himself passed in front of his shop only a few hundred paces behind the martyrs-to-be and was walking quickly in order to reach them. Ḥájí Mírzá immediately stepped out of his shop to follow Bahá'u'lláh, who signalled him with the movement of His hand that he should return to the shop. From there, Ḥájí Mírzá looked out and saw that Bahá'u'lláh reached the party at the junction and at that very moment the executioner removed the chain from one man and executed him.

Of course, Ḥájí Mírzá knew that Bahá'u'lláh was in 'Akká and not in Yazd, but he had no doubt that it was Bahá'u'lláh whom he saw in the bazaar. From this amazing vision he realized that the martyrs were not alone at the time of martyrdom, that their unparalleled courage and heroism was not entirely due to themselves, that Bahá'u'lláh strengthened them with His unfailing power and that those who had reached the pinnacle of faith and assurance were bound to feel the presence of Bahá'u'lláh at their side. It is interesting to note that some years later, Ḥájí Mírzá himself was martyred in Yazd.

131. Ḥájí Mírzá and his wife—“Whatever is God’s Will will happen”; Rubábih, the prostitute, shows a magnanimous spirit

The martyrdom of Ḥájí Mírzáy-i-Halabí-Sáz (tinsmith), one of the most devoted followers of Bahá'u'lláh in Yazd, is an episode from that history. It happened during one of the most grievous upheavals in Yazd in the summer of 1903 when a great number of Bahá'ís were savagely martyred within a few days:

On the anniversary of the birth of the Prophet Muḥammad [17 Rabí'u'l-Avval], a religious festival, a group of men gathered outside the house of Ḥájí Mírzá. For a considerable time they viciously pelted the door of the house with stones and broke all the windows. They behaved with such vulgarity that eventually Ḥájí Mírzá appeared on the roof of the house above the porch and demanded an explanation. Some of the men felt embarrassed as soon as they saw Ḥájí Mírzá; they bowed their heads in shame and left. Some of the younger ones continued their acts of violence but were eventually calmed by Ḥájí Mírzá's words and left also ... However they returned again after

sunset and continued throwing stones into the courtyard for about three hours.

Following his usual practice, Ḥájí Mírzá left in the early hours of the morning for the home of Ḥájí Mírzá Mahmúd-i-Afnán where the friends gathered to pray at the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. He stayed there until the prayers ended just before sunrise. As everybody was about to go, Ḥájí Mírzá expressed a desire to bid farewell to them all, as he thought that he might never see them again. He embraced everyone and said farewell to them. Ḥájí Mírzá Maḥmúd advised Ḥájí Mírzá not to go home for a while but to wait and see what would transpire during the day. But he went home saying 'Whatever is God's will, will happen.'

Haji Mírzá was busy working at home during the morning when a number of men appeared outside his door, headed by a certain Ḥasan-i-Mihrízí, an unusually strong and well-built person. He kicked the door open and the crowd poured in. Haji Mírzá was cutting a piece of glass at the time, while his wife and three young children sat beside him. Ḥasan-i-Mihrízí, who was at the front of the crowd and carried a heavy chain, took Haji Mírzá by the hand, violently dragged him out of the house and beat him savagely with the chain. The crowd surged forward and everybody began beating the victim. They attacked him fiercely, some with sticks or stones, others with chains, yet others with bare hands. They beat him so much that he fell on the ground dazed and bleeding all over.

The wife of Ḥájí Mírzá, in desperation, pushed her way through the crowd and threw herself on the wounded body of her husband. But the crowd beat her with sticks and chains, and wounded her badly.

They tried hard to push her away from the body of her beloved, but she clung on top of him for some time. The children, near the crowd, were screaming and frightened to death. God knows what the children went through. The eldest son, 'Ináyatu'lláh, was eleven, the eldest daughter, Riḍván, was nine and the youngest, Túbá, was six years old. After a while, the attackers succeeded in separating husband and wife. Although his body was battered and covered with blood from head to toe, Haji Mírzá was dragged towards the home of the Imám-Jum'ih, accompanied by a crowd which by now numbered about two hundred. No sooner did they drag him a few steps then his wife managed to throw herself on his body again, but the crowd removed her. Nevertheless she managed to cling to him yet again. This time they beat her harder than before until she fell unconscious in the street. Then they took Haji Mírzá away. In the meantime a number of people had entered the house and were busy plundering everything they could find...

As to the children of that glorious martyr, they were wailing and weeping beside their beloved mother who had fallen on the ground unconscious ... Then a few women arrived and took away a scarf which had covered her head. Her body had been so badly beaten by chains and sticks, and kicked by so many, that her thin dress was torn and she lay almost naked on the ground. At last a certain woman by the name of Rubábih, who was known to be a prostitute, showed a truly magnanimous spirit. She went to her home, which was close to the house of Hájí Mírzá, brought an old *chádur*, spread it over the injured woman and tried in vain to revive her. In the meantime the children were sobbing unceasingly; their grief knew no bounds. Rubábih did all she could to comfort them, and carried

their mother on her back to her home. (In this incident Rubábih showed great courage in going to help the victim. Normally in such circumstances, no one dared to extend assistance to a Bahá'í, for he himself would then be accused of being one. In this case, it appears that Rubábih, herself an outcast because she was a prostitute, did not fear retaliation from the public). There she prepared a herbal infusion, gave some to the children and administered some to their mother, who regained consciousness after about two hours. But the children had cried so much that they were exhausted.

As soon as she was able, Ḥájí Mírzá's wife ... asked for news of her husband and was told that he was taken to the Castle [Government headquarters] and that the Prince was treating him with the utmost kindness ... On hearing this she broke down in tears. Rubábih consoled her, saying, 'Thanks to God, Ḥájí is safe, you should try not to weep in front of the children as they have suffered greatly' ... She helped Ḥájí Mírzá's wife ... to her feet and carried her home with the children. The house was thoroughly plundered. The furniture, carpets, clothes, even doors of the rooms were taken away. Nothing of any value was left. They could not close the door of the house as it had been broken and thrown on the ground.

The mother, covered all over with wounds, and the grief-stricken children, took refuge in the house and were sobbing most bitterly until about midday, when a woman brought tidings from Ḥájí Mírzá Maḥmúd-i-Afnán that Ḥájí Mírzá had walked unaided to the Castle and was well. She conveyed further words of comfort from Afnán, assuring her that Ḥájí Mírzá was now in a safe place and would return home in the evening. This news brought some relief. Rubábih

although fearful that she might be attacked, managed to bring some food for the children and their mother. In the meantime, since the house had no door, women and children came in frequently to see if there was anything left to take away.

The mother and her children had taken refuge in the corner of a room waiting for darkness and Hájí Mírzá's arrival ... with the help of Rubábih they cooked a simple broth to be served to Hájí Mírzá when he should return. But he did not come.

As to Hájí Mírzá, the crowd were taking him to the home of the Imám-Jum'ih. When they reached the entrance of Muşallá, however, a certain man by the name of Hasan the son of Rasúl-i-Mu'ayyidí stepped forward and called on Hájí Mírzá to utter imprecations against the Bahá'í Faith. Hájí Mírzá only gazed at him and did not respond. Hasan repeated his demand. Hájí said 'You are neither a judge of religious law nor of common law. It is none of your business. When they take me to the proper authority I shall answer questions.' On hearing this, Hasan went to the nearby butcher's shop, took a cleaver, and with a powerful stroke slashed Hájí Mírzá's skull open. With another stroke he hacked off his arm ...

In the meantime two or three government officials arrived at the scene and took the injured man to the Government house at the Castle. Hájí Mírzá possessed such spiritual strength that in spite of his severe injuries he managed to walk to the Castle. Only upon arrival inside the corridor did he fall to the ground, but regained consciousness a few minutes later... The crowd went as far as the Castle and then dispersed ... Hájí Mírzá took out his American watch which was adorned with the picture of the Master on the back and

gave it to a certain Áqá Mullá Muḥammad-‘Alí to deliver it to his wife and children.

... In the meantime the executioner had tied his own apron on Ḥájí’s head, but blood was pouring out and he was becoming weaker ... until he expired. Thus he attained to the exalted station of martyrdom. The executioner unwound the apron from Ḥájí Mírzá’s head and placed it on his face...

After dark the Governor...sent for Ḥájí Mírzá Maḥmúd-i-Afnán and asked him to send someone to remove the body about two hours after sunset and bury it. Accordingly the custodian of the Buq‘atu’l-Khadrá called at the Castle. He carried the body of Ḥájí Mírzá on his back to the Buq‘atu’l-Khadrá and buried it there. Ḥájí Mírzá was thirty-eight years old when martyred.

The family of Ḥájí Mírzá remained unaware of his martyrdom that night. They stayed awake till morning, anxious and expectant of his safe arrival home. The children were tense and continually asked about their father. The mother did her best to assure them that he would come soon. But time passed, and when it was four hours after sunset the night curfew guards went on duty around the city. Thus any hope of Ḥájí Mírzá’s arrival faded. The children could not sleep. The mother, in pain from her many wounds and injuries, was highly distressed and could not sleep either. She waited till the dawn and when her husband did not return, she went, in spite of her condition, to the home of Ḥájí Mírzá Maḥmúd-i-Afnán to enquire about him. As soon as his eyes fell on her, Ḥájí Mírzá Maḥmúd could not contain his grief and began to weep. This was how Ḥájí Mírzá’s wife learned of the martyrdom of her husband. God alone knows the state of her

mind at that time and the agony that she went through! She wept ceaselessly, and returned home broken and shattered. The children, on the other hand, were waiting for their mother to bring their father back. But when they saw her alone and in such a state of anguish, they realized what had happened. Their heart-rending cries and wails of lamentation could be heard in all directions. We can feel the agony of their hearts when we reflect on their condition. The house was completely empty, the father had been killed, the mother wounded and the people had arisen against them.

Two days later, a woman maliciously spread rumours that Hájí Mírzá's wife had been putting poison in public cisterns in the town. This gross accusation was an excuse for some ... women to make an attempt on her life. As she was sitting with her children in a corner of the house lamenting her bereavement and praying to God, suddenly a group of women, sixty or seventy strong, entered the house, pushed her down on the ground and began to beat her with the intention of taking her life. The children were thrown about by that cruel and bloodthirsty mob, which created a great commotion in the house. However, the Kad-Khudá and his men were speedily informed. They rushed to the spot, forced their way through the crowd and found that Hájí Mírzá's wife had been unconscious on the ground for about half an hour and the attackers were still beating her ... These savage women were convinced that she was dead when the Kad-Khudá and his men drove them out.

Hájí Mírzá's wife lay on the ground, her clothes torn, her body naked and her flesh covered in blood and dust. Pieces of her torn clothing could be seen scattered around her. The Kad-Khudá, overcome by

feelings of shame, was embarrassed to look at her exposed body and therefore left. The children who had been brutally handled for a long time, found themselves standing around the battered body of their mother. There was no one to look after them except an old grandmother who was herself an invalid.

But God demonstrated His might and power that day. His mercy and compassion descended upon the children. After an hour, the lifeless body of their mother began to move. Soon she regained consciousness. Rubábih brought some clothes and put them on her.

On hearing that Haji Mírzá's wife was alive, the group of women were determined to go back and put an end to her life. But in spite of the fact that she was unable to move, the Kad-Khudá managed to carry her out of the house. She was taken to the Government house in the castle... Shaykh Muḥammad-Ja'far-i-Sabzivárí, who was a *mujtahid*, undertook to protect her. He sent for a certain woman, Bíbí Bagum ... and asked her to keep the unfortunate woman in her home and to look after her until the situation improved.

For twenty days, Haji Mírzá's wife was kept in the home of Bíbí Bagum. During this period the innocent young children, wronged and oppressed, their parents taken from them, stayed in the ruins of their plundered home with an old sick grandmother. They merely existed, in a state of perpetual fear and expectation—they feared for their lives, thinking they would be killed too, while their hearts were in a state of expectation of their mother's return. The children suffered so much that after twenty days their bodies looked like mere skeletons, and their faces had the colour of a corpse. Many people who passed by threw stones into the house, reviled them and

used foul language. Each time they heard the shouts of cursing and execration, the children thought the people were coming to kill them and would be frightened to death. They would run towards the frail body of their grandmother and throw themselves on her bosom. The agony of bereavement so tortured the eldest son, 'Ináyatu'lláh, that he became seriously ill and lay in the corner of a room. The other children suffered so much that they came very close to death. They often asked their grandmother 'What have we done that people kill us?' No pen can bear to write the agony which the children went through...

Eventually, after twenty days, when the situation had become somewhat more peaceful, the mother came back with much fear and trepidation.

Ḥájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir-i-Málmírí, the author of the *History of the Martyrs of Yazd*, concludes the account of Ḥájí Mírzá's martyrdom with the following words of his widow. She recounted to him the agony of her heart when she returned home and found her children almost lifeless.

'God is my witness, when I arrived home, I saw three children whom I could not recognize as my own. I wanted to know where my children were; my mother said to me: "These are your children!" When I was assured that they were indeed my children, I was plunged into such a state of agony and distress that all my sufferings of the past paled into insignificance. She said to me, 'Even now as I recount the story after all these years, my whole body is seized with fear and trembling.'

The same author, in his unpublished 'History of the Faith in the Province of Yazd', has written the following account giving us another glimpse of the sufferings inflicted upon the children of Hájí Mírzá while their mother was kept in custody:

Zaynal-i-'Arab was a neighbour of Hájí Mírzá. The roof of his house was joined to that of Hájí Mírzá's house. One evening during the upheaval of Yazd, Zaynal was told by some violent men in Mír-Chaqmáq that, since he was a neighbour of Hájí Mírzá's, they suspected him of being a Bahá'í. The fact however was that Zaynal, far from being a Bahá'í, was a vile man and foremost among the troublemakers of Yazd. When such an accusation was levelled against him, he became so angry that he decided to go and kill the wife of Hájí Mírzá and her three children. He went home immediately, took up his revolver, tied a cartridge belt around his waist and went up the stairs onto the roof of his own house. From there he crossed to the roof of Hájí Mírzá's house and began to shout abuse and utter curses. He loaded the gun and announced in a loud voice in vulgar terms his intention of going down the steps to kill the ... children of Hájí Mírzá. At that time the children were sitting in a comer around their old grandmother. The ugly figure of Zaynal, shouting abuse and standing on the roof with a revolver in his hand, frightened the innocent children terribly. They cried, screamed and begged.

While Zaynal was on his way down the steps to the courtyard of the house, another neighbour, Áqá Husayn, a son of Áqá Ridá, who had heard the commotion, appeared on the roof just in time to avert a tragedy. He ran towards Zaynal and tried to stop him. He asked 'Why

do you want to kill these children?' 'This evening,' Zaynal replied, 'a number of people in Mír-Chaqmáq accused me of being a Bahá'í, because I am a neighbour of Hájí Mírzá's. I am therefore determined to wipe out this family. No one can stop me from carrying out my intention.'

Áqá H̄usayn counselled Zaynal to calm down and began to explain that the children were innocent. He said 'Their father, who was a Bahá'í, has been put to death, and no one knows the fate of their mother. These children have been orphaned; their father was assaulted in front of their eyes and later died, their mother was beaten so much that it is not yet known whether she is dead or alive. The children now live in a ruined house; they don't get enough food. Look at their pitiful condition. They are reduced to mere skeletons. How can your conscience allow you to carry out your design? The Prophet of Islám exhorted His followers to honour their neighbours even if they were infidels. You are a follower of the Prophet, how can you do such a thing to these innocent children?'

These words of Áqá H̄usayn, however, had no effect on Zaynal. Eventually Áqá H̄usayn urged him to postpone the intended murder, to go to his house instead for a smoke, have a cup of tea and relax for a while ... And at last Áqá H̄usayn managed to take Zaynal to his home. Through loving-kindness and much exhortation he succeeded in changing Zaynal's mind.

As to the children, God alone knows the measure of their anguish and fear that night! ... One of them said to me: 'We sat all night in the dark and were literally trembling with fear. Our eyes were fixed in the direction of the stairs expecting Zaynal to come down at any

time. The slightest noise would scare us to death for we thought that he was coming downstairs. We shall never forget the horrors and the dread of that night.'

132. Siyyid Ismá'íl Dhabíh—Worlds of spirit opened before his eyes

Some believers who attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh saw a glimpse of that inner light which was concealed within His person. They were dazzled by it and could no longer bear to stand in the darkness of this world.

One such was Siyyid Ismá'íl of Zavárih surnamed Dhabíh (Sacrifice) by Bahá'u'lláh. He was a devout man highly esteemed for his piety and rectitude of conduct, his learning and knowledge. He was converted to the Faith in the early days of the Báb's ministry, attained His presence in the house of the Imám-Jum'ih of Işfahán, and was present when the Báb revealed a commentary on the Súrih of V'al-'Aşr. The rapidity with which the Báb penned that lengthy epistle and the power of His utterance as He chanted some of its passages, in the presence of a number of distinguished divines, captured the imagination of Dhabíh who became one of His devoted followers. Over a decade later, Dhabíh came to Baghhdád and attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. Áqá Muḥammad-Riḍá had invited Bahá'u'lláh to his home, begging Him for the inestimable privilege of acting as His host. Bahá'u'lláh accepted his invitation and a few days later, in the afternoon, honoured Áqá Muḥammad-Riḍá by going to his house.

In the *Kitáb-i-Badí'*, revealed a few years later in Adrianople, Bahá'u'lláh Himself has described His meeting with Dhabíh on that occasion. As was customary at that time of day, their host had provided several trays of various fruits and sweetmeats. Dhabíh was invited by Bahá'u'lláh to partake of the food but he begged most humbly and earnestly to receive instead, through Bahá'u'lláh's bounty, a portion of spiritual food from the unseen treasury of His divine knowledge. Favourable to his plea, Bahá'u'lláh summoned Dhabíh to sit before Him and hearken to His words—words of incomparable power and awe which were filled with spiritual significance and which, according to Bahá'u'lláh's testimony, no one is capable of describing.

By hearing the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh on that day, Dhabíh was transformed and worlds of spirit were opened before his eyes. After this meeting he remained in a state of spiritual intoxication, wholly devoted to Bahá'u'lláh, his love for Him intensifying with the passing of each day.

In order to pay homage to his Lord and to express his inner feelings of humility and self-effacement towards Him, Dhabíh took upon himself the task of sweeping the approaches to the house of Bahá'u'lláh at the hour of dawn. In those days one of the duties of a servant in any household was to sweep a small portion of the path leading to the entrance of the house. As a token of humility and lowliness, however, Dhabíh would, instead of using a brush, unwind his green turban, the ensign of his holy lineage, and with it would sweep the approaches of the house of Bahá'u'lláh. He would then place in the fold of his cloak the dust on which the feet of his Beloved had trodden and, unwilling that

others should tread on it, would carry it all the way to the river to throw it into its waters.

The story of Dhabíh is that of a passionate lover. The object of his adoration was Bahá'u'lláh, Who had ignited within his breast the fire of the love of God, a fire so intense that it began to consume his whole being. Eventually he reached a state where he would neither eat nor drink. For forty days he abstained from food. Unable, at last, to check the crushing force of love which pressed upon his soul, he came one day, at the hour of dawn, to the house of Bahá'u'lláh and for the last time swept its approaches with his turban. After performing this task, he paid a visit to the home of Áqá Muḥammad-Riḍá where he met some of the friends for the last time. Later he obtained a razor, went to the bank of the Tigris and there turning his face towards the house of Bahá'u'lláh, took his life by cutting his throat.

Bahá'u'lláh has extolled Dhabíh as the 'King and Beloved of Martyrs'. He is reported to have said that 'No blood has, till now, been poured upon the earth as pure as the blood he shed'

133. Ḥájí-Abdu'r-Raḥím-i-Qannád—He was much loved by Bahá'u'lláh

Ḥájí Muḥammad was a son of Ḥájí 'Abdu'r-Raḥím-i-Qannád (candymaker) from Yazd. In his unpublished 'History of the Faith in the Province of Yazd', Ḥájí Muḥammad-Táhir-i-Málmírí has written an account of the life of Ḥájí 'Abdu'r-Raḥím. The following is a summary of a portion of his notes:

It is very difficult for me to describe his exalted character, his spirituality, and radiance, the depth of his faith and his devotion to the Cause of God. Suffice it to say that when the news of the conversion to the Faith of Hájí 'Abdu'r-Rahím became public knowledge, Mírzá Muḥammad-Taqí, a *mujtahid* [doctor of Islámic law] of Yazd, was highly disturbed. He was reported to have said, 'If the whole population of Yazd had been converted to this new Faith, I would not have been as much disturbed as I am now over the conversion of Hájí 'Abdu'r-Rahím. Now the back of Islám is broken.'

Because his life was in danger some time after his embracing the Faith, Hájí 'Abdu'r-Rahím was forced to leave Yazd, and eventually went to the Holy Land. He was very dear to Bahá'u'lláh and was permitted by Him to reside there. Among his four sons were Shaykh 'Alí, the eldest, whom Bahá'u'lláh sent on a mission to Khartúm where he established a business and later died. The other son, Hájí Muḥammad, established a business with two other believers in Alexandria. And the youngest son, Aḥmad Effendi, was given the honour by 'Abdu'l-Bahá of marrying His youngest daughter.

In one of His Tablets revealed in the year 1882 Bahá'u'lláh, in the words of His amanuensis, gives the story of the events following Shaykh 'Alí's death in Khartúm. He says that when he died the Persian Consul sent the full account of his assets to the commercial attaché of the Persian Embassy in Cairo who in turn demanded the payment of the death duties required by law. Shaykh 'Alí's younger brother Hájí Muḥammad and one of his partners Siyyid 'Alí, who are both praised in this Tablet by Bahá'u'lláh for their trustworthiness, assured the authorities that they would fulfil their obligation in this regard. A number of leading

merchants of the city also assured the Persian attaché that the Bahá'ís were trustworthy people and would honour their obligation. This episode coincided with the bombardment of Alexandria by British forces in 1882 when a great part of the city was ruined and the business house of Hájí Muḥammad, together with all its goods, was utterly destroyed.

The two men returned to the Holy Land almost penniless. They succeeded, however, in obtaining a sum of money sufficient to pay their debt to the authorities. Siyyid 'Alí travelled to Cairo and although by then the former commercial attaché had been dismissed from his post, he presented the sum of fifty English guineas to his successor. Both the merchants and the embassy officials were deeply touched by this action. Knowing that the partners' business had been completely wiped out, the commercial attaché at first refused to accept the money. He is reported to have said that this noble act of honesty demonstrated by the Bahá'ís was sufficient for him. However, in the end he took the money and stated that the best reward in this transaction was that the enemies of the Faith were praising the conduct of its followers.

Bahá'u'lláh in this Tablet describes this action by the two believers as the king of goodly deeds. He prays that His followers in every land may manifest the spirit of trustworthiness among the people.

The story of Hájí Muḥammad would not be complete without referring to one of his noble qualities, namely, his utter obedience to the Centre of the Cause. There was a time when Hájí Muḥammad had a business concern in 'Akká. One day he was sitting in his office when the Master arrived with an urgent instruction from Bahá'u'lláh that Hájí Muḥammad should immediately proceed to Jaddih (Jiddah) in Arabia.

He asked ‘Abdu’l-Bahá if he could be permitted to attain the presence of Bahá’u’lláh before departing for Jaddih. The Master told him that there was no time, for the boat was leaving at any minute. Hájí Muḥammad at once closed the office, and without even paying a visit to his family boarded the ship which sailed away almost immediately. Once on board, he realized that because of the extraordinary rush, he had not even thought to ask the Master the purpose of his trip to Jaddih. But now it was too late, and he knew that Bahá’u’lláh would guide his steps when he arrived in that city. This is the best example of instant, exact and complete obedience to the command of Bahá’u’lláh.

The journey was fraught with danger because the sea was unusually stormy. The danger of the ship sinking was in everyone’s mind except for Hájí Muḥammad, who was sure that it would sail safely to its destination because God had given him a mission in Jaddih, the nature of which was as yet unknown to him. Soon after disembarking from the ship, he heard two people speaking in Persian among the crowds. When he approached them he soon found out that they were Bahá’ís. They were Hájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-‘Alí, that illustrious follower of Bahá’u’lláh, and his fellow prisoner Ḥusayn-i-Shírází who had been set free from their ten-year imprisonment in Khartúm and were on their way to ‘Akká. They were in need of help and guidance, for this was their first journey to the Holy Land. Hájí Muḥammad knew then that the purpose of his mission in Jaddih was to assist these two souls to go to ‘Akká, a task which he then carried out ably.

134. Mullá-Riḍá—He had a passionate love for Bahá’u’lláh

A notable example of a man of insight was Mullá Muḥammad-Riḍá, a native of Muḥammad-Ábád in the province of Yazd. He was a divine known for his piety, eloquence and courage. He had embraced the Bábí Faith in the early years of its inception and became a great light among the followers of the Báb in Yazd. The following is a brief account of how he recognized the station of Bahá'u'lláh.

Soon after the return of Bahá'u'lláh from Kurdistán, a well-known Bábí surnamed Raḍa'r-Rúḥ, noted for his knowledge and learning, travelled to Bagḥdád and attained His presence. Although he met Bahá'u'lláh face to face, he failed at that time to recognize the full glory of His station. On his return to Yazd, Raḍa'r-Rúḥ shared with Mullá Riḍá the *Qaṣidiy-i-Varqá'íyyih* revealed by the Pen of Bahá'u'lláh. Upon perusing this single Tablet, Mullá Riḍá, through the purity of his heart and the clarity of his vision, recognized Bahá'u'lláh and exclaimed with great joy: 'I can see the Promised One of the Bayán made manifest and seated upon the throne of the words which have been revealed in this Tablet'. Raḍa'r-Rúḥ, who had actually attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh in Bagḥdád, became somewhat perturbed by the attitude and claims of Mullá Riḍá, and pointed out that Bahá'u'lláh Himself had not made such a claim. After some time, however, Raḍa'r-Rúḥ also accepted Bahá'u'lláh and His Faith, suffered much persecution in His path and, finally, about the year 1868 died a martyr's death in the village of Mihríz outside Yazd.

The story of Mullá Riḍá's life is a fascinating one. The following account is based on a biography of him:

Mullá Riḍá belonged to a well-known family and had received his education as a Muslim clergyman. From the time he embraced the Cause till the very moment he passed away in Tīhrán prison his

whole life was dedicated to teaching work. He ought to be regarded as a great hero whom the Almighty had raised in the early days of the Cause to proclaim His Message and upon whom He had bestowed a sword-like power of utterance with which he tore asunder the veils of ignorance and superstition, and by doing so constantly exposed himself to intense pain and suffering. In fact, seldom a day passed without his being handed a cup of woeful trials which he would sip with abundant joy and satisfaction.

Mullá Riḍá was an old man with a tall and shapely stature that enhanced his dignified bearing. His mode of behaviour was governed by a rare combination of frankness, humour, eloquence and exceptional courage, and dominated by his passionate love for Bahá'u'lláh. No one is known to have surpassed his unusual power of endurance. Of him it is authoritatively said by the friends that while he was detained in Yazd for Bahá'í activities and prior to his expulsion from the town, the Governor ordered that the bastinado be inflicted on him in public at seven crossroads during a single day so as to dissuade the inhabitants from going over to the new creed. At each appointed spot, Mullá Riḍá would remove his aba [cloak], turban and socks and place them on a handkerchief which he would spread on the ground; then after lying down and inserting his feet into the loop, he would cover his face with the hem of his garment and ask his persecutors to proceed. At no time during these rounds of torture did he breathe a word, or make a sign or move that implied a painful feeling. At one point his unusual calm in the face of brutal lashings made the stupefied onlookers imagine that the victim had collapsed. However, when his face was uncovered, they found him cleaning his teeth in a quiet manner!

As a teacher, Mullá Riḍá was highly qualified, exceptionally well-informed and audacious. No one could rival him in speech or in the knowledge of the *Qur'án* and Islámic law and tradition. While in Tíhrán prison, he was summoned on several occasions to answer questions about the Faith at gatherings of princes and notables of the realm. And at each session he prevailed over his distinguished opponents in argument and laid bare their ignorance and the absurdity of their notions.

Far from being cautious and calculating. Mullá Riḍá was extremely bold and frank in his manners, deeds and assertions. Always he spoke on the spur of the moment, unguardedly and effectively. He was not one to 'seek' opportunity for teaching; rather he would 'force' openings for himself in order to speak about the Cause to almost everyone he met. The dungeon life, dismal and dreary as it was, failed to curb his heroic spirit or to prevent his bold adventure in teaching work. On the contrary, it brought him new opportunities and spiritual powers which he grasped and exploited to the full, always disregarding the fact that such an indiscreet manner of public teaching in the presence of fanatical prisoners and authorities would entail fresh dangers and sufferings not only for himself but also for the rest of the friends who shared his dire fate. 'His public discussions', Siyyid Asadu'lláh-i-Qumí, his companion in jail narrates, 'sometimes became highly controversial and the excited fanatics who looked for such opportunities would join in with their derisive and insulting words. We used to point out to him that these ignorant people who passed such abusive remarks about the Cause certainly were not seekers of truth, but only trouble-makers. But he contended that the Cause is great and therefore is bound to

encounter great opposition and that those who try to defile its fair name through abuse and vituperation surely will never succeed in doing it any harm. What they actually do, he maintained, is to let everyone know how stupid they themselves are. Their foolish act resembles that of a man who tried vainly to spit on the sun.'

This same Siyyid Asadu'lláh further states that 'again and again we argued with Mullá Riḍá, begged and urged him to be moderate and sparing in his talks but nothing proved of any avail. Then as the situation grew worse and new dangers loomed ahead, the sense of fear and anxiety in our hearts prompted us to take a step that soon brought in its wake a grievous trial for him and a world of sorrow for us all. As a precaution against incidents, we went to the jailer, Maṣḥhadí 'Alí, and asked him to tell Mullá Riḍá not to speak in public about the Cause, hoping that his words and authority would induce him to change his attitude. But alas, how little did we know then that no earthly power, no amount of pain and suffering could ever curb his uncompromising spirit or dissuade this aged man of God from placing teaching work above safety and other personal considerations. So when he had refused to comply with the jailer's order, the latter grew angry and told his men to inflict corporal punishment on him. They took Mullá Riḍá into the prison yard and most brutally flogged his bare back. However, in spite of old age and the rigours of prison life, he remained steadfast as a rock throughout the ordeal. He neither budged nor did he raise the faintest cry, nor did his face bear the slightest expression of agony. It seemed as if he had momentarily lost his sense of feeling. All the friends were profoundly shocked and shaken at the sight of his suffering and soon after the torturing, I hurriedly went over to offer my sympathy and

to dress his wounds. Mullá Riḍá, greatly surprised at my behaviour, shouted triumphantly: “O, Siyyid Asadu’lláh! Do you really think I am hurt? At the time of flogging I felt like a drunken elephant and never felt the slightest pain. I was in the presence of Bahá’u’lláh, talking to him.”

Among the non-Bahá’í prisoners who witnessed this harrowing scene there was a distinguished man by the name of Ghulám-Riḍá Khán, whose heart was deeply touched and transformed at the sight of the superhuman endurance manifested by the victim, and the interest and surprise thus aroused led him to investigate. His search for truth was soon rewarded by confirmation and he eventually became a devoted believer. When released from prison, this same man was asked how he happened to become a Bahá’í. ‘I received my light from the floggings,’ he said and added, ‘If instead hundreds of verses from the *Qur’án* had been recited to me or a thousand reasons adduced to convince me of the truth of this Message, none would have influenced me as did the unruffled calm which the old, stout-hearted Mullá Riḍá evinced under torture.’

Another story told by Siyyid Asadulláh is the following. ‘There was a poor prisoner of Jewish persuasion in our midst. One day Mullá Riḍá called me and said: “Do you see this Jew, how miserable and lonely he is? None of the Muslims ever speak to or associate with him, nor do they let him enter the public bath because they regard him as unclean. And look what dirty, ragged clothing he wears. Now would you not help me to bathe this poor Jew by the side of the prison pool?” He insisted so much that at last I consented to assist him in this odious task. We made the Jew sit beside the pool and removed

the untidy clothing which barely covered his squalid figure. Then I kept pouring water over him while Mullá Riḍá scrubbed and sponged his foul body. Having washed him clean, Mullá Riḍá brought some clean clothing for him to wear. Throughout the whole time the Jew was lost in bewilderment. "Are you people angels or human beings?" muttered the Jew. "Why, surely you are not of the Jewish fold, yet so very kind and generous!" he added. "O, you wretched fellow!" exclaimed Mullá Riḍá, "it is none but the word of your Father that prompted me to wash and clothe you. But alas! You don't know your Father, do you? Nor have you heard this word of His: 'Consort ye with the peoples of all religions in a spirit of love and fellowship.'"

Mullá Riḍá was a man of peculiar conduct and of a trend of thought unusual by our standards. He had attained a station from which he saw in every object a sign or a reflection of the glory of Bahá'u'lláh, and the love he cherished for Him dominated his whole being and to it he subordinated every other impulse. Mírzá Ḥusayn-i-Zanjání, another Bahá'í prisoner, gives the following account concerning Mullá Riḍá: 'For sixteen months I was his close companion during which I dedicated myself to his service. I prepared his food, washed his clothing, did everything in my power to make him comfortable. However, he seldom thanked me; instead he would say, "I thank the Blessed Beauty for the comfort and help He has provided for me." Whenever I brought him food he used to say: "I render Thee thanks, O Bahá'u'lláh!" Or when he happened to give away something as charity or do a service to others he would say: "I give this to Bahá'u'lláh ..." One day they brought in a prisoner who had no shirt on. Mullá Riḍá on seeing him turned to me and said: "This poor young man is a servant of Bahá'u'lláh, though he does not know his

Lord. As he is half-naked we would better let him have the spare shirt we have between ourselves. We do not need to have a spare shirt in prison; it is a sort of luxury and surely we can do without it.” I said “Very well, you put on this spare shirt which I have just washed and give this boy the one you are now wearing.” On hearing my suggestion, Mullá Riḍá lost his temper and shouted at me indignantly: “Do you mean to say that I put on the clean shirt and place my used one in the hands of the Blessed Beauty? How dare you make such a cruel suggestion? Aren't you a Bahá'í? Bahá'u'lláh says it is not charity unless you give away the things you hold dear. I wonder how long it will take you to attain and understand.”

Mírzá Husayn further states: ‘Early during the reign of Muẓaffari’d-Din Sháh [1896-1907], the friends in Ṭihrán petitioned the Sháh on several occasions and succeeded in obtaining a decree for our release. On the day of liberation we were paraded in chains along the thickly crowded route to the house of the Farrásh-báshí where we were taken into custody, awaiting necessary formalities to be over. Throughout that anxious time we begged and cautioned Mullá Riḍá to keep calm and silent, lest a heedless word to the authorities create fresh troubles and suffering for us. Yet, notwithstanding our constant warnings and against our advice, he went to an adjoining room to talk to a group of theological students headed by a fanatical evil-minded Siyyid. We could hear their conversation, as it developed into a heated dispute. Mullá Riḍá was hitting hard with the solid weapon of proofs, accompanied by a flood of verses from the *Qur’án*. The hostile group were utterly confounded and, as none could challenge him in argument, they grew hysterical and abusive, inflicted blows on Mullá Riḍá and ejected him from their midst. This

tragic incident, however, did not end there. It led to grievous consequences. The same day through mischievous machinations on the part of the malicious Siyyid, Mullá Riḍá was ordered to go back to jail, while the rest of us were released.

‘This new development brought immense grief and anxiety to our hearts but failed to disturb Mullá Riḍá in the least. He remained bold, happy, imperturbable and as jovial as ever. However, as there was no one to look after him in prison, the dire privations and hardships there made themselves strongly felt on his frail and aged frame and served to hasten his journey to the shores of eternity. His days of suffering were now numbered and his illustrious soul, only ten days after this last confinement, took its flight to the abode of the Beloved.’

The two wonderful Tablets revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to his imperishable memory show how glorious is his rank as a teacher as well as a martyr, and how heroic an example he set in serving the Cause of God.

Whereas Mullá Riḍá recognized the station of Bahá’u’lláh through a mere perusal of one of His Tablets, there were others who, though sincere in their search for truth, were deprived of this vision and because of their learning and knowledge took time to acknowledge the authenticity of the Message of Bahá’u’lláh.

135. Mírzá ‘Abbas, Qábil—*The Hidden Words* transformed him

Mírzá ‘Abbas Qábil’s life of service and dedication is clearly indicative of a potent and transforming influence on his soul, partly derived from his

chanting of some passages of *The Hidden Words* every day.

He was a zealous and enthusiastic man, a poet of remarkable talent, a teacher of wide repute and, above all, devoted to Bahá'u'lláh. He lived to old age, after suffering many persecutions and spending much of his life in travel and teaching. He used to stay at home with his family only a few months each year; the rest of the time he travelled long distances on a donkey, riding from village to village and town to town. His enthusiastic spirit, coupled with his deep love for Bahá'u'lláh, cheered and uplifted the believers whom he met on his way. They would gather to meet him and he would often request them, whenever circumstances permitted, to chant in unison certain Tablets or poems of Bahá'u'lláh which lent themselves to collective chanting, and would teach them to sing together some of his own beautiful, soul-stirring songs composed in praise and glorification of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá or Shoghi Effendi.

In those days the playing of musical instruments was frowned upon by the Muslim clergy, and the Bahá'ís were careful not to upset a fanatical populace by playing them. But Qábil had a certain genius in clapping his hands to accompany their songs of love and praise. Where greater freedom prevailed, a home-made drum was a welcome accompaniment to his chant of love for Bahá'u'lláh. The believers, who were often oppressed and persecuted, always welcomed the few days that Qábil spent with them, for he created joy and enthusiasm wherever he went.

136. Siyyid Ja'far-i-Yazdí—“...it won't matter if you spit upon my face”

Siyyid Ja'far-i-Yazdí was a distinguished divine and a man highly esteemed by the inhabitants of Yazd. It was on the occasion of Vahíd's visit to that city for the purpose of teaching the Cause that he embraced the Bábí Faith. Soon afterwards a wave of persecutions compelled Vahíd and Siyyid Ja'far, together with some other believers, to leave Yazd and go to Nayríz in the province of Fárs.

Having enjoyed great prestige as a divine and being endowed with a wonderful power of exposition, Siyyid Ja'far, under the direction of Vahíd, began to teach the Cause publicly in Nayríz. It was not long before a great multitude joined the Faith. This in turn provoked bitter opposition from government authorities and ecclesiastics. A great upheaval followed resulting in the martyrdom of many, including Vahíd himself.

The chief instigator of these dire happenings, Zaynu'l-Ábidín Khán, the Governor of Nayríz, captured a few survivors whom he proposed to torture to death for various specific reasons. Among these was Ja'far, who, because of his knowledge and power of utterance, was regarded by the Governor as one of those sharing the major responsibility for converting people to the new Faith. Nabíl, the famous Bahá'í chronicler, has recorded the following about Siyyid Ja'far's arrest:

Among them [survivors of the Nayríz upheaval] was a certain Siyyid Ja'far-i-Yazdí, who in former days had exercised immense influence and had been greatly honoured by the people. So great was the respect they owed him that Zaynu'l-Ábidín Khán gave him precedence over himself and treated him with extreme deference and courtesy. He gave orders that the turban of that same man be befouled and flung into the fire. Shorn of the emblem of his lineage,

he was exposed to the eyes of the public, who marched before him and overwhelmed him with abuse and ridicule.

The Nayriz upheaval which lasted for many months brought widespread poverty and famine in its wake. The troops who were engaged in this conflict had drawn too heavily upon the meagre resources of the local community and at long last, after the departure of the troops, food had become almost unobtainable and many poor people were starving. In the meantime, the Governor had hoarded a large stock of corn to sell to the public at an inflated price. When, however, the situation became desperate, he consented to distribute the corn among the people at a nominal sum.

When the ration was given out, Siyyid Ja'far would be brought from the dungeon and posted at the entrance to the barn. The Governor's orders were that all those who wished to obtain corn must first spit upon Siyyid Ja'far's face. Failure to do this would deprive them of their ration.

The following extract from a biography of Siyyid Ja'far reveals something of this ordeal and other indignities which were heaped upon him and his fellow-prisoner, Hájí Muḥammad-Taqí, an eminent personage of Nayríz and an ardent follower of the Báb.

For hours this champion of the Cause of God [Siyyid Ja'far], this once revered man of learning, stood by the door of the barn while hundreds of men and women spat upon his blessed face as they filed through that door, looking at him with bitter hate and prejudice.

In the face of this dire humiliation, Áqá Siyyid Ja'far's feelings were not those of disgust, intolerance or indignation. On the contrary, he remained calm and resigned throughout his ordeal and manifested a

spirit of sublime joy and love and thankfulness towards those who offended him.

Once during the ordeal, it is authoritatively stated, he noticed several people who hesitated to come forward for their share. Apparently the ghastly deed of spitting upon his face kept them away. With a face beaming with heavenly joy he beckoned them and said: 'You had better come and get your share before it is too late; it won't matter if you spit upon my face; I'll wipe it off with my handkerchief...'

A deed such as this, so rare, so Christ-like, constitutes a shining proof of the transmuting power which is latent in the words of the Manifestations of God.

Very probably, as he stood by the door of the barn that day, his thoughts went back to those glamorous days in Yazd, where each Friday at the close of his sermon, standing on the steps of the pulpit, he would receive the homage and the tumultuous ovation of the vast audience. Now how striking was the contrast! Although the object of the vilest indignity, he was extremely happy, because his beloved Lord had revealed to his eyes the glorious vista of a new life and bestowed upon him the crown of eternal glory. Little wonder, therefore, that those bitter persecutions could not becloud the radiance of his heavenly joy...

This monstrous treatment meted out to Áqá Siyyid Ja'far was but a prelude to a period of agonizing tortures for himself as well as for his illustrious companion. Among other things, the ruthless Governor ordered that the bastinado be inflicted on Áqá Siyyid Ja'far in public. Each day he was conducted from the dungeon to the gate of the house of a well-to-do citizen where this heart-rending scene was

staged. There he was beaten until, as was the fashion, the occupants of the house as well as passers-by would secure the victim's temporary release by offering money to the torturers as a ransom. Then, next day, the scene would be shifted to another point along the street. After a while, as a result of this daily torture, Áqá Siyyid Ja'far's legs and feet became so horribly sore and swollen that they could no longer support his body.

The fate of his companion, Hájí Muḥammad-Taquí, was even more cruel and appalling. Daily, he was conducted to the Governor's mansion where, stripped of his clothes, he was flung into the pool. A number of men, placed around and armed with long sticks, would administer severe blows upon his body. The standing order was that the beating should be continued until the water around him turned reddish with blood.

However, the mighty Hand that had raised up and reared these wondrous beings was now to stay the tide of suffering which was about to engulf them. They were destined to live to receive the greatest privilege of all, having their eyes illumined by gazing upon the heavenly countenance of Bahá'u'lláh.

It was the Governor's wife who, as the result of a dream, was prompted to secure their freedom. She approached her husband with an earnest appeal to release these unfortunate victims, but her intercession proved of no avail. Moreover, she was rebuked for being too soft and sentimental. Undismayed by her husband's ruthless attitude, she decided to work secretly towards that end.

With the goodwill and support of a few trusted persons at her disposal she worked out a plan and made the necessary

arrangements with utmost caution. Then, late one evening the prison door was opened and the pitiable figures of Ḥájí Muḥammad-Taqí and Áqá Siyyid Ja‘far were taken out, propped up on donkeys and entrusted to a muleteer with the express order to carry them at full speed to Harát—a small town beyond the area of jurisdiction of the Governor of Nayríz.

Eventually, when these oppressed souls reached Harát they were utterly exhausted. The sight of their appalling condition presented a study in grief and aroused the sympathy of the headman of the village who received and treated them with the utmost kindness.

They remained in Harát for a number of months to recuperate and heal their terrible wounds. Afterwards they travelled to Yazd. When the friends came to know about the banishment of Bahá‘u’lláh to ‘Iráq, Ḥájí Muḥammad-Taqí set out on foot on a journey of no less than 1,500 kilometres to Bagħdád, where he attained the presence of Bahá‘u’lláh and received His abundant blessings. The momentous Súrih of Şabr was revealed to his imperishable memory.

Later Áqá Siyyid Ja‘far followed the example of his old companion. Those feet that had received such beastly tortures for months did not fail to carry him all the long way to the abode of his Lord where the Hands of Glory showered heavenly bounties upon him ...

137. Áqá Muḥammad-‘Alí—A delightful companion to Bahá‘u’lláh

Áqá Muḥammad-‘Alí was a devoted companion of Bahá‘u’lláh. He had accompanied Bahá‘u’lláh from Bagħdád to Constantinople and Adrianople, and he was also among those who later journeyed with

Him to 'Akká. He was a man who enjoyed a good life in spite of the hardships and privations suffered during these banishments. Of him 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes:

... he had little to live on, but was happy and content. A man of excellent disposition, he was congenial to believers and others alike ... In Adrianople as well, his days passed happily, under the protection of Bahá'u'lláh. He would carry on some business which, however trifling, would bring in surprisingly abundant returns ...

He spent his days in utter bliss. Here, too, he carried on a small business, which occupied him from morning till noon. In the afternoons he would take his samovar, wrap it in a dark-coloured pouch made from a saddle-bag, and go off somewhere to a garden or meadow, or out in a field, and have his tea. Sometimes he would be found at the farm of Mazra'ih, or again in the Ridván Garden; or, at the Mansion, he would have the honour of attending upon Bahá'u'lláh.

Muhammad-'Alí would carefully consider every blessing that came his way. 'How delicious my tea is today,' he would comment. 'What perfume, what colour! How lovely this meadow is, and the flowers so bright!' He used to say that everything, even air and water, had its own special fragrance. For him the days passed in indescribable delight. Even kings were not so happy as this old man, the people said. 'He is completely free of the world,' they would declare. 'He lives in joy.' It also happened that his food was of the very best, and that his home was situated in the very best part of 'Akká. Gracious God! Here he was, a prisoner, and yet experiencing comfort, peace and joy.

Áqá Muḥammad-‘Alí had a great sense of humour and was a delightful companion to Bahá’u’lláh. Once in ‘Akká Bahá’u’lláh attended a memorial meeting for one of the believers who had died. Áqá Muḥammad-‘Alí was present. He noticed how the bounties of Bahá’u’lláh and His loving-kindness were being showered upon the soul of the deceased. Longing for the same treatment, he is reported to have said to Him, ‘I shall be honoured if you would presume that I am dead also, and give me the privilege of inviting you to attend a memorial meeting for me!’ Thereupon he gave a lavish feast in which he entertained Bahá’u’lláh and the believers in ‘Akká.

138. Mírzá Muṣṭafá—“Kill me before Shaykh Aḥmad, that I may not see them shed his blood”

On the day Bahá’u’lláh was to leave Constantinople, a devoted believer by the name of Mírzá Muṣṭafá arrived. He was a native of Naráq, and had embraced the Faith of the Báb in the early days. During Bahá’u’lláh’s sojourn in ‘Iráq he had visited that country, and attained His presence. He had remained there for some time, and beheld the glory of his Lord which was as yet unrevealed to the eyes of men. In Constantinople he had the opportunity to meet Him only once, when Bahá’u’lláh summoned him and directed him to return to Persia and engage in teaching His Cause. He went to Ádhirbáyján. The following are the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá concerning this heroic soul:

When Mírzá Muṣṭafá reached Ádhirbáyján, he began to spread the Faith. Day and night he remained in a state of prayer, and there in Tabríz he drank of a brimming cup. His fervour increased, his teaching raised a tumult. Then the eminent scholar, the renowned

Shaykh Aḥmad-i-Khurásání, came to Ádhirbáyján and the two of them joined forces. The result was such overwhelming spiritual fire that they taught the Faith openly and publicly and the people of Tabríz rose up in wrath.

The farráshes hunted them down, and caught Mírzá Muşţafá. But then the oppressors said, 'Mírzá Muşţafá had two long locks of hair. This cannot be the right man.' At once, Mírzá Muşţafá took off his hat and down fell the locks of hair. 'Behold!' he told them. 'I am the one.' They arrested him then. They tortured him and Shaykh Aḥmad until finally, in Tabríz, those two great men drained the cup of death and, martyred, hastened away to the Supreme Horizon.

At the place where they were to be killed, Mírzá Muşţafá cried out: 'Kill me first, kill me before Shaykh Aḥmad, that I may not see them shed his blood!'

It was customary at the time of execution for the victim to turn his face towards the Qiblih of Islám. But Mírzá Muşţafá turned towards Adrianople. He was reminded to face the Qiblih but he refused to do so. He said 'This is the true Qiblih,' and shouted 'Ya-Bahá'u'l-Abhá'.

139. Mullá Muḥammad-i-Manshádí—"I will not come to the mosque again"

Soon after his return from 'Akká where he attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, Ḥájí Muḥammad-Táhir, as bidden, began his teaching work with unbounded enthusiasm and devotion in the district of Yazd. Bahá'u'lláh had personally taught him how to teach His Faith. Many people with whom he talked joined the ranks of the believers, but he

never attributed this success to himself. He was absolutely convinced that the hand of Bahá'u'lláh was always at work. One of those with whom he came in contact was Mullá Muḥammad-i-Manshádí, a distinguished *mujtahid* and one of the leading figures among the divines of the district of Yazd. Being sincere and pure at heart, this great man recognized the truth of the Cause of God and later laid down his life in the path of Bahá'u'lláh. This is the story:

In the winter, I paid a visit to Manshád and stayed in the house of Rada'r-Rúḥ. One day his brother, Áqá Mullá Bábá'í, who was later martyred, talked about a certain Muslim divine [Mullá Muḥammad-i-Manshádí], saying that he was a good person. He asked my advice as to whether he should invite him, so that I could speak to him about the Faith. I thought there was no harm provided he did not create trouble. Mullá Bábá'í assured me that this man was not a trouble-maker ... so I agreed that he should be invited.

Mullá Bábá'í informed me that Mullá Muḥammad was the most learned among the divines and that this opinion was shared by all the Muslim clergy in the city of Yazd, because most of the divines in the city usually spent two or three years studying at Najaf and Karbilá, whereas Mullá Muḥammad had studied for twenty-one years at Najaf and had received the rank of *mujtahid* from three different leaders of the Shí'ah hierarchy. Since Mullá Muḥammad was a native of Manshád, he preferred to live in his home village rather than having his office in the city ... He was an acknowledged authority on religious matters and the clergy in Yazd used to refer to him those problems about which they could not agree.

However, he came one evening. Although I was not a knowledgeable person, I did not feel in any way inadequate, since God, exalted by His glory, was assisting me. I spoke with Mullá Muḥammad for about four to five hours that evening. But he did not talk much. When leaving, he said that he would like to come the next evening and bring with him a certain Mullá 'Alí-Akbar. Mullá Báábá'í, however, felt it was not wise to invite Mullá 'Alí-Akbar since he might stir up trouble. But Mullá Muḥammad assured him that in his presence Mullá 'Alí-Akbar would not be able to do any harm.

So the next evening two of them came. Mullá 'Alí-Akbar was a brother-in-law of Mullá Muḥammad. He did not have great knowledge but was a meddler and an argumentative person who used to confuse the issues during conversation. That evening, he took part in discussions with me which lasted till midnight. In the course of discussion he continually tried to pervert the truth, but Mullá Muḥammad, who always realized this, would intervene and support my argument ...

The next evening Mullá Muḥammad came alone, but he would neither agree nor disagree with my talks and explanations. When he was leaving I gave him the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* to read at home. When he arrived the next evening he said to me, 'I did not grasp much from your talks during this period, but after reading a part of this book, I was assured that God has manifested Himself, because these words are new and unique.'... So Mullá Muḥammad was confirmed in the Faith as a result of reading the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* ...

The next day He ascended the pulpit and made the following statement: 'Up to now all of us have been used to consider that the

Bábís are misled, but during the last few days I have come to realize, and I am now assured, that the Promised Qá'im has manifested Himself. Anyone who wishes to know this may investigate and find the truth for himself.'

Mullá 'Alí-Akbar who was sitting close to the pulpit shouted loudly 'Jináb-i-Mullá! What are you saying? Do you realize that after speaking in this manner you may not be allowed to come to the mosque again or to remain the Imám-Jum'ih?'

Mulhi Muḥammad answered 'I will not come to the mosque again.' And he never did.

As to Mullá Muḥammad, once the great *mujtahid* of Manshad, whose conversion to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh had sparked off such cruelties, he renounced the leadership of the Muslim community after his recognition of the station of Bahá'u'lláh. Having no earthly possessions to support himself and his family, he found no alternative but to earn his living by working as a building labourer. He was a tower of strength to the Bahá'ís and served the Cause with great humility and self-effacement, until after some years he won the crown of martyrdom and laid down his life in the path of Bahá'u'lláh.

The same people who were once his admirers and servants, who used to bow before him as he appeared in their midst, who crowded in the mosque to hear him speak and lead them in prayer, were now intent upon taking his life, for he had embraced the Cause of God. During the Bahá'í massacre of 1903 in the city of Yazd and neighbouring villages Mullá Muḥammad was martyred. The crowds dragged his body through the village and delivered it to the flames.

This chain of events, leading one to another, amply demonstrates that teaching the Cause in the early days needed great courage and wisdom. It also shows that victories won for the Faith of God have often resulted in trials and persecutions which in turn have spurred the believers on to achieve greater victories for their Lord.

140. Muḥammad-Khán—He was instantly enslaved

Muḥammad-Khán rendered great services to the Faith. Having recognized the Supreme Manifestation of God, he could not sit idle. He conveyed the glad tidings of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh to his friends and associates, among them Mírzá Yúsuf Khán, the Mustawfíyu'l-Mamálik, who at one stage was Prime Minister of Persia. 'Abdu'l-Bahá relates the story of Muḥammad-Khán (whom he refers to as 'the Hájí') when he embraced the Faith, and describes his enthusiasm and his meeting with Mírzá Yúsuf Khán in these words:

Thus at the very moment when he heard the call from the Kingdom of God, he shouted, 'Yea verily!' and he was off like the desert wind. He travelled over vast distances, arrived at the Most Great Prison and attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. When his eyes fell upon that bright Countenance he was instantly enslaved. He returned to Persia so that he could meet with those people who professed to be following the Path, those friends of other days who were seeking out the Truth, and deal with them as his loyalty and duty required.

Both going and returning, the Hájí betook himself to each one of his friends, foregathered with them, and let each one hear the new song from Heaven. He reached his homeland and set his family's affairs in

order, providing for all, seeing to the security, happiness and comfort of each one. After that he bade them all goodbye. To his relatives, his wife, children, kin, he said: 'Do not look for me again; do not wait for my return.'

He took up a staff and wandered away; over the mountains he went, across the plains, seeking and finding the mystics, his friends. On his first journey, he went to the late Mírzá Yúsuf Khán (Mustawfíyu'l-Mamálik), in Tíhrán. When he had said his say, Yúsuf Khán expressed a wish, and declared that should it be fulfilled, he would believe; the wish was to be given a son. Should such a bounty become his, Yúsuf Khán would be won over. The Hájí reported this to Bahá'u'lláh, and received a firm promise in reply. Accordingly, when the Hájí met with Yúsuf Khán on his second journey, he found him with a child in his arms. 'Mírzá,' the Hájí cried, 'praise be to God! Your test has demonstrated the Truth. You snared your bird of joy.' 'Yes,' answered Yúsuf Khán, 'the proof is clear. I am convinced. This year, when you go to Bahá'u'lláh, say that I implore His grace and favour for this child, so that it may be kept in the sheltering care of God.'

'Abdu'l-Bahá in one of His Tablets states that when Bahá'u'lláh was informed of this request He directed Muḥammad-Khán to go home via Tíhrán especially to meet Mírzá Yúsuf Khán, give him a sugar plum to eat and convey to him the assurance that God would give him a son. It was on his final return to the Holy Land that Muḥammad-Khán saw with his own eyes the fulfilment of that promise.

Muḥammad-Khán was a devoted believer on fire with the love of Bahá'u'lláh. When he embraced the Faith and later attained Bahá'u'lláh's presence, he became an entirely new creation. The honour

and high esteem in which he was held by his people and the comfort and prosperity he enjoyed in his life were now utterly worthless to him. His greatest desire was to relinquish his all and become a servant of Bahá'u'lláh as a doorkeeper. He attained his wish and for some years was a servant in the household of Bahá'u'lláh. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has recounted his story as follows:

Hájí Muḥammad then went to the blissful future martyr, the King of Martyrs, and asked him to intercede, so that he, the Hájí, might be allowed to keep watch at the doorway of Bahá'u'lláh. The King of Martyrs sent in this request by letter, after which Hájí Khán duly arrived at the Most Great Prison and made his home in the neighbourhood of his loving Friend. He enjoyed this honour for a long time, and later, in the Mazrá'ih garden as well, he was very frequently in Bahá'u'lláh's presence. After the Beloved had ascended, Hájí Khán remained faithful to the Covenant and Testament, shunning the hypocrites. At last, when this servant was absent on the journeys to Europe and America, the Hájí made his way to the travellers' hospice at the Ḥazratu'l-Quds; and here, beside the Shrine of the Báb, he took his flight to the world above.

May God refresh his spirit with the musk-scented air of the Abhá Paradise, and the sweet savours of holiness that blow from the highest Heaven. Unto him be greetings and praise. His bright tomb is in Haifa.

141. Áqá Mírzá Áqáy-i-Afnán (Núru'd-Din)—He received many bounties from Bahá'u'lláh

Áqá Mírzá Áqáy-i-Afnán's mother was a sister of Khadíjih Bagum, the wife of the Báb, and Áqá Mírzá Áqá was born two years before His Declaration. In a Tablet to His wife revealed in the prison of Máh-Kú the Báb assures her that when Áqá Mírzá Áqá reaches the age of maturity he will be her helper and protector. These prophetic words of the Báb were fulfilled, for Áqá Mírzá Áqá dedicated his life to the service of his beloved aunt, whom he revered and served with unbounded devotion. Khadíjih Bagum lovingly taught him the Faith and at the age of thirteen Áqá Mírzá Áqá recognized the truth of the Mission of the Báb. It was through his efforts that Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muḥammad, the eldest maternal uncle of the Báb, went to meet Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdád and as a result became the recipient of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* which assured him of the truth of the Báb's Revelation.

Soon after His Declaration near Baghdád, Bahá'u'lláh sent Nabíl-i-A'zam to Persia to announce the momentous news to the Bábís. Nabíl went to the home of Áqá Mírzá Áqá and announced the joyful tidings to the believers in Shíráz. Áqá Mírzá Áqá immediately gave his allegiance to Bahá'u'lláh and considered himself a humble servant at His threshold. On one occasion the wife of the Báb, who was seated behind a curtain, heard Nabíl inform the friends that the Blessed Beauty was the Promised One of the Bayán, 'Him Whom God shall make Manifest'. No sooner did that noble woman hear this announcement than she put her forehead to the ground in adoration of her newly-found Lord and is reported to have whispered to her nephew: 'Offer at His sacred threshold my most humble devotion.' Thus the bonds of love and adoration which had united these two became strengthened through their immediate response to the Cause they had both spontaneously espoused.

From the early days Áqá Mírzá Áqá became the recipient of many favours and bounties from Bahá'u'lláh. The custodianship of the House of the Báb, which was conferred upon the wife of the Báb and her sister, also included him and his descendants. In 1879 Áqá Mírzá Áqá moved to India and established a trading business in Bombay. A few years later, in 1887, he travelled to Egypt and Beirut where he stayed for some time in the home of his maternal uncle Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Hasan, known as Afnán-i-Kabír (the Great Afnán). In Beirut he and his eldest son Áqá Siyyid Áqá received permission to visit Bahá'u'lláh. They both attained His presence for the first time on the anniversary of the Báb's Declaration which that year coincided with 20 January 1888. Bahá'u'lláh bestowed unbounded blessings upon them. He is reported to have honoured them by ordering His servant to place a fur-lined overcoat on the shoulders of each as they were sitting in His presence.

With Bahá'u'lláh's approval Áqá Mírzá Áqá and his eldest son proceeded to Port Said and established a business there. Each year he was permitted to go to the Holy Land where he attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. He went in 1889, 1890 and 1891. His last visit was the most memorable as he stayed for nine months and was accompanied by his family; they preceded him to Haifa and arrived on 17 July 1891 when Bahá'u'lláh was staying at the foot of Mount Carmel on his last visit to that spot. The party consisted of Áqá Mírzá Áqá's wife, four of their sons, and their only daughter. Áqá Mírzá Áqá himself joined his family fifteen days later when his eldest son returned to Port Said.

One of his sons Hájí Mírzá Habíbu'lláh, who was then fifteen years of age, has recorded in his memoirs some interesting anecdotes of their

pilgrimage. The following are extracts from his notes summarized and translated:

When the ship reached Haifa the very thought of prostrating ourselves at His threshold and attaining His presence which the Prophets and His chosen ones had wished to attain invoked such eagerness and excitement in our hearts that with tears streaming down our cheeks, we were transported into a different world. We arrived at a spot where the souls of all the Manifestations of God were circumambulating day and night around His Blessed Person. My eldest brother, Áqá Siyyid Áqá, who had previously attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, taught us how to conduct ourselves in that holy presence with absolute humility, servitude and utter self-effacement ...

I remember clearly that the sun had not yet fully risen, the air was fresh and vivifying as we were led to His Blessed tent which was pitched at the foot of Mount Carmel ... Our wish was truly fulfilled when our guide pushed the curtain aside and we beheld the most holy Figure of the Blessed Beauty standing in the middle of the room. (Bahá'u'lláh at that time stayed in a house not far from the tent)

On our right sat Mírzá Áqá Ján in front of a samovar. Bahá'u'lláh ordered tea for us and then the Tongue of Grandeur addressed us in these words, 'O flowers of the rose garden of Jináb-i-Afnán (Áqá Mírzá Áqá), you are welcome. Your journey from Shíráz was very difficult. The will of God and the efforts of Jináb-i-Afnán enabled you to attain to this Most Holy Threshold... '

The house next door to that of the Blessed Beauty was rented for us, and we stayed in this close proximity of His luminous Person.

Attaining His presence and meeting with the early believers made us forget everything else. It is impossible to describe the sweetness of life and the joy of our souls in those days.

Fifteen days had passed when my eldest brother returned to Port Said and my father arrived. My father was the recipient of much blessing and bounty from Bahá'u'lláh. It was around that time that the news of the martyrdom of the seven martyrs of Yazd reached there...

The weather in Haifa and 'Akká was now improving. Autumn was setting in. The Blessed Beauty returned to the Mansion of Bahjí. A small house close to the Mansion was provided for us ... From our house we could see the room of Bahá'u'lláh. When we arose at dawn for our devotions, we could often see His room lighted and His Blessed Person pacing up and down revealing verses, and Mírzá Áqá Ján taking down His words ... In those days Mírzá Yúsuf Khán-i-Vujdání and Siyyid Asadu'lláh-i-Qumí were tutors to the Aghṣán. The Blessed Beauty instructed the three of us, Hájí Mírzá Buzurg, Hájí Mírzá Dīyá and myself, to attend their lessons. The late Mishkín Qalam taught us calligraphy and one of the rooms on the ground floor of the Mansion was set aside as our classroom.

One day before sunrise a servant of Bahá'u'lláh's household informed us that His Blessed Person would be coming to our house. On hearing this news tears of joy flowed from our eyes. With infinite joy we hastened to Him. He was coming toward our house with great majesty and grandeur. We all prostrated ourselves and kissed His feet. Upon each one of us He showered His bounties. He entered our home and conferred upon us everlasting honour. I brought a cup of

tea for Him. He drank half of it and gave me the rest. He also gave me a black rosary made of olive wood which He was holding in His hands. I kissed His hands. I loved that rosary as my own life and have left it in the archives of the House of the Báb in Shíráz.

As I have already mentioned, we could see the room of the Blessed Beauty from our house. I saw Him several times at the hour of dawn or in the early morning engaged in revealing verses of God. Often His Blessed Person was uttering words and Mírzá Áqá Ján was sitting in His presence. Usually Mírzá Áqá Ján had several pens cut to a fine nib, with paper and ink ready at his side. The outpouring of the Word of God was swift, and billowed as a surging sea.

Mírzá Áqá Ján wrote as quickly as he could. The speed was such that sometimes his pen jumped out of his hand. He then would take another pen. And on some occasions he was unable to cope with the speed of Revelation ...

The festival on the first day of Muḥarram 1309 (7th August 1891) was celebrated by the Blessed Perfection. He had summoned all the friends to attend. Since my father was a heavily built man and suffered from rheumatism he could not sit on the floor, and the Blessed Perfection said, 'Bring a chair for the Afnán.' One of the servants brought a chair for him. He then said, 'Bring chairs for his sons also.' So all of us sat on chairs. All the resident believers and pilgrims were present. That day the utterances of His Blessed Person centred around the theme of the divisions which had occurred in past religions...He then Himself distributed some sweetmeats to all present. At the end He said, 'This is a day on which the exalted Herald was born, and illumined the whole world with the brightness

of His light. This is the time of rejoicing.' (These are not the exact words of Bahá'u'lláh, but the recollections of the chronicler.) And then He dismissed all from His presence. After this the believers could be seen standing in small groups close to the Mansion near the pine trees, repeating the words of the Blessed Perfection to each other so as to commit them to memory.

The next day, the 2nd of Muḥarram, which was the anniversary of the birthday of the One who is the Creator of the world and the Lord of mankind [Bahá'u'lláh], all the pilgrims and resident Bahá'ís were summoned to His holy presence. That day He spoke about the greatness of His Revelation, the power of the Most Exalted Pen, the circumstances of His exile and His arrival at the Most Great Prison. He then spoke in great detail about the oppression and the persecution on the part of the tyrant enemies and divines ... He stated that in spite of all the sufferings inflicted upon them by the government and the Sháh, the friends do not cease to demonstrate their allegiance to the Cause. They disregard wisdom and caution and they are not to be blamed for this, because two great festivals have been combined together. He gave us the glad-tidings that the future of the Cause throughout the world would be very brilliant ... When His utterances ended He distributed sweetmeats and we were dismissed from His presence.

One evening we were informed that the Beloved of the World [Bahá'u'lláh] intended to visit the Garden of Junaynih and had directed that all the pilgrims and resident Bahá'ís accompany Him in the morning. That night we could not sleep because we were so excited ... that we should have the bounty of being in His holy

presence for several hours the next day. At the hour of dawn we faced His blessed room and engaged in prayers and devotions. Before sunrise we all assembled outside the gate of the Mansion. It took about one hour until His Blessed Person came downstairs and mounted a white donkey ... All the believers followed Him on foot to the garden. One of the local believers, Hájí Khávar, was a tall man. He walked alongside Bahá'u'lláh and held an umbrella over His head as a protection against the heat of the sun. The air was refreshing as we arrived in the garden ... His Blessed Person was extremely happy that day and each one of the friends received his share of the bounties from His presence. We had lunch in the garden, then we assembled together and attained His presence.

It was at that time that 'Abdu'l-Bahá arrived from 'Akká. The Blessed Beauty said, 'The Master is coming, hasten to attend Him' ... On those days Bahá'u'lláh used to sow the seeds of loyalty and servitude toward 'Him whom God hath purposed' ['Abdu'l-Bahá] in the hearts of the believers and explained the lofty station and the hidden reality of the Master to all.

Attended by everyone, 'Abdu'l-Bahá came with great humility into the presence of the Blessed Beauty. Then the Tongue of Grandeur uttered words to this effect, 'From morning until now this garden was not very pleasant, but now with the presence of the Master it has become truly most delightful.' Then, turning to the Master, He remarked, 'You should have come in the morning.' 'Abdu'l-Bahá responded, 'The Governor of 'Akká and some residents had requested to meet with Me. Therefore I had to receive and entertain them.' Bahá'u'lláh, with a smiling face, said, 'The Master is our shield.

Everybody here lives in the utmost comfort and peace. Association with the outside people such as these is very, very difficult. It is the Master who stands up to everything, and prepares the means of comfort for all the friends. May God protect Him from the evil of the envious and the hostile.’

Áqá Mírzá Áqá and his family basked in the sunshine of Bahá’u’lláh’s presence for nine months. When the time came to depart they were all plunged into deepest sorrow. But Bahá’u’lláh showered His blessings upon them and they left His presence. On the day of their departure Maryam Sulṭán Bagum, the beloved wife of Áqá Mírzá Áqá, attained the presence of Bahá’u’lláh to pay her last homage to Him. She is reported to have kissed the hands of Bahá’u’lláh and made a wish that He might give her the ring He was wearing on His finger as a token of blessing for her family. She did not, however, express her wish. She then went to say farewell to the Greatest Holy Leaf, the daughter of Bahá’u’lláh. While she was there, one of the maids of the household brought Bahá’u’lláh’s ring and said to Maryam Sulṭán Bagum, ‘The Blessed Beauty has given this for you.’

142. Mullá Kázim—He refused to recant his faith

Mullá Kázim from Talkhunchih, a village in the neighbourhood of Işfahán, was a learned divine well respected by the people of Işfahán. He became a believer in AH 1288 (AD 1871-2) and began to teach the Faith to his people, some of whom became believers. The news spread and he was forced to leave his native village. For a time he lived in Işfahán where he succeeded in bringing a number of people under the shadow of the Cause. This news reached the powerful *mujtahid* of the

city, the inveterate enemy of the Cause Shaykh Muḥammad-Báqir (the Wolf), who immediately wrote his death sentence. By this time, however, Mullá Kázim had relinquished his clerical attire and was working as a labourer in a public bath in the city. He succeeded in slipping out of Iṣfahán back to his own village. Then followed a period of comings and goings to Iṣfahán, Shíráz and Ṭihrán. At last he was arrested in his native village and sent to Iṣfahán where he was put in prison. Prince Masú'd Mírzá the Zillu's-Sultán summoned Mullá Kázim to his presence, and when he refused to recant his Faith the Prince implemented the death sentence and ordered his execution. This was in 1877.

The execution took place in a large public square, the famous Maydán-i-Sháh, where great crowds had assembled to watch. Having refused to recant his Faith and be freed, Mullá Kázim was beheaded by the executioner. Shaykh Muḥammad-Báqir ordered his corpse to be hung upside-down from a pole situated on the executioner's platform. The rope from which he was suspended broke and his body fell down from a great height. His smashed body was again suspended and the Shaykh announced that anyone who threw a stone at the corpse would assuredly secure a place for himself in paradise. A frenzied crowd carried out the attack. For two days men and women could be seen walking long distances carrying stones. Even pregnant women who could hardly walk took part in this shameful crime. When the body was deserted at night some men even gouged out the eyes and cut off the fingers, the nose, the lips and the ears.

On the morning of the third day Shaykh Muḥammad-Báqir arrived on the scene. Not satisfied with the savage indignities which had been

heaped upon the victim, he ordered the corpse to be lowered to the ground for a horseman to gallop over it. And when every part of the corpse was broken, it was delivered to the flames and the charred bones were thrown into a disused well.

143. Ḥájí Muḥammad-Riḍá—He gave all to his Beloved

There is a passage in the *Lawḥ-i-Dunyá* which may not be apparent to some as being a reference to the martyrdom of Ḥájí Muḥammad-Riḍáy-i-Iṣfahání. Bahá'u'lláh describes this episode with great feeling:

Day and night this Wronged One yieldeth thanks and praise unto the Lord of men, for it is witnessed that the words of counsel and exhortation We uttered have proved effective and that this people hath evinced such character and conduct as are acceptable in Our sight. This is affirmed by virtue of the event which hath truly cheered the eye of the world, and is none other than the intercession of the friends with the high authorities in favour of their enemies.

Ḥájí Muḥammad-Riḍá was originally from the province of Khurasan, but lived in Iṣfahán and worked as a merchant. He was a devoted believer and a very active teacher of the Cause. Because of his teaching activities he was put in prison, but was released after some time. He then left Iṣfahán and eventually went to 'Akká and attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. Coming into contact with the Person of Bahá'u'lláh was the cause of igniting within his heart the fire of love and devotion for his Lord. He begged Him to accept him as a martyr and enable him to lay down his life in His path. Bahá'u'lláh is reported to have told him that it was not necessary, as many souls had already sacrificed their lives in

His path. But Hájí Muḥammad-Riḍa was so intoxicated with the wine of Bahá'u'lláh's presence that he wanted to give his all to his Beloved. So he repeated his plea. This time the Blessed Beauty remained silent and he took it as a sign of consent. Later he asked Bahá'u'lláh to assign for him a city to reside in. He was bidden to proceed to 'Ishqábád. He lived there for several years and was engaged in teaching the Cause among the Muslim population.

On 1 July 1889 Hájí Muḥammad-Riḍá received a Tablet from Bahá'u'lláh in which He praises him for his devoted services, bestows His blessings upon him for his steadfastness and devotion to the Cause, and assures him that all his deeds and aspirations are manifest before Him. He further states that a grievous upheaval has occurred in the city of 'Ishqábád and describes it as the attack of a serpent upon one who is the recipient of the bounties of His Lord.

Although the identity of the believer who was the target is not disclosed by Bahá'u'lláh, He prays for Hájí Muḥammad-Riḍá that God may give strength to his body and assurance to his heart. This Tablet arrived at a time when Hájí Muḥammad-Riḍá had invited all the believers of 'Ishqábád to a feast. When it was read out to the friends, Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl explained that although no upheaval had taken place so far in 'Ishqábád, since Bahá'u'lláh has used the past tense and clearly indicated that one of the believers had been struck down by the enemies, it was an absolute certainty that this upheaval was inevitable. It would happen soon and only one person would be martyred. Hájí Muḥammad-Riḍá said to the friends that he believed that he was the believer whose martyrdom Bahá'u'lláh had foretold in this Tablet. And this happened two months later.

Incensed by the remarkable progress of the Faith in 'Ishqábád, the Shí'ah Muslim community had been secretly planning to assassinate a number of believers. Although their plan did not materialize, they succeeded in murdering Hájí Muḥammad-Riḍá. Two men armed with daggers attacked him in the bazaar and stabbed him to death. This was on the morning of 8 September 1889. It is reported that they stabbed him thirty-two times amid the jubilation of a great number of people who had gathered to watch him die. Some of the believers attributed the prayers revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in the Tablet he had received, which beseeched God to give strength to his body, as an indication of the agonizing and torturous way in which he was to be martyred. The murderers were so bloodthirsty that they were seen licking their daggers which were dripping with blood, until the Russian police arrived and took them into custody.

On discovering the plot, which had been intended to kill a number of prominent Bahá'ís, the believers sent a petition to General Komaroff, the Governor-General of Transcaspia, and appealed for protection. This was granted to them and in this way the enemies' plans were frustrated. A prolonged investigation was conducted in the law courts where, in the presence of spectators, many Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís were questioned. At the end the court delivered the verdict of guilty and sentence was pronounced. The two murderers were to be executed by hanging, and a few men accessory to the crime were to be exiled to Siberia. This was the first time in the history of the Faith that those responsible for killing a Bahá'í had been brought to justice. The verdict infuriated the Shí'ah clergy in Persia, who were in the habit of decorating the murderers of the Bahá'ís. They made desperate attempts

to free the criminals, but did not succeed in influencing the Russian government.

In the meantime, while the prisoners were behind bars awaiting their execution, a number of their relatives accompanied by a few leading merchants visited some prominent Bahá'ís and begged them to intercede with the government for the commuting of the death sentence. The Bahá'ís held a meeting, consulted and decided to take action. Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl and another believer made representations to the Governor on behalf of the Bahá'í community and interceded with the government, in the first place to absolve the murderers of their crime, and if not possible to mitigate their sentences. The Governor was deeply impressed by the attitude of the Bahá'ís and their willingness to forgive the assassins.

This request was passed on to the Czar, who approved the commuting of the sentences. But the decision was kept a secret and only revealed dramatically at the last moment. On the execution day gallows were erected and graves dug. The prisoners dressed in white robes and ready for execution were brought out of the prison and led to the scaffold. When the moment arrived a government official, in the presence of great multitudes, read out a proclamation announcing that as a result of the intercession of the Bahá'ís with the government requesting pardon for their enemies, His Majesty the Czar had commuted the sentences of the two murderers to life imprisonment in Siberia, and halved the sentences of the others.

This act of intercession on behalf of their enemies was acclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh as a princely deed. It brought great satisfaction to His heart that through His counsels and exhortations for well-nigh forty years,

the believers had at last risen to such heights of faith as to intercede for the release of those who were their deadly enemies.

144. 'Abdu'r-Raḥím—He could not resist the urge to see Bahá'u'lláh

'Abdu'r-Raḥím was a native of Bushrú'íyyih, the birthplace of Mullá Ḥusayn, the first to believe in the Báb. His original name was Ja'far, but when he attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh he was given the name Raḥím (Compassionate). Before his conversion to the Faith, 'Abdu'r-Raḥím had been a fanatical Muslim. Having noticed the growth of the Faith, he once sought guidance from a local clergyman as to his attitude towards the Bahá'ís. 'To fight them', the clergyman said, 'is as meritorious as taking part in the Jihád (holy war), to kill them is praiseworthy in the sight of God, and to be killed is a privilege which bestows upon the individual Muslim the reward of martyrdom and entrance into the highest paradise.'

These words provoked in 'Abdu'r-Raḥím a strong urge to kill some Bahá'ís. Armed with a weapon, he one day confronted an old believer by the name of Ḥájí Bábá, and told him in no uncertain terms that he had come to take his life because he had strayed from the path of truth and had embraced the Faith of the Bahá'ís.

Faced with the threat of death, Ḥájí Bábá displayed unruffled calm and spoke with tenderness such words that the heart of 'Abdu'r-Raḥím was touched. Soon his mood changed. Instead of being an enemy intent upon killing, he now wanted to investigate the truth.

Ḥájí Bábá conducted ‘Abdu’r-Raḥím to the home of the sister of Mullá Ḥusayn where the friends often held their meetings for teaching the Cause. That meeting with ‘Abdu’r-Raḥím lasted one day and one night, during which time he was most assiduously involved in discussion. At the end of that marathon meeting he recognized the truth of the Cause and became filled with such a new spirit of faith and enthusiasm that he could not rest in his native town any longer. Knowing that the Supreme Manifestation of God was on this earth he could not resist the urge to go and see Him face to face. So he set off on the long journey to attain His presence.

For six months ‘Abdu’r-Raḥím travelled on foot until he reached the abode of his Beloved—the prison city of ‘Akká. He arrived in the early days of Bahá’u’lláh’s incarceration in the barracks when no visitor suspected of being a Bahá’í was permitted even to approach the vicinity of the prison. His arrival coincided with the period when Nabíl-A’zam was attempting in vain to get a glimpse of his Lord. Nabíl poured out his heart to ‘Abdu’r-Raḥím and lamented over his own inability to achieve his purpose. But ‘Abdu’r-Raḥím, undismayed, proceeded to attempt to circumambulate the prison.

Before undertaking such a holy mission, he decided that he must wash his clothes which were unclean, as they had been worn throughout the journey. He washed them in the sea and waited until they were dry. When he put them on, however, he looked very odd and shabby as the clothes had shrunk and were torn.

With the utmost devotion and a heart overflowing with the love of Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’r-Raḥím approached the prison and began to circumambulate it. Then to his surprise he noticed that a hand from a

window of the prison was beckoning him to come inside. He knew it was the hand of Bahá'u'lláh summoning him to His presence. He rushed to the gate of the prison which was guarded by soldiers. But the soldiers seemed to him to be motionless and without life; they appeared not to see him. They did not even move an eyelid as he went through the gate.

Soon 'Abdu'r-Raḥím found himself in the presence of His Lord, overwhelmed by emotion and carried away into the world of the Spirit, communing with the One who was the object of his adoration and love. Bahá'u'lláh told him that through the hands of power and might He had temporarily blinded the eyes of the guards so that he might attain His presence as a bounty on His part.

It is not clear how many days 'Abdu'r-Raḥím remained in the prison. However, Bahá'u'lláh revealed a Tablet for him while he was there. In that Tablet He confirms that He had closed the eyes of the guards so that 'Abdu'r-Raḥím could enter His presence and witness the glory of His countenance. He calls him by the new name Raḥím (Compassionate), showers His blessings upon him, and urges him to recount the experience of his pilgrimage to friends on his return home.

Before leaving Bahá'u'lláh entrusted 'Abdu'r-Raḥím with Tablets to be delivered to some believers in Persia. While in Baghhdád on his way to Persia, the guards saw him one day in the bazaar and became suspicious. They followed him, intending to arrest him. As soon as 'Abdu'r-Raḥím realized this, he took the parcel containing the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh out of his pocket and as he was walking along threw it into the shop nearest to him. He did this so quickly that the guards did not see it. He took this action because he knew that if the guards had

discovered the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, not only would they have destroyed or confiscated them, but his own life would have been endangered also.

As he threw the parcel into the unknown shop, he put his whole trust in Bahá'u'lláh, turned to Him in prayer and begged Him to protect these Tablets through his all-embracing power. This is reminiscent of the story of the mother of Moses who placed her babe, as it lay in a box, on the river, trusting that God would take care of it and deliver it into the right hands.

The guards arrested 'Abdu'r-Rahím and took him into custody. After some investigations into his identity, the authorities were satisfied that he was a man of God and a harmless person. They released him and gave him a small sum of money in compensation. As he looked at the money placed in the palm of his hand, 'Abdu'r-Rahím could not help complaining to Bahá'u'lláh in his heart saying: 'You took away from me the most precious of all things in the world—the Tablets—and gave me instead a few coins!' He then returned to the bazaar with much trepidation to see what had happened to the parcel.

At first he strolled up and down the bazaar several times and occasionally stood near the shop and looked inside, but nothing happened. Eventually, toward the end of the day, he went near the shop again. This time there were no customers there and he saw the shopkeeper beckoning him in. He went inside. To his great surprise the shopkeeper came forward, warmly embraced him, welcomed him with the Bahá'í greeting 'Alláh'u'Abhá!' and handed him the parcel. He happened to be one of the few Bahá'ís living in Baghdád. The two men marvelled at the power of God and regarded this incident as a miracle.

For there were hundreds of shops in the bazaar, but on that fateful day and at the moment when the guards were approaching him, 'Abdu'r-Raḥím, a complete stranger, happened to be passing in front of the only shop which was owned by a Bahá'í.

The joy and gladness of 'Abdu'r-Raḥím in finding the Tablets knew no bounds. He stayed a few days in the house of the Bahá'í friend, the shopkeeper. Through him he met a few believers in Baghdád, and then departed for Persia. He visited several towns and delivered the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh to their owners. To each of the believers he recounted the stories of his pilgrimage and spoke of Bahá'u'lláh, of His power and majesty and of the unfailing confirmations which He had bestowed upon him throughout the journey. When 'Abdu'r-Raḥím arrived in his native town he was like a ball of fire ignited by the hand of Bahá'u'lláh. The radiance of his face and the force of his utterance were evident to all. He began to teach the Faith fearlessly after his return from 'Akká, but this action provoked the wrath of the clergy and the fanatic populace who rose up against him and forced him out of his native town of Bushrú'íyyih. He took residence in another town, Fárán.

Some years later Bahá'u'lláh conferred a great honour upon Mullá Şádiq-i-Khurásání, entitled Ismulláh'u'l-Aşdaq (The name of God, the Most Truthful), one of the most outstanding followers of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, by inviting him to travel to 'Akká and attain His presence. But since he was very old, Bahá'u'lláh directed that on his journey to 'Akká Ismulláh'u'l-Aşdaq be accompanied by a trustworthy man. The Bahá'ís of Mashhad could not agree among themselves who that person ought to be. Therefore they drew lots and 'Abdu'r-Raḥím's name came up. In this way he was given the privilege of attaining the presence of

Bahá'u'lláh for the second time. And when he arrived in 'Akká Bahá'u'lláh confirmed that by 'a trustworthy man' he had actually meant 'Abdu'r-Rahím.

145. Abu'l-Qásim—The gardener of Riḍván

There are many anecdotes about Bahá'u'lláh in the Garden of Riḍván. The following is an account by May Bolles Maxwell describing in beautiful language her impressions of the garden when she visited it during her pilgrimage. May Maxwell was among the first group of pilgrims from the West to visit the Master in 1898–9. She may be regarded as one of the few spiritual giants of the Faith in the Western world. When she passed away Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Faith, described her as "Abdu'l-Bahá's beloved handmaid and distinguished disciple" and bestowed upon her the rank of martyr.

These are her reminiscences:

After driving for about half an hour we reached the garden where Bahá'u'lláh spent much of His time during His long years of exile in 'Akká. Although this garden is small it is one of the loveliest spots we had ever seen. Bahá'u'lláh frequently said to His gardener, Abu'l-Qásim, *'This is the most beautiful garden in the world.'* With its tall trees, its wealth of flowers, and its fountains, it lies like a peerless gem surrounded by two limpid streams of water just as it is described in the *Qur'án*; and the atmosphere which pervades it is so fraught with sacred memories, with divine significance, with heavenly peace and calm that one no longer marvels to hear of the traveller who, passing one day before its gates, paused and gazing in

saw Bahá'u'lláh seated beneath the shade of the mulberry trees, 'that canopy not made with hands,' and remembering the prophecy in the *Qur'án*, he recognized his Lord and hastened to prostrate himself at His feet.

We visited the little house at the end of the garden and stood on the threshold of that room where Bahá'u'lláh was wont to sit in hot weather, and one by one we knelt down, and with tears of love and longing kissed the ground where His blessed feet had rested. We returned to the garden, where Abu'l-Qásim made tea for us.

Abu'l-Qásim referred to in this story is the first gardener who dedicated his life to the service of Bahá'u'lláh in that garden. He was a native of the village of Manshád in the district of Yazd. It was mainly through his hard work that the garden was built for Bahá'u'lláh. One of Abu'l-Qásim's brothers was Muḥammad-Ibráhím who also served Bahá'u'lláh as a gardener at Bahjí and other places. May Maxwell continues:

He told us the story of the locusts. How that during one hot summer there had been a pest of locusts and they had consumed most of the foliage in the surrounding country. One day Abu'l-Qásim saw a thick cloud coming swiftly towards the garden, and in a moment thousands of locusts were covering the tall trees beneath which Bahá'u'lláh so often sat. Abu'l-Qásim hastened to the house at the end of the garden and coming before his Lord besought Him, saying: 'My Lord, the locusts have come, and are eating away the shade from above Thy blessed head. I beg of Thee to cause them to depart.' The Manifestation smiled, and said: '*The locusts must be fed; let them be.*' Much chagrined, Abu'l-Qásim returned to the garden and for some time watched the destructive work in silence; but presently, unable

to bear it, he ventured to return again to Bahá'u'lláh and humbly entreated Him to send away the locusts. The Blessed Perfection arose and went into the garden and stood beneath the trees covered with the insects. Then He said: '*Abu'l-Qásim does not want you; God protect you.*' And lifting up the hem of His robe He shook it, and immediately all the locusts arose in a body and flew away.

When Abu'l-Qásim concluded this story he exclaimed with strong emotion as he touched his eyes: 'Oh, blessed are these eyes to have seen such things; oh, blessed are these ears to have heard such things.' In parting he gave us flowers, and seemed, like all the oriental believers, unable to do enough to show his love.

Ustád 'Alí-Akbar-i-Banná, an illustrious martyr of the Faith, has recounted in his detailed history of the Faith in 'Ishqábád the following concerning these two brothers: Áqá Abu'l-Qásim and Áqá Muḥammad-Ibráhím:

For twenty-seven years these two brothers have been serving in the Holy Land. Áqá Abu'l-Qásim has always been a gardener at the Ridván Gardens while Áqá Muḥammad-Ibráhím was a gardener at Bahjí, the Junayn Gardens, etc. Seventeen years ago when I had the honour of attaining the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, Áqá Muḥammad-Ibráhím in the course of our conversation told me the following story:

'One day the Blessed Beauty was in one of the holy places ... That place was surrounded by dry reeds and grass. Suddenly these caught fire and the flames rapidly began to spread around. His blessed Person turned to me and said: "Ibráhím, go and put out the fire." I immediately went towards the fire not knowing how to carry out

this task. As I approached, a wind blew and pushed the fire away from me. As if the fire was fleeing from me. I put out the fire by throwing a small amount of earth over it. This incident brought to my mind the verse: “We said, O fire, be Thou cold and a preservation unto Ibráhím...”

Dr. Ḥabíb Mu’ayyad, who travelled to ‘Akká in 1907 and was permitted by the Master to study medicine in the University of Beirut, and who later served ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the Holy Land with great dedication, has recorded in his memoirs a brief account of the activities of Abu’l-Qásim in the Garden of Riḍván. The following is a summary of his reminiscences:

Abu’l-Qásim served in the Garden of Riḍván for many years. He worked as a gardener tending the trees, the fruits and flowers. He welcomed the friends to the garden, whether pilgrims or residents, entertained them lovingly, and ensured that they enjoyed their visit. He had devised a master-plan to prevent the Arab inhabitants of ‘Akká from entering the Garden. (The Garden of Riḍván was a very beautiful oasis in the area, a place full of fruits and flowers which some of the inhabitants were eager to take away. If they had been able to gain admission, it would have been impossible to keep the Garden as a holy place.) Whenever he was leaving the Garden to go to ‘Akká either to attain the presence of the Master or to purchase food or other necessities, he would lock the gate with the instruction that it should remain locked until his return. He had invented two passwords, one which signalled that the gate was to be opened and the other that it should remain shut. When he returned, if there was no one outside the garden wanting to get in, he would call out a

fictitious name, ‘Shukru’lláh’ (Thanks to God). This meant, ‘Thanks to God there is no one bothering us’, and the gate would open! If, however, there were some people outside, he would call out the name ‘Ḥasan’ which in Persian sounds phonetically like ‘They are’, meaning, ‘They are waiting outside’, and the gate would not open! People thought that Ḥasan was the name of the gardener’s servant. And since there was no response from Ḥasan they would eventually leave the garden area and go home. In this way Abu’l-Qásim protected the fruits and flowers of the garden from the inhabitants.

Abu’l-Qásim was tall with broad shoulders, massive in size—a real heavyweight—and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sometimes made humorous remarks about his size and strength, remarks which invoked feelings of joy and gratitude in Abu’l-Qásim.

146. Ḥájí Muḥammad-Báqir-i-Qazvíní—He fell from grace but was saved

Ḥaji Muḥammad-Báqir-i-Qazvíní had an unusual Bahá’í career; he was one who fell from grace, but was saved towards the end of his life. Ḥaji Muḥammad-Báqir attained the presence of Bahá’u’lláh in Baghdád. While there he requested Bahá’u’lláh to bestow wealth upon him. Bahá’u’lláh acceded to his plea and assured him that God would grant his wish. Soon afterwards he became very rich, but as a result grew heedless of the Cause of God.

In the course of Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-‘Alí’s account of what appears to be his first audience with Bahá’u’lláh in Adrianople, we find the following story of Ḥájí Muḥammad-Báqir.

Because it was the early days of the rise of the Day-Star of the World, Bahá'u'lláh asked me to give Him an account of the state of the believers in Tīhrán, Qazvín, Zanján and Tabríz, the towns I had passed through. He enquired of their faith, and their love for the Cause. I did not reply. (It was not unusual for the believers who were in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh not to reply to His questions. In the first place, they were so carried away that they could not utter a word. Secondly, to speak was regarded by many as being contrary to the spirit of utter self-effacement in His presence.) After we [Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí and his two companions] were dismissed from His presence, we were taken to a place where it was arranged for us to stay. There, Bahá'u'lláh sent someone to whom I could recount the conditions of the believers. I reported all I knew about each person, including the late Hájí Muḥammad-Báqir who was at that time a well-known merchant, foremost among the believers in faith, certitude and enthusiasm, and was serving the Cause with devotion and self-sacrifice.

The messenger left and after some minutes returned with an exalted Tablet which had been revealed in honour of the Hájí. He stated [on behalf of Bahá'u'lláh]: 'This man attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdád. There he wrote a letter to Him and begged for wealth and prosperity. In answer, this exalted and wonderful Tablet was revealed for him. In it Bahá'u'lláh stated that his request would be granted and that the doors of prosperity and wealth would be opened for him from every direction. He warned him, however, to be on his guard and not to allow riches to become a barrier and make him heedless.

Now you are here to attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and in the future you will witness that this man [Ḥájí Muḥammad-Báqir] will be overtaken with fear to such an extent that he will renounce God and His Cause. Not long after, he will make substantial losses, following which he will write a letter to Bahá'u'lláh and repent. God will then turn his losses into profit and he will become again highly successful in his business and will emerge as the foremost merchant in Constantinople and Tabríz. However, this time he will wax prouder than before, more heedless and deprived ... This time he will lose all his possessions, will be unable to continue trading and will become helpless in arranging his affairs. It is then that he will repent and return, and will be content to live as a poor man. He will spend the days of his life in the service of the Cause of God. His end will be blessed and he will receive great confirmations from God.' He then said to me: 'Remember all these things, for they will come to pass, and you shall witness them.'

We were in Adrianople when news came that Javád, the younger brother of the Ḥájí, had been arrested and cast into prison. Ḥaji Muḥammad-Báqir had paid one thousand túmáns (a very large sum of money in those days) for the release of his brother and had left Tabríz for Constantinople in great haste. Upon arrival he had gone to visit the late Muḥíru'd-Dawlih, the Persian Ambassador, and there in his presence had recanted his Faith. Bahá'u'lláh affirmed that this was the beginning of his tests and instructed that believers passing through Constantinople should not associate with him.

Later, I left Adrianople for Constantinople where I stayed for fourteen months. There I heard that the Ḥájí had bought enormous

quantities of cotton and because the prices had suddenly fallen drastically, not only had he lost all his possessions, but he was also unable to pay his creditors ... When this happened he wrote a letter supplicating Bahá'u'lláh and repenting. A holy and blessed Tablet was revealed in his honour. In it Bahá'u'lláh gave him the glad-tidings that he would soon make enormous profits. When I went to Egypt, I heard that the price of cotton had risen considerably and the Hájí's wealth as a result increased tenfold.

This time Hájí Muḥammad-Báqir became very rich and influential. He emerged foremost among the merchants of Constantinople and acquired great fame. However, his wealth again became a barrier between him and God. Again he forsook the Cause, and completely cut off his relationship with Bahá'u'lláh. After some years Bahá'u'lláh asked Hájí Abu'l-Ḥasan-i-Amín (the trustee of Bahá'u'lláh) to establish contact with him and find out how he was.

Hájí Amín went to see him in Constantinople. He found him to be utterly heedless and forgetful of Bahá'u'lláh and the Cause. The world and its attractions had so possessed him that at one point in the interview, Hájí Muḥammad-Báqir pointed to a coffer in his office and said, 'My god is in this box!' Hájí Amín has stated that when he reported this to Bahá'u'lláh, He became very sad. As He was pacing up and down, He stopped, held out His hand, palm open, and said 'With this hand We conferred upon him riches.' Then with a sudden movement, He withdrew, closed His hand, and said, 'Now with the same hand We take it back from him.'

Soon Hájí Muḥammad-Báqir lost all his possessions. He again became repentant and wrote to Bahá'u'lláh. This time a Tablet was revealed for

him in which Bahá'u'lláh clearly stated that God took away his wealth so that he might return to Him and become steadfast in His love. He directed Hájí Muḥammad-Báqir to leave Constantinople and occupy himself with transcribing the holy Writings.

After this incident, Hájí Muḥammad-Báqir lived the remainder of his life in the utmost poverty. He grew strong in his faith and devoted his time to the service of the Cause. Hájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-'Alí, who met him after this event, writes:

...I met him [Hájí Muḥammad-Báqir] in Tabríz. He said 'After the revelation of the Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh, it was as if the nails in the wall, the curtains in the room, and everything else had ears to hear and were carrying out the command of Bahá'u'lláh. I lost everything that I had earned. The house I live in now is owned by my wife and the clothes I wear are tailored by my children.'

Haji Muḥammad-Báqir was not the only one who had asked Bahá'u'lláh to bestow upon him riches through the power of God. There were others, some of whom became utterly heedless of the Cause after their success in life.

147. Mullá Muḥammad 'Alí—He was a shining example of faith

Another eminent Bahá'í who came to 'Akká but was recognized and expelled from the city was Mullá Muḥammad-'Alí, surnamed Nabíl-i-Qá'iní by Bahá'u'lláh. He had known Bahá'u'lláh in Tíhrán some years before the Báb declared His mission. At that time he had recognized the superhuman qualities of Bahá'u'lláh and become an ardent admirer of His person. When Nabíl-i-Akbar (a title given to the same person)

returned from 'Iráq to his native town in Qá'in, he began to teach the Cause of the Báb openly to the public. As soon as Mullá Muḥammad-'Alí heard the news of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, he became an ardent believer, saying that he had attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh in Ṭīhrán and had been deeply attracted to Him then.

The next time he saw the face of His Lord was in the prison of 'Akká. At first he was driven out of the city. But he made other attempts and eventually plans were made for him to enter the barracks. This he did successfully and was ushered into the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. The glory and majesty emanating from His person so overwhelmed Nabíl-i-Qá'iní that as soon as his eyes beheld Him he fainted and fell upon the ground.

This great man, who had lived many years of his life in luxury and honour and had been held in high esteem by the people of his native town, was now living in such poverty that like Ustád Ismá'íl he too had to sell needles and thimbles as a pedlar to the people of Nazareth. He earned his living in this way for about two years, selling to the women of Nazareth needles at the rate of three for an egg! During this time he succeeded in converting a number of her Christian citizens to the Faith.

Nabíl-i-Qá'iní was a shining example of faith and detachment; he will be always remembered as one who had recognized Bahá'u'lláh's powers prior to the Declaration of the Báb. He passed away in 'Akká.

148. 'Alí-Akbar-i-Ḥakkák—Nothing could make him denounce the Faith

The following account depicting the scene of the martyrdom of one of the early believers, demonstrates their steadfastness.

Here is one who laid down his life in such a dramatic fashion that many among the multitude of spectators who had thronged the square to deride the victim and make merry at the sight of his execution were moved to tears. Even the hearts of those callous men who had been appointed to commit this heinous deed were deeply touched.

The illustrious hero who appeared on this tragic scene was 'Alí-Akbar-i-Ḥakkák, a very attractive and handsome young man from Yazd, Persia. He was an engraver by profession and highly skilled in his art. He was married and had a four-year-old son by the name of Ḥabíbulláh. As soon as the tragic news of the Nayríz upheaval reached Yazd, 'Alí-Akbar set out at once on a journey to visit the historic site where the peerless Vaḥid together with his band of valiant crusaders had fought and fallen. On his return to Yazd he manifested such a spiritual joy and overwhelming zeal in the teaching work that soon he was denounced and branded as a 'Bábí' whereupon the despotic Governor had him arrested on a charge of heresy and reported the matter to Ṭíhrán asking for instructions.

Nearly two months wore on and no word came from Ṭíhrán. Therefore a fine was exacted from the captive and then he was released on bail on the understanding that as soon as the decree was received he should place himself immediately at the disposal of the Governor.

Unruffled by the dire fate which awaited him, 'Alí-Akbar resumed his occupation in a spirit of complete resignation until after a lapse of three months a message came from Ṭíhrán to the effect that any person found to belong to the Bábí Faith should be put to death

forthwith. This odious order invested the Governor with plenary powers to carry out his design. Therefore early in the morning of 15 July 1852 he sent his men to arrest 'Alí-Akbar at his home. Having done so they conducted him to the Governor's office in the barracks where the Governor interviewed him.

Though the people in Yazd were steeped in prejudice against the new Faith and apt to fly into a fierce fury at the sight of anyone who was identified as 'Bábí', they nevertheless admired 'Alí-Akbar for his rare qualities and charming manners. Moreover, his reputation as the best engraver had won him real affection by all who had come to know him. Even the Governor and the officials felt reluctant to have him executed. They did everything in their power to make him utter a mere word of lip denial against the new Faith and thus save his own life. They employed many a word of persuasion, threat and promise but none could induce this valiant hero to recant nor did the pomp and might of a ruthless potentate influence this stout-hearted man of God to compromise his cherished faith in favour of this fleeting life and its earthly vanities. The Governor grew angry; he could not tolerate one who dared to challenge his authority and persist in his own ideas.

Furious with rage, the Governor summoned his Farrásh-báshí (chief steward) and ordered him to put this defiant Bábí to death at once by blowing him from the mouth of a cannon. The order was immediately passed on to the artillery unit who hauled their gun out of the barracks to the adjoining public square. Then the Farrásh-báshí accompanied by the executioner led the valiant victim to the square amidst a gathering multitude of spectators.

Eager to save 'Alí-Akbar from his fate, the Farrásh-báshí employed ingenious ways of intimidation and inducement in a futile effort to break down his spirit and make him abjure his allegiance to the new Faith.

The cannon from which he was to be blown was an old type muzzle-loader, and the Farrásh-báshí, knowing that it was as yet unloaded, hit upon the idea of staging a mock execution in the hope that the victim would succumb to the fright and terror that such an ordeal would usually provoke. Therefore, assuming a wild and serious look, he barked orders at the executioner to hurry up, tie down the victim tightly to the mouth of the gun and have him blown off without further delay. Thus 'Alí-Akbar was bound to the gun and left in this frightful position for quite a long while during which the gun crew kept running back and forth pretending to be adjusting their gun, as though they were just about to fire.

During the whole time the Farrásh-báshí was watching the victim closely, urging him to recant. However, he was amazed to see that instead of becoming terrified and shaken 'Alí-Akbar had maintained his calm and fortitude throughout. The Farrásh-báshí soon realized that intimidation had failed to bring about what he hoped for. He ran towards the gunner, stopped him from his false attempt at discharging the unloaded gun, and asked the executioner to set the victim free.

By that time (about 11 a.m.) the whole square was fully packed with a seething mass of spectators who looked stupefied and bewildered.

As soon as 'Alí-Akbar was unfastened the Farrásh-báshí came over to him expressing his sympathy in a kindly manner. He then conducted

him to an adjacent public cistern away from the crowd where he offered him a seat near to himself on a little platform. He reasoned with 'Alí-Akbar most earnestly, urged and persuaded him again and again to denounce the Faith and save his own life, but the effort proved unsuccessful. There sat 'Alí-Akbar solid as a rock, immovable and uncompromising, resisting the full force of these dire tests. As these painful moments dragged on, the Farrásh-báshí began to perceive with bitter plainness that nothing whatever could induce this invincible youth to recant. Dismayed and disappointed, he led him back to the scene of death and ordered the gun crew to load their gun forthwith. Meanwhile a new idea occurred to him which might well prove effective in breaking down the victim's fortitude. He sent his men to fetch 'Alí-Akbar's poor wife and child to the scene—a very strong and challenging inducement indeed. After a few moments the unfortunate wife appeared in a state of panic holding the hand of their beloved child who looked sweet and attractive in his best suit.

She faced her husband and weeping bitterly implored, 'Come and have pity on this child!' 'What am I to do without you?' she sobbed. But 'Alí-Akbar did not answer; he turned his back on them. Again the wife and child came forward and stood in front of him. She flung herself at his feet, begging and imploring. But 'Alí-Akbar kept silent and once again turned away from them. Then the little child ran over to his father and grabbing the hem of his garment exclaimed 'Daddy, Daddy, why do you turn away from me? Don't you love me any more?'

These simple, piercing words must have moved 'Alí-Akbar more than anything else. Perhaps he could not bear it, for he raised his head heavenward in such a gesture as to make an impassioned appeal. It seemed as if he were saying: 'Oh God! I entreat Thee to spare me from further temptations.'

The tragic episode had reached its climax. The occasion had become so gripping, so heart-rending that many among the onlookers were stricken with grief and sympathy. Even the Farrásh-báshí's eyes were dimmed with tears.

The heroic self-renunciation and superhuman fortitude manifested by this gallant martyr shattered the last scrap of hope which the Farrásh-báshí entertained in making the victim abjure his faith. Browbeaten and dismayed, he decided to put an end to this sad spectacle by carrying out the Governor's order at once.

So the victim was presently bound up once again to the mouth of the cannon in front of his unfortunate wife and child. As soon as this had been done the site was cleared of all those who stood nearby, but the child refused to be pushed further away. He became restive and kept crying and pleading, 'Take me to my Daddy! Let me go near him!'

The dreadful end was now at hand. A tense feeling had seized upon the souls and a sense of dread and awe overwhelmed the whole mass of the people in the square.

At a sharp signal from the Farrásh-báshí the gunner ignited the explosive charge which was designed to send the victim sky-high, torn into bits in a split of a second. But to the profound amazement of all the gun didn't go off! Again and again the charge was ignited

but the gun still wouldn't go off! Everybody looked stupefied and spellbound.

The Farrásh-báshí ran towards the victim and calling him by his name exclaimed, 'We don't want you to be killed; it seems that God does not wish it either. Now won't you have sympathy for your child?!' But he did not say a word, even when his horror-stricken wife and child rushed once again to his side. He stayed as calm and unconcerned as ever.

In the meantime the gunner was busy at the breech refilling the charge. The Farrásh-báshí paused a moment in earnest expectation. Perhaps he would now give way. Perhaps he would say a word of denial. Perhaps something would happen that could save his life.

However, to 'Alí-Akbar's mind a compromise was utterly unthinkable...The soul longed and craved to sacrifice his puny frame for the love of his Lord and to take his flight to the abode of the Beloved. Now the golden opportunity had offered itself...His prolonged and unexampled fortitude served increasingly to throw into relief the striking contrast between his own noble vision and the Farrásh-báshí's base pattern of thought.

Far from being grieved and shaken, how jubilant, how thrilled, how relaxed must have felt his soul when the Farrásh-báshí in his utter despair and bewilderment signalled once again to fire.

And this time in a flash of a second the body of 'Alí-Akbar, blasted into bits amidst a tremendous burst of fire and smoke, flew sky-high, then came down from heaven like a swarm of tiny meteors,

accompanied by a shower of crimson droplets, to be scattered far and wide all over the square.

The Governor ordered that the fragments of his body should be left exposed until sunset, that they might be trampled upon by men and animals.

This tragic martyrdom came as a shattering blow to the entire body of the early believers, particularly to his unfortunate wife. Her grief knew no bounds as she continued to weep and wail, and to beat her head.

149. Háshim Khán—“People like me...are like the sand...when the sun rises...this sand is the first to become illumined by its rays”

In the early days of the Faith, a certain wealthy and knowledgeable person from Káshán set off with his family for pilgrimage to the cities of Najaf and Karbilá. Circumstances had forced him to engage a Bábí caravan-driver by the name of Háshim Khán to transport the party to its destination and back. The reason for his reluctance to travel in company with Háshim Khán, in spite of the fact that the latter was known to be the most trusted caravan-driver in the area, was that he was a Bábí. Háshim Khán was tall and strong. He had little education, yet his heart was touched by the light of God’s infant Faith. As a result, he was endowed with the gift of understanding and was able to convince people in his simple way of the truth of the Cause he had espoused. He was commonly referred to as Háshim Bábí. The merchant and his family shunned Háshim throughout the journey. They did not wish to associate with one who in their estimation had embraced a

heretical Faith. On such long journeys the party has to stop two or three times a day for rest and to feed the animals. On one occasion when they were resting, the merchant decided to speak to Háshim to try to guide him back to the fold. So he called him to come and join the others. Having thanked him for his selfless service and care, he began to converse with Háshim and remarked, 'How is it that with all my knowledge, I have failed to appreciate the validity of the Message of the Báb while you, an almost illiterate person, claim to have recognized the truth of His Mission?'

Háshim took a handful of sand in his hand and said, 'People like me have no merit in society. They are like the sand in the desert which has no value, yet, when the sun rises in the morning this sand is the first to become illumined by its rays. A learned man, however, is like a precious jewel. It is kept in a box and locked up in a room, and when the sun rises it remains in darkness.' The merchant was moved by this answer. He continued to learn from Háshim all the way home, until the veils which obscured his vision were removed and the jewel of his heart was enlightened by the radiance of God's newborn Faith. This simple answer by Háshim is very profound indeed. While it exalts the station of knowledge, it demonstrates that when the Sun of Truth appears in the world, men of learning must make an effort to open their hearts and souls to its rays and to become illumined by them.

150. Mírzá Muḥammad—The revelation of a special prayer

Mírzá Muḥammad, entitled Na'ím, was a believer of remarkable faith and devotion and a poet of outstanding calibre. He was a truly devoted servant of Bahá'u'lláh. As a result of embracing the Faith, he suffered

great persecutions in his native village of Sidih near Işfahán. By order of the clergy, he and four other believers had their arms tied to their bodies; they were then tied closely together with a rope and paraded barefoot through the village. Crowds had gathered from neighbouring villages to watch them being tortured. For about fourteen hours the victims were alternately beaten with sticks by the officials. Their bare bodies, painted in different colours, were exposed to the severe winter cold and were so badly battered that many spectators were horrified to witness them. After some time in prison in Işfahán, they were exiled from their homes. In the case of Na'ím, his wife was taken from him and married to another man without any divorce proceedings.

Na'ím and his fellow believers left Işfahán on foot. They were penniless and suffered great hardships on the way until they arrived in Tíhrán. Na'ím, to earn a living, at first occupied himself with transcribing the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh which were usually bought by the believers at a modest price, as there were no printing facilities available at that time. His income was so inadequate that he lived in the utmost poverty for some time. Later, however, through his literary talents he secured a prestigious post as a teacher and became prosperous.

Neither in poverty nor in prosperity did Na'ím ever fail in his devoted services to the Cause, services that he rendered with the utmost devotion and self-sacrifice. He occupied most of his free time with teaching the seekers after truth, and deepening the Bahá'ís, until the end of his life. Noteworthy among his activities was a special class he conducted for several years, teaching and deepening a limited number of Bahá'í youth, most of whom became very prominent teachers of the Cause.

Na'ím's contribution to the literature of the Faith is outstanding. His poetry, deservedly regarded as brilliant, was only matched by his deep understanding of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh and other religions. Among his works is an enchanting book of proofs in verse which is a brilliant exposition of the truth of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh.

The following story is his spoken chronicle and demonstrates the truth of the words of Bahá'u'lláh when He said: 'We are with you at all times':

After my arrival in Tíhrán, I was once reading the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, and I came across a very beautiful and penetrating prayer revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and quoted in that book. I immediately wished in my heart that these resplendent words had been revealed from the Pen of the Most High for me, this insignificant servant. Some time passed when one day I received a message from Hájí Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh-i-Şahíh-Furúsh ... who was a well-known figure among the Bahá'ís and a channel of communication with the Holy Land. In this message he told me that a Tablet in my name had arrived from the Realm of Glory and that I should call in person at his office in Sabzih-Maydán and collect it. I hastened to his office where I received an exalted Tablet ... as a result of this I was moved to the depth of my emotions. I worked out carefully that at the same moment that I had made a wish in my heart to have the above prayer revealed for me, the bounties of Bahá'u'lláh had been directed toward me in Tíhrán. He had re-revealed the same prayer at that very moment in my name and He sent it to me. The time that it normally took for communications to arrive in Tíhrán from the Holy Land was the same as that between my making a wish in my heart, and the arrival of the Tablet. Glorified be God, the Lord of Grandeur

and Majesty! Although sufferings and tribulations had encompassed the Realm of Glory from every direction, yet the bounties of Bahá'u'lláh were being vouchsafed to His most insignificant servants, and this demonstrates the truth of the words: 'Nothing whatsoever keepeth Him from being occupied with any other thing.'

This is the text of the prayer that Na'ím had wished for:

Glory to Thee, O my God! But for the tribulations which are sustained in Thy path, how could Thy true lovers be recognized; and were it not for the trials which are borne for love of Thee, how could the station of such as yearn for Thee be revealed? Thy might beareth Me witness! The companions of all who adore Thee are the tears they shed, and the comforters of such as seek Thee are the groans they utter, and the food of them who haste to meet Thee is the fragments of their broken hearts. How sweet to my taste is the bitterness of death suffered in Thy path, and how precious in my estimation are the shafts of Thine enemies when encountered for the sake of the exaltation of Thy Word! Let me quaff in Thy Cause, O my God and my Master, whatsoever Thou didst desire, and send down upon me in Thy Love all Thou didst ordain. By Thy glory! I wish only what Thou wishest, and cherish what Thou cherishest. In Thee have I, at all times, placed My whole trust and confidence. Thou art verily the All-Possessing, the Most High.

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