

**Fire  
on the  
mountain-top**

by  
Gloria Faizi

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Cover by 'Faizi Designs'

Revised edition: 2003

Reprint: 2005

ISBN: 81-7896-029-X

Bahá'í Publishing Trust  
F-3/6, Okhla Industrial Area, Phase-I  
New Delhi - 110 020, India

Printed at Link Printers, New Delhi-20

## *To the Pioneers of Arabia*

These stories are based on accounts  
gathered in Persia by 'Azízu'lláh Sulaymání.  
They are not given here in chronological order.

By the same author:

*The Bahá'í Faith—An Introduction*

*Bahá'u'lláh—The Promised One*

*Stories About Bahá'í Funds*

*The Promise of Lord Krishna*

*Flowers of One Garden*

*Poems for Children*

Three articles under one cover about  
Hindu concepts from a Bahá'í perspective:

*Man and His Creator*

*The Manifestations of God*

*Prayer and Meditation*

*“Ye are even as the fire  
which in the darkness of the night  
has been kindled upon the mountain-top”*



## Contents

Introduction .....	1
Poets of Işfahán .....	5
The story of Na'ím and his friends .....	9
The vengeance of the mujtahids .....	12
A teaching trip .....	16
Firesides .....	20
Raised from the dead .....	22
The wolf and the lamb .....	23
Persecutions in Yazd .....	27
A noble son .....	29
Prophecies fulfilled .....	32
The journey to Yazd .....	34
Bahrám's companion .....	36
The story of 'Abbás-Ábád .....	37
The flight to Káshán .....	41
A father's grief .....	42
The honoured guest .....	43
Hitting the mark .....	45
Change of fortune .....	47
Giving to the end .....	48
The Jewish physician .....	49
Teaching in Hamadán .....	50
The difficult crossing .....	53
Father and son .....	55
A plan that worked .....	59
Brothers at last .....	61
The journey of the mystic .....	63
Vujdání and the Mullá .....	68
The road to Hamadán .....	71

The essence of dates .....	73
The dumb prisoner .....	75
Varqá's poem .....	76
The prisoners in Zanján .....	77
The children .....	81
The child-martyr .....	84
Contacting the prisoners .....	91
A strange incident .....	92
Blind hatred .....	94
Never at a loss .....	95
A brave soul .....	95
Prison life with Mullá Riḍá .....	98
A warm welcome .....	99
Rebirth .....	99
Tests .....	103
A famous doctor .....	111
Methods of teaching .....	113
The Bahá'í Centre .....	117
"You are right!" .....	118
An illiterate teacher and his learned pupil .....	119
The final proof .....	120
Abu'l-Faḍl at home .....	121
The "Bahá'í Mullá" .....	122
A unique servant .....	123
The murder in 'Ishqábád .....	124
Meetings in Tīhrán .....	128
The miracle .....	132
The challenge from the pulpit .....	133
Furúghí's turn .....	135
The magician .....	137
Two princes .....	139
Names of the main characters in the book .....	143

## Introduction

The incidents related in this book are taken from the lives of people who belong to our own age. These people came from every walk of life; some were from the ranks of the rich nobility, others were poor, simple folk; some were among the learned and famous scholars of their day, while others were completely illiterate. The only thing they had in common was their Faith. They were all inspired by the vision of a glorious Day when the Kingdom of God would be established on earth, and the different races and religions of the world would be united in true brotherhood. Though they themselves would not live to see that day, they were prepared to sacrifice all they had if by doing so they could raise the call to unity, and prove to an unbelieving world that the wolf and the lamb could truly drink from the same stream. They derived their inspiration from the same source: the Messenger of God Who comes in every age.

In 1844, a Youth from Shíráz, in Persia, claimed to be the Herald of the One Whose advent had been promised by the Founders of all the religions of the past. He called Himself the Báb, which means the Gate. He taught that the old Dispensation had come to an end, and He had come to usher in a new age. He called upon His followers to sanctify their lives and prepare themselves for the coming of “Him Whom God shall make Manifest”.

The Báb’s saintly life and inspired teachings soon won Him thousands of followers from among His countrymen. The clergy were greatly alarmed and, using their unchallenged power over the government and the mass of ignorant people around them, started a nation-wide attack on the new Faith. Many thousands of its adherents—known as Bábís—were tortured to death. The Báb—that youthful and gentle Prophet to Whose greatness friends and foes alike have attested—was Himself publicly martyred in the hope that the Movement He had started would die with Him. He willingly laid down His life as a sacrifice to the One Who was soon to appear.

Bahá'u'lláh (the Glory of God) declared His mission in 1863. He claimed to be the great Messenger foretold in all the Holy Scriptures. His mission, He said, was to bring about the unity of mankind and establish the Kingdom of God on earth.

The followers of the Báb, having recognized Bahá'u'lláh and accepted His claim, became known as Bahá'ís, while the influence of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings was immediately felt among people of all classes and members of conflicting religious sects. High officials and illiterate peasants forgot their differences as they sat together in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh; Jews, Muslims, Christians and Zoroastrians became united as one family through the love He was able to create in their hearts.

The fanatical clergy, who had hoped to extinguish the fire which the Báb had kindled in the heart of Persia, became increasingly alarmed at the influence of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings and vowed not to rest till they had uprooted the new Movement from their midst. Using every means in their power, they set out to undermine its prestige, stain its fair name and stir the ignorant mass of people against its followers. Bahá'u'lláh Himself suffered torture, imprisonment and exile at their hands, but no power could stop the growth of His Cause.

Bahá'u'lláh appointed His Son., 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as "the Centre of His Covenant" to whom all Bahá'ís should turn for guidance after He, Himself, had passed away. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who had willingly shared His Father's exile and imprisonment since He was a child, had already won the love and respect of the Bahá'ís through His great devotion to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. He dedicated His entire life to the service of humanity and the promotion of the new Faith. His wisdom and His overflowing love for His fellow-men won him hundreds of admirers all over the world. The Master, as He was often called, came to be known as the father of the orphan and the friend of the poor.

Inspired by the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and led by His unerring guidance, Bahá'ís scattered throughout the world and took the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to every corner of the globe. This book, however, deals with incidents in the lives of some of those early believers who spread the Faith in the land of its birth, and whose memory will always be cherished by their

fellow-believers everywhere.

As we read about these early Bahá'ís, we realize that they were in many ways very much like ourselves, for they too had human weaknesses and shortcomings. Their greatness lay in the quality of their faith in Bahá'u'lláh and His Message. This was the secret of their victory—despite their shortcomings.

\* \* \* \* \*



## Poets of Işfahán

The orchards around Işfahán are beautiful in early spring. Hundreds of almond trees are covered in white blossoms, while between them, here and there, are splashes of pink from the blossoms on the peach trees. Under this canopy of delicate bloom, the new crop is growing and the green is like a rich velvet carpet spread out as far as the eye can see. The sunshine is warm, the air is perfumed and the birds sing love-songs all the day.

In an orchard such as this, a group of talented young men sat together, many years ago. Na'ím, the gifted poet, had just finished reading his latest poem, and his friends were full of admiration. "How do you do it?" exclaimed Síná. "There are very few poets who can write about religion in such beautiful, flowing verse." "The most wonderful thing," said Nayyir, "is that there is nothing grave and solemn about it. Na'ím can write about an ancient saint with the same fresh sweetness as he can describe a rose-bud in spring." "Come, come," said the modest poet, "both of you brothers write beautiful poetry yourselves. And what about the rest of you?" he said, turning to the others. "Let us hear what you have all been writing since we met."

There they sat among the colours and music of nature, reciting poetry, discussing topics of every kind and trying to unravel the mysteries of life. Soon they were back on the subject of religion, and each had something to say:

"It is impossible to find a religious person who is not prejudiced against every other religion but his own."

"This is because every one of them is quite sure his own religion is the right one, and all others are false."

"Their attitude is quite illogical, yet how can an impartial person searching for true religion be sure of finding it?"

"He should first make a study of every religion and then decide between them."

"Every religion! It would take a hundred lifetimes! Even if it were possible for one man to do it, how can he be sure he is able

to make the right choice in the end? Ten different people, using their own intelligence, would probably arrive at ten different conclusions.”

“Does it matter?”

“Of course. All religions teach that God has indicated the path we must take in every age. If this is true, people going in ten different directions could not all have found the right path. Besides, there can be no cooperation and unity of purpose between these men, which is the trouble between people professing different religions today.”

“What, then, is the answer? Should we believe that God has provided the Path and then made it impossible for us to find it?”

“This cannot be. What is certain, however, is that Man cannot hope to find the true path without the help of God. Once we realize our limitations, we will be prepared to ask for that help. We ourselves must, of course, make the effort to find Truth, forsaking our prejudices and using our intelligence, but more important than all is that we must purify our hearts and pray for Divine guidance.”

From what we know about these young men, their discussion on religion must have been something like this. Whatever the words and arguments they used, they came to the conclusion that they themselves should, putting their trust in God, mix with every group, listen to every argument and never give up hope until they were fully convinced that they had been guided to the object of their search.

Such a discussion on religion, with the final decision it led to, may not seem strange to us today because we live at a time when many young people question and doubt old standards. Few of those living in the past century, however, felt and spoke as we do about problems concerning religion. They were born and bred within a certain sect, and any digression from its beliefs was considered disastrous. Those who doubted the accepted ideas around them did not often have the courage to admit it. Seldom, indeed, did they set out to investigate other religions with the intention of seeking Truth, wherever the path might lead them.

\* \* \* \* \*

The travellers were sitting in one of the rooms at the inn in Tabriz. Two of them had sat with other friends in an orchard outside Işfahán

discussing religion one day, but a long time had passed since then and they were no nearer the Truth they had hoped to find. Did God truly answer the prayer of those who asked for guidance?

A horseman had just arrived. He rode up to the room which the travellers from Işfahán occupied and alighted from his horse. The men had never seen him before, but welcomed the stranger as he walked in. The newcomer, looking round the room, saw two men who worked at the inn. He asked one of them to attend to his horse and sent the other to prepare the hubble-bubble pipe. After they had left the room, he sat down and started talking to the young travellers. "Have you heard the glad tidings?" he asked. He spoke of the advent of a new Messenger from God, the One Whose coming had been promised by all the religions of the past. He told them about the young Herald who had come to prepare the way for the great Messenger, and Who had sacrificed His life for His Cause.

The travellers listened with mixed feelings. This kind of talk was attributed to the Bábís,\* whose very name was distasteful to all Muslims.

The stranger went on to tell them of the signs and proofs with which these twin Messengers had appeared. So great was his faith, so eloquent his argument, that the travellers listened with rising interest. After some time, he said: "Now you must hear some of those gem-like verses that have streamed from the pen of the Promised One." Taking a folded paper from his pocket, he proceeded to chant verses of such beauty and grandeur that the travellers sat spell-bound as they listened. They had heard nothing like it before. The majesty of those heavenly words, chanted in the most impressive manner, stirred the depths of their souls.

When he had finished, the stranger folded the paper and, touching it to his lips and forehead as a sign of reverence, presented it to his hosts. He had sown the seeds of faith in their hearts and now, his mission accomplished, he called for his horse and rose to go.

Who was he? Where did he come from and to what destination was he bound? His name is not important. He was a willing instrument that had been used by the Hand of God.

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\* The Bahá'ís were still called Bábís by most people.

Thousands of people had gathered from the villages around to see the Bahá'ís being paraded through the streets. There were five of them, their shoulders tied in such a way that they had to take every step together or fall down in the snow.

Their naked bodies were bruised and swollen with the beating they had received all night. Even now as they moved slowly along, the mob kicked them and threw stones at them, while the guards used their rods on their wounded backs with such severity that some among the crowd could not bear to look on. An aged father pleaded with the guards for their pity as he saw his only son tortured before his eyes; a sister, in sheer desperation, tore the earrings from her bleeding ears and handed them to one of the guards, begging him to stop lashing her brother—but none showed any mercy.

The victims themselves surprised the onlookers by their calm and fortitude, one of them murmuring to himself:

*Truth is Truth, even if all defy it;  
Day is day, though blind men may deny it.*

He, and three of the others, had once sat with their friends in a beautiful orchard and vowed to set out in search of Truth. This is where the path had led them.

\* \* \* \* \*

Four weary men were dragging themselves along the dusty road. They had been able to escape with their lives from Işfahán, but they had had nothing to eat or drink that day and were too weak to go on much farther.

Someone happened to be passing that way. The men asked him whether they could find any water near by, and he pointed out a place to them. Na'ím, who had a little more strength left in him than the others, set out with an empty jar, but he was so exhausted on the way back that he could not walk up to his companions. The other three men were even weaker than he was, so they all had to wait till Na'ím could make the effort to reach them with the precious water.

They had no money to buy food. Before leaving the city, Na'ím, who had been a rich man, had sent a message to his wife asking

her to let him have a small sum of money in order to help him reach Ṭihrán, but his wife had sent the messenger away saying she would not help a Bábí. She had taken possession of all Na'ím's property and was already married to another man.

The four companions eventually found a dervish who was prepared to lend them a small silver coin with which they bought some food on the way. Later on in Ṭihrán they went through considerable trouble in order to find this dervish and give him back the money. They found him to be a receptive soul and gave him the new Message as well.

In Ṭihrán, Na'ím could often be seen sitting in the corner of a cold, bare room transcribing the Writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh for his fellow-believers. He earned a few copper coins each day and lived in great poverty. In order to warm his hands, he would gather horse dung from the streets in the early mornings to burn in his little tin samovar, but he managed to set aside some coins with which to buy a little tea and sugar to serve to his friends on Fridays when they gathered in his room to study the Writings of their Faith. They read by the light of a small fire of dried twigs which had also been painfully gathered during the week; yet, so eager were they to study these precious Writings that they often sat up through the whole night taking turns at chanting the verses.

In the morning as they rose to go, the friends could never tell what fresh affliction they might each be called upon to endure before they met again, but they were always, and under all circumstances, prepared to say with Na'ím:

*I do not know, O Lord, what's best for me;  
I only ask for that which comes from Thee.*

## **The story of Na'ím and his friends**

Na'ím, the famous Bahá'í poet, was a great friend of Nayyir and Síná. He had known the brothers since childhood when they lived among some of the most superstitious and fanatical Muslims in a village near Işfahán. In their youth these men were drawn into close friendship because of their similar tastes, and they gradually

formed a circle of friends who read and criticized each other's poetry and discussed topics of every nature.

They were particularly interested in religion, and their studies and discussions on this subject led them to decide that they should each independently investigate truth for themselves; but should one of them arrive at the goal of this difficult journey and feel convinced that he had indeed found the object of his search, he should then take upon himself the obligation of informing his friends.

Nayyir and Síná were the first to embrace the Bahá'í Faith. They were away from their own home at that time but, faithful to their pledge, they hurried back to bring the glad tidings to their friends. Na'ím listened with great interest as they gave him the Message, and soon became a staunch follower of the new Cause. One or two others among their friends were also drawn to the Faith, but the rest felt reluctant to associate with anyone who spoke in favour of the Bahá'ís, much less were they prepared to listen to ideas accepted by people who were already branded as enemies of God and religion.

From that time rumours were spread in the village that Nayyir and Síná, as well as Na'ím and a few others, had left the Faith of Islám to join hands with the Bahá'ís, and were now engaged in misleading others. Most people, however, who loved and respected these men would not believe the rumours, while their few enemies had no way of proving anything against them.

Among the enemies of the Cause in that village were two priests who acted as deputies of those influential mujtahids\* of Işfahán, known to the Bahá'ís as 'the Wolf' and 'the Son of the Wolf'. Confident that any schemes against the followers of the new Faith would meet with the approval of these mujtahids, the two priests decided to carry out a plan by which they could openly denounce the Bahá'ís in their village. They approached the brother of a man who had long been suspected as a Bahá'í, and persuaded him to pretend adherence to the new Faith. In this way he could get hold of a book about the Cause and deliver it for proof into the hands of the priests. This plan was carried out and the book of *Íqán* fell into the possession of the enemies of the Faith.

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\* Muslim doctors of law.

The next morning one of the priests, armed with the book as proof, climbed up the minaret of the village mosque. "The religion of God has perished!" he screamed out to the people, "God's true Faith is dead!" The inhabitants of the place hastened to the mosque to hear what he had to say. "O people," cried the hysterical priest, "I tell you, the religion of our forefathers is dead and forgotten! Look," he said, producing the *Íqán*, "this book belongs to the followers of the Báb and has been found in the house of the infidel brothers, Nayyir and Síná! I, myself," he assured them, "have read the first and second pages of this book and I swear by God that, had I dared to go on to the third page, I would have been converted! Beware of what these accursed infidels can do and rid yourselves of them before they have uprooted God's religion in this village!"

The mischief was done. Friendship and family ties were forgotten as hatred for the Bahá'ís swelled in the hearts of the people, blinding them to all decency and justice. Nothing could appease them now except the death of all those who had dared to join the new Faith.

The two mujtahids of Işfahán signed the death-warrants of five Bahá'ís in that village, three of them being Nayyir, Síná and Na'ím. They were all to be taken to the prison in Işfahán and handed over to the governor who was to carry out the death sentence. The villagers, however, were not going to be deprived of having a share in punishing the Bahá'ís themselves. The evening the death-warrants arrived, the five friends were stripped naked and beaten till daybreak. Na'ím has told the story of how, after being beaten all through the night, their faces and naked bodies were painted over with gaudy colours and tall paper hats were placed on their heads to make them look as ridiculous as possible. Their shoulders were then tied together and they were paraded through the streets of the village accompanied by a gang who played flutes, drums and tambourines. Na'ím also recalled that, notwithstanding the physical torture they endured, their sense of humour had not completely left them and once in a while they would burst into laughter as they viewed each other in their new apparel.

Fortunately, the few friends left to them outside managed to get their release from the governor's prison in Işfahán. Nayyir and Síná, were the last to come out of prison, and at first there was little hope for them. Their wives, in an attempt to move the heart of 'the

Wolf', went to him with their young children, begging him to have pity on the little ones and release their fathers, but that cruel mujtahid had them thrown out of his house. The deputy governor, however, who already knew Nayyir and Síná and was devoted to the two brothers, obtained their release by intervening on their behalf and persuading the governor of Işfahán, who was in the capital at the time, to overrule the death sentence issued by the mujtahids. This was a rare occurrence and one which could not be forgotten by the infuriated religious dignitaries. They vowed that they would not rest until they had wrought their vengeance on the victims who had temporarily escaped their punishment.

## **The vengeance of the mujtahids**

The cries and curses of the howling mob could be heard for miles around. They had surrounded the house and threatened to stone the two brothers to death.

Nayyir and Síná, the gentle poets who had enjoyed such popularity before, had now become outcasts among their countrymen. They had dared to join the ranks of the Bahá'ís and no death was considered too terrible for them.

The walls round the house were too high to climb and the heavy door withstood the attack of stones, but the savage mob would not be put off. "Fetch some paraffin," some of them shouted, "and we will burn down the door!"

In the house, the women and children trembled with fear. The first warning of what was to happen had come to them when the eldest son of Síná had been attacked on his way through the village a few days before. He and his father had left the village that same night, while Nayyir was to follow later with the rest of the family. It was now a consolation to them that one of the men sought after by the fanatical mob would not be there if they managed to break into the house, but it seemed as though Nayyir was doomed to die.

One person alone had not given up hope. The wife of Nayyir was not wasting precious time in lamentation. While the attention of all the neighbours was drawn away by the noisy crowd in the street, she was hacking out a hole in the wall which connected their house

to one of their neighbours. "This should open on to their storeroom," she thought. "Please God, do not let them hear the noise I make."

As soon as the hole was big enough for a man to pass through, the brave women persuaded her husband to take refuge in their neighbour's house, while she quickly patched up the wall. Then, climbing up to the roof of the house, she called to the crowd below. "Listen to me," she said, "I swear that the men you are looking for are not here in this house. Both have left and you are wasting your time trying to break down the door." No one believed her, but she managed to distract their attention for a while hoping that the crowd might disperse when it grew dark. "Nayyir and Síná have left this house, I tell you," she called out again. "Burn down the door!" cried the angry crowd.

Paraffin was now brought, but the pile of stones that had been thrown at the door provided a protection and the oil was wasted before the wood could catch fire. The sun had set by this time and some of the men were impatient to get to their own homes. After confused discussions and heated arguments, it was decided that the house should be guarded that night and they should come back to clear away the stones and finish the job in the morning.

As the disappointed crowd began to disperse for the night, Nayyir's family wondered what fate awaited him in their neighbour's house. Nayyir, too, wondered how he would be treated by the neighbours if they found him there. Should he remain hidden in the storeroom till everyone was asleep and then try to escape from the rooftops, or should he let the neighbours know he was in their house? If he did disclose his presence there, would they not be tempted to hand him over to his enemies?

He listened to the bloodcurdling cries of the mob outside. It seemed impossible that these could be the same people who had respected him before and been moved by his poetry. Perhaps even now, he thought, they might have left him and his fellow-believers to live in peace in the village had it not been for the instigations of those sworn enemies of their Faith, the mujtahids in Işfahán.

It seemed many hours before the noises in the street began to lessen and gradually die away. Now the neighbours could be heard coming into the house. "Foolish people!" someone was saying. "What makes them think these two brothers are Bábís?" "They

can never be Bábís,” said another voice, “we have been their neighbours for all these years and have never known them to be guilty of any of those crimes the Bábís are blamed for. Both brothers are good Muslims.”

Nayyir decided to come out of his hiding place and throw himself on the mercy of his neighbours. He quietly moved into one of the rooms and waited. An old lady came in and, seeing the outline of a figure in the gathering darkness, started back in fear. Then she recognized her neighbour. “It is you, Mr. Nayyir!” she exclaimed. “How did you come here without being seen?” Nayyir told her the story. “Do not be afraid,” the old lady said, “we will not betray you.” She went out and brought her son. “We will do all we can for you,” the son assured their guest.

The front door was locked and bolted while they waited for darkness to descend. The host then sent for a trusted friend and together they armed themselves and quietly escorted Nayyir to a place outside the boundaries of their village. There they begged him to take what money they had with them and sadly left him to go on by himself, while they hurried back to the village before their absence was discovered.

Nayyir walked on for many a weary mile, stumbling and falling in the dark, till he found his way to a village where he knew a few Bahá'ís. There he stayed in secret for some time, and was joined by Na'ím and another fellow-believer from his own village who had also escaped being killed by the mob.

The crowd, in the meantime, having returned to burn the door of Nayyir and Síná's house the next morning, found a copy of the Qur'án wrapped in a piece of cloth which Nayyir's wife had hung on the door. “We must honour the holy Book and refrain from burning the door,” some of them said. “These infidels do not believe in the Qur'án,” others remarked. “They may not believe in it, but we do,” said one man. “We can put the Book aside,” said another, “and then set fire to the door.” In the end it was decided that they should not burn the door, but break it down instead. They cleared away the stones and set themselves to work.

Nayyir and Síná's family, seeing that the crowd was determined to break into the house, decided to open the door themselves. The two young wives, however, threw themselves over a low wall

leading into a neighbour's yard and escaped through a narrow lane before the mob could reach them. This they did because they knew what fate awaited them if they were caught. Already they had heard how the relatives of the wife of Na'ím had found a new husband for her, saying that her marriage with Na'ím had been annulled when he became a Bábí. It also happened that Síná's wife was expecting a child at that time, and her own brother had sworn to rip open her belly rather than let her give birth to the child of a Bábí.

When the hysterical crowd of people rushed into the house, they caught hold of Nayyir's eldest son, a child of eight or nine, and started to beat him so that he might tell them where his father and uncle were hiding, but seeing that the child could give them no information, they left him and began to loot the house. They carried away everything that they could find—expensive carpets and textiles, metal work and beautiful crystal—all were confiscated. Not a mat or a morsel of food did they leave for the six small children who were now left alone in the empty house.

No one dared go near the children, and they would have starved had it not been for a kind neighbour who secretly took them a small pot of soup in the dead of night when no one was around. Two nights later when the poor mothers, facing every danger, went to see what had happened to their children, they found the youngest, only two years old, lying in a manger in the stable with a swollen stomach and unable to utter a word.

It was impossible for the women to take their children with them, so they left the six children in that grief-stricken house and came to see them sometimes in the dark. Their life went on in this way for three months! At last the mother-in-law of Síná, fearful for what might befall her daughter if she were found, persuaded a man who had a few mules to take the whole family by a secret path over the mountains to the city of Qum. From there they were eventually able to reach ʿIhrán and find Nayyir and Síná who had taken refuge in the capital.

The two brothers, having lost all their worldly belongings, dedicated the rest of their lives to the service of their beloved Faith. They travelled on foot from town to town and village to village to spread the tidings of the New Day. Sometimes they were treated with tolerance, at other times they had to suffer innumerable

hardships, but their loyalty and devotion to the task they had set themselves never wavered. Putting their trust in God, they arose to proclaim and teach His Cause and, remembering the words addressed by the Báb to His first disciples, they showed the utmost detachment wherever they went. They accepted no reward from the people of any city and departed out of each place as pure and undefiled as they had entered, shaking the dust from off their feet.

They died in poverty, but the seeds of faith which they sowed in the hearts of men wherever they travelled bore such a rich harvest that thousands of people today remember their names with gratitude, and pay homage to these two selfless men who renounced every comfort in the service of others.

### **A teaching trip**

It was snowing and bitterly cold, but Síná was impatient to be off. He had received a message from 'Abdu'l-Bahá asking him to visit the province of Mázindarán, and he wished to set out without any loss of time. But his friends and relatives were concerned about Síná who was now an ageing man. "Is it not possible for you to wait till the weather is a little better?" they said. "The life of a man cannot be relied upon," Síná replied. "If I stay here, I may die tomorrow without having obeyed my Master's orders whereas, if I should die on the way, I shall have died while carrying out His command." So the mules were ordered, and Síná left for Mázindarán. With him went his young son Ḥabíbu'lláh.

This was the first time that Ḥabíbu'lláh was going with his father on a teaching trip and he did not quite realize what he should be prepared for. That day they travelled from morning till a few hours after sunset before they came to a place where they could rest and have some food. But the people of the village did not prove hospitable, and the weary travellers had to spend the night in a stable where the ceiling leaked. They had great difficulty in keeping dry until day dawned and they were able to go on their way.

This introduction to their journey came rather unexpectedly to the young man, but he was soon put through an ordeal which was far more trying. Having arrived at another village on their way,

they joined the men who had gathered for prayer in the mosque. When the prayer was over, the villagers recognized Síná as a descendant of the Prophet from his green turban, and came to pay their respects to him. Then they noticed that his son wore a hat and his head was not shaved. This, they thought, was quite unbecoming to the son of such a respectable person and, as they could not find a barber to attend to Ḥabíbu'lláh, they very kindly cut his hair off with a pair of scissors, as close to the skull as possible. Having done him this favour, they also provided the young man with a huge turban under which poor Ḥabíbu'lláh could hardly keep his head up.

Another place in which they had to stay was a very dirty inn where they were attacked by hundreds of lice. When they eventually arrived at the home of some friends and were able to change their clothing and take a rest, Ḥabíbu'lláh, musing over the last few days, observed: "No wonder my elder brother is not very keen on these teaching trips!" Síná laughed out loud. "Yes," he said, "it can be a little uncomfortable at times."

Ḥabíbu'lláh shared quite a number of other adventures with his father on his first teaching trip. Once, when they were going to visit the Bahá'ís who lived in villages scattered in the heart of the forests of Mázindarán, they were caught in one of the heavy showers which are common in those parts and which are quickly followed by floods. Although they were soaked through, they decided not to enter the first village they came to as they knew no one there, but to go on to the next village where they had Bahá'í friends.

Unfortunately, their guide lost his way in the forest as night set in, and the floods made it impossible for them to go any farther. They could not think of staying in the forest till morning because of wild animals; besides, their clothes were wet and the night was bitterly cold. To add to their distress, Síná, who was far from well after the rigours of the journey, had a sudden attack of paralysis which affected his tongue and he was unable to speak any more.

Ḥabíbu'lláh and the guide decided that there was nothing for them to do but to try and go back to the village they had passed by earlier in the evening. In order to get to this village, however, they were obliged to go up a steep hill which had become so slippery from the rain that the horses they rode on could not climb it.

Ḥabíbu'lláh then remembered something he had read about one of the kings of Persia who had been faced with a similar difficulty. The king had ordered that the hoofs of the horses be wrapped up in felt cloth so that they would not slip back. So now Ḥabíbu'lláh threw their cloaks and other pieces of clothing under the feet of the horses in turn, until they reached the top of the hill.

Covered with mud and shivering with cold, the three men managed to find their way to the village they had been reluctant to enter before. To their surprise, they were received very kindly and taken into a house where a man and several women immediately kindled a large fire and started to dry their clothes.

The womenfolk showed great concern over Síná who lay unconscious all this while and one old woman, in particular, could not dry her tears as she sat beside the helpless patient. It seemed like a miracle when, halfway through the night, Síná began to recover from his illness and found that he could use his tongue again. The first words he uttered were in praise and gratitude to God that he had once more been permitted to suffer hardship in the path of service to His Cause. Then he turned to the old woman who had kept faithful watch by his bedside and who now seemed eager to talk to him, but he could not understand what she said as she spoke in a colloquial dialect. In the morning, the woman brought a translator who explained to Síná that she had dreamed of him and his son three nights before. She had seen him lying there unconscious in her dream, just as she had now seen him in reality. "Who are you?" she enquired of Síná, "and what are you doing in this forest?" He told her that he had come to see a friend in the next village. His friend and fellow-believer proved to be the old woman's grandson and, after a little more conversation, Síná found out that the woman herself was a Bahá'í, as was every inhabitant of the village in which they were staying! All the men of the village, with the exception of one, were out farming on the hills some distance away while the women stayed behind to do the work at home.

As soon as he was able to stand on his feet again, Síná and his son moved on to visit Bahá'ís in other villages. On one occasion, as they were preparing to leave a village, Ḥabíbu'lláh twisted his ankle badly and they were obliged to stay there for another three

days till he could walk again. This little incident was quite significant, for when they arrived at their next destination, they found that the two brothers at whose house they were hoping to stay had been seized and taken to prison three days before because they were Bahá'ís. Had Síná and his son been there at the time, they too would have been taken to prison.

Travelling with his father was anything but uneventful, Ḥabíbu'lláh decided, and some of the events which took place seemed quite incredible. One day, having just arrived at a village on their way back from Mázindarán, they were going to the home of one of the Bahá'ís when they met a notable of the place who was standing in front of his house. The gentleman invited them to go in and, on being told that they were expected elsewhere, started to follow them himself. Some of Síná's friends who had come out to welcome him asked this man why he was following Síná. "I do not know myself," he said. "All I do know is that I want to be with this Siyyid,\* whoever he is." "But this Siyyid is a Bahá'í," they told him as they approached their destination. "In that case," the man answered, "I wish to be a Bahá'í too." He then stepped into the house with Síná to hear about his new Faith! Strange as the incident was, the man's faith was genuine and he remained a staunch believer for the rest of his life.

This person was one of many people who were attracted by Síná's radiant personality during his travels around Persia. There was the headman of a village in the province of Khurásán, for instance, who met Síná years before this trip to Mázindarán. On that occasion, Síná was teaching the Faith in one of the towns of Khurásán when a great commotion was raised by some fanatical Muslims and there was danger of his being killed. The governor of the place, who knew a little about the Faith, hurriedly sent Síná with some soldiers to a village outside the boundaries of the town. These soldiers treated Síná like a criminal and told the headman of the village to beware of him because he was a Bábí. As soon as the soldiers left, however, the man threw himself at the feet of Síná and said: "I can see you are no criminal. Tell me, I beg you, what a Bábí is." Síná, who was too weak to talk to him after the hardships he had endured

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\* Descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad.

that day, took a book out of his pocket and handed it to his host. The man stayed up that night to finish reading the book and became a convinced Bahá'í before Síná left his village.

Síná would often recall the teaching trips they used to make when he was a young man. Things were far more difficult for a Bahá'í teacher in those days, he would tell his son. There was fear of persecution in every town and village, and going from place to place in itself was far from easy. One day, as Síná and Ḥabíbu'lláh were travelling on mules in Mázindarán, Síná pointed out a place to his son and said: "In my younger days, when we travelled on foot all the time, a companion with whom I was journeying this way sat down here from sheer exhaustion and could go no farther." Ḥabíbu'lláh realized that, difficult though teaching trips still were, they were nothing like they used to be.

## Firesides

More than forty men—Bahá'ís and others who had come to investigate the Faith—were gathered in the home of Nayyir and Síná when a crowd of two hundred ruffians, bent on murder and destruction, were heard approaching the house.

The two brothers lived in one of the poorest quarters of Tīhrán where the rough population of the city could be found, and where the Bahá'ís were in constant danger of being attacked by their enemies. But no fear of danger to themselves ever stopped Nayyir and Síná from teaching the Cause. When they were too old and ill to travel from place to place to spread the new Message, they held regular meetings in their humble home twice a week. These 'firesides', as they are termed today, were never to be forgotten by those who attended them. More than forty or fifty people would gather each time to hear Nayyir and Síná expound the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, and a great number of people owed their faith to the untiring efforts of these two men. Even those who did not embrace the Cause went away from these meetings as friends of the Bahá'ís and admirers of the hosts.

But the inhabitants of the district in which the two brothers lived were not going to tolerate their meetings forever and, when

encouraged by the clergy, they decided to do away with their Bahá'í neighbours once and for all. One night when they knew there was a meeting, two hundred of them joined together and, yelling and cursing at the top of their voices, came to kill anyone they might find at the gathering.

When the noise of the crowd was heard in the street, the two brothers begged their guests to try and save their lives, for there was no doubt about the intention of the mob outside. Among the guests at the meeting that night, there were twelve soldiers who belonged to the artillery. They had been coming to investigate the Faith for the past few weeks and already knew something about the Bahá'ís and their beliefs. When they saw the danger that threatened the people in the house, these soldiers opened the door and came out into the street. The sight of a group of strong-looking soldiers coming out of the house they were about to attack worked like magic on the rough crowd. All they had expected to find at the meeting were some helpless unarmed men who would be easy victims. They had not dreamed of confronting soldiers prepared to defend themselves. The effect of what they now saw was so great that they slowly retreated.

The twelve soldiers, quite pleased with the impression they had made, accepted an invitation to stay in the district every night for some time. They slept, two by two, in the houses of Bahá'ís who lived near Nayyir and Síná, and the 'firesides' went on as usual.

The ruffians attempted another attack hoping, no doubt, that there would be no more soldiers around. This time, however, our soldier friends decided to give the crowd a demonstration of a proper military attack! Drawing out their swords, they rushed forward together just as the mob entered the street. The result was a great commotion among their cowardly enemies who took to their heels and fled the place—all but one who, being slower than the others, was captured by the valiant soldiers! The wretched man, seeing Síná standing at the door of his house, caught hold of his sash and begged for mercy. Síná assured him that there was no intention of doing him any harm, but the man would not let go of the sash till Síná had vowed that he would be under his personal protection. Such were the conditions under which the early believers held their 'firesides'.

## Raised from the dead

Mullá 'Abdu'l-Qaní\* was being tortured in the streets of Ardikán. He was one of the most famous Bahá'ís of the village, and the fanatical people had long been thirsty for his blood. Now they attacked him with crude weapons: knives, sticks, chains and stones. Even the women and children were eager to take part in killing a Bahá'í, for this was considered to be the surest way of gaining admission into paradise.

They beat him and tore his flesh until he could no longer stand on his feet. Then they tied a rope to his feet and dragged him to the house of the mujtahid. "This is not the way I asked you to bring him here," said the religious dignitary, "but now that you have already killed him, throw his body into the moat."

But the people were not yet through with 'Abdu'l-Qaní. They dragged him into the streets once more and, while some went to get firewood and paraffin to burn his body, others kicked him and threw stones and spat on him. Someone even brought a saw and started cutting off his leg.

All of a sudden, a new man rushed upon the scene waving an envelope in his hand and swearing at the top of his voice. "Shameless people," he cried, "you are killing a man whose death-warrant has not yet been signed by our religious leaders. I have here in my hand a telegram instructing me to see into this matter." Saying this, he took out a chain from his pocket and drove the crowd away from their victim. He then called for someone to take up the body of 'Abdu'l-Qaní and carry it to his home, but none of those who heard him came forward.

The ruthless crowd was ready to pounce on its prey once more when a man who happened to pass that way recognized 'Abdu'l-Qaní and immediately offered to carry him on his shoulders. This man was a thief who had once broken into the house of 'Abdu'l-Qaní's sister and, having been caught, was going to be tortured by the orders of the governor when 'Abdu'l-Qaní intervened and saved him from this punishment.

'Abdu'l-Qaní's body was a mass of raw flesh and blood when it

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\* Mullá is a title given to Muslim priests.

was laid down in front of his family. One of his legs had been sawed half through and one eye hung out on his face. Yet he was still breathing, and his wife rushed out to find a doctor. None of the doctors she went to, however, had the courage to go to see 'Abdu'l-Qaní or even dared to write a prescription for him. Besides, they were sure that he was a dying man and that nothing they did could possibly save his life. So 'Abdu'l-Qaní's wife and elder son took upon themselves to tend to his wounds and use whatever treatment they considered best. Their untiring efforts were rewarded and 'Abdu'l-Qaní lived, though it was a long time before they could even change the bloodstained and shredded clothes which he had on.

When the people of Ardikán came to know that 'Abdu'l-Qaní was still alive, they looked upon it as a true miracle. They said that God had raised him up to life again after they had seen him die, and these same people who had almost killed him now came to beg for a piece of his bloodstained clothes so that they could keep it as a sacred relic.

## **The wolf and the lamb**

Mullá 'Abdu'l-Qaní of Ardikán, who was a well-known and much respected priest before he became a Bahá'í, was still clothed in the garments of the Muslim clergy when Ardishír, a young Zoroastrian, was taken to his house to hear about the new Faith.

The Zoroastrians of Persia, having suffered all forms of insults and indignations at the hands of the Muslims, especially dreaded meeting with any of the clergymen of Islám as this group never failed to poison the life of a Zoroastrian whenever they set eyes on one of them. Ardishír, therefore, had grave misgivings when he found his host to be dressed in the robes of the dreaded enemy. But he was soon to find out that this man was entirely different from any Muslim priest he had yet seen or heard of.

As soon as the young guest arrived at the threshold of his room, 'Abdu'l-Qaní rose to his feet in respect and courteously offered him a seat beside himself. He then proceeded to pour out a glass of tea for him with his own hands. The young man was greatly astonished. He could not imagine that it could be possible for a

Muslim priest to undergo such transformation even if he had become a Bahá'í. Not only did the Muslims treat Zoroastrians with great contempt, but it was impossible for them to permit a Zoroastrian to drink out of a glass used in their own home. All Zoroastrians were considered as unclean and no Muslim would dream of using a receptacle defiled by them.

The greatest surprise came for Ardishír when, after he had finished drinking the tea, his host deliberately filled the same glass again, without pouring out what was left inside, and began to drink from it. Then, turning to the young Zoroastrian, he remarked: "You must have heard how, in the days of the advent of the Promised Lord, the lamb and the wolf will drink from the same stream and graze in the same meadow. Do you still doubt that we are living in that Day?"

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The following story has been recounted by another Zoroastrian who met 'Abdu'l-Qaní:

When I was a young man I was a very staunch Zoroastrian. I faithfully believed in all the ideas that had been handed down to us by our forefathers and never questioned the truth of our beliefs. I felt quite certain that all other religions were false, but I particularly disliked Islám because of the way we were treated by its followers. They continually insulted us and confronted us with every form of malice. If a poor Zoroastrian who had brought fruit to sell in the market was seen to ride his donkey on the street, even a small Muslim child was permitted to hit him with stones and sticks, because it was considered an insult to Islám if a Zoroastrian or a Jew rode, instead of humbly walking past a Muslim. And if one of us was sitting on a doorstep, he was obliged to stand up in respect when a Muslim clergyman went by. Once, when an invalid Zoroastrian was riding on his donkey to go to a doctor, he happened to meet the priest of that district. Though unable to dismount, he saluted the clergyman with great reverence but instead of answering his greeting, the priest pulled him down from his mount and, using the reins of the donkey, gave the sick man a severe beating.

We could be identified by the clothes we were obliged to wear, and were looked upon as unclean heathens who should not be

permitted to associate with the Muslim population. We were even forbidden to build houses that were better or higher than those of our Muslim neighbours.

Notwithstanding the treatment that was meted out to us, life was much easier for Zoroastrians and Jews than it was for those who were known as Bábís. I was quite sure that these people did not believe in the Prophet Muḥammad by the way they were persecuted by the Muslims, and I therefore had great sympathy for them. One day I saw a cobbler who belonged to this new Faith being killed on the street. He was attacked with stones, bricks, chopping knives and any other weapon people could get hold of as they rushed to the scene. The man's flesh was cut to pieces before my eyes, and his corpse was set on fire.

I later came to know a few of the Bahá'ís and, to my utter astonishment and great disappointment, found that they believed Muḥammad was a Messenger of God! "How can you believe in a prophet whose followers treat you like this?" I asked one of them in amazement. "You cannot always judge a Prophet by what His followers do," the Bahá'í told me. "But how can you say a man is a true prophet," I objected, "if those who profess his religion can behave in this way?" "What the Muslims are doing today," I was told, "only proves that they have completely forgotten the teachings of the Founder of their Faith, for if the truth of a Messenger of God depends on the behaviour of those who name themselves after Him, then we should disbelieve in all the past Prophets alike." I realized that there was truth in what he said, but nothing could reconcile me to Islám and its Founder.

Some time before this, I had read a book which I greatly admired as it was written against Muḥammad and his religion. I had not dared to tell anyone about this book before, but I now felt that I could discuss it with my Bahá'í friends. They were very patient with me, but always managed to refute the arguments given in the book and prove them to be entirely false. Though I would not be drawn to Islám, I found that I was attracted to the Bahá'ís themselves. "Never mind about Muḥammad and his teachings," I said at last, "tell me something about the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh." I was given *The Hidden Words* to read. This little book captured my heart immediately and I began to read other Writings of

Bahá'u'lláh. In time, I came to believe that the Author of these Writings must have truly been inspired by God. But while reading the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, I one day came across a tribute He had paid to Muḥammad as a divine Messenger and this was something I could not tolerate. "I have no difficulty in accepting Bahá'u'lláh as a Messenger of God," I told the Bahá'ís one day, "but I can never be convinced that Muḥammad was a Prophet too."

My prejudice against the Muslims was so intense that in the end I decided to go so far as to forsake Bahá'u'lláh and His Cause, rather than accept the Prophet of Islám. It was then that I came to meet Mullá 'Abdu'l-Qaní. "Why do you find it so difficult to recognize Muḥammad as a true Prophet?" He asked me, and there followed a long discussion. He told me that the teachings brought by the Messenger of God could be likened to the life-giving waters of a pure lake. But, as days go by, the clear water in the lake is polluted by those who make use of it. Some dip their buckets into it, others their hands, and yet others their soiled garments. In time, the water changes its colour and smell and loses its life-giving power. Indeed, to drink that water then becomes the cause of disease. "This is why," 'Abdu'l-Qaní continued, "God sends a Messenger to purify His religion from time to time and make it a source of spiritual life to the world once more, after people have misused and corrupted it to suit their own desires." "But how can I be sure," I asked him, "that the teachings of Muḥammad were good and profitable when he brought them?" "There is only one way of finding out," said 'Abdu'l-Qaní. "You must forget your prejudice, lay aside all the ideas you find prevalent among the Muslims today, and read the teachings of Muḥammad as given in the Qur'án." "I cannot read Arabic," I told him, "and the Qur'án has not been translated into Persian." "If you are sincere in your search after Truth, and wish to know what is written in the Qur'án," 'Abdu'l-Qaní told me, "I am prepared to read it with you."

I began to study the Qur'án with Mullá 'Abdu'l-Qaní every day. It took me two years to go through it, but by that time my heart was completely won over by the Prophet of Islám. I then had no further difficulty in becoming a Bahá'í, much to the disappointment of my Muslim neighbours.

## Persecutions in Yazd

In the fierce heat of the noonday sun, thousands of people had gathered in the public square of Yazd, while others were engaged in killing the Bahá'ís and pillaging their homes in every district of the town. The Bahá'ís had been taken unawares and had nowhere to flee to. Their wives and children were trying to hide in cellars, wells, ditches and waterways, half dead with fear as they listened to the horrible curses and unearthly cries around them.

Suddenly the killing stopped and everyone hurried to the governor's fort. Word had been brought to the religious dignitary of the town that the governor had given refuge to Mullá 'Abdu'l-Qaní in his own fort and, furious at the news, the clergyman had called upon all devout Muslims to surround the place and be prepared to attack it if the governor did not hand 'Abdu'l-Qaní over to them.

Thousands of men rushed to the scene and surrounded the fort from every side, while the women crowded on to the rooftops around, mingling their screams and cries with the shouting and cursing of the men below. The governor, fearful of the influence of the clergy and the power of the masses, hastened to assure them that 'Abdu'l-Qaní had not entered the fort. Although he pleaded for hours, the mob would not believe him and he was obliged to beg for the help of the clergy themselves.

This incident, which held the attention of the inhabitants of Yazd from noon to sunset, brought relief to many Bahá'ís who would have otherwise been butchered to death that day.

'Abdu'l-Qaní and some of the members of his family were, in fact, in the home of some English friends when news was brought to them of what was happening outside. The hosts immediately asked 'Abdu'l-Qaní to leave the house as they were afraid of what might happen to themselves if people came to know that the human quarry they were after was to be found in their home. 'Abdu'l-Qaní, a frail man of seventy at that time, assured his hosts that he would not let any harm come to them. He asked to be permitted to stay there until there was reason to believe that people suspected where he was. Then, he promised, he would willingly leave the house to be killed on the street so that no harm might come to his

hosts. The hosts were reluctant to listen to his pleading. "Why should you choose a religion," said the lady of the house, "for which you have to suffer insults and persecutions wherever you go?" "Have you forgotten the days of Peter and Paul?" replied 'Abdu'l-Qaní, "Was this not how the early disciples of Christ were treated by the people of their day?"

'Abdu'l-Qaní sat behind the front door, ready to leave the house as soon as he heard a crowd approaching. At sunset the loud cries of a gang of men were heard coming that way. 'Abdu'l-Qaní said farewell to his children, thanked his hosts for letting them stay there, and prepared to go out. The noise in the street, however, grew less as the crowd passed by the alley without entering it.

Once more 'Abdu'l-Qaní sat down to wait. The sorrow of his own family and the anxiety of his hosts now knew no bounds. Soon the roaring of a great multitude of people was heard approaching. This time the numbers were so many, and the noise and commotion they made was so great, that the very earth trembled as they entered the alley and came near the house. 'Abdu'l-Qaní hurriedly opened the door and stepped outside. To his great surprise, the crowd went to another door close by and broke it down with a few kicks. This house belonged to another Bahá'í and the mob, not finding him at home, looted the place and left.

'Abdu'l-Qaní's English friends refused to have anything more to do with him. The old man, accompanied by his son-in-law who insisted on going with him, left in the hope of escaping from the town before the night was over. Fortunately, no one recognized them in the dark and they were able to make their way out of Yazd.

Being old and feeble, 'Abdu'l-Qaní could not walk very fast and the summer nights were short. Would they be able to find their way to a shelter before daybreak? As the first glimmerings of dawn appeared on the horizon, they recognized the outlines of one of the hamlets near by. The younger man hurried on in front to see if he could persuade a Zoroastrian he knew in that place to take them into his house. This man, though willing to help, was afraid to let them enter his own home. He took them to a walled garden a little away from his place, where there was no shelter from the hot sun, but where he hoped they might remain unobserved that day.

'Abdu'l-Qaní and his son-in-law were left in that garden, without

food or water, to live through fourteen hours of scorching sunshine. At night, almost dead from lack of water and food, they received a little nourishment from two men who were sent by the owner of the garden with a message asking them to leave the hamlet while it was still dark. This they found impossible to do. Not only was 'Abdu'l-Qaní too weak to undertake another journey on foot, but they could think of nowhere to go. In the end they persuaded their friend to let them stay on.

'Abdu'l-Qaní survived the torment of the blazing sun during those long summer days and the agony of sleeping on the rough ploughed land at night. He lived in that garden for thirty-nine days! Neither hunger and thirst, nor the persecutions and tortures he suffered at the hands of his enemies could dampen his enthusiasm for the Faith he loved so well. He lived through all those ordeals and died a natural death years later, serving the Cause to the end of his life.

### **A noble son**

Mullá 'Abdu'l-Qaní had a son of fifteen, named 'Abdu'l-Kháliq, who was with him in the house of his English friends on that fateful day in Yazd. 'Abdu'l-Kháliq was loved by all who knew him. Even their hosts who were so worried for their own safety would not let 'Abdu'l-Kháliq leave their house with his father that night. The next morning an English doctor who was concerned about the boy's safety took him to his own home where he hoped to keep him until the trouble in Yazd was over.

Later in the day, however, the doctor received a message from the governor that made him change his mind. The message was brought by the English minister in Yazd and it warned the foreigners in that town not to permit any Bahá'ís to enter their houses, as he, the governor, could not be responsible for the evil consequences if the Muslims found them hiding Bahá'ís in their homes. "Even if you suspect your own servant to belong to this Faith," the governor had said, "you must throw him out onto the streets."

The doctor was very worried, and the clergyman who had brought the message asked 'Abdu'l-Kháliq if he would be prepared to denounce the Founders of his Faith in order to safeguard his own

life. "Never!" was 'Abdu'l-Kháliq's immediate reply, "I would much rather be killed." "In that case," said his host reluctantly, "I am afraid I cannot keep you here any longer, as my own safety is now endangered." 'Abdu'l-Kháliq was given some money to have with him in case of need, and sent away from the house that night. Not knowing of any place he could go, the boy started to walk away from the town. He trembled with fear as he thought of the coming daylight when he might be recognized by someone on the road. But even if he were not, he thought, where could he go? Who would be prepared to give him refuge in his home in the villages around Yazd, or even give him food and water, when every stranger was suspected of being a Bahá'í who was running away from the town?

Suddenly his foot caught onto a wire and he fell down. He was immediately discovered by some workmen who were sleeping close by. "Who are you, and what are you doing here this time of night?" they asked him. 'Abdu'l Kháliq said he was on his way to do an errand for the English doctor. "You lie!" they told him. "You are one of those Bábís who are trying to escape." 'Abdu'l-Kháliq would not deny it and prepared himself to die. The workmen, however, did not kill him. They let him stay there for the night and go on his way in the morning. But they took from him the ring which his father had taken off his own finger and slipped into 'Abdu'l-Kháliq's hand when he was saying goodbye to his son. In the morning the generous boy gave the workmen some of his money too, before he set off into the wilderness.

When he had gone some distance from the place, one of the workmen caught up with him and said: "I can arrange for you to hide in the house of my master. How much can you give me to take to him?" 'Abdu'l-Kháliq gave him most of the sum he had in his pocket. "This is all I can afford," he said. The man told him to sit down and wait for his return.

'Abdu'l-Kháliq sat down on some rocks and waited for a long time. The sun was getting hotter every minute and the boy wondered how much longer he could bear it. After some agonizing hours, he realized that the workman had no intention of coming back, so he got up to continue his weary journey.

He soon met with a Zoroastrian who, seeing the state of the poor

boy in that heat, enquired where he was going. 'Abdu'l-Kháliq, hoping that the man might help him, said: "I am trying to escape from the town, but have nowhere to go. Do you know of anywhere?" But the Zoroastrian offered no help and left him to go on his way.

By now 'Abdu'l-Kháliq felt he would die of thirst if he could not find some water to drink. An old, kindly man who met him at this time saved his life by giving him a few gherkins. Then, after questioning the boy and getting to know of his distress, he took him to his home in the nearby village.

The old man had to go into town that same day and, scarcely had he entered the place, when he heard the town-crier's warning to the people of Yazd and its surroundings. "The revered dignitaries of Yazd have decreed," the man cried out, "that anyone who dares to give refuge to a Bábí, either in this town or the villages around it, will have his property confiscated and his house razed to the ground!"

The poor man hurried back to his village trembling with fear and begged 'Abdu'l-Kháliq to leave his home. "Let me stay for this one night," begged the boy, "and I will go in the morning." The old man woke him up at dawn and told him to hide in some ruins close by. 'Abdu'l-Kháliq gave him the rest of the money he had and took refuge among the ruins.

Once again the boy found himself in the scorching heat without water or food. As the hours went by and his thirst increased, he felt sure he could not bear this any longer. Any death, he thought, would be better than being roasted under the merciless desert sun. Even if he were to be killed by a savage mob, it would at least be quicker than dying in this way. He decided to go back to Yazd, and be prepared to meet his fate.

in Yazd, 'Abdu'l-Kháliq's grief-stricken mother did not have a minute's peace. She had seen her aged husband and her son-in-law walk out into streets which teemed with men bent on spilling their blood. No news of them had reached her, and she wondered whether they were still alive or had been cut to pieces by their ruthless enemies. She had hoped that her young son, 'Abdu'l-Kháliq, would be safe in the English doctor's house, but now she knew that he too had been turned out into the streets. "How could you have the heart," she told the doctor, "to send away an innocent boy who had

put his trust in you and taken refuge under your roof? Why could you not have let him be killed here so that I might, at least, have buried his body and wept over his grave? Now I must die a hundred deaths every day, not knowing what tortures he has suffered and where his poor body lies.”

The doctor was greatly moved by her terrible grief and wished he could give her some news of her son, but no one knew where ‘Abdu’l-Kháliq had gone and what had become of him. Then, after two days of anxiety, the doctor saw ‘Abdu’l-Kháliq stumble into his hospital more dead than alive. He was so glad to see the boy that he overcame the fear that people might have seen him entering the hospital. He made sure that the boy was given the attention he needed, then hurried to give the good news to ‘Abdu’l-Kháliq’s mother.

When ‘Abdu’l-Kháliq recovered from the effects of the hardships he had endured, his friend the doctor thought of taking him to one of the religious dignitaries of Yazd and getting a statement from the clergyman to say that ‘Abdu’l-Kháliq was not a Bahá’í and should not be molested, but the courageous boy would not think of it. He had had a taste of what a Bahá’í’s life could be like, yet he chose to remain loyal to his Faith.

## Prophecies fulfilled

From his studies of the Zoroastrian Scriptures, Mullá Bahrám\* had come to believe that the time for the appearance of that great Messenger foretold in the Holy Books was at hand. He questioned everyone who arrived at his village about the news of the outside world, hoping that something might reach his ears which would help him to recognize the signs of the advent of the Promised One. But a long time passed and he heard nothing of importance.

One day a neighbour of his who had just come back from the town told him that a Bábí was killed in Yazd that day. “What is a Bábí?” asked Mullá Bahrám. His neighbour was not sure, but recounted what he himself had heard about them. “They are

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\* He was not a Muslim priest, though he was known as Mullá Bahrám.

people," he said, "who become yellow in the face through acquiring too much knowledge." This made little sense to Mullá Bahrám, and soon other matters occupied his mind and he did not give much thought to what he had heard.

Some time later when Mullá Bahrám was working in Ṭīhrán, he was one day discussing religion with a friend whom he hoped to interest in the Zoroastrian Faith. Among the proofs which he mentioned concerning the Revelation of Zoroaster were the miracles He performed and the persecutions He and His disciples endured for the sake of His Cause. "Suffering persecutions is no proof," said his friend. "Only a few years ago eighty Bábís were killed for their Faith in a single day here in one of the squares of Ṭīhrán, while everybody knows that there is no truth in what they believe."

This was the second time Mullá Bahrám heard of the Bahá'ís and how they were being persecuted. The third time was in Káshán, where he was working with a man whom he had come to love and admire. This friend one day received a letter which he opened in the presence of Mullá Bahrám. The contents of that letter brought such grief to his heart that he could not conceal his feelings, and Mullá Bahrám begged to know of the reason for this great sorrow. His friend was reluctant to talk about it at first but, realizing that he could trust Mullá Bahrám with a secret, decided to tell him. Two of the notables of Iṣfahán, he said, who were known for their gentleness and the saintly life they led were, nevertheless, cruelly martyred because they were Bahá'ís. Mullá Bahrám was greatly touched by what he heard. He also realized now that his own friend, whom he had believed to be a Zoroastrian, was a member of this new Faith.

Mullá Bahrám could no longer ignore the Cause which had been brought to his attention from time to time through the martyrdom of its followers. His investigation, which started that very day, aroused his deep interest in the new Faith, but he had to leave for his native village near Yazd before he was fully convinced of the truth of the Cause.

In Yazd, Mullá Bahrám knew a family who bought beetroots from him whenever he took a donkey-load to sell in the town. On one of these occasions he was invited to go in and meet a friend of the

household. This friend was Málmírí, a famous Bahá'í teacher whose death-warrant had been signed by one of the religious dignitaries of Yazd, and who was now living in concealment in the basement of the house of one of his fellow-believers.

Málmírí's enemies were searching for him in the town and its surroundings, but even at a time like this he would not give up teaching the Faith if an opportunity presented itself. His host had told him about the young Zoroastrian who brought beetroots to the door and who seemed to be an intelligent and sincere person, and it was arranged that he should be invited in to meet Málmírí one day.

Mullá Bahrám came day after day to hear about the Cause. He would listen with tears streaming down his face as Málmírí explained to him how the prophecies of the Holy Books had all been fulfilled and the Promise of the ages had been revealed. "This is no time for tears," Málmírí told him. "I am giving you the glad tidings of a Revelation which will bring untold blessings to mankind and establish the Kingdom of God on earth." But Mullá Bahrám was stirred by emotions beyond his control as he recognized the greatness of the Day in which he lived.

These were the circumstances under which Mullá Bahrám, one of the first Zoroastrians to embrace the Cause in Yazd, came to be confirmed in his new Faith.

## **The journey to Yazd**

Mullá Bahrám was on his way to Yazd. He was travelling alone; the way was long and dreary, and for miles there was nothing to be seen but barren desert land. Yet Mullá Bahrám was glad to have a donkey to ride on, for the journey by foot would have been infinitely more difficult. As it was, he would be on the road for many days. Mullá Bahrám wondered how the news of his return would be received by the people in his village. Less than a year before he had been forced to leave the place to save his life, for two of the religious dignitaries of Yazd who had long opposed the Bahá'í Faith and persecuted the believers had suddenly died, and rumour was spread that Mullá Bahrám had brought about their deaths by means of witchcraft.

As one of the first Zoroastrians to embrace the Faith in Yazd, Mullá Bahrám had already made a number of enemies among Zoroastrians and Muslims alike because of the fearless manner in which he expounded the Cause and for being responsible for attracting many to the new Faith. It was therefore decided that he and some other well-known Bahá'ís whose lives were endangered by the sudden death of the religious dignitaries should not remain in Yazd to confront the wrath of the fanatical mob.

Mullá Bahrám had travelled to India where he had succeeded in teaching the Cause to some of the Zoroastrians before he received a message from Bahá'u'lláh to go back to Persia. So here he was on his way to Yazd, with all his capital and worldly belongings packed in the saddle on his donkey's back.

As Mullá Bahrám contemplated the events of the past, and wondered about those of the future, he little realized the kind of adventure in which he was about to participate. This adventure he shared with two thieves who set upon him and, having asked him to dismount from his donkey, took possession of all he had. They even took the clothes he wore, leaving him scarcely enough with which to cover himself.

Though unprepared for this new experience, Mullá Bahrám resigned himself to the Will of God and resumed his journey on foot. He had gone quite a distance when the sound of angry voices reached him from behind. Looking back, he saw the two thieves engaged in a fierce quarrel. He immediately retraced his steps to enquire about the cause of the trouble and found that the two could not agree on how to share his belongings between them. "Gentlemen", said Mullá Bahrám, "I beg you to stop quarrelling as I happen to know the exact price of each of these articles and, with your permission, will divide them between you in such a way that you will each get a fair share."

The idea appealed to the thieves and Mullá Bahrám divided his belongings between the two, to the satisfaction of both. The last two objects which remained to be divided were the donkey and the empty saddle. "Gentlemen," said Mullá Bahrám, "I find it absolutely impossible to be just in sharing these two things. Whichever of you gets the saddle will evidently be the loser, so I suggest that in order to solve the problem, you let me have these

in return for my services.”

The thieves thought the suggestion very wise, and generously permitted Mullá Bahrám to put the saddle on the donkey and ride the rest of the journey to Yazd.

### **Bahrám’s companion**

One night Mullá Bahrám dreamed that two dignified gentlemen had come to see him. From their green turbans he could tell they were descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad and, as they crossed his threshold, they spoke to him and said: “We are Nayyir and Síná.” Mullá Bahrám was out working on his farm the next morning when Nayyir and Síná arrived at the village. They had escaped the perils of Işfahán and, having failed to find a safe place to stay in Yazd, had come to take refuge with Mullá Bahrám for a while until they could move on again.

In answer to their knock, Mullá Bahrám’s wife opened the door. She was a very fanatical Zoroastrian who could not tolerate people of other Faiths whom her husband was in the habit of befriending since he had become a Bahá’í himself. In fact, she had little sympathy or tolerance towards her own husband now that he had chosen to change his former religious beliefs, and she missed no opportunity to show her resentment by making life as difficult as she possibly could for him. She now had one quick look at the two visitors and slammed the door in their faces. She would have nothing to do with people who wore turbans—green turbans, at that! “This is not Bahrám’s house,” she shouted at them, guessing who they had come to see.

Nayyir and Síná turned away with a heavy heart, wondering where they could go. As they were walking through the village on their way back, Mullá Bahrám, who was coming home, happened to pass by and recognized them as the two men he had seen in his dream. Going up to them, he asked: “Are you Nayyir and Síná?” “We are,” said the astonished brothers. “Are you Mullá Bahrám?” Mullá Bahrám embraced them tenderly, welcomed them to his village and took them home. The two brothers, however, knowing that they would not be welcomed by the lady of the house, wondered

whether they should accept the hospitality. Mullá Bahrám, in the meantime, did not take long in finding out how his wife had treated his distinguished guests. He had, by now, come to the end of his patience with her rude behaviour and, losing his temper completely, took her by the hand and showed her to the door, telling her to go back to her father's house.

Later on Mullá Bahrám's friends tried hard to bring a reconciliation between the husband and wife, but Mullá Bahrám would not be induced to put up with her any more. After some time, however, a letter received from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, which began: "O Bahrám,\* astronomers say that Mars is a quarrelsome and hot-tempered star ...", softened the heart of Mullá Bahrám and he permitted his wife to return to his house. She, however, was not prepared to change her ways, and her attitude remained hostile towards all Bahá'ís up to the very last day of her life.

In one of His beautiful prayers, 'Abdul-Bahá makes mention of her, asking God's blessings and forgiveness for "this dear handmaiden of Thine, Bahrám's companion ..."

## **The story of 'Abbás-Ábád**

The persecution of Bahá'ís in Yazd had reached its climax. Eighty-four people were dragged into the streets and tortured to death. Dozens of houses were looted and the womenfolk were left to mourn their husbands, sons and brothers among the ruins which had been their homes. The children, unable to grasp the full significance of the horrible events which took place around them, clung desperately to their helpless mothers, knowing that they would never see their fathers again.

The savage murderers, drunk with the blood they had spilt on the streets of Yazd, were now hunting for other victims. The roads round the town were well guarded so that no one who was known as a Bahá'í could hope to escape from Yazd. But in the town itself, there were some brave souls who were prepared to sacrifice their

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\* Bahrám means Mars. In several of His letters to individuals, 'Abdul-Bahá makes this type of intimate remark.

own safety in order to hide those of their fellow-believers whose lives were especially in danger.

The news of the massacre in the town quickly spread to the villages around, and the Bahá'ís living there knew that they would not be spared. Soon hundreds of wild fanatics, banded together, were moving towards those villages where there were Bahá'ís. Others joined them as they went from village to village, bringing untold suffering upon many, many homes.

In the small village of 'Abbás-Ábád where many of the inhabitants were Bahá'ís, there was a strange fear of expectation as they went about their daily work. Then suddenly: "They are coming!" rang like a death-cry through the village street and echoed from house to house.

This village has a special story to tell—one that will always stand as a witness to the shameless plottings of Prince Jalálu'd-Dawlih, the governor of Yazd. The prince, who had previously been responsible for the martyrdom of a number of Bahá'ís, had afterwards pretended to be sorry for what he had done and had begun to show kindness to the believers. Among those towards whom he professed friendship at this time was Mullá Bahrám, whom he would often go to visit on his farm. Mullá Bahrám had profound knowledge of agriculture and very good taste in laying out gardens and fields. The prince, therefore, decided to make use of him. He bought a large extent of wasteland at a very low price and asked Mullá Bahrám to turn it into agricultural land for him. Mullá Bahrám was very reluctant to give up his own prosperous farm and take on such a difficult job, but the prince gave him no peace until he had promised to do so.

Jalálu'd-Dawlih called his new estate 'Abbás-Ábád. To the Muslims he said this was in honour of the Muslim martyr, 'Abbás; to the Bahá'ís he said that he had chosen 'Abdu'l-Bahá's name\* so that it might bring a blessing on his land.

Mullá Bahrám sold all his own property and went to live with his family on this barren piece of land. With him went several other families, people whom he had chosen from among his Bahá'í and Zoroastrian friends to help him in his work on the prince's estate.

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\* 'Abdu'l-Bahá, meaning "Servant of the Glory", is a title which the Master used. His name was 'Abbás.

Together they toiled ceaselessly until they had built houses, ploughed the fields, prepared the water ducts and sown the crop. Mullá Bahrám spent every penny he had on 'Abbás-Ábád, and in return he was given some signed documents stating that the prince would pay him and his men their full dues as soon as the new crop was sold.

The harvest was ready when news reached 'Abbás-Ábád that fresh persecution of Bahá'ís had started in Yazd. Mullá Bahrám and his friends knew that they were trapped in the prince's village and had no way of escape. First, one of their young men who had gone to buy sheep from a neighbouring farm was killed, then a message was received from Jalálu'd-Dawlih ordering Mullá Bahrám to return all the signed documents in his possession. Mullá Bahrám refused to do this as these papers were all that he and his men had received in return for the capital and hard work that they had put into building up the new estate. The prince's messengers, however, were ordered not to come back without the documents. They gave Mullá Bahrám a severe beating which impaired his eyesight to the end of his life, and took away the papers by force.

Having lost all his life's savings in this way, Mullá Bahrám now wondered where he and his friends could take their families so as to escape being massacred by the bloodthirsty mob that was already on its way to 'Abbás-Ábád. There was nowhere they could go.

"They are coming!" cried someone through the village, and the helpless inhabitants bolted their front doors, hoping to keep the murderers off for a few more minutes. What scenes of sorrow must have taken place behind those closed doors as parents clasped their terrified children to themselves, praying God that the little ones might be spared! The noise of the crowd as it approached the village was enough to strike terror, into the bravest heart. Then someone arrived with a message: "The eminent priests who have come to this village have ordered that all the inhabitants should come out into the street! Everybody has to obey this order men, women and children!" They were not going to trouble themselves with breaking down the doors.

Mullá Bahrám stepped out alone, telling everybody else to stay in their homes. As he started to walk towards the savage crowd, a few of his friends could not bear to see him go alone and they, too,

followed at a distance.

Thousands of people had gathered to attack the villagers, most of them carrying spades and other farming tools, though there was also a group of forty gunmen among them. Walking at the head of this crowd were three Muslim priests, one of whom recognized Mullá Bahrám as he approached. This priest had had various dealings with Mullá Bahrám in the past and had become one of his admirers. Now, watching him walk towards his would-be murderers, the priest's heart was touched and, turning to the crowd, he said; "These Zoroastrians who live in 'Abbás-Ábád are, according to the explicit laws of our religion, under the protection of Islám and no one is permitted to molest them. Tell me, is there anyone here who can bring forward a complaint against Mullá Bahrám and his friends?" The priest was not the only one who was moved at the sight of Mullá Bahrám. Another man stepped forward and said; "I have heard of the goodness and generosity of this man who stands before us. When there were four hundred poor Muslim labourers working in this village, he showed them every kindness. He saw to it that none of them ever went hungry, and if he heard they were in need of food he would bring them whatever he had in his own house. When he had no bread to give, he would give away dried fruit or vegetables. Not once did he refuse to help our fellow-believers." The priest made the most of this: "Now that there is no one here who can complain against Mullá Bahrám," he said, "let us go away and leave him and his friends in peace." These words, however, had little effect on the savage mob. They had come a long distance, getting more and more excited as they approached the village, and they were not prepared to see their helpless victims suddenly snatched away from them now. The priest had found it much easier to spur them on to killing and pillage in the first place. His words were received in tense silence, and not one man made a move to obey him.

Fortunately, the head of the group of gunmen who had joined the crowd on their way to the village was prepared to side with the priest. "Did you not hear what our religious dignitary said?" he shouted to the crowd. "What are you waiting for?" Let us go!" No one moved. "Here, boys," he called out to his men. "See if you cannot send away these people." No sooner had the men raised

their guns, than the crowd began to move away.

This incident was so extraordinary that for days the inhabitants of 'Abbás-Ábád could hardly believe it had really happened. But their difficulties were far from being over. Prince Jalálu'd-Dawlih now gave orders that they should leave his estate at once. "Where are we to go?" they asked. "We are surrounded by enemies who will kill us on the roads, and even if we escape them, no one will give us refuge either in Yazd or in the villages around."

Mullá Bahrám wrote three letters to the prince asking for his help, but he would not reply. Feeling responsible for the safety of his friends and their families, Mullá Bahrám wrote a fourth time, entreating the prince and adjuring him by the life of his own children to take pity on these people who had served him so faithfully and issue an order that they should not be harmed when they left the safety of their homes. This time, Jalálu'd-Dawlih signed a statement to say that the inhabitants of 'Abbás-Ábád were not to be molested when they left his estate.

Such was the story of the village which Mullá Bahrám and his friends built for the governor of Yazd.

### **The flight to Káshán**

There was a knock on the door. Mullá Bahrám wondered who it could be at such an unusual hour of the night. Was there some new danger threatening his life? Had his enemies come to know he was staying here?

Mullá Bahrám, who had barely escaped with his life from 'Abbás-Ábád, had arrived in this village three days before and only a few of his close friends knew of his whereabouts. This midnight knock on the door reminded him of the many dangers which surrounded his life so long as he remained in the vicinity of Yazd. On the other hand, it was almost impossible to leave. All the roads were well guarded for miles around, and no one as famous a Bahá'í as Mullá Bahrám could hope to escape.

The knock was repeated—a gentle knock it was, not loud and aggressive. "It may be a friend," thought Mullá Bahrám as he rose to open the door. But he could have never guessed who it was that

had come to see him at such a time. It was his old friend with whom he had worked in Káshán many years ago, and who had been the first person to tell him of the Bahá'í Faith. This friend, being convinced that Mullá Bahrám would, sooner or later, fall into the hands of his enemies if he stayed in Yazd, had set out on foot to find him and help him escape to Káshán. He now recounted to Mullá Bahrám the circumstances of the last cruel martyrdom that had taken place only some hours before, and begged him to come away from Yazd. A few Muslims, Mullá Bahrám was told, had recognized a Bahá'í in the hills outside the town and, having cut off his head, they had placed it in a box, covered it with fresh leaves, and sent it to his wife as a gift of fruit.

Arrangements were made for Mullá Bahrám to leave that same night. They found a friend who knew the countryside very well and was prepared to take him as far as another village without getting close to any of the roads and footpaths in the dark. Yet another friend took him through the wilderness to a place outside the boundaries of Yazd, from where Mullá Bahrám could make his way to Káshán and comparative safety.

### **A father's grief**

Among the many hardships which had to be endured by the early Bahá'ís were the difficulties they came across in burying their dead. They were seldom permitted to use cemeteries belonging to other religions, nor was it easy for them to purchase land to be used as a Bahá'í cemetery. Many a time the buried bodies of Bahá'ís were dug up by fanatical crowds and burned or disgraced in public, so that when a Bahá'í lost a dear friend or a close relative, he not only grieved because of his loss, but also because he could not be sure that the body of his loved one would escape the assaults of a savage mob.

Mullá Bahrám, who received his full share of the sufferings which were meted out in those days to all who professed the new Faith, lost a fourteen-year-old daughter after he became a Bahá'í. To add to his great sorrow, neither would the Zoroastrian priests allow the body to be taken to their tower of silence, nor would the Muslim

clergy let it be buried in their cemetery. Mullá Bahrám wondered what was to become of his beloved child. After two days of great anxiety, an influential Zoroastrian friend who had some knowledge of Mullá Bahrám's religious beliefs persuaded the Zoroastrian priests to permit the body to be taken to the tower of silence.

Mullá Bahrám paid the priests, as was the custom, in the presence of hundreds of people who had gathered to see the last rites performed before the body was taken away. His Zoroastrian friend, seeing that Mullá Bahrám was giving the priests more than their due, rebuked him saying: "You will only make them more greedy, and they will not be content with what the poor can afford." The grief-stricken father replied in a voice loud enough for the priests to hear: "Only a part of what I am giving is their due. The rest is a gift from me because they let me keep my precious child with me for two more days." His words were not without effect on his hearers. One of the priests was deeply touched. He later investigated the Faith and became a devoted Bahá'í.

### **The honoured guest**

One day, when Mullá Bahrám was living in Tīhrán, he received news that his cousin had been taken to prison in Yazd because he had buried his infant child according to Bahá'í laws. The Zoroastrian priests had complained to the authorities saying that this man had rejected the sacred religious obligations of his own people, and had buried his child in accordance with heretical rites. They insisted that he should be punished, and the governor had had him chained and taken to prison.

On receiving the sad news, Mullá Bahrám set out to see a high official in the government who could help remedy this great injustice. The person he went to visit was surrounded by a number of distinguished guests when Mullá Bahrám arrived. One of these guests, seeing a man enter the gates dressed in the clothes of a Zoroastrian, ordered the guard to throw out "this dog of an infidel". The host, however, caught sight of Mullá Bahrám and hurried out to receive him in person. He accompanied him into the room and asked Mullá Bahrám to occupy his own seat. When his guest declined to do this, he insisted and would

not be content until Mulla Bahrám had sat in the seat of honour. As the high official himself was still standing, all the other guests remained standing too. Everyone was amazed at the respect and homage paid to this unknown visitor. "The respect I pay you, Mullá Bahrám," said his host, "is your due, for it is not often that one comes across a person who will not accept money when it is offered him." Mullá Bahrám now rose and begged his host to take a seat, then he went on to tell him why he had come. The high official immediately called for his secretary and dictated a telegram to be sent to the governor of Yazd, ordering him to release Mullá Bahrám's cousin without further delay. The wording of this message was so harsh and insulting that Mullá Bahrám politely requested that it be put in milder language. "Write it out yourself," Mullá Bahrám's host told him, "and I will sign it and send it."

His errand accomplished, Mullá Bahrám rose to go and the host courteously accompanied him to the door. The reason for this great honour shown to Mullá Bahrám by such a high official, who would not normally dream of receiving a common man from a Zoroastrian background into his house, remained a mystery to many who were present in that gathering, but a few of the host's close friends might have been told the facts of the story:

This high official had been in debt at one time and unable to pay in cash. The person to whom he owed the money was not a man who could be put off, so it was agreed that he should be given a mansion with extensive grounds to meet the debt. The two parties, however, could not come to an agreement about the value of this property; nor could they trust each other to bring an expert to price it. Whomsoever one of them suggested, the other would promptly reject, knowing that he would be bribed to value the property in favour of the person who had chosen him.

At last the two men decided that they would ask the famous Zoroastrian merchant for whom Mullá Bahrám was working at that time to send his own man to value the property. The merchant sent Mullá Bahrám who had expert knowledge on such matters, and who did all the merchant's own selling and buying of property.

The very first day Mullá Bahrám went to see the mansion, he was met by the high official who owned it. The gentleman was waiting in his carriage at the entrance to the grounds and asked

Mullá Bahrám to go for a drive with him. On the way he handed Mullá Bahrám a cheque for a sum which exceeded the total amount Mullá Bahrám received for six years' wages! "What is this?" Mullá Bahrám enquired. "This mansion," said the gentleman, "should pay back the debt I owe. I want you to value it in a way that will enable me to do this." Mullá Bahrám said: "Please keep this cheque for the time being, and we shall see about it later."

The actual value of the property happened to be more than the owner had hoped for and, after the matter was settled and the debt paid, the high official met Mullá Bahrám again and offered him a cheque for a larger sum than that which he was prepared to give before. Mullá Bahrám thanked him and said: "I cannot receive any money from you as I am employed by another man from whom I receive a salary. It was he who asked me to value your mansion, and I did this as part of my daily job."

At a time when the giving and taking of bribes was considered as a normal procedure and everyone, from the Prime Minister to the poorest labourer, expected to give or take bribes, Mullá Bahrám's honesty and integrity of character was so unusual that it had justly merited the respect and admiration of the high official.

Note: A few of these stories which bear little or no direct relationship to the Bahá'í Faith are included in the book because they give a picture of life in those days.

## **Hitting the mark**

The famous merchant for whom Mullá Bahrám worked in Tīhrán was much concerned about a very large debt which the chieftains of the Turkaman tribe had owed him for a long time. They took no notice of letters and messages which were sent to their desert home, and it was not easy to reach them in any other way. These people were not only difficult to get to, but were often very dangerous to encounter, especially when they were met in their own desert surroundings. There they ruled supreme, unconcerned about the laws which a prince or governor was able to enforce in some faraway city. In fact, the word of a man who could ride well and hit his mark with a bullet carried far more weight with

these tribesmen than any orders issued by a delicate nobleman with high-sounding titles.

The merchant, after giving the matter great thought, chose Mullá Bahrám from among all his employees and servants to go to the Turkaman desert and collect his debts. Fortunately for Mullá Bahrám, he was an accomplished horseman and expert in handling a gun.

Mullá Bahrám decided to take only one other person with him on his dangerous mission. This was another Bahá'í, a close friend of his who also worked for the noted merchant. Together they chose two of the best horses from their master's stable, took enough food to last for a few days and armed themselves in preparation for any dangers they might encounter.

Nothing of importance took place until they were within a day's ride from the desert. There they had their first warning of the perils that lay ahead. At a shabby-looking inn by the wayside they met a band of highway robbers who used the inn as their meeting place and kept close watch over all the passengers who came that way. If any were suspected of carrying money or valuables, they would be followed after they had left the inn. There were few, if any, among the passengers who had come this way with anything worth robbing who could boast of having escaped the notorious gang of thieves.

When Mullá Bahrám and his friend arrived, the robbers were practising shooting out in the open. They were trying to hit the marks on a piece of cardboard they had set at some distance, and were not having much success. Mullá Bahrám, tired after the long day's journey, sat down to watch the gang, but his friend had other plans for him. "This gentleman," he told the men standing around, "is quite good with his gun, and he would not mind joining you in your sport if you have no objections." "None at all," they assured him, and Mullá Bahrám was invited to take a turn. Mullá Bahrám had no wish to do so, but as they were insistent, he asked: "Which of the marks would you like me to hit?" The men smiled at each other as their leader said: "Try the bottom one on the left." The mark was promptly hit. "Surely, this was a coincidence!" they exclaimed. "Let us see you hit the top one on the right." Mullá Bahrám took aim and hit the mark without any difficulty. There was great excitement, but a few of the men still doubted if he would have as much luck with the remaining marks on the cardboard. To

assure them, Mullá Bahrám hit every single one!

This kind of marksmanship was by no means common, even among the tribesmen, and Mullá Bahrám's fame followed him wherever he went. The little incident at the inn saved him and his friend many unpleasant encounters while travelling in the desert. He was looked upon with reverence and awe as he moved among the tribesmen, and he had no difficulty in collecting his master's debts. The chieftains ordered several horses to be loaded with the merchandise they were expected to send to the merchant, and added many gifts as well.

## Change of fortune

Prince Jalálu'd-Dawlih, the governor of Yazd, during whose rule the Bahá'ís underwent terrible persecutions, was hated by the Muslims themselves. He was notorious for his insatiable greed and his extreme cruelty which induced him to murder some of his victims with his own hands. No one could be safe from the machinations of this cunning man so long as he was in power. The time came, however, when the oppressed people of Yazd could no longer endure life under the tyrant. They sent repeated complaints about him to the capital; in the end he lost his position and was called to Tīhrán in disgrace.

The new Sháh was not on good terms with Jalálu'd-Dawlih, and this encouraged people both in Yazd and in Tīhrán to come forward with many charges against him, insisting that he should appear in court. One of his most powerful creditors was the rich and influential Zoroastrian merchant for whom Mullá Bahrám was working in Tīhrán. This man now received a message from the high authorities in the country advising him to demand all that was his due from Jalálu'd-Dawlih and accept no excuses whatsoever.

The merchant decided to go to the prince in person, but knowing that Jalálu'd-Dawlih was capable of every crime, he asked Mullá Bahrám and a servant to arm themselves and escort him to the prince's mansion outside the city. Jalálu'd-Dawlih came out to greet his guest in person and began speaking in his usual flattering language, but the merchant knew him too well by now and was

determined not to listen to his cunning speech. He told the armed servant he had brought with him to stay outside the door, while he and Mullá Bahrám followed the prince inside.

Jalálu'd-Dawlih, seeing Mullá Bahrám enter with his employer, mentioned that he would like to speak to the merchant in private, but the latter would not be left alone with the prince. He said that he had no secrets from Mullá Bahrám and would like him to be present during their talks. Jalálu'd-Dawlih was obliged to endure the great humiliation of having Mullá Bahrám, whom he had robbed of all his capital and treated with savage cruelty, present at such a time to be a witness to his disgrace.

The prince was finally taken to court and forced to face the many charges brought against him. He lost all his property, much of his vast lands and estates going to the Zoroastrian merchant. Among these was the village of 'Abbás-Ábád which had been built by the toil and capital of Mullá Bahrám.

It is strange that, when the day for Jalálu'd-Dawlih's trial had been fixed, the person he dreaded most was Mullá Bahrám. He sent a message to some of the Bahá'ís in Tīhrán entreating them to persuade Mullá Bahrám not to appear in court, and promising to pay back all the money he owed him. Mullá Bahrám, fearing that the prince might come back to power and start persecuting his fellow-believers once more, did not complain against him. But the promise was not kept, and only a very small part of Mullá Bahrám's capital was eventually paid back to him.

## **Giving to the end**

The life of Mullá Bahrám was an inspiration to many who knew him. So great was the devotion and respect he had inspired in the heart of his employer during the many years he worked for him that the famous Zoroastrian merchant came to mention the name of Mullá Bahrám among the saints he named during his daily prayers!

When Mullá Bahrám was an old man, he was going home late from a Bahá'í meeting one night. He had come a long way on foot; it was snowing and the weather was bitterly cold. His son, who

had come out to meet him, was helping him along when they came across a beggar shivering and moaning from the cold. The man had no clothing except an old pair of pants and a sack which he had put over his head and shoulders. Mullá Bahrám stopped the beggar and told his son to stay with him until he came back. Then he went behind a wall, took off his warm gown and trousers and brought them for the man.

As he wrapped his 'abá\* round himself, Mullá Bahrám told his son: "When I arrived here from Yazd, I, too, was dressed like this beggar."

## The Jewish physician

Ḥakím Áqá Jání† hurried along the narrow lanes of Hamadán to the house of Muḥammad-Báqir who, carrying a lantern to light the way, ran on in front. Muḥammad-Báqir's wife lay desperately ill, shaken with convulsions and crying out in pain. She had been suffering with fever when the Jewish physician, Ḥakím Áqá Ján, was called in to see her earlier that evening, and he had given her a few pills to take, saying that she would soon feel better. She had scarcely taken the pills, however, when her condition grew worse and she was seized with severe pains and convulsions.

Hurrying to her bedside now, Ḥakím Áqá Ján had one look at his patient and the blood drained out of his face. He immediately realized what had happened: instead of the quinine pills he intended to give her, he had handed out strychnine. Not only was the patient now in danger of losing her life, but so was he himself. Indeed, knowing the hatred which the Muslims bore towards his people, Ḥakím Áqá Ján wondered if the consequences of such a mistake on his part might not affect his family and the whole Jewish population of Hamadán. He trembled at the thought and scarcely heard the question Muḥammad-Báqir was asking. The latter, sensing the state of the doctor's mind, asked the reason for his extreme anxiety. "I have made a mistake in giving the pills," confessed Ḥakím Áqá Ján. "Anyone can make a mistake," said Muḥammad-Báqir. "You did not do this on purpose, and even if the patient

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\* Cloak or mantle.

† Ḥakím means physician.

should die, no one will blame you for it.”

Ḥakím Áqá Ján could not believe his ears. Was it indeed a Muslim who spoke thus to him, a Jew? But there was no time to dwell on such mysteries when his patient needed all his attention. He rushed out of the house to the nearest drug shop and, having purchased some medicine with which he hoped he might be able to save her life, hurried back to sit with his patient through the night. After agonizing hours of suspense in which he did every possible thing within his power to save her, he was at last relieved to see that the danger had passed and that she would live.

During all this time, the gracious courtesy and the kindness with which he had been received in the home of Muḥammad-Báqir greatly affected and somewhat puzzled the physician. He had had many dealings with Muslims before and was familiar with the way they treated Jews, especially under such unfavourable conditions. The more he thought about it, the more he wondered at the unusual behaviour of this household.

Later, he mustered enough courage to ask Muḥammad-Báqir about his religious beliefs. “I belong to a new Faith,” was Muḥammad-Báqir’s reply, “I am a Bahá’í.” Ḥakím Áqá Ján was immediately interested to know about this new Faith and, after a period of investigation, became an ardent follower himself.

He was the first Jew to embrace the Cause in Hamadán, and although he did not live more than a few years after becoming a Bahá’í, he was able to bring a great number of other Jews into the Faith before he passed away.

## **Teaching in Hamadán**

One of the first individuals to be given the new Message by Ḥakím Áqá Ján, and who responded to the call of Bahá’u’lláh, was no less a personage than his own father—a famous rabbi of the Jewish community of Hamadán. After his father had embraced the Cause, Ḥakím Áqá Ján decided to address the whole of the Jewish congregation gathered one day in the synagogue, in the hope that they, too, would prove receptive to the Message.

The Jews in Hamadán all knew Ḥakím Áqá Ján. They had grown to love and respect him as the symbol of Jewish virtues in their community. But when he spoke to them from the pulpit, telling them of his belief in the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh and calling upon them to investigate the new Faith, they threw him out of the synagogue and called him a blasphemer.

Ḥakím Áqá Ján was not disheartened by their attitude, and soon many of those who had heard his sincere appeal in the synagogue sought him out privately and asked about his beliefs. In the course of that year, though surrounded by opposition from many sides, forty Jews embraced the Faith in Hamadán. Among them was the learned Ḥájí Mihdí\* who became an ardent teacher of the Cause and spent the rest of his life serving the Faith. His knowledge of the Bible and the Qur'án amazed everyone, and a great number of Jews, Christians and Muslims who heard him quote these Holy Books and refer to the prophecies in them concerning the advent of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh were convinced of the truth of Their Cause.

At one time Ḥájí Mihdí was teaching a number of Jews and Christians who were also attending the discourses of a well-known Christian missionary in Hamadán—Mr. Holmes. One of these men challenged Mr. Holmes to meet Ḥájí Mihdí and discuss the Holy Bible with him. The missionary accepted the challenge, and meetings were arranged where a number of people—Jews, Christians, Muslims and Bahá'ís—gathered twice a week to hear Mr. Holmes and Ḥájí Mihdí discuss various passages from the Bible. It was agreed from the beginning that a record of the discussions should be kept each time. Both Mr. Holmes and Ḥájí Mihdí were to sign these papers at the end of the meeting.

These discussions, which went on for two years, gradually took the form of an exposition of Bible prophecies on the Bahá'í Faith. Those who were present marvelled at the extent of the knowledge and insight of Ḥájí Mihdí as he quoted verse after verse from the Old and New Testaments and expounded the meanings. Even the Christian missionary was often heard to exclaim with admiration: “Ḥájí Mihdí knows the Bible so well

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\* Ḥájí is one who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

that you would think he had written it himself!" The records which were kept of these meetings were later gathered in the form of a book and published for the benefit of others.

Hájí Mihdí's teaching activities were soon to attract the enmity of fanatical people among the members of all religions, and many were the sufferings which befell him at the hands of these people. But once in a while the outcome of the plots carefully planned against him and his fellow-believers would not be to the complete satisfaction of their foes. The following is an example of one such incident:

The rabbis of the Jews in Hamadán complained to the governor, saying that some of the members of their community had left the congregation and become a disgrace to the Jewish people because they were guilty of unforgivable conduct. They gave him a list of those who had become Bahá'ís, foremost among whom was Hájí Mihdí, and asked him to punish them. The governor, however, appointed a day when the Jews who had complained, and those whose names they had given, should all gather in his presence so that he could hear both parties. The Jews decided that an old rabbi, who was considered to be the most experienced among them, should be the only one to address the governor because the others might be indiscreet in their speech.

As soon as the Jews and Bahá'ís had arrived and taken their seats, the governor, turning to the Jews, enquired about their complaint. Everyone kept quiet while the wise rabbi spoke: "Your honour," he said, "these people do not adhere to the laws of the Torah. They break the Sabbath by touching fire and doing business, but worse than that, they eat what is filthy and unclean." "What filth have they eaten?" the curious governor enquired." "The meat and cheese the Muslims sell ..." began the rabbi, but he did not get any further with the list he had in mind. "What!" exclaimed the furious governor, "have you come here to tell me that although you live in a Muslim country, you consider our food as filth?" Then, turning to his servants, he cried, "Beat these people and throw them out of my sight—and let me never set eyes on them again!"

## The difficult crossing

Taqí Khán had a dear friend to whom he longed to talk about his Faith, but his friend, Ishráq, was a very strict Muslim who would not tolerate any mention of the Bahá'ís or their religion which he considered to be sheer heresy. So prejudiced was he against the new Faith that, had he known his friend Taqí Khán to be a Bahá'í, he would have broken off his friendship with him and refused to see him any more. Even when Taqí Khán, once in a while and with extreme caution, made some reference to the Cause, Ishráq would be so upset that he would stop talking to his friend. Taqí Khán, however, drawn by his devotion to Ishráq, would do everything in his power to regain his goodwill and all would be well between them until, unable to restrain himself, Taqí Khán would refer to the subject again.

This went on for some time, but the friendship between the two men grew despite the repeated separations which took place. Taqí Khán, whose shop was far from where Ishráq worked, moved into a new place in order to be close to his friend and they spent much of their time together. Having by now lost all hope of being able to talk to Ishráq about the Bahá'í Faith himself, Taqí Khán decided to introduce him to a fellow-believer who might prove to be more fortunate in approaching the subject with him. The one he chose for Ishráq to meet was Adíb, a distinguished and learned Bahá'í who had been a noted Muslim clergyman before, and whose turban and cloak—signs of knowledge and authority as far as religious matters were concerned—made a good impression on Ishráq when he first went to see him with Taqí Khán. It was Adíb's personal behaviour and genuine kindness, however, which won Ishráq's great admiration and moved him to ask, before they rose to go, whether he might be permitted to repeat the visit. Adíb assured him that he would always be welcomed in his house and that it would not be necessary for him to make any special appointment beforehand.

Encouraged by Adíb's invitation, Ishráq decided to call upon him one day in Ramaḍán\* when he happened to be in that neighbour-

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\* Month of the fast.

hood. He found the door of the house open and, on knocking, heard Adíb's voice inviting him to walk in. Upon entering the room, however, he was horrified to see the revered personage he had come to visit sitting with three young men who seemed to be his guests, drinking tea in the sacred month of the fast! Ishrráq was so upset by this that he could not conceal his feelings and reproached Adíb saying: "One would think that someone like you should be able to set a better example than this for the youth to follow. If you, with your position and knowledge, refuse to keep the fast, what can be expected from the younger generation? Do you not realize the great harm you are doing to our religion?" "If you will sit down," Adíb replied with great dignity, "I may be able to give you a good reason why my guests and I are not fasting." But Ishrráq was too upset to listen to any reasons. "Even if you, yourself, have a legitimate reason for not being able to observe the fast," he told Adíb, "you can have no excuse for encouraging others to disrespect the month of Ramaḍán." "But I may not be a Muslim at all," protested Adíb, "and may not believe in observing the fast in this particular month." Ishrráq was so infuriated by this remark that he left Adíb's house immediately, and would not stay to hear another word. Neither would he have anything more to do with his friend Taqí Khán, who had introduced him to someone whom he considered to be a disloyal Muslim priest.

But Taqí Khán would not forsake his friend, knowing that Ishrráq's sincere love for his religion was his greatest virtue even if he did become tactless and intolerant at times. He also realized that Ishrráq's attachment to Islám would, in itself, become the means of his recognizing the One promised in the holy Scriptures of that Faith—if he could only be persuaded to forget his prejudice against the Bahá'ís long enough to see what they had to say!

Taqí Khán's patience was rewarded when he, after quite a long time, succeeded in making Ishrráq realize that the Qur'án condemned blind intolerance and taught that the true Muslim should investigate every claim before denouncing it as false. As soon as Ishrráq was prepared to enquire about the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, Taqí Khán knew that the most difficult stage had been passed, and that his friend would come to see the truth of the new Cause.

Adíb, the person Ishrráq had been instinctively drawn to, helped

him a great deal when he started to investigate the Faith; but it was not an easy matter for a person as prejudiced as Ishráq to become a Bahá'í. Fortunately, his devotion to Islám was greater than all his prejudices, and it was this loyalty to his own religion which led him to accept the fulfilment of its prophecies.

It is recorded in the Traditions of Islám that, when the Promised One appears, men will be called upon to cross a bridge which is narrower than a hair and sharper than a sword. Ishráq, and many others like him, must have often thought of this famous tradition as they prayed God to help them not to falter on the dangerous path which leads to the knowledge of the new Revelation.

### **Father and son**

When Ishráq became a Bahá'í, his father, who was a very strict Muslim, forbade him to enter his house any more, refused to call him his son and made no provision for him in his will. He, moreover, moved his residence from Tihrán to Qum so that he would never set eyes on his son again.

Ishráq received no news from this parents for a full year, after which he happened to hear from an acquaintance who had arrived from Qum that his mother was seriously ill. Longing to see her once more, he wrote a letter to his mother begging her to ask his father's permission that he might pay her a visit. She replied a few days later to say that she had succeeded in obtaining his father's permission only after hours of begging and weeping, but on one condition—that he denounce all forms of false beliefs and accept the true precepts of Islám before entering his father's house.

Ishráq immediately set out for Qum and, having arrived at his parents' home, was met by his father who told him that he could not see his mother until he renounced all false beliefs and ungodly practices. Ishráq was prepared for this. "May the wrath of the Almighty, His prophets, His saints, His angels and chosen ones," he said, "rest upon those who come with false claims and all who follow the path of the ungodly." Ishráq's father was delighted. Having embraced his son and kissed his face, he conducted him to his mother.

That evening Ishráq's father took him to hear the lecture of Mullá Maḥmúd, one of the well-known divines of Qum who was famed for his learning and for whom everyone had great respect. Mullá Maḥmúd gave a lecture in the mosque on religious matters every evening. Later he sat down with some of his close followers in a pleasant spot to smoke the hubble-bubble, sip tea and discuss different topics.

Ishráq's father decided that his son should accompany him to Mullá Maḥmúd's lecture every evening and also join the circle of the mullá's followers in listening to his discussions after the lecture. Ishráq attended the lectures and listened to the discussions, taking in much more than his father realized.

It was a habit with Mullá Maḥmúd that he would always end his lectures by mentioning some sad event pertaining to the martyrs of Karbilá and weeping over the tragedy, while his audience followed his example and wept also. One evening, he finished his speech by relating how the first person who made the pilgrimage to the shrine of the martyr Imám Ḥusayn greeted the holy Imám three successive times but received no answer. "For how could the martyred Ḥusayn reply," wailed Mullá Maḥmúd, "when his blessed head was severed from his body." Here the mullá wept, the audience beat their breasts and wept and the lecture came to an end.

Another evening, the mullá rounded off his lecture by saying that the blessed head of Imám Ḥusayn, though severed from the body, recited verses from the Qur'án on three successive occasions. Ishráq's father was greatly pleased with the mention of this miracle and said: "It is strange that these misled Bábís dare to say they do not accept miracles when the head of our holy Imám has shown forth such wonderful signs." On the way home that evening he especially commended the mullá and asked Ishráq to pay great attention to all that he said so as to benefit by his vast knowledge.

A few evenings later when the mullá sat down with his chosen circle of disciples after the lecture to sip tea and smoke his pipe, Ishráq politely enquired if he might ask a question. Having received the mullá's permission, he said: "Is it true that it is incumbent upon every true Muslim to greet whomever he meets, but that it is only an act of merit to reply to the greeting?" The mullá said: "No, my son, it is exactly the opposite. Greeting a person is a worthy act,

but to answer a greeting is incumbent upon every true Muslim.”

Ishráq put a second question to the mullá after some days: “Is reading the Qur’án an act of obligation,” he asked, “or is it an act of merit?” The mullá replied that it was not obligatory but a worthy thing to do. Ishráq’s father was sadly disappointed in his son. “Why do you ask questions that even an illiterate Muslim knows,” he said. “You should be asking for the explanation of important and difficult problems.” “I am not sure,” replied Ishráq, “that the questions I ask will not help to unravel an important problem, for I cannot see how the head of Imám Ḥusayn, whom we all know as a perfect Muslim, should recite the Qur’án on three successive occasions and yet fail to answer the greetings of a pilgrim who repeated his greetings three times, when every Muslim knows that reciting the Qur’án is only an act of merit, whereas the reply to a person’s greeting is incumbent upon every believer.”

A hush fell upon the gathering and everyone wondered what answer the mullá would give. Mullá Maḥmúd, shaking with fury, snatched the pipe from his mouth and cried: “Shameless fool! What right have you to interfere in such matters!” Then, turning to Ishráq’s father he said: “Your son is not only impudent and rude, but I can also see that he is a Bábí, for the Bábís always try to belittle the divines and religious dignitaries in the eyes of others. I do not doubt that you yourself are a Muslim, but you may be sure that your son has renounced the true Faith of God.” Ishráq’s father said: “It is true that my son associated with this group for a short while, but he renounced all those who have come with false claims and cursed those who have strayed away from the path of God before I let him enter my house.” Mullá Maḥmúd smiled mockingly. “I did not know you could be so simple,” he said. “Your son has denounced those who have made false claims because he is convinced that the Báb is a true Prophet, and when he curses those who leave the path of God, it is you and me he curses. I now warn you,” he added, “that if you do not send your son away from Qum immediately, I will carry out what I consider to be my duty.” Having said this, Mullá Maḥmúd left the gathering, while the others assured Ishráq’s father that the mullá would sign his son’s death-warrant if he should happen to set eyes on him again.

On the way home that evening no word passed between father

and son, but on the morrow, as Ishráq prepared to leave, his father said: "Son, guard your tongue. Do not mention all you have to say in the presence of everyone."

Ishráq's visit to Qum and his short discussion with Mullá Maḥmúd gave him an excuse to communicate with his father. Through his letters he was able to arouse his father's curiosity concerning the new Faith he had embraced, so much so that he one day received an invitation to go back to Qum and stay with his father for a few days so as to be able to discuss his beliefs at length. But this was to be a secret visit; no one was to know of his arrival in Qum and he was not to leave the house at any time.

During Ishráq's second visit to Qum his father grew very interested in the Cause and expressed the desire to be introduced to other Bahá'ís. It happened that a well-known Bahá'í teacher from Ṭihrán was about to pay a visit to Qum. Ishráq went to see this teacher in Ṭihrán and asked him to meet his father. Some days later Ishráq received a very touching letter from his father, thanking him for having guided him to the Cause and saying that Ishráq was now the father and he the son.

Ishráq also had a sister in Ṭihrán who had been forbidden by their father and her husband to have anything to do with him. Now that their father had accepted the Cause, he wrote to her to go and find out how her brother was faring and whether he was in need of anything, so as to give her an excuse to visit Ishráq. Ishráq, on the other hand, received a letter from his father begging him to see that his sister was not deprived from the Message of the New Day. In this manner the brother and sister were brought together once again, although they still had to conceal their meeting from the knowledge of her fanatical husband.

Ishráq's sister, unaware of the fact that her father had already accepted the Cause, grew to be interested in her brother's beliefs and in time expressed her desire to become a Bahá'í on condition that their father should never come to know about it. Ishráq then showed her the letter their father had sent him some time before, requesting him to give the Message of the new Faith to his sister. Her joy at the news was unbounded, so was her father's joy when he was informed that she, too, had embraced the Cause.

The mother of Ishráq did not become a believer herself, but

showed no opposition to the Faith. The only one in the family who could not be reconciled to the Cause was Ishráq's brother-in-law. No sooner did he realize that his wife had also accepted the new Faith, than he disappeared altogether and it was only years later that the family came to know of his whereabouts.

## A plan that worked

Áqá Kamál lived with his elder brother in Kirmánsháh. Their father, who had recently died, had left them a heritage, but Áqá Kamál's brother, being a strict fanatical Muslim, threatened to confiscate everything because Áqá Kamál had become a Bahá'í. The clergy, too, had warned Áqá Kamál that if he were seen moving about with Bahá'ís they would know that he was a follower of Bahá'u'lláh, and could therefore claim no share in his father's wealth. This made it extremely difficult for Áqá Kamál to meet with his fellow-believers, especially as he and his brother lived in the same house.

Ishráq, who had just arrived from Tíhrán and was not yet known to the people of Kirmánsháh, thought of a plan by which he might be able to help Áqá Kamál. He asked Áqá Kamál to invite him and another Bahá'í, who was also from a different part of the country, to go to his house for dinner one day so that they could meet Áqá Kamál's brother. He was warned that the brother would refuse to listen to him if he were suspected of being a Bahá'í, and Ishráq promised to be very careful.

There were a number of other guests at the home of Áqá Kamál that day, among them a bespectacled young man whom Áqá Kamál's brother treated with marked reverence. Ishráq could tell from the tone of his speech and the choice of his words that he was a clergyman, though the recent orders of the Sháh\* forbade the priests to wear their traditional 'abá and turban.

They had been in the house for some time, and had touched upon the usual topics of the day, when the friend who had come with Ishráq turned to him and said: "Tell us, Mr. Ishráq do you in Tíhrán

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\* There was a new dynasty in power after World War I.

come across the Bahá'ís too?" "Indeed we do!" replied Ishráq. "They are very active in teaching their Faith. What is more, once you start listening to what they have to say, you wonder what to tell them in reply. I, myself, am one of their many victims and I have not yet been able to refute their arguments." He then explained what the Bahá'ís said, and some of the proofs they gave in support of their beliefs. "Now you see what I mean," he concluded. "If only we could find a way of proving them to be wrong, they would not be able to influence people so much. I wish I could meet someone who could arm us with proper arguments by which to silence these Bahá'ís."

One of the guests turned to the bespectacled gentleman present and said: "I am sure Mr. Şadr will be able to help you." Mr. Şadr himself was not so sure as he now listened to Ishráq explain in some detail the beliefs of the Bahá'ís and the answers they gave to the objections raised against their Faith. He could think of nothing to say. On the other hand, an interest had been roused and everyone was waiting for him to speak. "In order to give you a satisfactory answer," he said at last, "I must refer to certain books and make a study of the subject, but I know of a noted religious dignitary who has an answer to every problem and can refute the false arguments of these infidels with a few sentences." "Would it be possible for me to have the honour of being introduced to this distinguished divine?" enquired Ishráq. "Yes indeed," replied Mr. Şadr. "He is usually at home in the evenings." "As I shall be soon leaving for Tīhrán," said Ishráq, "and this matter is of great importance to me, do you think you could take me to him now?" The other men said that they, too, would be interested to hear the learned divine on this subject and asked Mr. Şadr to take them all to see him. Áqá Kamál alone thought it unwise to go, and found an excuse to stay behind.

The men waited outside the house while Mr. Şadr went in to inform the religious dignitary of their arrival. After they had waited for a long time, a servant appeared and asked them to go in. They were ushered into a large room where an elderly person occupied the seat of honour. He sat on a thick cushion with a pile of books by his side. After the usual greetings were exchanged, Ishráq put his problem forward. The dignified personage repeated the current

arguments brought against the Bahá'í Faith, and Ishráq politely informed him of the answers which the believers gave to such statements. The religious dignitary had apparently never heard the other side of the argument before, and this kept him silent for some time; then he said with grave authority: "It is a sin to talk to these infidels. No true Muslim should ever go near them." "Would not the Bahá'ís then say," Ishráq calmly suggested, "that the clergy forbid people to talk to us because they are unable to refute our arguments? I beg you, sir, to give me at least one sound proof that can be produced as an unchallenged evidence against the claims of these people." "I have told you what you should do," said the eminent divine. "Stop talking to them!"

Áqá Kamál's brother, who had listened attentively to all the discussions, lost his patience at this point. "I have come to the conclusion," he boldly told the religious dignitary, "that you have no answer to give the Bahá'ís, and that my brother is not such a fool after all." Taking Ishráq by the hand, he said: "Come, let us go, for I have at last understood the truth of the matter."

Áqá Kamál, in the meantime, waited at home and wondered what would be the outcome of this meeting with the religious divine. His highest hopes, however, could not exceed the joy that awaited him. His brother, coming home from that fruitful meeting, embraced him tenderly and begged for his forgiveness. "I have wronged you in every way," he said, "but our guest from Tíhrán has opened my eyes and I can see that you are right in your beliefs. I, too, am now prepared to join you!"

## Brothers at last

It may be difficult for some people to realize today what barriers of hate and prejudice existed between the people of different religions at the time when the early Bahá'ís were striving to bring love and unity among them. The Muslims shunned the members of every other religion, regarding them as infidels and referring to them as "unclean dogs". Minority groups were forced to wear clothes which identified them as "unbelievers" so that devout Muslims might not be defiled by taking food or drink from their hands. The Jews,

Christians and Zoroastrians, on their part, thoroughly hated all Muslims; neither would they have anything to do with each other. They were all convinced that anyone who did not believe in their own particular religion was an enemy of God and had sided with the devil.

It was interesting to see at this time the miracle that was taking place within the Bahá'í community, whose members came from all these different backgrounds. Ishráq recounts a touching incident which took place in Rasht when he was there on a teaching trip. He had been talking to a fanatical Muslim who gradually became interested in the new Faith and started investigating it very seriously. The man had many questions to ask, and was satisfied with the answers Ishráq gave him. Then one evening, as he sat in a Bahá'í gathering and listened to the words of Bahá'u'lláh, it seemed as though a veil was suddenly removed from his eyes and he could see the beautiful Truth which lay at the heart of the new Message. He was overcome with emotion and, unable to restrain himself, went over to a man who had been a well-known Zoroastrian before he became a Bahá'í, and embraced him as a long-lost brother. As his eyes filled with tears, he told the story of his relationship with this man. "We both work in the same bazaar," he said, "and our offices are not far from each other. I hated to be so near a 'heathen' whom I knew had been a Zoroastrian before, and was now a Bahá'í. One day, I saw the man who brought tea for us take a tray into the office of this gentleman. I was so furious that I got hold of the man and beat him till my own arms began to ache. I warned him that if I ever saw him serving tea to the 'heathen' again, I would kill him; then I went into the man's tea-shop and, seeing that he had not put aside the glass out of which the 'infidel' had drunk his tea, I broke every single glass in the shop and paid for new ones to be bought so that Muslim customers could drink their tea out of clean glasses not polluted by the touch of unbelievers. And now," he added with great feeling as he finished recounting the incident, "I wish to beg our host to bring a single glass of tea so that this brother of mine can drink half of it, and permit me to have the honour of drinking the rest."

## The journey of the mystic

Vujdání was a mystic at heart. He longed to reach that stage of inner peace and tranquility so foreign to most people engaged in the affairs of this world. His mother came from the aristocracy, and life offered him opportunities which other young men would have willingly seized, but Vujdání was not interested in the posts which his influential relatives could give him. He was a seeker after Truth and longed to attain a state of spiritual satisfaction.

One day, as he entered a mosque to offer his prayers, he saw a clergyman giving a lecture out in the courtyard of the mosque. He joined the small audience and listened to a fascinating discourse on detachment. The speaker made such an impression on Vujdání that he followed him to his house after the lecture and begged the clergyman to accept him as a disciple. To his surprise, the clergyman told him that no individual should blindly follow another and that those priests who posed as guides for others to follow were nothing more than hypocrites. Every man, he said, should investigate truth for himself. This was a strange saying for a clergyman, but Vujdání took it as a sign of the man's humility.

He continued to attend the clergyman's lectures in the courtyard of the mosque every day and became more and more attracted to the man and his ideas. The views advanced in these daily lectures were quite different from the standard ideas of the clergy, and Vujdání found much to occupy his thoughts when he left the mosque each day.

But the lectures in the mosque came to an abrupt end and, when Vujdání enquired about the reason, he was told that the clergyman had been forbidden to enter the mosque any more as he was found to be a Bábí! Vujdání was very sad. He had heard people talk of the dreadful Bábís since he was a child and he hated them. "O God!" he prayed, "What have I done to deserve this? Why have I, after all my longing to attain Thy good pleasure, been attracted to an accursed infidel!"

After that Vujdání decided to study theology, hoping that this would lead him to some acceptable truth which would satisfy his searching mind and bring peace to his yearning heart. He shaved his head, put on a turban and retired to the secluded life of a

madrasah.\* But he did not stay there very long. He found the atmosphere stifling and his associates narrow-minded and prejudiced. He left his studies of theology, completely disillusioned, but the spirit of search still drove him on.

He now spent much time in prayer and meditation. He fasted and lived the life of a fakir, giving up all the pleasures of the flesh. One day, as he was passing through the market place on his way to the mosque, his eyes fell on an old dervish who sat in front of a small shop. Vujdání had seen many dervishes in his days but none had attracted him like this man. He was spotlessly clean; his loose gown which came down to his ankles, his beard and long, combed-out hair that fell over his shoulders were immaculately kept. But there was something more about this dervish—some kind of spiritual force which could not be defined. Vujdání felt this so strongly that he stood in front of the shop, unable to tear himself away, though not knowing how to start a conversation with the dervish. The shopkeeper enquired what he wanted, so he bought a couple of match boxes and moved on. After the prayers in the mosque he hurried back, but the dervish had gone.

Vujdání returned to his room and passed the night in prayer. The next morning, unable to put away the thought of the spiritual man he had seen, he set out to find him. He was sure that his meeting with this dervish was a direct answer to his prayers asking God for help in his search after Truth. This conviction was strengthened when he found the dervish and fell under the spell of his words. He then begged to be taught a verse which he could repeat in his meditations in order to attain the Truth. "My son," said the dervish, "do not believe what is said about the power of dervishes. They have become as worldly and corrupt as other people." Vujdání, however, felt a strange respect for this man and would not leave him. He came to live close to the dervish and felt his life undergoing a gradual change as the days went by. The dervish, much to his surprise, encouraged him to forsake the life of seclusion, to wear ordinary clothes again and start earning a living and leading a normal life.

Vujdání's relatives were happy to see the change in him. He was

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\* Theological college.

offered a post by his cousin, the governor of Maláyir, and went to live away from the dervish. But he still looked up to him as his spiritual guide and teacher, and considered himself a dervish at heart though he did not dress in the garb of that sect.

Vujdání continued with daily prayers and meditations as encouraged by his teacher, but the materialistic life around him began to weigh down his spirit once more and he longed for the companionship of kindred souls. It was about this time in his life that he was introduced to Ustád 'Alí—a man of rare spiritual qualities—and became an intimate friend of his. The two spent much time together praying, studying and discussing mystical works and religious writings. Once, when they were talking about the lives of God's Messengers on earth, Vujdání said with great feeling: "How unfortunate we are that we do not live in the days of any of the Messengers and Prophets of God. We are deprived of the direct grace which flows through them and heals the spiritual ills of the soul." Ustád 'Alí could no more withhold the secret he had from his friend. "We are living at the dawn of a great Age," he said. "This is the time foretold by all the Messengers of old. This is the Day they all longed to witness, for the Promised One has appeared in our lifetime!" Vujdání's reaction to this news was extraordinary. He prostrated himself to the ground in sheer gratitude and praise to the Almighty, and accepted the advent of the Promised One without the least hesitation. This, he felt, was what his eager soul had been reaching out for all these years. He was filled with such ecstasy that he could not control his emotions. He begged his friend to tell him where he could attain the presence of the Promised One as he wished to set out to visit Him without delay. Ustád 'Alí tried to calm him, and explained that it would not be wise to start speaking to people about the subject. Vujdání could not understand. "Why should this knowledge be withheld from people who are already waiting and praying for the advent of the Promised One?" he asked. Ustád 'Alí assured him that he would come to know in time.

Vujdání was so exhilarated by the wonderful news he had heard that every one noticed the change that had come over him. He sang praises of God wherever he went, and paid no attention to those of his acquaintances who accused him of having reached this happy

state through forbidden liquor during Ramaḍán.

The next time he met his friend, Ustád ‘Alí recounted to him the story of the young Herald who had come as a forerunner to the Promised One. He spoke of His saintly life, of the inner knowledge with which He was endowed and which had not been acquired from the schools of men, of His meekness and cruel martyrdom. Vujdáńi listened with rapt attention. He grieved that he had remained unaware of these happenings and had been deprived of the privilege of beholding the face of the Prophet of God. Ustád ‘Alí consoled him saying that the Promised one Himself was still on earth.

Having accepted the advent of the Promised Messenger of God, Vujdáńi’s faith was now put to a severe test—a test which shook him to the core of his being. Several days had elapsed since his conversation with his friend, when he suddenly realized that Ustád ‘Alí was, in fact, a Bábí! So great was this test that Vujdáńi could not endure it. He forsook his friend and left that town altogether. “O God, my God!” he cried in his anguish, “I have sought Thee day and night. I have prayed that Thou might lead my steps and guide me to the right path, and yet I find myself thrown into the company of Bábís once again. Why must Thou punish me in this way?”

Vujdáńi was out walking in the countryside with a group of friends one day, when he decided to renounce the world once more and set out to seek traces of the true Beloved, wherever his steps might lead him. Three of his friends said they would go with him, but the rigours of the journey proved too severe for them and, one by one, they left him to wander on alone. Vujdáńi gave them his clothes and, dressed in the long gown of a dervish, he journeyed from village to village and town to town. But neither the turbanned mullás, nor the dishevelled dervishes he met on his way could help him in his search. He trained himself to subdue the ego and endure every form of humiliation. Carrying a begging bowl as he went along, he chanted prayers and recited verses from Ḥáfiz\* weeping at his separation from the true Beloved:

*Oh come! and touch mine eyes, of thy sweet grace,  
For I am blind to all but to thy face.*

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\* The great Persian mystic poet.

His sincerity touched peoples' hearts as he moved among them. Many looked on him as a holy man and asked for his blessings. But he was not interested in fame or honour and did not stay long in one place. In time, he gave away even his dervish gown to one who needed it, and was left with an undergarment and a piece of skin which he threw over his shoulders when he travelled and used as a mat when he lay down to rest.

After many days he found himself close to the town where his friend and master, the old dervish, lived. He was filled with a great longing to see his teacher once more and set his steps towards the town. He was hoping to arrive after dark, so that his many friends and relatives there would not recognize him, but the gates of the town were closed for the night when he reached them and he had to wait till the morning. He need not have been concerned about being recognized in town, for he was so changed since he left the place that a friend of his looked him straight in the face the next day and passed without the slightest trace of recognition.

Only his old teacher knew him. Vujdání's eyes filled with tears as he looked on the dear face of the dervish once more. He recalled how often his teacher was wont to say: "A weary body and a broken heart is all we can offer at the threshold of the Beloved." A weary body and a broken heart—this was all that Vujdání now had to offer. Would he find peace at last?

"Tell me, my son," said the dervish, looking on him with his calm, serene eyes, "have you, in your many wanderings and travels, come across anyone who could guide you to the Truth you were seeking?" "Nowhere, dear Master," answered Vujdání, "did I find what I set out to seek, except among a group of people who are known as Bábís!" There was a slight pause, then his teacher spoke: "You have reached the end of your journey," he said, "for I take God as my witness that the Promised One has indeed appeared. All the Messengers of God and His Prophets, all the saints and sages of bygone days have sung the praises of this Day. Blessed are we who have lived to see it!"

This meeting with the dervish dispelled all the doubts Vujdání had about the Bábís and their religion. As he sat listening to his old teacher's discourse, he learned much about the new Faith. The veil was lifted from his eyes and he began to see and understand.

“How strange,” he thought, “how very strange are God’s ways. I have been running away from the Truth, but God, in His mercy, has offered it to me again and again!” His heart was now filled with a peace he had longed to attain: his many trials and sufferings were forgotten.

## **Vujdání and the Mullá**

Vujdání peeped into the tent and quickly drew away. “This is no place for me,” he decided, “even if I find no other shelter for the night.” The tent was full of mullás and clergymen of every description. Their white, green and blue turbans of various sizes denoted their backgrounds and positions. At the head of the gathering sat the most distinguished of them all, with his huge turban set beside him on the floor.

Vujdání had seen the tent from afar and thought perhaps a group of dervishes were gathered there for their chants, but he was in no way prepared to confront a crowd of clergymen—the sworn enemies of his Faith. It was far too risky.

But the owner of the tent—none other than the imposing mullá occupying the seat of honour—had seen him and called out for him to enter. “Please join us,” he said. “I can see you are a stranger in these parts and we should be honoured if you would grace our gathering with your presence.” The invitation was too gracious to be refused and Vujdání reluctantly entered the tent.

As the evening advanced, he found himself much affected by the kindness of his host. One or two of the other priests clearly showed that they resented his presence in their midst, but the host did everything in his power to make him feel welcomed.

Later on Vujdání learned that his friend, the mullá, had a son who was causing him great concern. “He is behaving in a very peculiar way,” explained the mullá, “and no one knows what is the matter with him. In the beginning he used to disappear into the wilderness a few days each month; now he sits at home all the time but will not talk to anyone. He does not even answer when his own little child speaks to him. I am beginning to wonder,” added the mullá, “whether he has reached a state of spiritual enlightenment

which makes him despise the things of this world.” Vujdání was touched by the father’s concern but could tell by the symptoms described to him that the young man was far from any spiritual attainment. “The love of God which is the source of our spiritual life,” he told the mullá, “brings joy to the heart and creates love towards our fellow-men. It does not make us despise His creation.”

The mullá took Vujdání to his house to see his son. The young man, who was in bed when they entered his room, immediately turned his back on them and pulled the bedclothes over his head. His father entreated him to speak to them. “This gentleman who has come to see you,” the mullá told his son, “is a wise man who has travelled far and gained much experience. Tell him your trouble, I beseech you, for he may be able to offer help.” But the young man buried himself deeper in his quilt and would have nothing to do with them. Vujdání shook his head. “If your son were a seeker after spiritual matters, and a lover in search of the true Beloved,” he said to the mullá, “he would not be running away from everyone, for the seeker ‘abideth in every land and dwelleth in every region. In every face, he seeketh the beauty of the Friend; in every country he looketh for the Beloved. He joineth every company, and seeketh fellowship with every soul, that haply in some mind he may uncover the secret of the Friend, or in some face he may behold the beauty of the Loved One.”

The words which Vujdání quoted were from *The Seven Valleys* of Bahá’u’lláh. They made such an impression on the mullá that he forgot his son and, turning to Vujdání, entreated him saying: “Will you not guide me to the spiritual heights you, yourself, have attained? I can see that I have a great deal to learn from you.” Vujdání had no wish to tell him about the Bahá’í Faith. “There is nothing for me to teach you,” he said, “for I, too, am but a humble seeker.” The mullá pleaded once more, but Vujdání was determined not to be drawn into a conversation on the subject. He had had enough experiences with the Muslim clergy before.

They sat down to sip the tea which had been brought in, and the mullá, sad at heart, picked up a book and recited one of the beautiful prayers of Imám ‘Alí. Vujdání, too, affected by the mood of his host, closed his eyes and chanted from the prayers of Bahá’u’lláh:

*O Thou in separation from Whom hearts and souls have melted, and by the fire of Whose love the whole world hath been set aflame! I implore Thee by Thy Name through which Thou hast subdued the whole creation, not to withhold from me that which is with Thee, O Thou Who rulest over all men! Thou seest, O my Lord, this stranger hastening to his most exalted home beneath the canopy of Thy majesty and within the precincts of Thy mercy; and this transgressor seeking the ocean of Thy forgiveness; and this lowly one the court of Thy glory; and this poor creature the orient of Thy wealth. Thine is the authority to command whatsoever Thou wilt. I bear witness that Thou art to be praised in Thy doings, and to be obeyed in Thy behests, and to remain unconstrained in Thy bidding.\**

When he stopped, the mullá begged him to go on and listened with tears in his eyes as Vujdání chanted the following:

*O Thou the Desire of the world and the Beloved of the nations! Thou seest me turning toward Thee, and rid of all attachment to any one save Thee, and clinging to Thy cord, through whose movement the whole creation hath been stirred up. I am Thy servant, O my Lord, and the son of Thy servant. Behold me standing ready to do Thy will and Thy desire, and wishing naught else except Thy good pleasure. I implore Thee by the Ocean of Thy mercy and the Daystar of Thy grace to do with Thy servant as Thou wilt and pleasest. By Thy might which is far above all mention and praise! Whatsoever is revealed by Thee is the desire of my heart and the beloved of my soul.†*

The mullá slowly repeated the last sentence to himself; then he said: "These prayers are not the words of our holy Imáms, and yet, they are empowered with such potency that I know they are not the words of an ordinary man. Who is the Author?" Vujdání pretended not to know. "I was taught these prayers," he said, "by my teacher, an old dervish, who told me to repeat them often, as they are a means of purifying the soul."

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\* *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, pp. 93-4.

† *ibid.*, pp. 92-3.

The mullá rose up and said: "Let us go back to the tent." On the way, as they turned a bend in the road, they could see the golden dome of one of the most sacred shrines of Islám. Here the mullá stopped and, taking Vujdání by the hand, he said: "I swear by this sacred shrine that for more than a month I have been earnestly praying for divine guidance. Day after day, I have entreated God for help, and I have no doubt that He, in His mercy, has sent you to me. I entreat you not to deprive me of whatever you possess."

Vujdání could no more deny the mullá what he so sincerely begged for—nor could he have found a more attentive ear.

## The road to Hamadán

Hamadán is one of the coldest regions of Persia. The roads to the town were often snowbound for months during the wintertime, and people who travelled alone ran the added risk of meeting with hungry wolves on the way. Notwithstanding these dangers, Vujdání set out to reach Hamadán on horseback one winter.

It was getting dark, and Vujdání was hurrying to reach a village where he could spend the night, when two horsemen caught up with him and robbed him of all he had, leaving him to struggle along barefooted in the snow. He reached the village with great difficulty and was given shelter for the night; but he had to leave the next day in the bitter cold, without shoes or proper clothing. He was half dead when he came across a small mud hut. A woman lived there with her son, but Vujdání was so frozen with cold that he entered without permission and crept under their kursí.\* The woman looked on with great concern, never doubting that he was insane, for no one in his right mind would come out almost naked in that cold. As soon as Vujdání could speak, he explained to her what had happened. "I know the thieves who took your things," the woman told him, but she was not eager to give their names. After much persuasion, however, she told him the name of one of the thieves and gave him directions about getting to the village

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\* A low, square wooden table over which a large quilt is spread. Under the kursí is placed a brazier of charcoal fire covered with ashes. People sit on mattresses round the kursí and lean against cushions, their legs stretched under the kursí and covered with the quilt.

where the man lived.

Vujdání was determined to find the thief, so he set out once more in the snow and did not stop till he had reached the village. There he went straight to the village headman, explained about the robbery, and gave the name of the thief. The headman ordered a number of horses to be brought out from the stable so that he could see whether Vujdání would recognize the robber's horse. Vujdání identified it without difficulty, but the thief would not admit having taken anything from the stranger, so the matter was referred to the village priest. Now the priest was not going to let down a neighbour and shower his favours on a stranger who had just arrived half-naked from nowhere, so after receiving a bribe from the thief in front of Vujdání's own eyes, he asked the man to take an oath saying that he was not guilty of the theft. But the robber was not prepared to take such an oath, which made matters a little complicated. A solution was finally suggested by the helpful priest. The robber, he said, could give Vujdání a donkey and an old rifle instead of his horse and clothing! Vujdání realized there was nothing he could do and wisely took whatever was given him.

The donkey turned out to be blind in one eye and so old and feeble that no one could ride it. Vujdání swung the rifle on his shoulder and plodded along behind the donkey to the next village where he put up the beast for sale. He was so eager to get rid of it that he sold it to the very first customer who came along. Much to his disappointment, the man returned the donkey in a few minutes and took his money back. Another man came forward and offered less than half what the first customer had given, but Vujdání did not refuse him. He took the money—a large handful of copper coins—tied it in his garment with a piece of string, and set out from the village. He had never missed his pocket so much, for the heavy lump of coins knocking against his legs as he walked did not make the journey any easier for him.

He arrived at the next stop tired and chilled to the bone, but he was delighted to find someone who would let him spend the night under a little kursí for the price of one copper coin. Unfortunately, his happiness was short-lived for he soon realized he was not the only paying guest. One by one the others came, paid their coin and crowded round the kursí till there was no space to move. Vujdání stayed in that stuffy atmosphere till he could endure it no longer. He then got up and prepared to leave, but once outside, he saw that it would be impossible

to start on his journey till daybreak. He was wondering what he could do and where he could spend the rest of the night, when a feeble light through the cracks of a door caught his attention. It was a place by the wayside and he decided to knock and see if they would let him in.

As it turned out the place was a small inn. Two men sat gambling in one corner, and a third man was smoking his opium a little farther away. The innkeeper was eager to oblige. He made some fresh tea for Vujdání, and brought the red-hot charcoal brazier close for him to warm his hands.

After the three other customers had left, the innkeeper brought out his book of Ḥáfiz and attempted to read parts of it for Vujdání, but Vujdání, who loved the poems of Ḥáfiz, could not bear to hear them read so crudely. He managed to take over the reading himself, and charmed the innkeeper with his beautiful recitation. The innkeeper's helper now joined them and he too sat enraptured at the feet of the visitor.

Vujdání, in the meantime, had drifted into a world of his own. The mystical poems of Ḥáfiz, mingled with his own thoughts, helped to make him forget the innkeepers altogether. After a while, he put down the poems and started to chant some of the prayers of Bahá'u'lláh, completely unaware of the impression they had on the two men who heard them for the first time.

When at last he came to himself, Vujdání found the innkeepers eager to know about his beliefs. He sat talking to them for the rest of the night, explaining the message of the new Cause. By dawn, both men were confirmed Bahá'ís!

Vujdání stayed with his new friends for one more day, after which he walked to the next village where there were a number of Bahá'ís. His fellow-believers gave him a warm welcome. They clothed him and made him rest for a few days before they would let him travel on to Hamadán.

## **The essence of dates**

There was a large gathering of noblemen, religious dignitaries, scholars and men of letters in the presence of the Crown Prince in Tabriz. The prince took pleasure in meeting these people from time

to time and listening to their discourses and debates. A variety of subjects were discussed, and some of the poets recited pieces of poetry they had composed. Varqá, whose poetry was much admired by the prince, was always a welcome guest while he was living in Tabríz. The prince would often request him to recite some of his latest compositions, and shower his praises and favours on him. But Varqá always kept his peace when there were discussions taking place in these gatherings, knowing the dangers in which they might involve him.

This time, however, the priests had started abusing the Bahá'ís in such a childish and unreasonable way that Varqá thought it wise to put in a few words. "The Bahá'í teachers," they were saying, "used to, at one time, feed their unsuspecting guests with a certain kind of date which made them into Bahá'ís. Now that people have found out about this trick, the Bahá'ís extract the essence of dates which their teachers then make into pills to be used on those whom they want to make Bahá'ís. They have a cunning way of doing this," the priests went on. "First, the teacher seats himself in such a position as to face all those who are gathered in a room, then he charms his hearers with a most fascinating speech so that everybody's mouth is opened wide with admiration. When this stage is reached, the Bahá'í teacher cleverly shoots out a pill from between his fingers into the mouth of each of his audience who, having swallowed it, cannot help becoming a Bahá'í."

It is difficult to tell what effect this kind of talk had on the prince's guests. Many of them, we know, were far too intelligent to believe such nonsense, but one thing is quite clear: few people, no matter what their position might have been in Persia at that time, would have dared to displease the priests who ruled supreme, their authority unchallenged. Even the Crown Prince had no desire to arouse their anger.

Varqá, alone, was determined to point out the shallowness of these enemies of his Faith. In the silence which followed the unique piece of information provided by the eminent priests, he asked permission of the Crown Prince to say a few words. Having been granted the permission, he told the gathering that he was surprised to hear anyone speak about the essence of dates, for he could assure them that, although he himself had knowledge of chemistry and

medicine, he had never heard of such a thing before. "Even if such an essence did exist and was available in pill form," he said, "is it not strange that these Bahá'í teachers we have been warned against, never make a mistake in hitting their target? Or are we to assume that they have each had years of training in marksmanship? And what are we to think of the open-mouthed audience? How can they all be so ill-mannered—no matter how interesting the talk—as to sit with mouths wide open all round the room, and yet see nothing strange in it? And we are to believe that they actually swallow the pills thrown into their mouths without being aware of it!"

If the priests had anything more to add on the subject, they must have felt it was not the right time and place to do so.

### **The dumb prisoner**

"A Bábí was brought in chains from Yazd today!" whispered one man to another in Işfahán, and the rumour soon began to spread. The Bahá'ís, who were always eager for news of their fellow-believers, were among the first to hear the rumour. They immediately tried to find out more about the new arrival, but no one could give them the slightest information about their fellow-believer's identity. They did not know who he was, or to which part of the prison he had been taken.

In the end, Síná, who had himself been released from the prison of Işfahán only two days before, offered to go and find out from the jailer who had become his friend.

Slowly and carefully he picked his way back through the narrow lanes to the dismal prison. It was here that he and his brother, Nayyir, had spent those long, never-ending days of suspense which ran into weeks and months, living under the death sentence of the dreaded mujtahids of Işfahán, not daring to hope that they would ever look upon the world outside again or hear the laughter of their little children.

Those who passed Síná on the way must have been impressed by his radiant, kindly face, and the neat green turban and sash which were the signs of his holy lineage. If any had recognized him as the Bahá'í who had just been released from prison, they could

never have believed he was on his way to visit his jailer now.

The jailer was prepared to help Síná. "I can take you to the Bábí you want to see," he said, "but let me tell you that it is no use trying to talk to him. The man is deaf and dumb." "Deaf and dumb!" thought Síná as he followed the jailer, "I wonder who he can be."

They passed into the dirtiest section of the prison which was reserved for the worst types of criminals. Here, in a cell packed with people, Síná caught sight of Varqá in chains and stocks. The two poets were old friends and, of course, had much to tell each other. The astonished jailer and prisoners standing around could not believe their eyes! They stared with wonder at this holy Siyyid who had graced their cell with his presence and worked a miracle in front of their very eyes. "The dumb man speaks!" they said to each other excitedly. "The Siyyid has given him the power of speech and hearing!"

No one, however, was as puzzled as Síná who was supposed to have performed the miracle. "You see," Varqá told him by way of explanation, "they spoke to me in such insulting language on the way from Yazd that I pretended not to hear them. It was quite convenient to be deaf and dumb before you arrived!"

### **Varqá's poem**

Varqá was on a teaching trip in Yazd when he was arrested by the orders of the governor, Jalálu'd-Dawlih, kept in prison for one year, and then sent in chains and stocks to the prison in Işfahán. Here he made friends with a nobleman who admired good poetry, and who kept in touch with the literary circle which met in the city.

One day, Varqá's friend received the copy of some poems composed by various poets at one of their gatherings. This he showed to Varqá, who was moved to add some beautiful verses of his own to those of the other poets. The poem which Varqá wrote in the prison of Işfahán had far-reaching effects. His friend was so affected by it that he asked about Varqá's religious beliefs and eventually became a Bahá'í. It also worked the following miracle:

The cruel Jalálu'd-Dawlih came to visit the prison in Işfahán. He

knew both Varqá and his friend the nobleman, so he walked towards them with a sneer on his face. Looking at Varqá's feet in stocks, he mockingly remarked: "If you are a prophet, why don't you work a miracle and let the stocks fall off your feet?" "I have neither claimed to be a prophet," replied Varqá, "nor boasted of performing miracles."

Jalálu'd-Dawlih moved on to the nobleman and took a paper from his hand. It was a page of beautiful poetry, and he started to read it. He was greatly impressed, especially with the one Varqá had written. "I did not realize what a great poet we have here," he remarked.

Before he left the prison, Jalálu'd-Dawlih ordered Varqá's feet to be removed from the stocks.

## **The prisoners in Zanján**

It was Ramaḍán, the month of the fast, and people sat up late into the night. In the smaller towns and villages of Persia, where life was monotonous and nothing of great interest took place from year to year, there was not much to occupy the long nights of Ramaḍán except making the usual round of visits and reading the Qur'án.

The town of Zanján, being one such place, was pleasantly surprised to hear one day that a few Bahá'ís had been caught, chained and placed in a cell for people to go and see behind the prison bars. The response from the population was overwhelming. They came in dozens, wondering what Bahá'ís really looked like, and went away greatly disappointed to see that they were ordinary human beings.

Among the visitors to the prison was a Muslim priest whose brother, Mírzá Ḥusayn, had been arrested with other Bahá'ís of Zanján. The priest had often told his brother that he would come to no good if he did not give up his allegiance to the new Cause. Now he came to see if this imprisonment had brought his brother to his senses and prepared him to recant his Faith. Much to his surprise, he found Mírzá Ḥusayn steadfast in his beliefs and ready to defend the Bahá'í Cause no matter what the consequences. When neither his exhortations nor his many threats produced any result,

the priest left the prison in a rage, using the foulest language.

One of the other Bahá'ís had a visit from a few of his Muslim soldier friends. These, unlike the priest, had come to console their friend in prison. "We do not care what your religion is," they said to him. "You are a friend of ours, and we have come to tell you that if anyone decides to kill you, he will have to deal with us first."

Most of the clergy and members of the upper classes came late in the evenings when they would sit in a large hall in the presence of the governor, 'Alá'í'd-Dawlih, and talk to three of the prisoners who were brought to the gathering in chains—Varqá, his twelve-year-old son Rúḥu'lláh and Mírzá Ḥusayn. They came in large numbers, and when a few left, there were always others to take their seats. Night after night they assembled, hurling curses, insults and accusations at the Bahá'ís. Sometimes a question would be asked, directed at Varqá who was known among them for his learning, but he was seldom permitted to answer without being interrupted by the clergy, for they were aware of the influence he could exert on his audience. At times, Varqá would turn to his son, Rúḥu'lláh, and ask him to answer on his behalf. Rúḥu'lláh charmed his hearers. The governor was so amazed and impressed at the child's extraordinary eloquence, that he openly expressed his admiration. "This child's strange power of argument is a miracle in itself," he said.

However much the clergy resented it, the prisoners, if given the chance to speak, put to shame those who tried to belittle their Faith. Once an arrogant priest said: "If you consider Bahá'u'lláh's sayings as a proof of prophethood, I too can bring words as beautiful as his." "At the time of Muḥammad too," replied Varqá, "there were those who made the same claim. Neither were they, nor are you, able to accomplish such a task. But even if you were capable of producing the beautiful sayings you boast of, whose would you claim them to be?" "I would say they were my own words, of course," said the priest. "Here lies the difference," said Varqá; "Bahá'u'lláh claims that He has nothing to say of His own. All His sayings He claims to be of God. Not only does He make such a stupendous claim, but thousands of people from the different religious backgrounds of the world have accepted His words as the words of God, and hundreds upon hundreds of great scholars,

men of letters and religious dignitaries have laid down their lives as a proof to the power of these words. Now tell me, can you too, after having produced your wonderful works, claim that a single person will go so far as to say you are the greatest clergyman alive?"

At another time the governor turned to Mírzá Ḥusayn and said: "You claim that you have accepted the Bahá'í Faith after long investigation, but tell me how it is that you went to the Bahá'ís for your investigations. Were there not enough learned Muslims for you to enquire from?" "If a person wishes to find out about Islám," said Mírzá Ḥusayn, "would you advise him to go to a Christian clergyman?" The priests were furious with Mírzá Ḥusayn's answer. They rushed on him and gave him a sound beating. One of the noblemen present drew out his sword to kill Mírzá Ḥusayn, but the governor said: "This man must not be killed all at once. Leave him to me. I shall have a limb cut off his body each day, and kill him at the end of a week."

Mírzá Ḥusayn, who came from a notable family of clergymen himself, wore a turban at that time. The priests pulled off his headgear angrily, saying that he had disgraced the turban by becoming a Bahá'í. They ordered the guards to put an old, dirty hat on his head and pull it over his eyebrows to make him look ridiculous, so that they could make fun of him during the rest of the evening.

As the gatherings in the presence of the governor of Zanján went on night after night, the clergy began to monopolize the conversation so that the Bahá'ís would not be given a chance to talk. If a question was asked, a few of them would raise such a commotion as to make it impossible for the prisoners to reply. Often a question would lead to a heated argument among the clergy themselves, and this sometimes brought them close to blows. The Bahá'ís did not look forward to this stage because there was always the danger that, once they had got into a fighting mood, the clergy might band together and attack the Bahá'ís, blaming them for everything.

One night 'Alá'í'd-Dawlih was very annoyed with the continuous rows the clergy were having among themselves. "You have come here to find out what Varqá has to say," he reminded them. "If you have questions to put to him, you can ask them one by one, so that

he can answer you.” But the governor was no match for the clergy who were determined to denounce Varqá as an infidel no matter what he believed.

The impression Varqá and Rúḥu’lláh had made on the governor himself, however, was so great that one night he said in all sincerity, and in the presence of a number of people: “Varqá, I swear by the crown of His Majesty and the soul of Amír Nizám that if you stop propagating this Faith, I will obtain for you a proper title from the Sháh, pay you a handsome salary and make you my personal physician,\* so that you may wish for nothing more in life.” Great though his desire to help his prisoner, ‘Alá’i’d-Dawlih had, alas, no understanding of the heights of detachment Varqá had climbed in his love for his Beloved. “Do you really think,” Varqá told him, “that I would renounce the Messenger of God for the titles and riches this world can offer?” “But you can dedicate your life to God’s Cause and serve Islám,” said ‘Alá’i’d-Dawlih. “This is what I am doing now,” explained Varqá. “God’s eternal Faith is one. What I believe in is what all the Messengers of God have taught. It is They Who have told us in the holy Books to watch for the advent of the Promised One. If I, as a believer in God and His holy Books, have come to recognize the Promised One we have been waiting for, can I forsake Him and turn my back on Him for the sake of material benefits?” “Denounce this Faith in front of others, at least,” begged the governor, “even if you believe in it at heart.” “It would be impossible for me to live the life of such a hypocrite,” replied Varqá. “Alas!” sighed ‘Alá’i’d-Dawlih. “You leave me no choice. I must send you and your son to the capital to be dealt with by others there, but Mírzá Ḥusayn will be blown from the mouth of a cannon here in Zanján tomorrow.”

Varqá remained silent at the time, but he found an opportunity to have a few words with the governor alone later on. “Do not stain your hands with the blood of the Bahá’ís,” he begged ‘Alá’i’d-Dawlih. “Send Mírzá Ḥusayn with us to the capital and let him, too, be dealt with by others who are already steeped in blood.” ‘Alá’i’d-Dawlih listened to this request and ordered that

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\* Varqá had profound knowledge of medicine.

all three prisoners be sent in chains to the capital the next day.

## The children

Ṭayyibih was five years old when she and her younger brother, Jamál, were taken to see their father, Mírzá Ḥusayn, in prison one day. It was all so strange to them. Why did their father have chains round his neck? Why was he kept in such a dirty place, and why was everybody around him so rude?

Ṭayyibih had heard older people say that her father would be sent to Ṭihrán, and this worried her more than anything else. "Is it true that they will send you to Ṭihrán?" she asked him. "Yes," Mírzá Ḥusayn cheerfully replied. "I am going to bring you a pretty dress from Ṭihrán to wear on Naw-Rúz!"\* But Ṭayyibih would not be consoled. Her eyes filled with tears as she threw her arms round her father's neck. "Please don't go away, father," she begged. "I don't want a pretty dress." She looked into his eyes with such sweet sadness that her father's heart was filled with anguish. He realized that parting with his children was the severest test he had to encounter, and prayed that God might give him the strength to remain steadfast to the end. "You must go now," he told Ṭayyibih and Jamál. Taking a few copper coins from his pocket, he held them out to his daughter, saying: "Take these and buy some sweets on the way home." But Ṭayyibih shook her little head. "Keep the money, father," she said. "You may need to buy something for yourself on the way to Ṭihrán." That was the last time Ṭayyibih and Jamál saw their father before he was taken away from Zanján.

While Mírzá Ḥusayn suffered innumerable hardships in the prison of Ṭihrán, his children also had their full share of suffering to endure. One day, a regiment of soldiers and artillerymen surrounded their house in Zanján. Ṭayyibih and Jamál clung to their mother, wondering if she, too, would now be taken away from them. The soldiers had come by orders of the governor and religious dignitaries of the town, and demanded that every body in the house should come outside. The family of Mírzá Ḥusayn

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\* New Year's Day.

were not alone. They had given refuge in their house to a few homeless Bahá'í ladies, and now they all came out together, prepared for the worst. But the soldiers did not seem intent on killing that day. They had come to carry away all of Mírzá Ḥusayn's valuable belongings, and then raze his house to the ground.

The women and children looked on as the soldiers carried away everything they had—not only the rich carpets, silverware, crystals and other objects of value, but even the least significant articles, including the dough which was kneaded for making bread.

After the looting was over, the soldiers set about demolishing the large house. Doors, windows and walls—all came down amid the continuous loud swearing and cursing. The Bahá'í women and children were forced to go round begging the neighbours for pickaxes and other tools needed for the destruction of the house. By the time the soldiers had finished their task, there was not a single wall left standing where the house had been. Even the garden walls and the fruit trees in the orchard were savagely torn down as an act of merit by those who hoped for the rewards of paradise after having punished the infidels on earth.

Ṭayyibih and Jamál were now left with the ladies amid the ruins of their house, with neither food nor means of keeping warm during the cold night. They kept close to their mother, getting a little warmth from her body, and trembled at the sound of every footstep. No friends or relatives dared to come near them, and many who had professed friendship before, now became avowed enemies.

As the night grew colder the ladies decided to take shelter in a sacred shrine not far away, but the caretakers recognized them and would not let them enter. On the way back Ṭayyibih and Jamál were secretly left with a Bahá'í, while the ladies themselves went to a Muslim friend and begged for shelter for the night. Their friend consented to take them in if they would leave her house before daylight.

After that, the ladies sat in the ruins of the house during the day, and went to the home of their Muslim friend when it was completely dark and there was little risk of being recognized on the streets. All day long, the people of Zanján gathered around to scorn and jeer at the Bahá'í women living among the ruins. "If your life in this world is no better than this," said one of the onlookers

mockingly, "what will your lot be like in the world to come?" "We are not the first women to suffer in the Cause of God," one of the Bahá'ís replied. "There have been women treated like us in every Dispensation. Our lot in the next world will probably be like theirs."

During those days of severe tribulations when their menfolk were imprisoned and their homes plundered, when friends disowned them and enemies did everything they could to add to their suffering, these women showed such courage and steadfastness as to amaze everyone who saw or heard of them.

Ṭayyibih and Jamál's uncle, who was a Muslim clergyman, took the children to his own home after a few days. He took care of them and bought them new clothes, but Ṭayyibih could tell by the way he spoke to the people around him that he was ashamed of her father. "He has disgraced us," he kept on repeating. "I can no more lift up my head in public. Oh, that he had been guilty of theft, adultery, or even murder! But the disgrace of having a Bábí brother is more than I can bear."

He also spoke of calling in a priest to "put the testament into the children's mouths". By this he meant that Ṭayyibih and Jamál would be asked to repeat in front of witnesses: "I testify that there is no god but God. I testify that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God," thereby assuring everyone that they were true Muslims. But Ṭayyibih, whose knowledge of religious matters was limited, thought that he was planning some terrible torture for her and Jamál. Her uncle's house, with all the comfort it provided, became a prison to the little girl. She thought of her dear father with the chains round his neck, taken to the big city so far away; and she thought of her mother sitting among the ruins of their beautiful home, with none of her friends or relatives coming to see her any more.

One day she heard her uncle say again: "We must arrange to put the testament into these children's mouths as soon as possible. It cannot be put off any longer. I shall have to inform a few of the clergy to witness it." Ṭayyibih was terribly frightened. She clasped her little brother to herself, wondering how she could save him. There was no one she could turn to for sympathy. Everybody in the house seemed to be on her uncle's side. Suddenly she had an idea. "Jamál," she said to her brother, "if I tell you something, you won't say it to anyone, will you?" "No, I won't," the little boy

promised. She looked around to make sure no one else was listening, then whispered in his ear: "They are going to bring someone to put the testament into our mouths!" "What is the testament?" Jamál asked innocently. "It is something awful ... horrible ..." she said, not knowing how to explain. "It is like a piece of fire they put in your mouth. They burn your tongue with it!" Jamál looked into his sister's eyes with sheer horror. But he was also puzzled. "Why are they going to do it?" he asked. "What have we done?" "We are Bahá'ís," Ṭayyibih explained simply, "and they don't like us." Whatever this meant to the little boy, he had seen enough in his short life to know that danger was never very far away. He clung to Ṭayyibih as his only refuge. "What will we do?" he asked. "We are going to run away!" his sister answered. "But you must not tell anyone. Promise you will not tell anyone, or they will chain us like father." Jamál promised.

Running away from their uncle's house was easier said than done. There were always people about—neighbours dropping in to visit the lady of the house, servants coming and going in the yard. Ṭayyibih kept careful watch and when the right moment came, she caught hold of her brother's hand and crept to the front door. Slowly she opened it and peeped outside. There was no one she knew in the street. "Run, Jamál" she whispered, and the two ran as fast as their little legs could take them.

As the cold night wind swept over the ruins of their house, Ṭayyibih and Jamál pressed closer to their mother. She had already explained to them what was meant by "putting the testament into their mouths" and they knew that they would not be tortured if they went back to the comfort of their uncle's house, but they were glad they had come back to their mother, even though she had nothing to give them now—except her love.

## **The child-martyr**

Rúḥu'lláh, the child-martyr of the Bahá'í Faith, was a prodigy. At the age of twelve, his knowledge of the holy Scriptures, his powerful arguments in defence of his beloved Faith in the presence of the dreaded religious authorities of Persia, the beautiful poetry

he wrote and his sweet, saintly nature won him admirers everywhere he went. Many of the noted enemies of the new Faith were charmed by his eloquence, while others came to look upon him as a living miracle.

At the time when Rúḥu'lláh, his father and Mírzá Ḥusayn had been arrested because of their beliefs and were being taken to Ṭihrán in chains, the soldiers in charge were so attracted by the charm of this child of twelve that they wished to take the heavy chains from round his neck, but he would not have it so. "I am quite happy with these chains," he assured them, "besides, you must be faithful to your trust. You were given orders to take us to Ṭihrán in chains, and it is your duty to obey those orders." He was never heard to complain of the discomforts of that long and arduous journey, but seemed to derive great happiness from the many odes and prayers he chanted to himself as they rode along.

In one of the villages where they stopped on their way, the priests and notables ordered the Bahá'ís to be brought before them, especially as they had heard that the famous Varqá was among the prisoners. Varqá, the father of Rúḥu'lláh, was well-known throughout the country as a man of outstanding literary merits and a fearless champion of the new Faith. He spent much time in prayer and meditation, and longed to lay down his life as a sacrifice for the Cause of God.

The priests started to question the prisoners, but soon found they were no match for either Varqá or his twelve-year-old son, Rúḥu'lláh, who astonished everyone with the courage he showed in the presence of the religious divines. Unable to belittle the Bahá'í prisoners with arguments, the priests tried to stir up mischief and get them killed. "When will this land be purged of these infidels?" they wailed. "When will the Faith of Islám be rid of its enemies?" Although there was a row of armed soldiers standing as though ready for orders to shoot, and the prisoners had already prepared themselves to die, nothing happened. The priests grew more emphatic. "What are you waiting for?" they shouted. "Are you going to tolerate these Bábís\* among you?" The armed soldiers and guards, however, were determined to take the prisoners to the

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\* See footnote on page 7.

capital alive, so no one paid much attention to the village priests.

While this was going on, the son-in-law of one of the officers came to have a look at the prisoners. He was standing near the Bahá'ís when the officer and his friends decided to play a joke on him. They told two of the guards to pretend they thought this man had become a Bábí too. The guards took up a chain and approached the young man with rough and abusive language: "So now you have become a Bábí too, have you, you son of a ...! Well, we'll show you what we do with Bábís!" The poor man was so frightened that he lost his power of speech. He gave out a terrified cry and fell down in a faint. Some people thought he had died of fright but he opened his eyes after receiving much attention, though it was some time before he could speak. "What happened to you?" they asked him. "Why were you so afraid? We were only playing a joke on you." "A joke!" he exclaimed. "I nearly died of fright." "Look at this child," someone said, pointing at Rúḥu'lláh. "He is not afraid." "No," confessed the man, looking at Rúḥu'lláh with new eyes, "but then, he is a Bábí!"

The priests, in the meantime, having lost hope of getting the prisoners killed in their village, could do no more than wreak their vengeance on the child-prisoner. They had noticed that his feet were not in stocks as those of the other two, so they called the village carpenter and ordered him to prepare a pair of stocks for Rúḥu'lláh, thereby adding considerably to his suffering as he rode on horseback in the bitter cold and snow from Zanján to Ṭihrán. Rúḥu'lláh did not complain. Nor could this incident dampen his radiant spirit or discourage him from teaching the Cause to the soldiers who were with them. As the difficult journey came to its close, a few of these soldiers had secretly embraced the Faith of their prisoners.

In the prison of Ṭihrán, the Bahá'ís were treated with extreme cruelty. There were four of them there, all chained together with a chain put round their necks which was so heavy that it was difficult for the men to keep their heads up. Rúḥu'lláh collapsed under its weight and two supports had to be put under the chain on each side of him to keep him in a sitting position.

There were about sixty other prisoners in that place—murderers and thieves of every description—but none were treated as cruelly

as the Bahá'ís. Five days later, two other Bahá'ís were brought to the same prison, but these men were not prepared to suffer for their Faith. They denied having anything to do with the new Cause, hoping that they would be set free. The jailer, however, was in no hurry to send them away. "As you are not Bábís," he said, "you can sit with the crowd of thieves and murderers."

The prisoners were normally permitted to buy food with their own money, but the Bahá'ís had neither money with them, nor the means of getting help from outside. When Varqá's belongings, among them many valuable handwritten books, were confiscated, he said to a friend: "I am glad to think that every thing I possessed in this world was of the best quality and worthy of being given in the path of God." Now his enemies begrudged him even the dry bread which was the normal ration of the prison.

One of the prisoners, a rich man who was able to buy all he wished in prison, came to know that the Bahá'ís had no means of buying food and were not often given the meager ration of bread which the other prisoners received. His heart was touched and he thought of a plan by which he could give them a good meal one day. He said he had made a vow to provide a dinner for all the prisoners. When the food arrived, however, the guards would not let the Bahá'ís touch it. "You are not counted among the others," they said. But the host insisted that his vow included everybody present, and that it would be useless if a single person were left out. He had later said to a friend: "The fools did not realize that it was for the sake of those few roses that I watered all the thorns." A few days later he also gave away three silver coins to each prisoner, so as to have an excuse to give some money to the Bahá'ís.

One day Varqá, who had many admirers among the influential circles of the capital, received a message from a relative entreating him to write a poem in praise of the Sháh, so that it could be delivered to His Majesty and a request be made for the release of the poet. Varqá would not hear of it. "My pen has written praises of God and His divine Messenger," he said. "Am I to pollute it now by flattering a tyrant? Never! Let him do what he wants with me; I am prepared for the worst." But he sent a message to the Sháh requesting that he be brought face to face with the religious dignitaries of the capital and be permitted to discuss his beliefs

with them in the presence of His Majesty. The message was given through the powerful and bloodthirsty courtier, Ḥájibu'd-Dawlih, who had come to see Varqá in prison in the hope that the prisoner would promise him a rich bribe if he arranged for his release. But Varqá had no such intentions, and Ḥájibu'd-Dawlih, having lost all hope of getting anything out of him, struck Varqá on the head with his walking stick and left in a rage. This same man came back once more, this time performing such a heinous crime as to put to shame any ordinary murderer. The account of the incident is recorded by Mírzá Ḥusayn who was chained with Varqá and Rúḥu'lláh in the prison. The summary of a part of this chronicle is as follows:

“One night, when Rúḥu'lláh had fallen asleep under the chains, I saw his father caress his face and whisper: ‘O God, is it possible that this sacrifice I bring to Thee will be accepted in Thy sight?’ I was moved beyond words. I sat up and wept for many hours, stirred by strange emotions, though no one guessed how I passed that night .... In the morning I recounted to Varqá something I had once heard from a very good Bahá'í teacher. He had said that if he knew there was any danger threatening his life, he would run away from it as fast as he could, because God has created us for a purpose and we have a duty to perform in this world. We should live and serve our fellowmen. Varqá replied: ‘This is true, according to the standards of reason; but in the realms of the spirit, each one of us has a different path to tread.’

“... Ḥájibu'd-Dawlih entered the prison with a number of executioners clad in their scarlet clothes, and gave orders that all the prisoners should be chained to their places. No one knew what he had in mind and a terrible fear seized everyone. Then the jailer came to us Bahá'ís and said: ‘Come with me. You are wanted in court.’ We got up to follow him, though we did not believe what he said. ‘It is not necessary to put on your ‘abás, he told us, but Rúḥu'lláh insisted on wearing his. As we came out into the prison yard, we were surprised to see armed soldiers standing everywhere and wondered if they had come to shoot us. The executioners too were standing in a row, and Ḥájibu'd-Dawlih had a savage look in his eyes. But there was not a sound from anyone, and the silence was terrifying. At last Ḥájibu'd-Dawlih asked the jailer to open

the locks on our chains and send us two by two. The jailer's hands were trembling so badly that he could not open the locks, so another man stepped forward and unlocked our chains. Varqá and Rúḥu'lláh were the first to be taken away. They went through a door into a long passage leading to another building, while we two were ordered to wait. We could hear noises on the other side of the door, but it was impossible to tell what was going on. After a while, someone came out into the prison yard to take the bastinado.\* We thought they were going to put Varqá's feet in it and beat him. I said: 'I dread this beating. I hope they will cut my throat or shoot me and get it over with quickly.' The door opened again, and this time the jailer came out carrying a bloody dagger which he took to the pond in the yard and washed. One of the executioners next appeared with Varqá's clothes bundled under his arm. By this time we were in such a state of inner turmoil that we could hardly believe we were seeing these things. It seemed as though our minds refused to accept what our eyes could see. The door opened once more and we two were summoned. As we got near the door we heard strange noises and hurried talking, but nothing seemed to make sense to us any more. We were about to enter through the door when it was quickly closed again. We heard Hájibu'd-Dawlih say: 'They can wait till tomorrow.' He then came hurrying out in a state of terrible anxiety and utter confusion. He left his dagger in the hand of the jailer and rushed away with the empty scabbard hanging from his waist.

"My friend and I were taken back to our cell where we found that even the mat we sat on had been taken away in our absence. We sat on the damp mud floor and wondered what had taken place behind that closed door leading to the other building. If Varqá had been killed, then what had happened to Rúḥu'lláh? We were so shocked by the experience and so concerned about Rúḥu'lláh that we were incapable of speech. We sat from the afternoon till midnight unable to utter a single word. Gradually some of the guards gathered round us, laughing and mocking and discussing among themselves how they were going to divide our

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\* This instrument is a long piece of wood in the middle of which two ends of a short rope are tied to form a loop. The feet of the victim are held firmly in this loop by rolling the wood which is then held up by a man on either side while a third man applies a rod to the soles.

clothes between them on the following day. I heard all these things, but they made little impression on me. Later on I saw one of the jailers who had shown us some kindness before. I caught hold of him and begged him to tell me what had happened. I made him swear by the martyred saints of Islám that he would tell me the truth as he had seen it take place. This is what he recounted: ‘... Hájibu’d-Dawlih said to Varqá: “Which shall I kill first, you or your son?” Varqá replied: “It makes no difference to me.” Then Hájibu’d-Dawlih drew his dagger and thrust it into Varqá’s belly saying: “How do you feel now?” Varqá’s words before he died were: “I am feeling much better than you are. Praise be to God!” Hájibu’d-Dawlih ordered four executioners to cut Varqá’s body into pieces. The sight of so much blood was horrible to see. Rúḥu’lláh was watching all the time, overcome with grief. He kept on repeating: “Father, father, take me with you!” Hájibu’d-Dawlih came to him and said: “Don’t weep. I shall take you with me and give you a proper salary. I shall ask the Sháh to give you a position!” But Rúḥu’lláh replied: “I want neither a salary from you, nor a position from the Sháh! I am going to join my father.” Hájibu’d-Dawlih asked for a piece of rope, but no one could find any rope, so they brought the bastinado and put Rúḥu’lláh’s neck in it. Two of the jailers lifted the bastinado from either side and held it while Rúḥu’lláh gasped for breath. As soon as his body was still, they put him down and Hájibu’d-Dawlih called for the two other Bahá’ís to be brought in. But just then, the child’s body made a sudden movement, raised itself from the floor and fell several feet away. Then it was still again. This incident shook Hájibu’d-Dawlih so badly that he did not have the nerve to carry on with any more killings.’

“You can imagine how we felt after hearing the details of the martyrdom of Varqá and Rúḥu’lláh. The picture came to life, and I could not put it out of my mind. My heart would not be consoled, and I wept for my beloved friends all through the night. Finally I fell asleep and had a dream. I saw Rúḥu’lláh coming towards me, looking extremely happy. He said: ‘Did you see how ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s promise came true?’ Rúḥu’lláh had often told me with great pride that when he was saying farewell to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá after visiting Him in the Holy Land, the Master had patted him on the

shoulder and said: 'If God so ordains ... He will proclaim His Cause through Rúḥu'lláh.'"

The martyrdom of Rúḥu'lláh, as well as his short but fruitful life, will always be a means of proclaiming the greatness of the Cause of God. His beautiful poetry and his exquisite handwriting remain with us, as well as many incidents of his life which have been recorded by people who knew him personally.

The following is a very free translation of part of a poem by Rúḥu'lláh in which he asks for martyrdom:

*From the cup of divine bounty give me to drink  
And rid me of sin and weakness;  
For though my sins be great indeed,  
The mercy of my Lord is greater still.*

*Welcome to thee, Sáqí\* of the divine banquet!  
Come thou, refresh my soul and make  
Me worthy of being sacrificed  
In the path of the Best-Beloved.*

## Contacting the prisoners

Word had reached the Bahá'ís in Tīhrán that four of their fellow-believers, among them Varqá and Rúḥu'lláh, had been brought in chains from Zanján and imprisoned in the capital. This was all the information they could gather, and there was no way of finding out what had happened to these friends and how they were faring in prison.

One day, a young man was taken to prison, accompanied by a very angry father who had asked the authorities in charge to arrest him. The father complained that his son was insolent and disobedient and insisted that he had to be punished by being sent to prison.

The boy was kept in jail for three days, during which time he sat close to the Bahá'í prisoners and got to know them. "What have you done," they asked him, "to make your father so angry?" "I

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\* Cupbearer.

wanted to go to my uncle in Hamadán,” he replied, “and my father would not permit me to do so. In the end I decided to run away from home, but my father found out about it and had me imprisoned.”

It was some time after the boy was released that the Bahá'ís in prison came to know that both he and his father were fellow-believers who had worked out this plan so that they could get some information about their friends from Zanján.

Unfortunately, the prison authorities kept close watch and no other contact could be made with the Bahá'ís in prison for months to come. By that time two of them, Varqá and Rúḥu'lláh, had been cruelly martyred, while the other two had gone through unbelievable trials. The day after their friends were killed, the jailers had asked the two remaining Bahá'í prisoners for the clothes they wore, saying: “It is your turn to be killed today. If you do not let us have your clothes, your executioners will get them, though they belong to us by right for we have looked after you here in prison.” The prisoners gave away all their outer clothing, including their socks and shoes. But although they were taken out to be killed on three successive days, something happened each time and their execution was never carried out.

It was typical of these brave men that, when they were giving away everything they had and preparing to die, the only thing they kept for themselves was some rock sugar which they ate, saying: “This will give us a little more blood, so that the executioner who cuts our throats will not say the Bahá'ís have any less blood than other people!”

It was not until four months later that a few of the Bahá'í women of Ṭíhrán were able to bring them a little food and clothing from outside.

### **A strange incident**

Varqá was in constant physical agony when he was taken in chains and stocks from Zanján to Ṭíhrán. He was a big-built person and had difficulty in riding a horse which was loaded with packs on both sides; but more than that, the stocks on his feet were so heavy

that they pulled his legs from the joints, and every movement of the horse was a torture to bear. And this went on for many long hours day after day.

Some of the guards who accompanied them had become friendly with the Bahá'í prisoners after the first few days and it was already whispered among them that the officer in charge had himself become a Bahá'í. These men were all willing to help Varqá by removing the packs placed on his horse's back and by tying his legs to the side of the horse to relieve the pull from the heavy stocks, but there were one or two men who would not permit this, saying that the prisoners should suffer as much as possible.

One of the guards was exceptionally cruel. He would whip Varqá's horse to make it gallop, and take pleasure in seeing the agony his prisoner went through. Once the officer in charge said to him: "You are worse than the tyrant who tortured the Muslim prisoners in the early days of Islám." "Oh no," he replied, "These Bábís are as bad as those early enemies of Islám, and it is our duty to torture them. They think they are the saints and we are the wicked ones, whereas it is the other way round." Varqá was very sad because of what this man said and, turning to him, he remarked: "May the Lord judge between us!"

The guard said no more but galloped ahead towards a spring some distance away. The rest saw him alight from his horse, drink some water, and then start to smoke. But all of a sudden he doubled over and started screaming with pain. No one knew what had happened to him. The pain in his stomach became worse and it was with great difficulty that he was taken to the nearest village. Varqá was extremely upset. Being a physician himself, he immediately wrote out a prescription for the guard, but it was too late, and the man died.

Varqá could not forgive himself for what he had said to the guard. He was filled with remorse for having been so rash in calling upon God to punish the man. He remembered with great sorrow the words of his Master: "Should other peoples and nations be unfaithful to you show your fidelity unto them, should they be unjust towards you show justice towards them, should they keep aloof from you attract them to yourself, should they show their enmity be friendly

towards them, should they poison your lives sweeten their souls, should they inflict a wound upon you be a salve to their sores. Such are the attributes of the sincere. Such are the attributes of the truthful." Varqá would not be consoled because he had neglected the command.

## **Blind hatred**

Varqá's mother-in-law was a rich, talented and accomplished woman. She was also a sworn enemy of the Bahá'í Faith. So great was the hatred she bore towards all its followers that when she heard Varqá and Rúḥu'lláh had been killed because of their Faith, she gave a large banquet and called in musicians to celebrate the occasion.

Some years before that she herself had tried to persuade a servant to kill Varqá, promising him a very handsome reward. But the servant had, unknown to her, already fallen under the spell of her son-in-law and accepted his beliefs. He warned Varqá of the intentions of his mother-in-law, and Varqá took the necessary precautions to save his life.

Having lost hope in bringing about his death herself, Varqá's mother-in-law went to an influential mujtahid who was a relative of hers, informed him that Varqá was a Bahá'í and asked for his death-warrant. The mujtahid told her that he could not give the death sentence until he himself was convinced that her son-in-law was an infidel. "I can give you ample proof," said the lady. "I shall bring you one of his own children who has been taught by Varqá himself, and after you have seen this child you will have no more doubts."

Rúḥu'lláh, a child of eight or nine at that time, was brought to the presence of the mujtahid and told to repeat one of the prayers his father had taught him. Rúḥu'lláh stood up and said a long, beautiful prayer revealed by Bahá'u'lláh. The mujtahid was touched beyond words. Turning to the child's grandmother, he said: "How dare you expect me to sign the death-warrant of a man who has taught his son to pray to his Creator in this way?"

## Never at a loss

Rúḥu'lláh and his brother were walking in the streets of Zanján one day when a be-turbaned, awe-inspiring mujtahid came riding along on his donkey. The mujtahid could tell by the clothes the boys were wearing that they were not natives of Zanján. "Whose children are you?" he asked them. Rúḥu'lláh answered: "We are the sons of Varqá of Yazd." "What is your name?" the mujtahid enquired of the boy. "My name is Rúḥu'lláh," the child replied. "Oho! What a great name!" said the mujtahid. "This is the title of His Holiness Jesus Christ who raised the dead!" "If you will ride a little more slowly, sir," was Rúḥu'lláh's prompt reply, "I, too, will raise you from the dead." "You must be Bábís!" growled the priest as he hastened along.

## A brave soul

This is part of an account which comes to us from a fellow-prisoner of Mullá Riḍá of Yazd:

"There were a number of us in the prison of Ṭihrán. Mullá Riḍá and I ate from the same bowl, and were chained together at night. I have never known anyone like Mullá Riḍá. He was learned and wise, he was forbearing and meek, his faith was unshakeable, his courage knew no limits and his endurance under torture was almost superhuman.

"I had already heard strange accounts about the courage and steadfastness which Mullá Riḍá had shown when he was being persecuted by enemies of the Cause. Once, the religious dignitaries of Yazd had sentenced him to be bastinadoed seven times in one day in seven different places of the town, so that the different sections of the population might see the punishment inflicted on a Bábí. Arriving at each place, Mullá Riḍá would cheerfully spread his handkerchief on the ground and, taking off his cloak, turban and socks, he would place them on the handkerchief; then he would lie down on his back, pull his tunic over his head and, raising his feet to receive the rods, he would say to his torturers: 'You can set to work now, gentlemen.' His calmness infuriated the men, and

they applied the rods with all their might, hoping that he would cry out in pain or beg for mercy. Not once did they hear him utter a sound. On one occasion they had beaten him so severely that the onlookers thought he must have died under the torture. To their surprise, when they pulled away the garment from off his face, they found him engaged in cleaning his teeth! No wonder people asked whether he was an ordinary human being, with the same kind of flesh and bone as themselves.

“Years later, when Mullá Riḍá was an old man and imprisoned as a Bábí, one of the notables of Ṭihrán saw him receive a severe lashing on his bare back in the prison yard. He was so impressed by the serene manner in which Mullá Riḍá received the savage treatment that he immediately wanted to know about the Cause for which this dignified old man was suffering. His investigations led him to accept the new Faith, and he often told his friends that Mullá Riḍá’s calm behaviour under such cruel torture did more to attract him to the Cause than any amount of arguments could have done.

“After that lashing Mullá Riḍá’s back was terribly wounded, but when one of his fellow-believers in the prison tried to express his sympathy, Mullá Riḍá stopped him saying: ‘What do you think? When the jailer was applying those lashes, I found myself in the presence of Bahá’u’lláh. I was on top of the world and did not feel a thing!’

“At the time when Náṣiri’d-Dín Sháh was assassinated, the enemies of the Cause started to put the blame on the Bahá’ís. It was a very dangerous time for the believers and no one knew what would be the outcome of this false accusation. Mullá Riḍá, who was out of prison at that time, happened to be among the congregation in a mosque when the priest began to abuse the Bábís and accuse them of the assassination of the Sháh. With complete disregard for his own safety, Mullá Riḍá interrupted the priest before he could arouse the people’s anger against the followers of the new Faith. ‘Hold your peace!’ he called out. ‘This has nothing to do with the Bábís. They would never do such a thing!’ The congregation stared at him in surprise. ‘Why should you be defending the Bábís?’ someone asked. ‘You are not one of them, are you?’ ‘Of course I am!’ Mullá Riḍá boldly declared, whereupon he was seized and sent to Ṭihrán.

“The high official into whose presence he was conducted in Ṭihrán looked at Mullá Riḍá and said: ‘This old man is no Bábí; let him go.’ But Mullá Riḍá would be known as nothing else. ‘You are mistaken, your Highness,’ he protested, ‘I am not only a Bábí, but a Bahá’í as well. In fact, I have already been imprisoned a number of times because of my Faith, and there are many people who can testify to the truth of what I say.’ What! said the astonished official. ‘Do you wish to be sent to prison again?’ ‘If it be so decreed,’ replied Mullá Riḍá calmly, ‘I shall certainly accept it.’ This is how Mullá Riḍá came to join the rest of us in the prison of Ṭihrán.

“Nothing could stop Mullá Riḍá from telling others about the new Faith. He taught people under the most difficult conditions and the fact that his own life was endangered by it did not seem to matter to him. In prison he spoke about the Cause to our fellow-prisoners. Many of them mocked us and abused our Faith, but whenever I lost my patience, Mullá Riḍá would say: ‘Why are you disturbed? This is how people have always reacted towards the teachings of God’s Messengers.’

“We were eventually released from prison after sixteen months due to the efforts of some of our women who had appealed to the new king, but we were so weak from lack of food and fresh air that we could hardly walk. On the day of our release we were taken to the house of an official where our chains were taken off and we were told we could go to our homes. Before we could leave that place, however, a clergyman happened to arrive at the house of the official and, on being told about our case, expressed a desire to meet us. We knew that this might prove a dangerous encounter and excused ourselves saying that we were too weak to talk to anyone. Mullá Riḍá alone rose up to go. ‘We cannot refuse to speak to him,’ he said. We begged him not to go, but he would not listen to our entreaties. The result of the discussions between Mullá Riḍá and that clergyman was that Mullá Riḍá was sentenced to go back to the prison. When I heard this my grief knew no bounds, and I begged to be permitted to go to prison instead of him as he was very old and frail at that time and I knew that he could not endure the rigours of that dreadful confinement much longer. Mullá Riḍá would not hear of this and I watched him go with great sorrow, though he himself showed no signs of sadness. He even joked to

us about going back to prison, and told us an amusing anecdote to make us laugh before he left us.

“Mullá Riḍá passed away in prison ten days later. He had been starved to death, we were told, but we knew that they could have never succeeded in breaking his spirit.”

### **Prison life with Mullá Riḍá**

It was a strange sight. There, beside the pond in the prison yard, two men were busy helping the only Jewish prisoner in the place to take a bath. One man was pouring water over him, while the other, an elderly person, was scrubbing his back. Those who saw them wondered what sort of people these two men were, who cared to show kindness to a Jew. Even the Jew himself could not quite understand. Ever since he had been brought to this prison, he had been despised and shunned by his fellow-prisoners, and had received nothing but curses and blows from the jailers. Why should these two men, utter strangers to him, be concerned with his needs?

The idea of helping the Jew to take a bath had come from Mullá Riḍá. He had noticed how the man was being treated by everyone else, and had said to his friend: “Do you realize how much more difficult life is for this poor Jew than for the rest of the prisoners here? No one associates with him; no one gives him anything. They all regard him as unclean and will not let him step into their bath. If you will give me a hand, we can at least help him have a good wash beside the pond in the yard outside.”

So they helped the Jew take a bath, and gave him their spare clothes to wear.

At another time when Mullá Riḍá was imprisoned with a number of his fellow-believers in Tīhrán, they had only one spare shirt between them. This shirt was washed and handed round in turn.

One day, a young man who was guilty of theft was brought to the prison and chained beside Mullá Riḍá. Mullá Riḍá noticed that this young man had no shirt at all, so he asked for the spare one they had, to give to him. One of his friends said to Mullá Riḍá: “You put on the clean shirt and let the young man have the one you are wearing.” “How can I do such a thing?” said Mullá Riḍá. “What

we give away to another man is like a gift we make to Bahá'u'lláh. Do you expect me to give Him anything less than the best I have?"

### **A warm welcome**

An old man got up to welcome the Bahá'ís as they stepped into the prison in Tíhrán. "Greetings to you, Ḥájí Ímán!" he said. Ḥájí Ímán recognized him as a thief with whom he had been imprisoned in this same place some years before. "Greetings to you, my friend," he replied. "You are still here!" "Yes," said the old man, "I have been here for seventeen years now. But it is never the same without Bahá'ís in the prison! I was so happy to hear you were coming back."

Some of the other prisoners, too, gathered around the new arrivals. "How is 'Ibn-i-Abhar?" they enquired, "and where is he now? He stayed here with us for four years, and was like a father to us all. We have been like orphans since he went away." "The Bahá'ís are all like 'Ibn-i-Abhar," said the old man who had seen many come and go during his long years in prison. "They bring blessings with them whenever they come here. May they always continue to grace this prison with their presence."

It was a simple, touching welcome by one who had no other friends in the world.

### **Rebirth**

Siyid Muḥammad sat in his room wrapped in deep thought. He had heard people say that his friend, 'Andalíb, had become a Bábí. Though Siyyid Muḥammad doubted the rumour, he was, nevertheless, much disturbed in his mind. Why should people think that 'Andalíb, such a learned and pious youth, would be deceived by the Bábís? What could possibly attract him to these enemies of God and of religion? But now that this rumour had started, only 'Andalíb himself could stop it by openly denouncing the new Faith. Siyyid Muḥammad waited till it was dark, then, throwing his 'abá over his head, made his way to the house of his friend.

“See that no one else is let in,” he told ‘Andalíb upon his arrival. “I have an important matter to discuss with you.” ‘Andalíb spoke to his mother, then, closing the door behind him, sat down on a small mattress opposite Siyyid Muḥammad.

The two young men had much in common. They were both well versed in Islamic scriptures and, unlike most orthodox Muslims of their day, they were also acquainted with the works of the great philosophers. But, whereas ‘Andalíb was a writer and a poet, Siyyid Muḥammad was studying to become a mujtahid and succeed his uncle as one of the religious dignitaries of Láhiján. He came from an old family who had always trained one of their sons to become a mujtahid. Siyyid Muḥammad had been chosen from childhood and given the necessary education to prepare him for this position.

“Do you know what I have heard today?” said Siyyid Muḥammad to his friend in a voice which betrayed his inner agitation. ‘Andalíb knew what to expect, but calmly enquired: “What have you heard?” Siyyid Muḥammad found it difficult to speak to his friend in connection with a religion he held in such contempt, but he made the effort. “They say you have become a Bábí!” There was a long pause, then ‘Andalíb spoke: “Well,” he said, “supposing what they say is true ...” “What!” cried his friend. “Have you lost your sanity? Are you prepared to renounce this world and the next by joining a group of infidels who are cursed by God and men alike?”

‘Andalíb wondered if it would be wise to speak of his new-found Faith. He knew too well of the hatred Siyyid Muḥammad bore towards the Bábís, as the Bahá’ís were still called by their countrymen. He remembered how Siyyid Muḥammad would never take anything from the hand of someone he suspected to belong to this group, much less would he enter the house of a Bábí or treat one of them as a friend. Yet ‘Andalíb could not doubt Siyyid Muḥammad’s sincerity. The fact that he had risked his own reputation by coming to warn ‘Andalíb of the rumour he had heard proved that he was indeed a true friend.

“I will tell you everything,” he told Siyyid Muḥammad at length, “for I see that you are the only real friend I have in Láhiján and I cannot be any less sincere in my friendship towards you. What you have heard is true, but before you pass any judgement, you must make me a promise. If I have strayed away from the right

path in my search for Truth, you must help me to turn back, but if I can convince you that I have indeed found the Truth, then you too must accept it. Give me your word!" Siyyid Muḥammad accepted the challenge, fully convinced that he could save his friend from the spell under which he had fallen.

This was in Ramaḍán—the sacred month of the fast. For the next few months the two friends met regularly. Siyyid Muḥammad would go to 'Andalíb after dark when there was little danger of being recognized on the streets, and would come back to his room before dawn. In the beginning Siyyid Muḥammad, quite confident of his own knowledge, referred to passages out of the Qur'án and recited innumerable traditions concerning the advent of the Promised One. He mentioned all the signs given in the holy Scriptures regarding the Resurrection and the Day of Judgement, and brought forth every argument he could think of to refute the claims of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

'Andalíb listened patiently, then calmly explained the true meanings of the symbolic terms used in the holy Books. He referred to given dates and proofs by which the truth of the Missions of both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh could be established, and pointed out how all the signs mentioned by the Prophets of the past had already appeared.

Night after night, week after week, the two friends met. Siyyid Muḥammad was not convinced, but he was not so sure of his old ideas any more. One evening 'Andalíb, tired of discussions, unlocked his safe and took out some of the Writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. Siyyid Muḥammad stayed up all night to read them and reluctantly rose to leave in the morning.

All through that day, though he attended his lectures as usual, his mind was on the Writings he had left behind in the home of 'Andalíb and, as soon as it was dark, he hurried back to the precious manuscripts. What he read had a profound effect on him, yet so great had been his prejudice against the Authors of these Writings, that even now he had doubts and could not bring himself to admit the truth of their Cause. What was quite evident to him, however, was that he no longer believed in the old standards he had once unquestioningly accepted. He felt he was losing faith in everything. "No wonder people are forbidden to associate with Bábís," he

thought. "These Bábís can undermine all one's cherished views on religion, and one is left with nothing unless one accepts what they offer." He decided that he should not see 'Andalíb any more.

So he stopped going to his friend's house. Yet, however much he tried, he could not rid himself of the thoughts which now tormented him day and night. He started questioning the divines and religious dignitaries about problems he had discussed with 'Andalíb, but he found their views so shallow and so prejudiced that he soon gave up all hopes of receiving guidance from this group. He did not know where to turn and it seemed to him that even God had forsaken him, for he could find no peace in prayer. He would go out into the wastelands and forests outside Láhiján to be alone with his Creator, and there he would pray aloud and cry out and beg for guidance until night set in and the thought of wild animals prowling about sent him back to the town. People noticed the great change that had come over him and whispered that he was in love. Some said that he had studied too hard and read too many books; but none knew of the true reason for his state of mind, or of his secret visits to 'Andalíb.

In an attempt to forget all about his discussions with 'Andalíb, Siyyid Muḥammad gathered together a group of his young friends and gave all his spare time to entertainments and excursions in the country. One evening, the young people were returning home after having spent the day out of town and Siyyid Muḥammad was walking alone, a little behind the others, wrapped in thoughts he could not shake off despite the carefree life he seemed to be leading. Suddenly his eyes fell on 'Andalíb. Two months had passed since the day the two friends had last met.

"What happened to your promise, Siyyid Muḥammad?" asked 'Andalíb. "Was it not agreed between us that we would not give up our discussions until one of us had convinced the other of the truth of his beliefs? If you were to die this very night and, in the presence of the Most High, be called upon to give an answer regarding this Cause, what would you have to say? Could you say that you had truly investigated the new Faith and found it to be false? Or would you say that you were afraid it might be true and ran away?"

Siyyid Muḥammad was shaken to the core of his being. He knew

that he could no longer go on deceiving himself, that he could have no peace until he had found a solution to the problems which overwhelmed his soul. Once more he shut himself up in his own room to study the signs of the advent of the Promised One. He went through the holy Scriptures and the works of the great religious scholars, and noted down sixty-one signs he wished to discuss. Armed with these, he knocked again on the door of 'Andalíb's house.

The night sessions were resumed between the two young men and continued for months. During this period, 'Andalíb's patience was sorely tried, for Siyyid Muḥammad would neither exhaust his arguments nor bring himself to admit that there was truth in what his friend told him.

A full year went by from the day when Siyyid Muḥammad, fearful for the life of his friend, had come to warn him of the rumour he had heard. The two friends were sitting in the same room where they had first started their discussions, but a great change had come over them. A year before, each of the young men was fully convinced that he could win his friend over to his own Faith. Now, Siyyid Muḥammad knew that 'Andalíb's faith could never be shaken, while 'Andalíb had come to the end of his patience with his friend. "I am tired of you and your arguments," he finally told Siyyid Muḥammad. "Go your way and leave me to mine, for I have stopped hoping that you will see the Truth." To his great surprise, Siyyid Muḥammad replied: "Must I confess my faith to you in words, or is it sufficient that I believe in my heart?"

Great indeed was the joy that came at last to these two men whose friendship had withstood such severe trials and established a bond between them which could never be broken.

## Tests

Siyyid Muḥammad was nineteen years of age when he embraced the new Cause, and it was not long before his faith was to be put to the test. His faithful friend, 'Andalíb, had warned him to be careful, and for a time he contented himself with the study of whatever Writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh 'Andalíb could give him, and with meeting an occasional Bahá'í visitor who passed through

Láhiján. These visitors were a great source of inspiration to the believers in the small towns and villages. They brought news of Bahá'ís in other parts of Persia or, better still, they sometimes carried a handwritten copy of a letter recently received from Bahá'u'lláh in the Holy Land.

One day, when Siyyid Muḥammad was in the company of a group of his acquaintances, 'Andalíb entered the room and quietly placed a piece of paper in his hand. It was a note saying that Samandar\* had just arrived in Láhiján. Siyyid Muḥammad immediately destroyed the note and rose to go. He waited outside in the courtyard till 'Andalíb could find an excuse to follow him, and together they hurried to meet the new arrival.

The distinguished guest had been to the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, and had brought a precious gift for Siyyid Muḥammad—a letter addressed to him and written in Bahá'u'lláh's own handwriting. This letter set aflame the fire which was kindled in the heart of Siyyid Muḥammad, and burned away the veils which had so far concealed the love he bore for his new-found Faith. Nothing could keep him quiet any more. He started discussing the new Cause with those whom he thought might be prepared to listen, and succeeded in guiding a few receptive souls. But the risk he took was great, and soon his very life was endangered by it.

Many of his friends warned him to refrain from propagating the new Faith before he came to be denounced as a Bábí, but their warnings went unheeded, and Siyyid Muḥammad soon found himself confronted with the opposition of the entire body of the students of the madrasah where he was studying theology and Islamic law, and where he, like many of his fellow-students, was given one of the rooms around the large courtyard.

An incident which took place at this time helped to fan the flame of their anger against Siyyid Muḥammad. Some of those to whom he had given the new Message had repeatedly insulted the Writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, saying that no one in his sane mind would ever think that the Authors of these works could be inspired. Siyyid Muḥammad, wishing to prove the utter ignorance and prejudice of these people, wrote down some passages from different

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\* Father of the Hand of the Cause of God, Mr. Samandarí.

parts of the Qur'án and, handing this to them, said: "Be fair, can you truly say that these words are not inspired and that it is a sin to believe in the Author of these verses?" So blind were they in their prejudice that they scorned the sayings of their own Prophet and persisted in their ignorance even when Siyyid Muḥammad repeatedly warned them to open their eyes and be fair in their judgement. At last, Siyyid Muḥammad asked for a copy of the Qur'án and pointed out the verses to them, but instead of shaming them into silence, this incident served to heighten their anger and make them sworn enemies of Siyyid Muḥammad.

Gradually the atmosphere in the madrasah grew so tense that Siyyid Muḥammad decided to take away the sacred Writings he had in his room and entrust them into the hands of one of the other believers in Láhiján. This friend advised him to leave the town before he came to any harm, but nothing could be further from Siyyid Muḥammad's intentions. "If I go away at this time," he said, "people will say I was afraid to stand up for my religion. Besides, I will lose the opportunity of teaching the Cause to my own relatives. I must stay in Láhiján no matter what may happen."

Having delivered the Writings into safe hands, he went to spend the night at home. His uncle, who had cared for him since childhood, and at whose house he was staying, was very late in coming home that night. Siyyid Muḥammad was told that the Imám Jum'ih, the chief of the divines of the town, had sent for his uncle. Siyyid Muḥammad knew what this meant, but thought it unwise to mention anything about the subject to the members of the household. The next morning, however, when he was preparing to leave for the madrasah, his uncle stopped him saying: "Do not bother to attend any further lectures. The knowledge you have so far acquired is quite sufficient for all of us." Siyyid Muḥammad pretended not to understand what he meant. "Why?" he asked. "What has happened?" "You know perfectly well what has happened!" retorted his uncle. "You have foolishly endangered your own life and brought disgrace upon our name!" "It is easy for you to save your name from disgrace by breaking relationships with me," said Siyyid Muḥammad, "but I cannot stay at home like a coward."

Upon leaving the house, Siyyid Muḥammad directed his steps to the residence of the Imám Jum'ih. Two of his fellow-students were

there when he arrived, but the Imám Jum'ih was the only one who returned his salutations. After he was seated, the host ordered his servant to prepare the hubble-bubble pipe and then, turning to Siyyid Muḥammad, he said: "I am about to leave the town on urgent business. I advise you not to go to the madrasah till I come back." "May I know the reason?" asked Siyyid Muḥammad. "The reason," replied the Imám Jum'ih, "is that there have been certain rumours about you, and your fellow-students refuse to have you disgrace the name of the madrasah in which they study. When I am back again, I intend to clear your name of these false accusations, but for the time being, you must keep away from the madrasah lest you endanger your life. I have already spoken to your uncle and told him that you should not be allowed to leave the house; I do not understand why you are so utterly disregarding of your own safety."

The hubble-bubble pipe was now brought in, and the Imám Jum'ih proceeded to smoke in silence. Then he passed the pipe to the man who sat beside him who, in turn, smoked for a few minutes and passed it to his friend. But when this person wished to give the pipe to Siyyid Muḥammad, the Imám Jum'ih forbade him with a motion of his hand. This, in clear terms, branded Siyyid Muḥammad as a Bábí who should not be permitted to defile what was to be used by devout Muslims.

When the Imám Jum'ih rose to leave, the three students went to attend a lecture at the house of another mujtahid. The other two students, however, would have nothing to do with Siyyid Muḥammad and hurried on in front so as not to be seen with him. The lesson had not yet started when Siyyid Muḥammad arrived and the mujtahid, their teacher, received him very warmly, asking after his health and well-being. The discourse of the day concerned the signs of the times referred to in the holy Books, and the students found ample opportunity to direct their sarcastic remarks at Siyyid Muḥammad. To their astonishment Siyyid Muḥammad too had a lot to say about his views on the subject that day.

When the lesson was over, Siyyid Muḥammad was invited to sit beside the teacher and, no sooner was he seated than the mujtahid put his hand into Siyyid Muḥammad's pocket to investigate its contents. Having found nothing of interest there, he proceeded to search the folds of his turban. After making sure that no papers

were hidden in his turban either, he turned to two of his students and asked: "Where are the writings you spoke of?" "He must have left them in his room," one of them replied. Siyyid Muḥammad, pretending to be utterly unaware of what they were referring to, asked the mujtahid what it was that he had expected to find on him. "These two men," said the mujtahid, "came to me and said that you had renounced the Faith of your illustrious Ancestor, the Holy Prophet, and had joined the followers of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. They said you were carrying their writings with you to read to people in order to convert them to the new Faith, that you had already succeeded in deceiving a great number and that if nothing were done to stop you, half the population of Láhiján would become Bábís in no time. I could not believe what they said, and I told them that a person as intelligent and well-informed as yourself would never be deceived by these people. I asked them to stop disgracing your name in this town, and warned them that their foolish talk might become the cause of the murder of an innocent descendant of the Prophet, but they would not be silenced. They said it was my duty as a mujtahid to protect the interests of Islám and to make sure that you did not mislead the people of Láhiján. That is why I have searched your pockets and turban. Now these men should be ashamed of the false charges they have brought against you. Give me the key to your room so that they can search that place too and see that you are hiding no secret papers." Siyyid Muḥammad gave the key to his safe, saying that his room was open as he expected two young boys who came to study with him.

The two children whom Siyyid Muḥammad taught in his spare time, and who were now awaiting his return in the madrasah, were Bahá'í children who had seen their teacher place some sacred Writings in his safe. They did not know that he had already removed them from that place and taken them to the home of another believer, so when they saw the men enter Siyyid Muḥammad's room and go straight to this safe, they threw themselves on the box and fought to keep the men away. As soon as one of the boys would be pulled aside, the other would manage to throw himself on the safe, and this further irritated the men who were already burning with hatred towards Siyyid Muḥammad. The two boys were eventually held off and the safe was opened but, to everybody's astonishment, it

was found to be empty. The joy of the two children can well be imagined, but the men were so furious that they looted the room and took away everything Siyyid Muḥammad owned.

While this was taking place in the madrasah, the mujtahid was trying to persuade Siyyid Muḥammad to speak ill of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh in the presence of the assembled students. "Your fellow-students," remarked the mujtahid, "accuse you of having said that the Promised One has appeared." "There is a group of people," Siyyid Muḥammad replied, "who believe the Promised One has come and, as students of religion, it is our duty to investigate into the matter before we can either accept or deny the claim." "The falsehood of this claim has already been proven to me," said the mujtahid, "and it is for you to follow me in these matters." "I would have gladly followed you," replied Siyyid Muḥammad, "had it not been an essential duty of every Muslim to investigate the claim of the Promised One for himself." The mujtahid was losing his patience. "You are accused of being a Bábí," he said, "and I order you to denounce the names of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, and curse their Faith in the presence of everyone here." "Is it you I must obey, or God?" asked Siyyid Muḥammad. "Have I spoken against the word of God?" cried the mujtahid. "God has forbidden us to curse anyone," Siyyid Muḥammad reminded him, and recited the verse given in the Qur'án. The mujtahid could no longer control his anger. "Will you, or will you not, denounce these people, you dog?" he thundered. "I am afraid," said Siyyid Muḥammad. The mujtahid calmed down. "Who are you afraid of?" he asked. "Is it someone who is present in this gathering?" "It is God I am afraid of," was the reply. "I am now thoroughly convinced," said the furious mujtahid, "that you have renounced the Faith of your illustrious Ancestor." Then, calling his servant, he ordered him to take away Siyyid Muḥammad's 'abá and turban so that he might no more be clothed in the honourable garments of a religious Muslim. As soon as the servant made a move, however, Siyyid Muḥammad called out: "Beware! If you so much as take one step towards me, you will come to repent it." The mujtahid was suddenly seized with fear. "Stay where you are!" he told the servant. Then, turning to Siyyid Muḥammad, he quietly said: "Now that you have given up the Faith of your holy Ancestor, you should put away the

clothes that belong to His religion.” “The Faith of my Ancestor,” replied Siyyid Muḥammad, “has nothing to do with my turban, which I can take off myself. I was hoping that you would ask for my head!” Saying this, he took off his ‘abá and turban, while his long, black hair now fell over his shoulders. Then, in the silence which followed, he chanted the verses written by one of the Imáms when he was suffering persecutions at the hands of his enemies. The effect of these beautiful verses, as well as the deep, impressive tones in which they were chanted, was such that some of those who heard him were moved to tears. As Siyyid Muḥammad left that gathering, a great joy took possession of his whole being, making him utterly oblivious of the danger that threatened his life.

It was Siyyid Muḥammad’s intention to keep away from his uncle’s house lest his presence there should belittle his uncle’s reputation among the inhabitants of Láhiján, but his relatives insisted that he should stay with them. His uncle, in the meantime, having heard of what had happened after the lecture, had hurried to that place and reproached the mujtahid for his behaviour towards his nephew. “Your deliberate persistence,” he told the mujtahid, “has annoyed the young man and caused him to stand against you. You have no reason to assume that he is a Bábí when he, himself, has made no such confession.”

Though he did not wish to admit it, however, Siyyid Muḥammad’s uncle was quite aware of the fact that unless his nephew openly denounced the Bábís and the Authors of their Faith, nothing could now save him from the evil consequences of the rumours which were fast spreading throughout the town and its surroundings. At the same time, realizing that neither threats nor punishments could persuade Siyyid Muḥammad to alter the course he had chosen to take, he decided to approach him with kind words.

Arriving at his home, he spoke to his nephew in the presence of a few close relatives who were all devoted to the young man. He reminded Siyyid Muḥammad of the hopes he cherished for his future and of the pains he had taken in educating him since his childhood so that he might now become a source of comfort to his ageing uncle and succeed to his title and position after his death. He went on to speak of the jealousy of Siyyid Muḥammad’s fellow-students at the madrasah, how they had waited for an opportunity

to degrade him in the eyes of others, and how they had now found an excuse by which they could disgrace his name and become the means of causing his death. "All I ask of you," he told Siyyid Muḥammad, "is to make it clear to those who are now present in this room that these rumours are unfounded, by denouncing the Báb."

Siyyid Muḥammad knew what this meant. He was being asked to speak ill of the Founders of his Faith, so that his relatives could act as witnesses and take him to recant his faith in the presence of a different mujtahid every day. He took out his sharp pen-knife and proceeded to open it. One of the men quickly took it away from his hand. "What are you doing?" they asked in astonishment. "I was about to cut out my tongue," replied Siyyid Muḥammad, "for I could neither disobey my uncle nor could I bring myself to curse anyone."

The ladies of the house, who heard and saw what was going on in the room from behind a curtain, could not bear to see Siyyid Muḥammad treated in this manner. "You will make him lose his mind altogether if you go on like this," they said to his uncle. "Is it not enough that he has to suffer at the hands of his enemies outside? Can he not have peace in his own home? Perhaps the Bábís have given him some powerful drug which has affected his mind and he cannot think clearly any more."

Siyyid Muḥammad's uncle took his cue from these wise ladies. "My nephew," he told everyone, "has been drugged by the Bábís and has become mentally deranged. No one should aggravate his malady by speaking to him about these infidels and their accursed religion." These words, coming from an influential religious dignitary, prevented Siyyid Muḥammad from being killed in Láhiján.

His life, nevertheless, became more difficult every day. He was treated like a leper wherever he went and devoted Muslims would not be defiled by taking anything from his hand. 'Andalíb, his faithful friend, had to leave that town, and Siyyid Muḥammad found himself gradually cut off from his fellow-believers. He thirsted for news, and longed to meet with other Bahá'ís. In the end, deciding that he could not go on living in an atmosphere which oppressed his soul on every side, he left his hometown, his position and all his worldly belongings to seek a new life in Tìhrán.

## A famous doctor

The story of the tests and trials which Siyyid Muḥammad met with in Ṭihrán are too numerous to be recounted here. For a long time he was looked upon with suspicion by friend and foe alike. That people should come to suspect him as a Bábí and shun his company was to be expected by Siyyid Muḥammad, but to be treated with indifference by his fellow-believers was something which he had not anticipated and which caused him much sorrow. The Bahá'ís, on the other hand, could not be entirely blamed for their conduct towards him. Being constantly persecuted by the clergy, they were reluctant to welcome in their midst a stranger who apparently belonged to this class and who might be posing as a fellow-believer so that he could betray their names and numbers to their enemies.

The situation, in time, became so difficult for Siyyid Muḥammad that, had his faith been any less strong, he would not have been able to persevere much longer. But he proved to be as unshakable as a mountain in the face of the severe calamities which beset him in those days. His desire to teach the Cause was so great that even when he had to go without proper nourishment for several months, the little money he had was mostly spent in buying tea and sugar and tobacco for the hubble-bubble pipe,\* so that he could invite people to his room in the evenings and prepare them to receive the new Message.

Though his heart never wavered in those difficult days, his body grew very weak. Many a time, as he lay ill with fever and starving in the corner of his room with his old 'abá as his only covering, he thought of what his uncle had said to him as he was preparing to leave the comfort of his life in Láhiján and seek an unknown destiny in a strange city rather than give up his new-found Faith. "I can see you," his uncle had told him, "dying of starvation and misery in the corner of a forsaken room, with not a friend beside you."

Yet Siyyid Muḥammad's life was not destined to end in this way. He was to live and become rich and famous. He was to receive titles from the Sháh and be respected as one of the most well-known physicians of the capital.

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\* Offering the hubble-bubble pipe to guests was the customary etiquette.

After enduring every kind of hardship in Ṭīhrán, Siyyid Muḥammad's life gradually underwent a change. He was able to earn a living by teaching private pupils who came to him in the evenings, while his days were devoted to the study of medicine. Then, one day, he received a visit from a Bahá'í whom he had met in his own hometown. This friend, who had just arrived in Ṭīhrán, introduced Siyyid Muḥammad to the rest of the Bahá'ís there, and reproached them for having failed to see the difference between a mischief-maker and a person who had sacrificed all he had for the sake of his Faith. His association with the Bahá'ís of Ṭīhrán was a turning point in the life of Siyyid Muḥammad. From then on, he took an active part in all that the Bahá'ís undertook in the capital. He was on the first Local Spiritual Assembly in Persia, and a member of the Committee of the Tarbíyat School which was the first Bahá'í school established in that country.

But Siyyid Muḥammad never forgot the days when he lay ill in an empty room, with no one to care for him and no means of obtaining any food; and years later, when he was a famous doctor, he also became known as a friend of the poor. Not only did he give free treatment to the needy but he also provided them with medicine and food. He came to be loved and respected by all who knew him, and even some of those people who had previously shunned his company because of his religion were now proud to call him their friend.

There are people still living in Persia who remember the majestic figure of Siyyid Muḥammad, with the wonderful kind eyes that attracted so many to him, walking through the streets on the way to visit a prince or a beggar, to attend an official banquet or to cheer up his fellow-believers in prison. They remember him standing by the baker's shop, day after day during the famine, distributing bread to the poor. They also remember how, when there was an epidemic of typhoid in Ṭīhrán, people swore that no patient died who had been visited by Siyyid Muḥammad, such faith did they have in his healing powers.

One day, as Siyyid Muḥammad was walking through the market place, his young son who was with him noticed how those whom they met on the way, whether men or women, old people or young children, all greeted his father as they passed him by. "Do you

know all these people?" he asked his father. "No, my son," replied Siyyid Muḥammad. "Do you suppose everybody knows who you are?" enquired the boy. "No, I do not think so," was the answer. "Then how is it," asked the boy in surprise, "that everyone we meet greets you on the streets?" Siyyid Muḥammad smiled and said: "The reason, my son, is that I love everybody, and they can probably feel it."

Note: One or two points mentioned in this account come from a published talk given by Siyyid Muḥammad's son, General Núri'd-Dín 'Alá'í, as well as from incidents related to me by my grandmother, Siyyid Muḥammad's wife.—G.F.

## Methods of teaching

'Abdu'l-Bahá once sent Siyyid Asadu'lláh-i-Qumí to teach the Faith in Qarabágh, a province of Caucasia, where there were no Bahá'ís at that time. The Master told him not to come away from Qarabágh until he had brought at least one person into the Faith.

Siyyid Asadu'lláh travelled throughout the length and breadth of Qarabágh, going from town to town and village to village, but nowhere did he find anyone to whom he could speak of the new Cause. The people of Qarabágh were not only steeped in all kinds of superstitions, but were also ignorant of the most basic principles of Islám, the Faith they professed. Even the very name of the Prophet was unknown to most of them. Siyyid Asadu'lláh also noticed that the majority of the people in Qarabágh carried daggers or knives with which they would confront anyone who dared to displease them with his speech.

After travelling from place to place and failing to find any soul to whom he could convey the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, Siyyid Asadu'lláh lost all hope of teaching in Qarabágh and reluctantly decided to leave the place. Having made this decision, he sat down beside a running brook under the shade of a tree and thought of having his lunch before leaving. He put his bread on a handkerchief spread on the ground before him, washed a piece of cheese and a bunch of grapes which he had purchased, and prepared to eat. But his mind was not at rest and his thoughts dwelt upon his sad

disappointment in having failed to teach the Cause in Qarabágh. Above all, he wondered how he could ever report this to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, recalling the Master's words that he should bring at least one person into the Faith before leaving. A sense of utter misery gradually descended upon him and tears flowed down his cheeks onto his long beard.

It was the hour of noon and no passer-by interrupted the quiet of the lane, so Siyyid Asadu'lláh wept freely, little realizing that he was being watched by a shopkeeper from across the road. The shopkeeper, Mashhadí 'Abdil by name, was touched by the state in which he saw Siyyid Asadu'lláh and, coming forward, enquired about the cause of his sorrow. This question, coming from an utter stranger, only helped to increase Siyyid Asadu'lláh's tears and he could give no reply. Mashhadí 'Abdil was greatly moved. He begged Siyyid Asadu'lláh to confide in him, vowing to do all in his power to remove the burden which weighed so heavily on his heart. To this Siyyid Asadu'lláh sadly replied: "It is not easy to remove the cause of my sorrow, and I do not see how anyone can help me in solving my difficulty." Mashhadí 'Abdil said: "I am a man of honour and I pledge my word that I will do anything I can to help you. Are you in need of money? Do you have a debt to pay? Or perhaps you have an enemy? Confide in me and have no fear." At last Siyyid Asadu'lláh, impressed by the man's sincerity, said: "What I have to say cannot be told here in the street." Mashhadí 'Abdil immediately conducted Siyyid Asadu'lláh to his dwelling place and there, in the privacy of his home, he was very gradually given the Message of the New Day and told why Siyyid Asadu'lláh was so sad at the thought of leaving Qarabágh that afternoon.

Mashhadí 'Abdil was pure of heart and versed in the Qur'án and Traditions, so he did not have much difficulty in accepting the Truth. But no sooner had he believed in the new Faith than he thought of publicly announcing the advent of the Promised One to all the people in Qarabágh. In vain did Siyyid Asadu'lláh warn him against the consequences of such an act. In vain did he beg him to search for receptive souls before delivering the Message. "I know my countrymen," said Mashhadí 'Abdil. "They are all simple people who will not fail to see the Truth. I have no doubt

that they will willingly accept the Promised One when they hear of His advent."

Siyyid Asadu'lláh, having lost all hope of persuading Mashhadí 'Abdil to take a wiser course of action, requested him to refrain from making mention of his new-found Faith for at least two days during which time he could be instructed in the teachings and given sufficient proofs by which to satisfy others of the truth of the new Cause.

In the course of these two days Siyyid Asadu'lláh taught Mashhadí 'Abdil the history and teachings of the Faith, pointed out to him logical proofs by which he could establish the truth of the Cause, and referred to certain passages to be found in the Qur'án and Traditions concerning the Twin Messengers Who had appeared. On the third day he bade farewell to Mashhadí 'Abdil and left Qarabágh after having warned his friend once more that the manner in which he had chosen to bring the message of the new Faith to the attention of the people in his town was unwise and would not achieve the required result.

Mashhadí 'Abdil, however, was full of confidence. He decided to announce the advent of the new Age on the following market day when a great crowd from the villages around, as well as from the town itself, gathered in a large square to sell their goods or purchase their requirements for the week.

The appointed day arrived and Mashhadí 'Abdil climbed onto a raised platform in the middle of the square where all could see him. He called aloud upon the crowd to draw near and, as he was a well-known person in the town, many people immediately gathered round him to hear what he had to say. Mashhadí 'Abdil called again and again until all left their work and came to hear him. "I testify that there is no god but God," commenced Mashhadí 'Abdil. "I testify that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God and that 'Alí, the Commander of the Faithful, is the Guardian of the Cause of God." He then recited a poem in praise of the Prophet and Imáms, after which he added: "I bring you the glad tidings that the Promised One has appeared out of Shíráz ...." He could get no further, for the first blow from the crowd knocked him down unconscious.

When Mashhadí 'Abdil opened his eyes he found that he was lying in a strange place and could not move a limb. His audience

had not spared him in any way, beating him until they thought he was dead. Some relatives had then tied him to a horse and secretly brought him to a safe hiding place outside the town, leaving only a close friend to stay with him until he regained consciousness.

As soon as he could gather his thoughts, Mashhadí 'Abdil realized what had happened and remembered the repeated warnings of Siyyid Asadu'lláh. He now understood the wisdom of his teacher's words and decided to accept the advice he had given. Turning to the faithful friend who now sat beside him, he asked what had happened to him and why he was lying in that strange place. His friend reminded him of his speech in the market place but Mashhadí 'Abdil denied the whole incident saying: "It is impossible that I should have said such a thing. How can you accuse me of such foolish conduct?" His friend, thinking that he had either lost his memory or that a momentary madness had come over him in the market square, made no further reference to the incident.

When Mashhadí 'Abdil was eventually able to go back to his work, this friend sat in his shop for a few days and whispered to all who passed by to make no mention of what had happened in the presence of Mashhadí 'Abdil, for he had not been in his right mind when he spoke to the crowd and had now forgotten all about the incident.

Mashhadí 'Abdil, in the meantime, grown wiser through his sad experience, tried to follow the instructions of Siyyid Asadu'lláh and searched for pure souls to whom he could deliver the Message which the multitude had rejected. It was not long before he could confide in a friend, and then in a few others. Gradually a small group of believers was formed who would gather very secretly to hold meetings and discuss the Cause. It was not possible for them, however, to conceal their Faith indefinitely, and it was whispered around that Mashhadí 'Abdil had indeed become a Bábí and was secretly engaged in converting others to the new Faith.

This rumour was one day brought to the attention of Ḥasan Big, a man renowned for his boldness of manner and known to draw his dagger on the slightest pretext. He, moreover, belonged to a well-known and influential tribe whom none cared to displease. After being informed that Mashhadí 'Abdil had become a Bábí, Ḥasan Big was also told that those who accepted this new Faith

denied the existence of God and denounced the Prophet and Imáms, mentioning their names in disrespect. Ḥasan Big was so enraged by what he heard that he immediately set out to find Mashhadí ‘Abdil.

Mashhadí ‘Abdil was sitting in his shop as usual when the figure of Ḥasan Big, with drawn dagger, appeared in the doorway. “Is it true, Mashhadí ‘Abdil,” he thundered, “that you are a Bábí and have no respect for the Prophet and our Imáms?” Mashhadí ‘Abdil had no doubt but that the hour of his death was at hand, yet he somehow managed to persuade Ḥasan Big to sit down and hear what he had to say. He told him that the Bahá’ís believed in God and the Prophet Muḥammad, and had the greatest respect for all the Imáms. He then went on to tell him more about the Faith and, to his surprise, Ḥasan Big listened with great interest.

One hour passed, then two, and still Mashhadí ‘Abdil spoke and Ḥasan Big listened. Three hours passed. Ḥasan Big, who had come to Mashhadí ‘Abdil with a drawn dagger that morning, rose to go at noon firmly convinced of the truth of the new Cause.

Having accepted the Faith, he now drew his dagger once more and stepped into the market. “Hear me O people!” he called. “Hear what I have to say! Mashhadí ‘Abdil is in truth a Bábí, so are a few others ...” He proceeded to name them one by one. “What is more, I myself have today accepted the new Faith, and I solemnly swear that anyone who dares to insult Mashhadí ‘Abdil or any other fellow-believer of mine will feel the point of my dagger!”

No one dared to provoke the displeasure of Ḥasan Big, and so at last the Bahá’ís in Qarabágh were able to confess their Faith and bring it to the attention of others.

Note: The two sons of Mashhadí ‘Abdil’s trusted friend, who had stayed with him and nursed him after the beating he had received, both became Bahá’ís.

## **The Bahá’í Centre**

When the Bahá’ís in Qarabágh were, at long last, able to meet without fear of persecution, and a number of other people were enquiring about their Faith, they decided they needed a proper

Centre for their gatherings. The few places they could find, however, were either unsuitable for the purpose or much more expensive than they could afford.

There was one place, in particular, which they all thought would make an ideal Bahá'í Centre. It was a beautiful building which was going up in a very good locality—but, of course, they would never be able to afford it. Dádásh 'Amú, a renowned gambler, was building this place as a gambling house and hoped to make a fortune out of it. The Bahá'ís had no hope of ever getting the building unless a real miracle should happen.

The miracle, strangely enough, did take place. Dádásh 'Amú became a Bahá'í before the building was finished, and he donated it as the first Bahá'í Centre in Qarabágh.

### **“You are right!”**

Mashhadí 'Abdil, who was known as a Bahá'í wherever he went in Qarabágh, happened to be walking in a small village one day when a man stopped him saying: “Come with me to the mosque, if you dare, so that the priest can refute your arguments in front of all the villagers, and stop poor, simple folk from listening to you.”

Mashhadí 'Abdil followed the man to a large mosque packed with people. No sooner had they gone through the door, when Mashhadí 'Abdil's companion called to the priest and said: “I have brought you a Bábí!” Mashhadí 'Abdil wondered what kind of a response such a revelation would evoke. To his surprise, the mullá, who sat high on top of the pulpit with a huge turban on his head, started to finger his rosary and repeat: “Praised be God, praised be God, praised be God ....” This went on for so long that Mashhadí 'Abdil, losing his patience, decided to disregard the rules of etiquette and be the first to speak. “May I have the honour of knowing your name, reverend priest?” he said in Turkish, the native tongue of the villagers. The mullá paused, then gave a nervous cough and said: “My name is Mullá Úsúp.” Mashhadí 'Abdil could immediately tell from his accent and his mispronunciation of the name 'Yúsuf' that the man was one of those illiterate charlatans who sometimes came over from Persia and pretended to be a

clergyman in these far off places in order to get free board and lodging for a few months, and gather money from the simple villagers. "I am quite relieved at finding out who you are," said Mashhadí 'Abdil, and the charlatan, realizing that he could not fool the newcomer, said in his own native tongue: "For the love of God, do not give me away in front of these people." "I shall not give you away," replied Mashhadí 'Abdil, speaking in Persian too, so that none of the others could understand, "but you must promise to agree with all I say." "I promise," said the charlatan.

Mashhadí 'Abdil, addressing the mullá in Turkish this time, so that the congregation could follow their conversation, said: "I have been telling these people that the Muslims are expecting the coming of a great Teacher; am I right or wrong?" "You are right!" was the prompt reply. "I tell them that when this great Teacher appears, the Muslims themselves may be the first to denounce Him and start persecuting Him; am I right?" The turbaned head nodded several times in agreement. "I have also told them," went on Mashhadí 'Abdil, "that according to the definite prophecies recorded in the holy Scriptures of Islám, the worst enemies of the Promised One will be the Muslim clergymen; am I right or wrong?" "You are right, you are right!" proclaimed the sage from the pulpit.

Mashhadí 'Abdil, now turning to the man who had brought him to the mosque, said: "Do you see how your honoured priest agrees with all I say?" The man could only stare in open-mouthed astonishment as Mashhadí 'Abdil rose to leave the place.

## **An illiterate teacher and his learned pupil**

A group of learned divines stopped at the shop of a poor, illiterate man to nail the shoe of one of the donkeys on which they rode. These dignitaries of Islám were on their way to visit a sacred shrine which lay beyond the gates of Tíhrán, and which they were in the habit of visiting on Fridays.

But this Friday was to be different from other days, for among those who entered the blacksmith's shop was Abu'l-Faḍl, who was to become one of the greatest scholars of the Bahá'í world, and the man who attended to the donkey's shoe was the one who was

destined to rend asunder the veils of tradition which so enveloped the mind of Abu'l-Faḍl as to prevent him from investigating the new Cause.

“Is it true, O learned divine,” asked the blacksmith of Abu'l-Faḍl as he worked on the donkey's shoe, “that it is recorded in our traditions that every raindrop is brought down to earth by an angel from the sky?” “Yes,” replied Abu'l-Faḍl, “it is true.”

The blacksmith went on with his work. He picked up a nail and hammered it into place. Then he said: “I have heard that, according to our traditions, no angel ever enters a house where there is a dog. Is there indeed such a tradition?” “There is,” replied Abu'l-Faḍl. The blacksmith hammered in the last nail and said: “I presume that no raindrops ever fall in a place where there is a dog.”

Abu'l-Faḍl felt hot with shame and embarrassment as he realized that an illiterate man had had to point out to him the obvious conclusion to be derived from the two well-known traditions. As he left the shop and joined his learned companions, one of them said: “The man you were talking to is a Bábí.”

That same evening Abu'l-Faḍl began investigating the new Faith.

## **The final proof**

When Abu'l-Faḍl started to investigate the Bahá'í Faith, he had many questions to ask concerning problems which perplexed him but, being endowed with justice, he was prepared to accept the logical answers given him, even though the Bahá'ís he first came in touch with were far less learned than he was.

While still engaged in studying the Faith, Abu'l-Faḍl one day found himself discussing the new Cause in the house of a famous religious dignitary where a few other people were also present. The important clergyman, proud of his own position, attacked the Faith and tried to belittle it in the eyes of his guests, while Abu'l-Faḍl, producing the fruit of his own investigations, gave convincing answers he himself had received to similar arguments. He expressed his views with such enthusiasm and sincerity that his host thought him to be a Bahá'í.

Unable to refute the learned arguments of Abu'l-Faḍl, the religious

dignitary tried to frighten him into silence. "Listen to me, Abu'l-Faḍl!" he said in an authoritative voice. "There is one way of proving truth from falsehood and that is by producing a miracle. If you are convinced of the truth of this Cause, bring us a miracle to prove it, or else I shall myself perform a miracle to convince you of its falsehood!" "I am greatly indebted to you for what you say," Abu'l-Faḍl eagerly replied, "for you have offered to solve my difficulty. I have, in accordance with my obligation as a Muslim, started to investigate this Faith and am now finding it extremely difficult to denounce it as false though I am not completely convinced of its truth and am not, therefore, in a position to produce a miracle to prove this. It is my religious duty to continue my search until I arrive at some definite conclusion and satisfy myself of its truth or falsehood. Now you offer to put an end to my strenuous efforts by producing a miracle which will immediately prove the falsehood of this Cause! I shall indeed be indebted to you for the rest of my life."

The poor clergyman had not anticipated this turn of affairs. He got up immediately and prepared to leave the gathering. Abu'l-Faḍl caught hold of the hem of his garment and entreated him to stay. "Why are you leaving us?" he said. "Pray do not go until you have shown us the miracle!" But the religious dignitary, mumbling something to the effect that there was another man in town who could perform miracles, hurried away to take refuge in the section of the house reserved for the womenfolk.

### **Abu'l-Faḍl at home**

One of Abu'l-Faḍl's many friends and admirers has recounted the following:

"I was in Samarqand when Abu'l-Faḍl came to that town and, being eager to serve such a noble personage, I arranged to stay in the same house with him. To my dismay, I found that he would not let me do anything for him, but insisted that he, himself, should wait on me. He said: 'You must promise me two things: First, that you never try to do any work for me, and second, that you never, never touch my penknife!'

"Each morning, after having said his prayers, Abu'l-Faḍl would

light the charcoal fire, bring the samovar to boil and prepare the tea. He would then bring everything into the room and serve the breakfast, after which I would go to my office and he would sit down to write or study. I said to him: 'How can I sit idle here while you do all the work?' He smiled and said: 'I am the one who benefits by this arrangement because I get a chance to serve one of the servants of Bahá'u'lláh.'

"One day, when Abu'l-Faḍl had gone out of the room to light the samovar, I saw his penknife lying on his table. I looked at it and wondered why he had told me not to touch it. I picked it up and tried the blade which was so sharp that it immediately cut my finger. I quickly put the penknife down, wrapped my handkerchief round my bleeding finger and sat in my place.

"When Abu'l-Faḍl came in, he gave me one look and burst out laughing. 'Did I not warn you against that penknife?' he said."

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Many of Abu'l-Faḍl's friends, who were aware of the vast extent of his knowledge, were always eager to go to him with questions on various subjects. Abu'l-Faḍl graciously received such people in the afternoons but his mornings were set aside for writing and study.

At one time, when he was staying in the Holy Land, a group of Western ladies, with whom he could not communicate very well as he did not speak their language, would go to his room every morning and take up much of his time. One day, however, when the ladies knocked on his door, they received no reply. They knocked a second time, and there was still no reply. They knew that Abu'l-Faḍl was in, so they knocked again and again. At last they heard his voice from within: "Abu'l-Faḍl is not here!" he sweetly announced in English. The ladies burst out laughing, and he, too, joined in their laughter.

We do not know the end of the story, but hope that the scholar was left in peace to attend to his work in the mornings.

## **The "Bahá'í Mullá"**

The fame of Abu'l-Faḍl spread in Hamadán where he had been staying for some time. The ignorant people spoke of him as the

mullá of the Bahá'ís, and the governor of the town, hoping that he was as rich as a Muslim mullá, arrested him in the name of a Bahá'í.

The dozen men who were sent to bring Abu'l-Faḍl from his home were very disappointed to see that there was nothing they could loot in the single room occupied by this "Bahá'í mullá". All his belongings, which were a few articles of clothing and some books and papers, were gathered up and taken away with him.

Abu'l-Faḍl was imprisoned in the house of the chief constable of Hamadán. During the two weeks he was there he taught the Bahá'í Faith to his guard, who became a devoted believer, while the chief constable himself, who often listened to Abu'l-Faḍl's discourse with his guard from an adjoining room, became a great friend of the Cause and an ardent admirer of his prisoner.

After a fortnight, the chief constable reported to the governor, assuring him that Abu'l-Faḍl was quite a harmless person and, what was more important to the governor, that he did not have a penny to his name. He was therefore permitted to leave the prison on condition that he should also leave Hamadán.

The guard who was taught by Abu'l-Faḍl during his imprisonment took the new Message to the people of his own village where a strong Bahá'í community was established.

## **A unique servant**

Abu'l-Faḍl, who had dedicated his time and talents to the service of the Faith he loved so well, became extremely depressed after the passing of Bahá'u'lláh, so much so that he spent much time alone in sorrow, wondering what would now become of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh and who would guide His followers.

After some time he received a letter from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, calling upon him to rise up once more to serve the Cause of his Beloved and not to be disheartened because Bahá'u'lláh had left this earth, for He would always watch over His Faith and protect it. 'Abdu'l-Bahá explained how the Cause of God, far from weakening, grew in strength and flourished after the passing of His Messengers because the people of the world could not often recognize the Messenger of God while He was with them on

earth and it was only after He had left them that they came to see the signs of His greatness.

This letter from the Master filled Abu'l-Faḍl with fresh zeal and he came out of his retreat, never again to leave the field of service. But it was after he had gone to the Holy Land and visited 'Abdu'l-Bahá in person that he realized what a mighty stronghold Bahá'u'lláh had built to protect His Cause when He appointed His beloved Son as the Centre of His Covenant to whom all His followers should turn for guidance.

Abu'l-Faḍl lost his heart completely to 'Abdul-Bahá. After a stay of ten months in the Holy Land, he was filled with such devotion for the Master that he sang the praises of 'Abdu'l-Bahá wherever he went. He told of the Master's flowing love towards both friends and enemies. He recounted how, in the poorest quarters of Acre and the remotest corners of the prison, men and women who were deprived of all the bounties of life listened for His footsteps and derived blessing from the sunshine of His presence. He spoke of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's king-like majesty and of His great humility; of His knowledge, His patience and generosity; of His sweetness and His wonderful humour.

An American lady, who met Abu'l-Faḍl while he was in America and heard him talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, has said: "One day, after I had listened to Abu'l-Faḍl speak of the Master, I went to him and said: 'I cannot imagine anyone to be more learned, more pure and loving than yourself, yet you are always telling us of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. What must He be like who has created such admiration in your heart!' Abu'l-Faḍl looked at me and said: 'No one can befittingly describe Him. If you ever meet 'Abdu'l-Bahá, you will see that I am not fit to be His servant!' I often thought of these words until the time when the Master came to America and I had the privilege of meeting Him myself. Only then did I realize what Abu'l-Faḍl had meant."

### **The murder in 'Ishqábád**

Hájí Muḥammad-Riḍá was passing through the market place in 'Ishqábád when he was attacked by two ruffians and killed on the

spot. Over five hundred people stood by and watched him being stabbed—not once but thirty-two times!

Most of those who saw Muḥammad-Riḍá being martyred that day belonged to the Shí'ah\* population of 'Ishqábád who had plotted against the Bahá'ís for a long time, hoping that they could start persecutions here as in Persia. They had singled out Muḥammad-Riḍá, who was much loved and respected among the Bahá'ís, as their first victim.

The government of the Tsar was quick in seizing the two murderers and taking them to prison where they were to await their trial, yet so fierce was the hatred of the merchants in the market place that none of the Bahá'ís dared to go near the corpse of their fellow-believer and it lay on the road for several hours. A brave young man eventually came forward and, amid the jeers, the ridicule and curses of the people around him, lifted the body onto his own shoulders and carried it to a place of safety from where it was secretly taken away in the dead of night and buried out of town.

The Shí'ahs, in the meantime, threatened to kill twenty-four other Bahá'ís. They sent messages to Persia asking the clergy for their support and spread rumours that the Russian Government had no jurisdiction over the Muslims in 'Ishqábád as they were Persian citizens. The majority of the ignorant and fanatical people among them were stirred up by a few malicious enemies of the Cause who spread the usual false reports about the Bahá'ís and their beliefs, and made every attempt to keep ablaze the fervour of religious hatred until they had rid themselves of the Bahá'ís in 'Ishqábád.

The Bahá'ís showed extraordinary courage as they went about their business in the town, but by the second day after the martyrdom of Muḥammad-Riḍá, when a number of ruffians had armed themselves and were preparing to attack other Bahá'ís, it became evident that they should seek protection from the government. A few of them, whose lives were in immediate danger, went to see the governor. He received them with kindness and listened to their appeal. After they had explained the situation to him, the governor said: "I have been told that Ḥájí Muḥammad-

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\* A sect of Islám.

Ridá, being a Bahá'í, has cursed the Imáms of the Muslims, and the two men, unable to bear the insult, have stabbed him in their anger. Is it true that Bahá'ís have no respect for the leaders of Islám?" "We have been living among you for a number of years," the Bahá'ís replied, "and we have many Christian friends in this country. You should ask them whether they have ever heard us utter a disrespectful word about the religious leaders of Islám, for if we were to speak ill of the Imáms in front of Muslims, would we not speak more freely in the presence of Christians who do not believe in them?" They then explained that this was a trick which had been used in Persia for many years, as it was one of the easiest ways of instigating a fanatical mob against the Bahá'ís. Now that the people of Persia were getting to know that Bahá'ís respect the leaders of all religions, the enemies of the Faith were trying out this trick in 'Ishqábád.

The next day brought a change in the atmosphere of the town. The government authorities started investigations, and many of the Christians who were well aware of the cruelties being inflicted on the Bahá'ís by the Muslim population came forward to throw light on the true situation. A number of the enemies of the new Faith, afraid of the consequences, fled the town. Some of the chief instigators of the plot against the Bahá'ís were found and imprisoned, while others took refuge in Persia from where, backed by some of the clergy, they sent threatening messages to the Bahá'ís in 'Ishqábád and spread rumours of how this or that great personage was being sent from Persia to take the Bahá'ís of 'Ishqábád (mostly Persian citizens) in chains to their own country. Various measures were taken by the Muslims to frighten the Bahá'ís and force them to leave 'Ishqábád, but the Bahá'ís put their trust in God and stayed, though they did not know what was to happen to them from day to day.

At last, the preliminary investigations being finished in 'Ishqábád, the governor's report was sent to the capital and instructions arrived in due course. There was to be a military trial which meant that the decisions of the court would be final and no appeals could be made. Even the Tsar himself was not able to change the decisions of a military court. This information immediately spread throughout the town and every heart was filled with fear, as no one could tell what the outcome of this trial would be.

About one hundred and fifty people were summoned to attend the court, and the day of the trial saw a commotion the like of which was seldom seen in 'Ishqábád. The trial lasted for three days, while the atmosphere of the court grew more and more tense with each passing hour, until the feeling of suspended doom spread over the entire population of the town.

The decision of the judges had not yet been announced, when an irresponsible person left the courtroom and told a friend that the Muslim prisoners were to be set free. This information immediately spread in the market place, and the Muslims came out of their shops and houses to celebrate the occasion. They gathered in groups to welcome the prisoners, and inflicted untold suffering on the Bahá'ís they came across. But within an hour, when the true verdict of the judges was announced, their joy was turned to grief. The two murderers of Hájí Muḥammad-Riḍá had been sentenced to be hanged. The clergyman who had denounced the Bahá'ís from the pulpit and encouraged the mob to rise against them had received life imprisonment in Siberia; three of the men who had plotted against the Bahá'ís were to be imprisoned in Siberia for fifteen years; and a fourth man was sentenced to one year and four months in prison, after which he was to leave Russia. The governor residing in 'Ishqábád, however, was given the right to reduce the severity of these sentences if he so wished. Only two of those who had been arrested were found to be innocent and set free.

As soon as the court adjourned, the prisoners sent messages to their relatives entreating them to ask the Bahá'ís to intervene on their behalf and beg the governor to reduce their sentences. A delegation of the Muslims came to plead with the Bahá'ís, who generously responded and promised to do what they could.

Abu'l-Faḍl, who was in 'Ishqábád at the time, and another well-known Bahá'í, both of whom had seen the governor after the martyrdom of Hájí Muḥammad-Riḍá to ask protection for the Bahá'ís, set out to visit him once more. The governor was deeply moved when he heard that the Bahá'ís had sent them to make a plea on behalf of their oppressors. "If a Bahá'í had killed a Muslim in 'Ishqábád," he said, "would not all the Bahá'ís in Persia have been massacred by now? Yet you are prepared to forgive these murderers and ask me to reduce their punishment! Greatly though I admire

your sentiments," he added, "I can promise you nothing at present."

The next day, however, it was made known to the people of the town that the governor had shortened the terms of the imprisonments in Siberia, though he had shown no mercy towards the two who had murdered Muḥammad-Riḍá, and the day for their hanging had already been fixed.

As the appointed day approached, the murderers were brought out to erect their own gallows outside the prison and to dig a deep pit under it with their own hands. It was a pitiful sight, and many hearts were saddened at the thought of the terrible death which awaited the wretched men. The fatal day saw hundreds of curious people gathered outside the prison to watch the awful event. The gallows were surrounded by a ring of soldiers and precautions were taken to control the mob, but there were many eyes that flashed with anger and lips that muttered curses against the Bahá'ís, whom they blamed for what was about to befall the two Muslims.

A priest performed the last religious rites and the hangman had put the loops round the necks of the victims, when a voice suddenly broke through the deathlike silence which had descended on the crowd. An order had been received from the governor and was being read aloud. The people of 'Ishqábád were thereby informed that, as the Bahá'ís themselves had appealed to the governor and begged him to spare the lives of the two men who had murdered their friend and fellow-believer, the governor, having decided to honour this noble act, had changed the death sentence to fifteen years of imprisonment in Siberia.

For the first time in the history of the Bahá'í Faith, the relentless persecutors of its followers had been taken to court and had received punishment for their crimes.

## Meetings in Ṭihrán

The arrival of a pilgrim from the Holy Land\* has always been a

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\* Bahá'u'lláh was exiled to the Holy Land, where He lived to the end of His life. His remains were laid to rest near Acre. The remains of His Herald, the Báb, were buried on Mount Carmel, across the bay from Acre. 'Abdul-Bahá, Who had gone into exile with His Father, remained in the Holy Land after Bahá'u'lláh passed away.

great event for the Bahá'ís in Persia. From early morning till late at night the pilgrim is surrounded by eager friends who long to hear every single item of news and to listen to all the wonderful experiences their fellow-believer has had during his pilgrimage. Meetings are held where crowds of Bahá'ís gather from far and near to meet the blessed pilgrim who brings them tidings from the Holy Land.

This is true even today when dozens of pilgrims go back to Persia every year. One can imagine what it must have been like in the days of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá when only a few fortunate ones could have the privilege of visiting the Holy Land and carrying back with them news of the Beloved to hundreds of expectant lovers throughout Persia. But the Bahá'ís there have never been permitted by the authorities to hold meetings or even gather freely in private homes to meet with each other. In the days of Bahá'u'lláh and the Master restrictions were far more severe, and the least indiscretion on the part of the Bahá'ís brought about all forms of persecutions.

At such a time, a very distinguished teacher of the Faith, Mírzá Maḥmúd-i-Furúghí, arrived in Ṭíhrán after a long stay with 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The news of his arrival immediately spread among the believers who, in their eagerness to receive news about the Master, forgot all caution and gathered in large numbers to meet Furúghí. Every little thing he had seen or heard during his pilgrimage was of interest to his friends, but more than this, he had brought them wonderful, inspiring messages from the Master Himself. These were like the breath of life to those who heard them; it filled them with fresh zeal and courage to serve the Cause and bring happiness to the heart of their beloved Master. The gatherings grew in size; no price seemed too great to pay for the joy of hearing the messages of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

The enemies of the Cause, who were always on the alert, were now filled with rage to see the boldness with which the Bahá'ís gathered to hear a pilgrim from the Holy Land. They lost no time in bringing this to the attention of Prince Kámrán Mírzá,\* the viceroy, filling him, no doubt, with grave forebodings regarding the intentions of the Bahá'ís. Kámrán Mírzá immediately asked

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\* 'Mírzá' at the end of a name is a title given to the descendants of the Qájár dynasty.

some of his servants to seek further information about the meetings. These men managed to find out where the Bahá'ís were gathering on a certain day and followed them to a secluded garden so as to ascertain their numbers. They had no difficulty in doing this because they had merely to count the pairs of shoes which had been removed at the entrance to the meeting place. There were almost nine hundred pairs!

This news was quite sufficient to cause Kámrán Mírzá the greatest anxiety. Could the Bahá'ís be plotting against the government? Were they planning to overthrow their enemies? He decided to send for Furúghí and find out from him in person. Furúghí received the message calmly but the rest of the Bahá'ís were greatly concerned. Many of them begged him not to go, for they anticipated great danger awaiting him in the house of Kámrán Mírzá. Furúghí, however, knew no fear and set out to visit the viceroy. One of the Bahá'ís, Khammár by name, who was known for his courage and who was, moreover, famous for the wild and reckless life he had led before his recent conversion to the Faith, accompanied Furúghí and walked on in front holding the bridle of his horse.

At the gate of the viceroy's mansion, Furúghí was told that Kámrán Mírzá was very busy and could not meet him till the following day. He went back on the morrow and received the same message: the prince was busy with urgent matters and could not see him that day. Furúghí would not be put off, and one of his friends remarked:

*Hunters have always chased their prey, There's nothing strange in that, 'Tis fun to see the prey, for once, Chasing the dreaded hunter!*

Furúghí went back a third time, accompanied by the faithful Khammár. This time the prince received him, exclaiming: "What a fearless fellow you are!"

Furúghí's outward appearance in itself was enough to persuade anyone of his utter lack of fear. Clothed in the robes of a scholar, he had a pleasing countenance, and a thick black beard. His piercing eyes could flash fire at times, and his voice, if raised, could arouse fear in any heart.

Kámrán Mírzá received him with courtesy. He ordered a carpet to be spread for them in the garden and a tray of lettuce to be served with sour-sweet syrup, according to the Persian custom. Then, turning to Furúghí, he said: "Tell me, are you really a Bábí?" "I am no Bábí," was the reply, "I am a Bahá'í, so were my father and my mother." This was the introduction to a long discussion on the Faith. Once, when Kámrán Mírzá referred to Bahá'u'lláh in a disrespectful manner, Furúghí's eyes flashed with anger. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself," he told the prince, "to mention the name of the Messenger of God in this rude manner." Then, reaching out for the knife which had been brought for the lettuce, he cried: "Give me that knife so that I may cut my throat and let you drink the blood of a Bahá'í for which you are thirsting." His words had a profound effect and the prince took care not to hurt his feelings any more.

Kámrán Mírzá eventually brought up the subject of the large gathering of Bahá'ís which had come to his knowledge, and expressed his concern lest the Bahá'ís should cause disturbances in the country. "Our meetings are held to prevent mischief," Furúghí answered him, "for we have all types of people in this Faith and unless they are always reminded about the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, and their duties as peaceful and loyal citizens of the country in which they live, we cannot be sure that some misinformed individual will not become the cause of disturbance in the land. This did happen once in the early days of the Faith when a young Bábí who was ignorant of the teachings of the Báb made an attempt on the life of His Majesty the Sháh. But such behaviour has never been repeated among us for the Bahá'ís are continually reminded in our meetings that, according to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, they should be obedient to the government and respect the authorities of the land. We are doing you a great service by holding these meetings." Furúghí's words produced the desired effect. "I did not know of your intention," said Kámrán Mírzá. "Now that I am reassured, you can hold as many meetings as you like."

Furúghí rose to go and take the wonderful news to the believers. As he was walking towards the garden gate, a figure stepped out in front of him from behind a tree. It was Khammár. "What on earth were you hiding here for?" asked Furúghí in surprise. "I was not

sure what Kámrán Mírzá had in mind for you,” said Khammár, “so I was aiming at him with my pistol to be prepared in case he wished to harm you.” Then, as an after thought, he enquired: “Do you think God would have forgiven me if I had shot Kámrán Mírzá under the circumstances?” “To tell you the truth,” replied Furúghí, “I do not know, but I promise to get you the answer from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s answer was given in a very interesting way, but that in itself is another story. We will end this one by saying that the Bahá’ís, when they heard about Furúghí’s visit with Kámrán Mírzá, needed no further encouragement for their meetings. For once, at least, they could gather to hear a pilgrim from the Holy Land with the full permission of the authorities.

## The miracle

Among the people to whom the Bahá’ís of Bád-kúbih\* had spoken of the Faith, there was a man who said he had but one difficulty in accepting the Cause. He agreed with all that his Bahá’í friends told him and could not find a single fault with what they believed in. All he needed to make him a confirmed Bahá’í, he said, was to see a miracle performed before his eyes.

The Bahá’ís, of course, did not know what to do with him. No amount of reasoning seemed to do any good. “I know all you say is true,” he would tell them, “but I must see a miracle with my own eyes before my heart can be truly satisfied.”

It happened that Furúghí, the famous Bahá’í teacher, was visiting the friends of Bád-kúbih at that time, and he was told about this man. “Bring him to meet me some day,” said Furúghí, “and we shall see what can be done.” The Bahá’ís hoped that Furúghí, whose dynamic personality and powerful voice never failed to impress those who came face to face with him, would be able to make their friend listen to reason, so they arranged for someone to conduct him to Furúghí’s home.

When the two visitors arrived, they found Furúghí engaged in his daily devotions and, not wishing to disturb him, they sat down quietly while their host, unaware of their presence in the room, continued with his prayer. The sincerity with which he prayed was

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\* Persian name for Bákú.

very touching. He was the essence of humility as he prostrated himself on the floor, while tears streamed down his face as he lifted it up in adoration. Sometimes he would chant the verses in his rich, loud voice, and sometimes the words could be hardly heard as he murmured them softly to himself.

It was a long time before Furúghí finished his prayers and turned round to see his visitors. One of them he already knew; fixing his piercing eyes on the other, he said: "Are you the person who wants to see a miracle?" "No ... no, sir," stammered the man in reply. "I ... I don't want to see any miracles." "Then what is your difficulty in accepting the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh?" demanded Furúghí. "Nothing, sir," was the prompt answer. "I am quite convinced of the truth of this Faith, and consider myself a Bahá'í from this day on."

The friend who had brought this man to meet Furúghí could not believe his ears. Was not this the same man who had repeatedly expressed that nothing but a miracle performed before his own eyes could satisfy him? Was it not the same man whom all the Bahá'ís in Bádkúbih had failed to convince with every logical argument they could think of? He could hardly wait until they had left Furúghí's home and were out on the street alone. "What happened to you?" he then asked his friend. "Why did you suddenly lose all your interest in miracles?" "To tell you the truth," was the answer, "I had no doubt that the holy personage I saw could perform any miracle he chose and I did not dare displease him by asking for a demonstration .... Besides, I was so impressed by the manner in which he prayed that I could ask for no other proof concerning the truth of this Cause."

## **The challenge from the pulpit**

The people of Yazd, instigated by their fanatical priests, have shown great enmity towards the Bahá'ís, and have been responsible for the martyrdom of many believers.

One day an influential religious dignitary of this town told the congregation who had gathered to hear his sermon in the mosque that the Bahá'ís had succeeded in misleading only the most simple and ignorant people to their Faith; they never dared approach people

like himself, as they knew very well that they could not refute the arguments of the learned and would be put to shame.

The Bahá'ís in Yazd did not know what to do with this mujtahid, especially as he continued to challenge them publicly from his pulpit in the mosque. In the end, they decided to write to Tīhrán and ask for help from their fellow-believers in the capital. When Furúghí heard of this, he longed to set out for Yazd and confront the mujtahid in front of his own supporters. This was a task after his own heart, he thought, but 'Abdu'l-Bahá had already asked him to go to Khurásán, and someone else would have to be sent to Yazd.

Furúghí was on the point of leaving for Khurásán, and had already packed the saddle on his mule when a telegram was handed to him. It was from the Master, instructing Furúghí to go to Khurásán, via Yazd! He immediately wrote a letter to the Bahá'ís of Yazd telling them that he was on his way to meet the mujtahid.

One of the Bahá'ís of Yazd, who knew the governor of the town, thought it wise to inform him of the situation before Furúghí's arrival so that he might know what was going on. The governor was quite disturbed at the news and begged the Bahá'í to write to Furúghí asking him to ignore the mujtahid's challenge and keep away from such a dangerous interview. Furúghí, however, having received 'Abdu'l-Bahá's blessings on his journey to Yazd, was not going to be put off by anyone else. He wrote back a most remarkable reply to his Bahá'í friend in Yazd, parts of which ran as follows:

“It is impossible for me to forgo this meeting with the mujtahid, and I am quite prepared for the consequences. I shall neither state my knowledge of any other Bahá'í in Yazd, nor do I seek help from its governor. I shall go straight to the door of the mosque and, if anyone should ask me who I am and where I come from, I shall say that I have dropped out of the sky and have an errand to do with the mujtahid .... Should the mujtahid be prepared to listen to logical and intelligent argument, I shall reason with him, but if he wishes me to prove my Faith by other means, I shall ask him to climb with me to the top of the minaret, from where we can both drop down to see which one of us will be able to descend unharmed; or I shall have fire kindled in the middle of the town square and, taking the mujtahid by the hand, I shall lead him into the blazing conflagration to see which of us can come out untouched by the flames ....”

This letter was shown to the governor who was astonished at Furúghí's astounding faith, and greatly admired his fearless spirit. "I shall send two of my servants," he said, "to meet this man outside Yazd and conduct him safely to my own house; then we shall see what can be done about this meeting with the mujtahid."

Furúghí arrived in Yazd as the guest of the governor. After his arrival, the governor himself wrote to the mujtahid stating that, as he had publicly challenged the Bahá'ís to send someone to talk to him about their Faith, a learned and fearless Bahá'í had been sent to meet him from Īhrán with the permission of the government authorities. The governor also enclosed in his letter to the mujtahid the interesting communication which had been received from Furúghí, written on his way to Yazd. The mujtahid immediately replied to say that he was not well enough to meet Furúghí, and would be grateful if the governor himself would give him some satisfactory answer.

Furúghí stayed on in Yazd for a few days to see if the mujtahid would pluck up courage to meet him, but the religious dignitary pretended to be ill, even when the governor sent him a second message after some days. Furúghí then asked his fellow-believers to arrange a large meeting to which every Bahá'í in Yazd could bring a non-Bahá'í friend. When they were all assembled, Furúghí spoke to them about the Cause, and then told them how the mujtahid, who had repeatedly challenged the Bahá'ís from his pulpit, had now refused to see him. He asked those who were present at that gathering to inform others of the truth of the matter, so that they would not listen to the mujtahid any more, should he ever dare to repeat his challenge.

### **Furúghí's turn**

"Have you ever been beaten for the sake of the Cause?" 'Abdu'l-Bahá asked Furúghí one day. "Not yet, my Master," Furúghí replied. "You know that His Holiness the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh were both beaten," the Master told him, "and, I, too, have had my share." Furúghí knew that his turn was soon to come.

It was not long after this that, going back to Persia, Furúghí was

asked to perform a Bahá'í marriage in Ábádih, a place near Shíráz. The mullás of Ábádih immediately complained to the governor. "The Bahá'ís," they said, "have now grown so bold as to perform their marriage ceremony in accordance with new customs which are against the laws of Islám! Such insolence cannot be endured. Unless the governor makes sure that they are punished at once, we ourselves will have to see to the matter."

The governor, fearing lest great mischief be stirred up by the fanatics, sent two of his servants to bring Furúghí to his presence. A large crowd of people immediately gathered in the streets and on the rooftops, armed with sticks and stones, hoping for an excuse to attack this famous Bahá'í teacher. But as Furúghí was accompanied by the governor's servants, none dared to raise his hand against him until he happened to pass by a madrasah where religious dignitaries taught theology and Islamic law. Here, one of the divines suddenly sprang forward and, taking hold of Furúghí's beard with one hand, struck him on the head and face with the other. "What are you waiting for, you cowards?" he cried to those standing around. The crowd needed no further encouragement; they attacked Furúghí from all sides, those standing on the rooftops throwing dust and ashes on his head. But before they could do him any serious injury, he was rescued from the mob by a group of armed soldiers who conducted him to the governor.

Now it happened that while Furúghí was in Tíhrán, he had visited the Prime Minister and, having charmed him with his eloquent and impressive manner of speech, had then told him of the many enemies he was confronted with wherever he travelled in Persia. "The only thing which can save me from their hands," he had told the Prime Minister, "is a letter signed by your Highness, instructing the government officials to protect me from the machinations of my enemies in different parts of the country." The Prime Minister had given him the letter he had asked for and Furúghí now showed it to the governor of Abádih.

The governor, however, had limited powers when opposed by the clergy, so he advised Furúghí to leave the town immediately and sent two of his horsemen to accompany him to a nearby village. As they were passing the gate which led out of the town, a woman who had come to know that Furúghí would be taken that way threw

a heap of ashes on him from overhead. Although she did not know it, this woman saved his life by what she did, for the ashes blinded the eyes of two fanatical mullás who were waiting behind the gate to shoot Furúghí as he passed by. These two men later visited Furúghí in the village and, after long discussions, were both impressed with Furúghí's arguments and gradually became convinced of the truth of the Cause.

The beating which Furúghí received at the hands of the mob in Ábádih was but the beginning of many other hardships he was to endure for the sake of the Cause. But he bore them all with great courage, and delighted in the fact that he, too, was at last called upon to suffer calamities in the path of his Beloved. Once, when he was badly wounded by a couple of young men who were sent to shoot him in his room, his friends found him covered with blood, but extremely happy and chanting the words of Bahá'u'lláh: "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!"

## The magician

Furúghí seemed to be leading a charmed life. Despite the many dangers he had been through, and the various attempts made on his life, he was still going about teaching the Faith after forty years.

Quite a few people had been bribed to kill this famous Bahá'í at one time or another, but he had somehow managed to escape them on every occasion. Once, when he was staying at his native village, a seditious mujtahid succeeded in exciting his whole congregation against Furúghí. News had been brought of how a Bahá'í had been killed in another place, and the mujtahid, climbing onto the pulpit and throwing down his turban as a sign of indignation, cried out to the assembled villagers: "Is there no manhood to be found in this place? Have you not heard how those valiant defenders of Islám have torn the accursed Bábí to pieces? Where is your courage? Where is your zeal for your religion? How long are you going to

tolerate these infidels in your midst? How long will you cowards sit back and watch that dog of a Bábí misleading people in your own village?" He went on and on until he obtained the desired result and his congregation swore they would tear Furúghí apart, limb from limb.

As the howling, bloodthirsty mob rushed towards Furúghí's house like an angry flood let suddenly loose, people swore he was doomed to die this time. Providence, however, had decreed otherwise, and before the savage crowd could reach its destination, another mujtahid, just as influential as the first, appeared on the scene. "Do you realize what you are doing, foolish people?" he shouted. "This man you have come to kill is no ordinary Bábí. He has many friends among the high officials of the country, and even the Prime Minister himself is ready to support him. If anything should happen to him, not one of you will be able to escape with your life!" The immediate danger facing them in this world seemed more real to the disappointed crowd than the delights of paradise promised by the first mujtahid if they succeeded in killing the Bábí, so they reluctantly dispersed to their homes, and left Furúghí to go about unmolested.

On another occasion, Furúghí's desperate enemies decided to enlist the help of a notorious gangster named Siyyid Ḥasan who was the leader of a group of criminals and was feared by all in the neighbourhood. "God will forgive every sin you have committed in your lifetime," they assured Siyyid Ḥasan, "if you will undertake the meritorious act of killing this Bábí teacher." Siyyid Ḥasan, determined to win the pleasures of the next world as well as this, set about to do some careful planning. When everything was ready, he sent one of his men to fetch Furúghí from his home after sunset and bring him to a place outside the village.

Furúghí himself opened the door. "Come out at once!" the man ordered him. "Siyyid Ḥasan has sent for you." Furúghí knew what this meant, but without raising any objection asked: "Could you please wait a minute while I fetch my cloak and walking stick?" "Of course not!" the man rudely replied. "Come immediately as you are." He had hardly finished his sentence when a great noise and commotion started in the street. Two of Siyyid Ḥasan's other men, who had just arrived on horseback to join their friend, were

being thrown off their seats by their horses which seemed to have suddenly gone wild. The animals neighed excitedly, kicked and reared in a most frightful manner, and their riders had great difficulty in landing on the ground unharmed. The men were utterly baffled by what had happened, as the horses had always been very tame and there was nothing to be seen in the street which could possibly throw them into such a state.

In the meantime, Furúghí, having quietly put on his cloak and taken his walking stick, was standing at the door, ready to leave. Seeing him, the men were suddenly full of apprehension. "You can work magic!" they cried. "What did you do to our horses to make them go wild? We have never known them to behave like this before."

Furúghí, when given the chance, could always charm his hearers and these men who had come to take him to his doom were no exceptions. Having now subdued their horses, they rode on in front to warn their leader about Furúghí's unknown powers, while the victim followed at some distance. By the time he had reached the rendezvous, his would-be murderer was feeling the effects of a very exaggerated account of the kind of magic the famous Bábí was capable of performing. Siyyid Ḥasan was in no hurry to harm him, and Furúghí had ample time to talk to, and win over, the feared gangster.

Calling one of his men to him, Siyyid Ḥasan said: "I want you to escort this respectable gentleman back to his house where his family may be anxious about his safety." "Thank you," said Furúghí, and wisely added: "but it is really not necessary for me to trouble anyone here to take me home. I am quite sure I shall be able to find my way alone."

## Two princes

Prince Ḥusayn-Qulí Mírzá, the great-grandson of Fath-‘Alí Sháh of Persia, accepted the Bahá'í Cause in his youth and became one of its staunch supporters for the rest of his life. He was a man of noble character, extremely courteous and gentle in his manner, with a touching humility which was felt by rich and poor alike. He was loved by all; people used to say that they could find no fault in the

prince except that he was a Bahá'í. There were many, too, who were attracted to the Faith by the life he led and because of the love and respect they had for him.

His house was open to all people, and whenever Bahá'í meetings were held there, a great number of non-Bahá'ís would always attend. On one such occasion, when every seat in the room was occupied and there was no more space to sit on the carpet, a new guest arrived. The prince, who was himself standing, immediately took off his valuable cloak and spread it on the floor for the newcomer to sit on. This gesture of his so impressed the man that he was led to investigate the Cause, and became a believer.

One day one of the Bahá'ís who had urgent work to attend to asked the prince if he would see that a load of hay was taken for his stable. The prince himself accompanied the man who was to take the hay and, having arrived at the house of his friend, found that the load had to be carried up a steep flight of steps to be placed in the loft. The man who had brought the hay refused to take it up all those steps. The prince calmly asked him to put the load on his own back and carried it up himself. It happened that the lady of the house, who had never had any sympathy for the Cause or the Bahá'ís, was watching the incident from behind a curtain. She was so overwhelmed by what the prince did that her whole attitude changed and she later came to embrace the Cause.

Of the many people who became interested in the Faith through the admirable qualities of the prince, was a man who had been a notorious thief and earned his living by waylaying people on the highways. After having embraced the Cause, this man one day happened to recognize among the Bahá'ís at a meeting one of those people whom he had once robbed of all his belongings. With tears in his eyes, he went forward to kneel at the feet of the one whom he had wronged and, having first introduced himself, asked his forgiveness and begged him to accept a small sum of money which was all he owned at the time. His fellow-believer embraced him lovingly and refused the money, assuring him that he was willing to forget the whole incident.

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The son of prince Ḥusayn-Qulí Mírzá, Mihdí-Qulí Mírzá, was also a wonderful Bahá'í. He went through severe tests and diffi-

culties during his lifetime, but his spirit was never broken and nothing could shake his great faith in the Cause.

One day he was brought the terrible news that his lovely young daughter, who had been married only a few months before, had suddenly died in the clinic of a Jewish lady doctor. Mihdí-Qulí Mírzá, hurrying to the place, found that the doctor had been careless in giving an injection, and that his daughter had died within a few minutes.

The news of this tragedy spread very swiftly through the town, and a great crowd of people gathered round the clinic shouting for revenge because a Jewish doctor had killed a Muslim woman. Mihdí-Qulí Mírzá hurriedly climbed onto the terrace and called aloud for all to listen.

As soon as the people in the street had stopped their cries, he told them that they need not think of revenge as the young woman who had died was his daughter, and he knew for sure that she was not a Muslim; that the deceased herself, her father, her mother and her husband were all Bahá'ís. There was no further excuse left for the crowd to harass the doctor, so they gradually dispersed.

The doctor herself, however, offered to pay the prince a large sum of money, but he shook his head. "Keep the money," he said, "I have forgiven you your mistake."

Later on certain government officials, threatening to punish the Jewish doctor, found ample excuse for extracting money from her. When the prince heard of this, he gave her a signed statement in which he mentioned that, as a follower of the Bahá'í Faith, he did not believe in revenge; he had forgiven her the mistake she had made and bore her no grudge; he did not wish the matter to be pursued any further.

This document was signed and sealed by the prince himself, his wife and his son-in-law. No one who read it could find an excuse for persecuting the doctor any more.

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## Names of the main characters in the book

'Abdu'l-Kháliq (son of Mullá 'Abdu'l-Qaní)  
Abu'l-Faḍl-i-Gulpáygání  
'Andalíb, Mírzá 'Alí-Ashraf  
Furúghí, Mírzá Maḥmúd  
Áqá Kamál  
Ḥabíbu'lláh (son of Síná)  
Ḥájí Mihdíy-i-Arjumand-i-Hamadání  
Ḥájí Muḥammad-Riḍáy-i-Iṣfahání  
Ḥakím Áqá Ján-i-Hamadání  
Ḥusayn-Qulí Mírzáy-i-Mawzún  
Ishrác, Áqá 'Abdu'l-Karím  
Málmírí, Ḥájí Muḥammad-Ṭáhir  
Mashhadí 'Abdil-i-Qarabághí  
Mihdí-Qulí Mírzáy-i-Mawzún  
Mírzá Ḥusayn-i-Zanjání  
Mullá 'Abdu'l-Qaníy-i-Ardikání  
Mullá Bahrám-i-Akhtar-Khávarí  
Mullá Riḍáy-i-Muḥammad-Ábádíy-i-Yazdí  
Na'ím, Áqá Muḥammad  
Nayyir, Siyyid Maḥmúd  
Rúḥu'lláh-i-Varqá  
Síná, Ḥájí Siyyid Ismá'íl  
Siyyid Asadu'lláh-i-Qumí  
Siyyid Muḥammad-i-'Alá'í, Názimu'l-Ḥukamá (father of the Hand of the Cause of God, General Shu'á'u'lláh 'Alá'í)  
Ṭayyibih and Jamál (children of Mírzá Ḥusayn)  
Varqá, Mírzá 'Alí-Muḥammad (father of the Hand of the Cause of God, Mr. Valiyu'lláh Varqá)  
Vujdání, Mírzá Yúsuf-Khán-i-Thábit