A Visit to Persia

by Guy Murchie

[The following notes are from the diary of Guy Murchie taken on his journey in Irán in 1964, made with the special permission of the Universal House of Justice. They were published in *Bahá'í News* in March, April, June, September 1965, and January, April, May 1966.]

Springtime in Shíráz

March 21, 1964

The history proper of the Bahá'í Faith began on the evening of May 22, 1844, in Shíráz in southern Persia (now called Irán) when the inspired seeker, Mullá Husayn, met and accepted the Báb. So it is appropriate to begin a visit to Persia in the garden city of Shíráz in spring and precisely at the site of the southern or Kaziran Gate where the two actually saw each other for the first time at sundown on that fateful day.

An old caravanserai or inn still stands near the historic spot with its ample courtyard surrounded by vaulted rooms, and near by are several big plane trees (some six feet in diameter) which must have cast their shade on resting caravans at that time. Mullá Husayn, it seems, had walked in the last few miles from Búshihr on a dirt road through grassland with a few scattered trees since cut down, probably wild almonds, olives, ash, poplars and willows, with here and there flat-roofed mud huts some of which are still standing. The Kaziran Gate, one of six gates of the old city, is no longer there, but merchants and peddlers are still selling vegetables, fruits, clothing and pottery on wooden stands at the base of the big planes probably about as they did in the Báb's time…

Next we saw in the southern (now Jewish) quarter of Shíráz, the small mosque called Masjid-i-Ilkhani where Mullá Husayn met with the future Letters of the Living and told them to disperse and find the Báb, Whom he had already found. This we reached through many narrow alleys with overhanging roofs of sheet metal, which I was told were quite old as the metal came from Russia in the time of the Báb. Some houses were propped against others across the alley at the second story level. A public bath stood near by where Mullá Husayn used to bathe with his followers in a tiled pool about six feet square and three feet deep. The mosque is built of brick with vaulted roof, has wooden doors arched at the top, and is now virtually empty of furnishings. . . .

We visited the Báb's own house in the afternoon, reaching it through a series of narrow alleys and finally a tunnel, a common sort of passage in olden times for reasons of secrecy and defense and still helpful for the same reason today. Two Afnán brothers, great-grandsons of the Báb's brother, live there and are custodians, dwelling and receiving pilgrims in adjoining quarters purchased for the

purpose. They are very gracious, quiet and hospitable. After tea we were shown the holy house. First the little patio, perhaps just over twenty feet square, with a small square pool in the center filled through a pipe from a forty-foot well in one corner with revolving drum to take the bucket rope. By the well is a block of stone on which the Báb used to sit and a tall orange tree which He Himself planted. The house and lower quarters (for the Báb's wife, mother, servants, etc.) have a checkered tile design on their walls, mostly blue and white. Doors are of carved wood. The living room (or, as Persians say, guest room for receiving visitors) is upstairs. This is where the Báb took Mullá Husayn on the fateful night of May 22, 1844, to announce His Cause. The stairs consist of nine steep steps, then one more above the upper landing. Before entering the room which is about twelve feet square, we knelt and touched our foreheads to the threshold, one by one, then silently entered, having left our shoes outside the patio below. Prayers appropriate to the occasion were chanted. The wall design (white on blue) carved in the plaster just above where the Báb had sat in the northwest corner of the room beside the window showed the ancient traditional Persian design of a lion attacking a bull. The next day in Persepolis, not far from Shíráz, we were to see the same design carved in several places on the ancient palace walls, for it is said to be symbolic of the power of regal or divine authority over mere brute strength. Although enemies of the Cause demolished much of the woodwork and some masonry in this house in mob action in 1957, it has been restored with great care and accuracy. Five wooden windows face west out of the holy upper room toward the setting sun, and we walked out upon the flat mud roof overlooking and partly surrounding the patio. The roof contains straw to bind the mud, and salt to prevent grass growing. Wooden rafters let it overhang the courtyard. We could see the purplish gray mountains to the north and a crow's nest in a tall plane tree about thirty feet to the south in a neighboring patio. Swallows flitted overhead and hooded crows cawed near by. The latter have gray bodies with black heads, wings and tails. White-cheeked nightingales are common here too, both wild and as pets in cages. A young pear tree is growing in the adjoining courtyard to the north, now owned by Bahá’ís but half demolished. A few cracks in the Báb's house dated from the earthquake that destroyed many buildings in Shíráz in 1850 shortly after His martyrdom. We picked a few leaves from the thorny orange boughs as we talked of the Báb and Mullá Husayn.

The Báb’s Shop in Búshihr

March 23

At 6 a.m. a group of five of us set off in a Land Rover for Búshihr on the Persian Gulf about 150 miles west of Shíráz to see the shop of the Báb who, being a merchant, had used it in His business of transporting tea, spices and other goods imported from India and more distant places. We roared and bounced over the very rough gravel road, winding over high mountain passes, fording rivers and stopping briefly at an oasis for breakfast where, in a small caravanserai, an old man squatted smoking his bubble pipe and warming himself over a tin brazier. Passing an occasional camel caravan, at about 9 o'clock we got to Kaziran which used to be well known as a lion hunting center — even as recently as the Báb's day, though the number of lions left was small by then — and the area still has plenty of leopards, wild boar, deer, antelope, wolves, foxes, jackals, wild goats,

rabbits, quail, pheasants, and other game.

When we arrived in Búshihr at noon it was hot on the arid, treeless flatland and when we made our way through the low city (no building more than two stories high) strewn along the shore, it was refreshing to view the green gulf with its big breakers rolling in over the undredged shoals. The Báb's shop is in an alley one block away from the sea, the main doors through which caravans would pass being of wood with lions and other figures carved in them. The buildings themselves, warehouses etc. are made of stone plastered with mud as is common all over Persia. We walked into the courtyard and washed the dust off our hands and faces while children and a cat played around us. Red bougainvillea and jasmine grew out of the small flower bed next the salt water well attended by a pitcher boy who poured directly on our soapy hands according to custom. Salt water is only seven or eight feet deep here which discourages the digging of cellars, a serious drawback in such a hot climate. Drinking water comes by collecting rain from' the flat roofs which is piped into cisterns.

Before inspecting the office, we repaired upstairs to the relatively new quarters built for the custodian and for receiving pilgrims and there, on magnificent Persian rugs, sat cross-legged on the floor for lunch. First we had tea in tiny glasses and cookies, then delicious hazel nuts, almonds and pistachios, followed by rice with raisins, fried shrimp, egg cakes, paper-thin "bread," fried potatoes, sweet jelly and soft drinks in original bottles, all served on a patterned blue oil cloth laid flat on the rug.

Although a slight sea breeze kept us reasonably cool, one could easily imagine the intense heat of summer here where shops then traditionally close at ten o'clock in the morning not to reopen until about five and office workers often sit waist-deep in barrels of salt water which, they say, was the custom in the Báb's office also, the indoor temperature sometimes reaching 115° F. Out in the blazing sun of course it was much hotter but the Báb Himself regularly on Fridays went out upon His roof to chant His noon prayers at considerable length. He sometimes remained at Búshihr a month or more, requiring from a week to 10 days to travel to or from Shíráz with His goods. Finishing our meal with fruit, someone spoke of the Báb's fondness for tangerines and a kind of sweet grapefruit that the Persians call "sweet lime." His Ethiopian servant Mobarak carried a large basket of them on to the ship when the Báb sailed out of here for Mecca in 1844, there being no fresh water on the vessel.

After some more tea and a few prayers, we made our pilgrimage downstairs to the Báb's personal office, a rather dark little room about thirteen by eleven feet in area and perhaps twelve feet high. Three wooden grilled windows, which can be slid up out of the way, shielded the room from the semi-public passageway between the yard and the street. Oil lamps were on the table and one could almost see the young Báb sitting there working on His accounts, a barrel of salt water perhaps standing in one corner.

Before leaving Búshihr we walked along the quayside where a number of wooden ships were moored or docked, most of them about seventy-five feet long built with spiked planking, single masts, no gaffs, canvas sails, engines (probably diesel), long upsweeping bows and tiller chains running aft to T-shaped rudder posts — likely similar to the ship the Báb embarked on, although that

may well have been larger. At Borázján (some forty miles inland) where we spent the night we went to see the famous ash tree under which the Báb was resting when He saw the mounted guardsmen of the governor of Shíráz passing by on their way to Búshihr to arrest Him after His return from Mecca, whereupon He immediately offered Himself as a willing prisoner. The old tree was cut down several years ago but new shoots from its stump have already grown into a clump of trees some thirty feet high. The story goes that the old man owning this land told his sons and heirs before he died that it was his will for them never to cut down this holy tree under which such a "famous siyyid" had rested, but later one of them heedlessly chopped it down, only to die himself the very next day. Returning to Shíráz we zigzagged our way up over the "Old Woman Pass," reportedly almost 10,000 feet high, over which the Báb walked barefoot as a prisoner, having refused to ride the stolen horses respectfully offered Him by the governor's men. The narrow stone-paved road built by Shah Abbas the Great some 300 years ago, skirting the newer gravel road, is plainly visible still, and we stopped to pick wild forget-me-nots appropriately growing there amid dark red poppies, yellow asters, chamomiles and wild grape hyacinths, while numerous scraggly wild almond trees covered the lower mountainsides, probably having provided welcome sustenance to the illustrious Prisoner and His escort as they are still offering to wayfarers today.

Birthplace of Bahá'u'lláh

April 2

Bahá'u'lláh's House in Tihrán was built about a decade before His birth in what was then the fashionable northeastern section of the city. Invited to visit it, I was first cautioned to speak no English as we walked through the streets and to keep my camera concealed because of the many and dangerous enemies of the Cause in the area who, if they realized it were a place of pilgrimage venerated by Bahá'ís, would likely attack and demolish it as they have so recently done to the Báb's house and others.

Leaving a broad street we made our way for three or four hundred yards through circuitous alleys where boys were playing ball, finally entering an ordinary-looking door which opened into a large courtyard. There we were greeted by the unpretentious custodian and his family who conducted us without delay to the holy Home, which was actually built by Mírzá Buzurg, Bahá'u'lláh's father, as the first of seven houses in a family compound. This walled enclosure of several acres, typical among the oriental nobility, included when completed a central kitchen building where meals for all the homes were prepared before being carried to their destinations by the ubiquitous servants. The courtyard of Bahá'u'lláh's house is about sixty feet long by fifty wide with a small grape arbor, rose bushes and many small fruit trees such as apple, pear and pomegranate, and flanked in some places by colonades of thin spiral columns. Walls are mostly of buff-colored brick with red windows rounded at the top, arched doorways, circular decorations here and there, and blue tile latticework at ground level to ventilate the basement rooms and keep them cool in summer. Several bedrooms upstairs open upon flat roof areas while still higher rise special towers serving as the upper vents of

the basement circulation system.

We soon climbed up the very steep three brick steps that led to the main parlor or receiving room, the steps being comparable in height and steepness to those of a railroad coach when you mount from the level of the rails, the accepted thing in the old days and presumably requiring a strong helping hand or boost for ladies and children. Touching our foreheads to the threshold, we entered the large parlor without shoes, stepping silently upon the exquisite pale carpets that covered the floor from wall to wall, some thirty feet one way and twenty feet the other. This was the room Bahá'u'lláh was actually born in, appropriately just before sunrise on the morning of November 12, 1817. It was traditional to use the best parlor for such an important event as a birth. The most conspicuous feature of the room is the south wall facing the courtyard with its three great windows with fairly large panes of glass between wooden muntins, most of the panes transparent but a few colored bright red, blue, yellow and green. Since the house was ransacked in 1852 at the time Bahá'u'lláh was put into the dungeon of Síyyáh-Chál, and remained in Muslim hands for some half a century, the present windows are only copies of the originals. Other features in the room, appear of high standard, the general style giving prominence to the Romanesque arch with not only the windows rounded at the top but the pale blue plastered walls lined with niches, each rounded at the top and ending at the bottom in a shelf or mantel about three feet from the floor. There is also a small fireplace about fourteen inches wide and two feet high in the middle of the north wall, a mantelpiece above its arched top also. The theme of round-topped niches continues throughout the mansion apparently, for all the basement rooms have it, including the luxurious bath suite.

We found the basement rooms pleasantly cool with their vertical ventilating shafts and vaulted brick ceilings of a pinkish but varicolored hue, and I noticed that the main room directly below the birth chamber has nine niches arrayed along its north side. In the west basement is a small kitchen with a chimney above the arched stove niche, evidently used before the central kitchen building was built or perhaps for minor meals. The bath suite of three rooms was especially interesting. At the bottom of the steep flight of stairs extending about eight feet below ground, we came first to a sort of dressing room, roughly octagonal with a central footbath of blue tile (also approximately octagonal) about two feet deep, then farther on, a bigger washing room likewise more or less octagonal but with alcoves that have attractive floral tracery in the tiled lower levels of their niches and, last of all, a short flight of steep steps leading up into a smaller pool room kept four or five feet deep in hot water and, if desired, filled with steam. The steps all around the pool could accommodate children of various ages and no doubt Bahá'u'lláh played there with His brothers when they were growing up.

This mansion was unusual, having been designed for Bahá'u'lláh's father as one of the Sháh's important ministers whose specific assignment was to advise and look after the Shah's eldest son, a young prince who then had the title of governor of the province of Luristán. As Bahá'u'lláh grew to manhood, the house was more and more used for guests who were particularly attracted by its provisions for escaping summer heat, not only in the vaulted basements by day but while sleeping upon its extensive roofs by night, usually beneath specially-made mosquito net canopies, these insects being plentiful in Tihrán throughout most of the year. After His father died when Bahá'u'lláh

was twenty-two, He grew accustomed to spending more of His time at His various country houses to the north, usually leaving the Tihrán house entirely in the hands of guests.

The Black Pit

April 3

This morning we drove to the Shah's old summer palace high up toward the foothills of the Elburz Mountains and saw the approximate place where Bahá'u'lláh was arrested in August 1852, stripped of His outer clothing and driven barefooted and bareheaded before an abusive mob all the many miles down to the dungeon to be imprisoned in heavy chains for four months. We drove over the same road He trod in His bare feet. It was probably a dirt road then but is now asphalted. Along both sides remain many old trees that were there on that terrible day and younger ones that have grown up since. Most of them are ash, I believe, with occasional planes and mulberry trees among them.

There is not much to see of the dungeon of Síyyáh-Chál, which means Black Pit, because it is underground and inaccessible because of the large modern buildings now being erected around it, but from the third story of one of these a few rubble-strewn ruins and portions of brick wall could be glimpsed behind a row of poplars. These ruins, however, are undoubtedly the remains of a domed building constructed above the Síyyáh-Chál after Bahá'u'lláh was there and which collapsed relatively recently. The actual dungeon is entirely underground, having originally been built as a water reservoir for one of the city's public baths, then later adapted as a place for confining the most dangerous criminals and enemies of the state. It is described as about eighteen feet deep, watertight and undrainable, with no opening but a small aperture at the top of three nights of very steep stairs. It was almost pitch dark and reeked with the foul stench from nearly 150 prisoners kept there under heavy chains and their legs in stocks without any provisions for sanitation. There was no structure above ground at that time but an open "prison yard" to which the prisoners were hauled up each day at the time of the noon prayer for a little air and exercise — presumably so they wouldn't just rot away in the pestilential vermin-infested hole and thus spoil the program of torturing and killing them. The Sháh evidently took some personal interest in their treatment for his city palace and its ample gardens adjoin the Síyyáh-Chál on its north side and stand there today as a public museum with glittering hallways of millions of tiny mirrors and elaborate exhibits of royal gifts from the crowned heads of Europe and Asia. It is said that in 1852 the Sháh in his bed at night must have actually heard the prayers chanted by Bahá'u'lláh and His many fellow Bábís who were exultantly awaiting martyrdom just beyond his garden wall.

Leaving the Síyyáh-Chál, we visited a near by large circular public square where many Bábís were beheaded during that same period of persecution, there having been a raised brick platform there at the time so the large blood-thirsty crowds could see every detail without obstruction. We also saw the garden where Táhirih was martyred, apparently some half a mile northwest of the Síyyáh-Chál. The area belonged then to the "chief of the nomads" in the Tihrán region who, I

understand, lived in a comfortable house near by. The garden probably contained many large pine trees, ashes, elms, etc. for tall and beautiful old pines still stand there and many other trees, though now the city is closing in. A "modern" hospital is already there and tennis courts and a swimming pool. Yet birds continue to enjoy the garden and I noticed wagtails, hooded crows and sparrows. The well where Táhirih was buried is now unmarked and unknown but, I'm told, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reasonably predicted it would be discovered in time and made into an appropriate and beautiful shrine.

Visit to Fort Tabarsi

April 6

Mazindaran is Persia's central northern province that spreads along the southern shores of the Caspian Sea. Hidden some 17 miles from the coast in its lush lowlands lies Fort Tabarsi where the greatest of several holy battles was fought in early Babi history. So it was with eager anticipation that I set out this sunny morning with five companions (interpreter, guides, etc.) to visit this sacred spot that is still so inaccessible to most westerners.

We drove in a jeep from the town of Shahi (called Aliabad a century ago) and, after half an hour on a wrong road, we crossed the new highway bridge over the Talar River, where in 1848 Mulla Husayn made his Babi followers abandon their precious belongings in order to purify them from the taint of earthly possessions. At that time the river is said to have been in flood and the country was partly wooded round about, but today we found the water fairly low and surrounding country flat with many rice fields where farmers were plowing with black humped Brahmin oxen and the occasional villages showed houses with thatched roofs clustered behind hedges af woven wattle, sometimes covered with brambles that may have been blackberry.

Shortly west of the river we turned south off the highway onto a dirt road with ruts and mud holes on a sort of causeway between the paddy fields, stopping to ask the way of farmers and in villages where chickens and ducks scattered before us and children and adults stopped to stare. In the second village the ruts got so bad the jeep was hopelessly stuck, so we got out and walked the remaining couple of miles. The interpreter's wife, who was with us, put on a *chadur* (shawl) for the sake of modesty in the eyes of the country people, particularly as the fort is not owned by Baha'is yet and many Muslims are very sensitive on such matters.

It was getting quite hot as we picked our way slowly ahead, sometimes through deep mud, once across a plowed field with here and there a large walnut tree, then back to the road with its mud walls and hedges. Birds flew by frequently and we heard one sing sweetly but unseen from a densely-leaved tree a phrase that sounded like "Swink-swee-na-na! Swee-na!" Further on we came to a dead, dark brown snake several feet long, which the guides referred to as a *korkori.* Nearby two men were building a hut near a rice field by tying together a framework of sticks stuck in the ground, presumably in preparation for plastering it with mud and thatching the roof. A young mother in white *chadur* and flowery pants passed us with her 3-year-old daughter wearing a red bandana and gold earrings and a necklace of beautiful agate-like stones, both of them barefoot. Then came a shepherd

boy with a long stick and more than a hundred black and white sheep. Our conversation ran mostly to simple Biblical-type anecdotes.

Just after a very tame magpie had hopped out of our way into a clump of nettles, we rounded a corner of the road and at last we saw it. There was Fort Tabarsi, a third of a mile away and, unexpectedly, on the far side of what seemed to be a small lake, actually a 2-acre reservoir created by a long mud dam for summer irrigation. The fort appeared as a low white building among tall trees on the plain just north of foothills leading gradually up to the snowy Elburz mountains visible in the haze to the south. On a clear day these peaks viewed from Fort Tabarsi, which is probably below sea level, must be very impressive as they reach more than 3000 feet higher than the highest Alps. Frogs croaked loudly in the pond and a heron circled gracefully overhead, finally alighting on a distant grassy bank. Several horses grazed in a nearby field as we skirted the water. We were thirsty from the midday heat, despite having drunk some dubious well water at a farm along the way, so when we arrived at the fort we were thankful for the chance to refresh ourselves with the clear, cool, holy water from the 50-foot well dug there by Mulla Husayn's men. Meantime one of our guides spoke with the Muslim family living in a small house near the fort, presumably as caretakers. An old woman, apparently rather apprehensive toward us, was eventually cajoled into consenting to our pilgrimage — perhaps in hopes of earning a little money by it — and we were invited to visit the fort.

We walked through the east gate house which, before the famous siege, was one of two entrances through an encircling mud wall, most of which has been replaced with a feeble wickerwork fence. There under several huge trees (which I could not identify without their leaves) and many small pomegranate and fruit trees, some weirdly pollarded, stood the fort with its plastered white walls and reddish tiled roof about 50 feet long by 25 feet wide. A few children stood around among grazing sheep, mallard ducks and bantam chickens. We entered the recessed porch at the east end facing us, then, removing our shoes, went into the first of two inside rooms, each of which is about 20 feet square. This is of white plaster covered with faded banners on the west wall and indented with niches surmounted with pointed arches. Through a door we next entered the west room which contains the 700-year-old tomb of the famed Muslim saint, Shaykh Tabarsi, the presence of which is said to have caused this building to be chosen for their last stand by the three hundred-odd Babis under attack by several regiments of the Shah's best troops, the site being thus assured immunity from desecration after their martyrdoms. Mulla Husayn also is buried in this room, since Quddus, who survived him and who alone slept in this room during the siege, determined to keep his body safely hidden from the steadily approaching enemies. But the only visible object in the room is the dominating tomb of the shaykh, surrounded by a sort of cage of open woodwork about 12 feet long, 8 feet wide and 6^ feet high. The floor is of ancient turquoise tile and there are two niches in each of the plastered white walls. The ceiling is of wood, temporarily replacing the pyramid-shaped upper ramparts said to have been built by the Babis for the siege and which the Baha'is hope some day to restore. Meantime the shaykh's body holds the fort safe from destruction. After we had chanted the Tablet of Visitation for Mulla Husayn and said a prayer in English, we were asked to leave the fort. So we put our shoes hack on and trooped over to the Muslim house where we were ushered into its single, small room. The floor was covered with coarse brownish rugs and around the bottom of the walls were colorful bed

quilt rolls surmounted by huge red cushions, against which two old barefooted women and a grown-up boy sat on the floor and poured us tea from a brass samovar fueled with glowing charcoal. As the nine of us sipped our tea, an old woman handed me a piece of iron cannon ball which she indicated had been dug up beside the fort. Although at first I thought she might have hi' tended this as a gift, she soon intimated to one of the guides that she would like to be paid for it, and he handed her a few coins which she gratefully accepted. Since the siege lasted eleven months, probably there are enough cannon ball fragments about to keep the family in pocket money for many years. At any rate, my piece of ball shows that the Shah's artillery used cannon balls about 5% inches in diameter and hollow, the casing being about three quarters of an inch thick. While Quddus and Mulla Husayn had quarters in the fort itself, their Babi soldiers dug themselves in outside, by the end of the siege being well protected, it is said, by a moat about 10 feet deep and 10 feet wide outside the walls and several deep dugout chambers within. They even built themselves a sizeable pool for bathing about 50 yards north of the fort. The Muslim artillery were firing from a small hill perhaps 100 feet high and half a mile or so to the south. One of the large smooth-barked trees (perhaps a live oak) north of the fort still has a "cannon ball hole" in its split trunk.

The captain of the Babi defenders after the death of Mulla Husayn was Muhammad Harati, under the overall leadership of Quddus, and he led forays to the hill where the tents of the Shah's troops could be seen, and captured cannon and ammunition, giving the Babis artillery of their own. The Babi soldiers were mostly laymen and commoners who wore the traditional baggy pants and coats and felt caps of the period, but a fair number were *mullas* (corresponding to priests) wearing robes and turbans. This costume would have been a serious disadvantage in fighting but, following Mulla Husayn's example, they would roll up their sleeves and tuck their skirts up into their sashes, revealing long, loose dark-colored pants underneath. Thus attired, they could not only ride their horses easily but felt themselves at no disadvantage on the ground. In fact their spiritual elation made them so fearless and invincible that they were victorious in every military action they undertook without exception, even when outnumbered a hundred to one. Their final capture and martyrdom was actually their greatest victory of all, this time not a military but a spiritual one, since the enemy had been able to attain his end only by descending to the vilest treachery.

Before leaving the fort, I noted that one of the commonest flowers growing here seemed to be the appropriate forget-me-not, while not far away stood something like a blue wild chrysanthemum, a scarlet pimpernel and a sort of yellow aster the guides called "tetikokh" (probably *Senecio vulgaris).* Birds included the gray hooded crow, goldfinch, sparrow, raven and several hawks. The hoopoe, reputed to have carried notes from Sheba to Solomon, is also common here, we were told, and I heard what sounded like a quail's whistle across the fields. Among wild mammals inhabiting the area, according to my guides, are porcupines, jackals, wolves, wild boar which bother farmers by eating their rice and wheat and, in the foothill forests, tigers!

March 25

The Journey to Nayriz

We set out this morning at 6 a.m. to visit Nayriz, some 100 miles southeast of Shiraz, site of the greatest siege in the early Baha'i history of southern Persia, which occurred in 1850. As we bounced over the rough gravel road eastward into the rising sun, we soon reached Lake Maharloo, a salt sea about twenty miles long, around which melons are grown not much differently than they were in the Bab's day. Outcrops of chrome ore were visible in the nearby mountains and, I was told, several chrome mines are in operation in the area. The only trees were in fruit orchards such as reddish pomegranate groves near the lake and neat rows of fig trees along the lower slopes of the foothills. Wild mustard in bloom made an occasional patch of yellow, while larks and wagtails ran across the road amid faint clouds of dust hanging on the still morning air.

Sarvestan

In Sarvestan, a flat-roofed mud village, we passed the old homes of many 19th-century martyrs of our Faith who had been executed in Shiraz by shooting them from the mouths of cannon. Later we climbed into hilly sagebrush country with almonds in bloom. In an oasis of two or three houses amid willows we stopped for breakfast of papery bread, tea in tiny glasses, fried eggs, raw onion and yogurt, the traditional fare of well-to-do merchants here. An old woman nearby in pants was churning butter in a goatskin rigged on a frame with a cord for easy shaking. Others in yellow flowery clothes were sorting and cleaning wheat. An old man was killing a lamb against the ground by slowly slitting its throat with a big knife. On our way again, we passed occasional mud forts with round towers at the corners and straw-topped walls, a black nomad tent here and there, and flowers such as red poppies and others resembling the tall, pale asphodels of southern Europe. Twice we overtook camel caravans and, more often, saw large flocks of sheep and goats, sometimes near their folds made of brambles arranged in a circular corral for defense against the wolves. That these marauders are a real menace was evident from the sticks, cudgels and woven slings carried by the shepherds. One of our passengers mentioned having been attacked by three wolves this past winter in Azerbaijan while walking alone between villages on a pioneering trip, but he took to his heels and, with the help of a few stones as missies, somehow managed to reach a house.

Some of the narrower ravines we passed through, I was told, were favorite haunts of highwaymen who frequently robbed and sometimes killed passersby. But the only inhabitants of the area we met were goats and black, scrawny cattle and once a dervish or tramp carrying his bowl and bubble pipe and standing, curiously enough, next to a whirling dust devil that had sprung up beside the road. Looking over some of the garden walls into fig orchards, we could see lush grass growing under the trees where, I was told, were thousands of autumn crocuses, the stigma of which make an orange-colored threadlike food called saffron commonly used for flavoring Persian stews.

Lake Nayriz

After nearly four hours of driving, including a stop to fix a flat tire, we descended from a high pass where snow was visible on mountain crags to salty Lake Nayriz about eighty miles long and sprawling across a wide, gradual valley surrounded by beautiful rocky mountains, some sienna-colored, others ochred, brownish and purplish with overlayers of weathered gray. Igneous volcanic mounds rose like small Gibraltars here and there along the lakeside where the ground was sometimes streaked in red and often punctuated with small meandering streams which, as we approached the town, were seen to be the sources of irrigation projects. Now a few swallows skimmed over our heads as we overtook a file of donkeys bearing brush to fuel the bakeries and public baths.

Nayriz, like other Persian towns, is made out of the earth surrounding it so its mud walls perfectly match the valley floor. Although almost all the houses are low and flat-roofed, there is one big ancient temple, now used as a mosque, that is said to antedate the Muslim era and is a place where God presumably was once worshipped only in the form of the sun, moon and stars.

Fort of Khajih

We drove directly around the town to the Fort of Khajih on the far outskirts, a holy spot famous for the siege of 1850 where illustrious Vahid and his few score of Babi followers held off the Shah's army until they were martyred by foul treachery. The fort occupies several acres and is roughly square, its walls made of mud with straw for a binder and embedded with stones in a few places, the towers rising to about fifteen feet high at the corners. The whole fort now serves as a sort of citadel or walled village like Irbil in 'Iraq or Carcassonne in France with many families dwelling there and children, donkeys, dogs and chickens moving freely about. The well that Vahid's men dug near the gate is still being used and Vahid's own room, at the corner nearest the town from which attack was most expected, seems to be just as he left it. It contains a charming little fireplace as well as a brazier or sunken Are pit in the brick floor, and the walls are indented with niches in traditional Persian style. They appear to be made of plastered mud but sound hollow to a rap as if they had flaked or crumbled inside. To the left of the fireplace is a doorway into a dark passage leading to the tower up which Vahid was wont to climb to his lookout station in order to keep track of the enemy. Before leaving of course we chanted and recited prayers in this quarter of the fort.

Between the fort and the town is a swift-flowing stream of good, clear mountain water along which graceful old willows and plane trees grow, the largest of the planes being famed because Vahid often held meetings under it while rallying his men before the siege. The number of his loyal Babi followers was pathetically small at first and, it is recorded (in *The Dawn Breakers,* p. 486) that Vahid's second sally against the thousands of troops surrounding the fort numbered only fifteen including half a dozen boys and several old men, one of the best of whom was a wiry ninety-year-old shoemaker. These inspired heroes actually fought hand-to-hand on this occasion for eight hours in darkness, demoralizing the enemy and accounting for sixty dead and more than a hundred seriously wounded by dawn.

There is little sign left of this fierce fighting in the gentle, carpeted plain around the fort where wild vetch grows with its fragrant, lavender blossoms, wild mustard, grape hyacinths, Persian clover, wild geraniums, silver weed, forget-me-nots, fescue grass (known for its resistance to trampling), wild brome grass and mint so pungent you can smell it sometimes in the fort itself. The streams too are in bloom now with the small white blossoms of watercress, floating lilies, ferns and knot grass.

Vahid's Tomb

After leaving the fort we saw Vahid's tomb with its pointed dome, then walked over to the nearby graveyard where, two generations later, the famous eighteen martyrs of 1904 were buried. These unfortunates, having attracted attention through their courageous devotion to their Faith, were dragged from their homes in Nayriz and brutally killed on the very day that 'Abdu'l-Baha placed the holy remains of the Bab in the Shrine on Mount Carmel, about a thousand miles away in Haifa. One of us chanted 'Abdu'l-Baha's Tablet of Visitation as we stood at this spot, thinking of the meaning of His statement that these eighteen martyrdoms were a sacrifice taken by God on the occasion of the arrival of the Bab's remains at His final resting place.

Another episode in Baha'i history that happened here in 1850 was the arrival of large government reinforcements shortly after Vahid's death when the Shah had given orders to exterminate the hundreds of Babis still remaining in the region. One Mirza 'All Sardar, who had been chosen to succeed Vahid, had already mustered a sizeable company of Babis with the idea of avenging Vahid, but, when it became obvious that the Babis could not overwhelm the tens of thousands of soldiers with artillery closing in on them, and the fort was clearly too feeble to withstand prolonged bombardment with cannonballs, the Babis made a strategic retreat to the mountains and found caves with streams to water them. There they built eighteen fortresses in the vertical ravines, visible from Nayriz, and there they held off the besiegers for many months, even capturing cannon by bold forays and hauling them up the ravines, and of course sending out frequent scouts and messengers to bring supplies and information. There were trees all over these mountains at the time, one of the commonest kinds being the wild almond which provided much-needed food, and even the valleys were wooded here and there, though few trees are left today. But despite these meagre blessings and all their courageous efforts, of course the embattled Babis could not withstand the Shah's hordes and their constant replacements forever and eventually they suffered their hundreds of separate martyrdoms in the long heartrending campaign as the royal troops brutally dragged off women and children, usually torturing any men left alive, finally beheading living prisoners and dead bodies alike until they had collected some 400 Babi heads to display in their triumphal processions.

A Meeting of Nayríz

Leaving the graveyard, we repaired for a sort of picnic lunch in a very beautiful Baha'i garden full of trees and swift streams. Besides willows, walnuts and planes, there were many kinds of fruit trees: apple, pear, apricot, plum, quince, pomegranate, peach, mulberry, almond and plantains. Under a low,

old grape arbor on a Persian carpet that literally reached from stream to stream (two of them being only eight feet apart), we sat and partook of rice, lamb loaf, salted fish, carrots, paper bread, yogurt and water from the streams that seemed really "sweet scented" as they gurgled by in that blossomy setting with birds twittering just above us and blue-bodied, black-winged dragonflies alighting on green blades that grew out of the water. We saw a turtle plodding through the garden and we ate green almonds off the trees. Then for half an hour we lay down and slept on the carpet, some of the Persians putting handkerchiefs over their heads for extra shade.

Before starting back to Shiraz we attended a special Baha'i meeting at the Nayriz Haziratu'l-Quds which was crowded with hundreds of eager but rather bewildered-looking people. After prayers, talks and some discussion, several children recited poetry, which is as popular in Persia as baseball in America, contests in it being broadcast regularly over the radio and TV. For the past two years, I was informed with pride, a twenty-two year-old girl in Shiraz has been "national champion" in the poetry quoting tournament in which each contestant in turn must quote a line beginning with the last letter of the previous line quoted. Indeed public statues in Persia, one is glad to see, are less often of generals than of famous poets.

March 27

Isfahan

Isfahan was, until about a century ago, not only the most central but by all odds the largest city of Persia, and it still basks in the memory of Shah 'Abbas the Great of the early 17th century who made it his capital. It is a city of beautiful turquoise mosques and trees and waterways, many of its boulevards having small, flowing canals on both sides as well as four continuous rows of trees that local Baha'is call "the flowering of the Bab's Cause" and that consist mostly of planes and poplars with here and there a pine, ash or cypress. This naturally gives it something of a pleasant garden atmosphere if you don't mind the dust and traffic or the hundreds of drooping telephone wires.

To the visiting Baha'i the most interesting places are the houses where the Bab stayed during His months in the city and the homes and graves of the immortal martyrs. An especially interesting place, therefore, is the magnificent home of the famous martyr brothers of Isfahan, Haji Mirza Hasan and Haji Mirza Husayn, in which the Bab was also a guest. After visiting the exquisite marble tomb of these merchant heroes who died for their Faith in 1879, we made our way through the muddy streets and past the camel pens of the bazaar and devious byways full of displayed wares to the secret and unpretentious doorway that led to the imposing courtyard and mansion built by their wealthy father and where they lived as citizens of the highest reputation all their days. Taking off our wet shoes, we walked through handsome hallways, up steep stairs and through room after room with plaster moldings, large elaborate mosaics, hand carved panels and great windows with thousands of tiny glass panes between muntins of delicate wood. Then finally to an extensive basement of vaulted brick, ventilated for cooling in summer, where the Bab had remained in seclusion for many days in 1846.

Yazd—Home of the Seven Martyrs

My interpreter and I went to Yazd on a crowded bus from Isfahan, the city of trees, and it took six hours of bouncing over a rough gravel road as we sped eastward over the Great Salt Desert which is flat, dusty and buff-colored in the foreground, sometimes with sparse brown grass or sage clumps, white in the distance with a background of lavender mountains against a gray blue sky. I am told there are sand dunes up to 700 feet high on this desert, some of them star-shaped as seen from the sky.

Yazd is a city of towers built of sandy mud the color of the desert and has some 65,000 inhabitants. It is said to have been founded as a sort of desert concentration camp where Alexander the Great kept prisoners captured in this part of Persia, and by the 19th century A.D. it had become the leading center of the nation's silk industry but has hardly yet felt any influence of the 20th century. It reveals its age in the ubiquitous wind-blown walls of mud, some more than half eaten away by the rasping sand storms. There seem to be few birds here beyond hawks, crows and sparrows, but camels are common in the streets, plodding ponderously on their splayed sand-shoe hoofs and odd caravans of laden cattle thread the mazelike alleys. In fact I saw a boy riding a heifer, sitting atop a big load of grain, guiding her with a rope through a hole in her nose. There are few dogs, but cats scuttle through the dusty lanes or gaze lynxlike up at you from restaurant floors, hoping patiently for at least a crust of bread from tea-drinking, raw-onion-chewing patrons arguing vainly, beads in hand, about their brittle problems.

The Baha'is of Yazd have a large Haziratu'l-Quds with well-tended gardens and a wide view of the city from the roof, revealing its distinctive feature of numerous ventilating towers described by Prof. E. G. Browne in 1888 in his *A Year Among the Persians* and still important for cooling water reservoirs and summer sleeping cellars. Beyond a few salty dunes in the distance one can see snowy mountains, while in the foreground one's eye catches a black flag Buttering on a high pole above a structure being built just beyond the Hazira gate. This will be a mosque and local Baha'is surmise that it was put there to counteract the influence of our growing "heresy."

Among the martyrs' graves shown us in a brief tour of the city was a particularly sacred burial spot: the well where the bodies of the famed "seven Martyrs of Yazd" were dumped in 1890 after they had been judicially condemned as Baha'is by the city government and each man handed over to a separate group of executioners to be tortured and killed as they wished in public squares and markets. Later I was led by a cautious Baha'i, walking 100 feet ahead (to avoid seeming associated with a earner a-wielding foreigner), to most of the seven places of martyrdom, some of them inside the vast covered bazaar full of merchants and bustling people in the center of the city. After the mutilated bodies showed no more signs of life, we were told, they were dragged by their feet in a proud procession through the main streets, then by a route unchanged in three quarters of a century out to the appointed well for disposal. An artisan was drying adobe bricks at one place in that road, spreading them out in the sun just as has been done for thousands of years. The holy well is still unmarked to avoid provoking local *mullas*, the Muslim "priests" who continue to be very suspicious and belligerent toward Baha'is here, but the surrounding land is owned by believers who have made it into a beautiful rose and pine garden.

The House of Quddus in Mashhad

Mashhad is the biggest city in northeastern Persia and lies close to where that country joins Afghanistan on the east and Turkistan (part of the Soviet Union) on the north. Turkistan, east of the Caspian Sea, is where the horse is presumed to have been first domesticated (around 4000 B.C.) and its principal city is 'Ishqabad where the first Baha'i temple was erected shortly after the turn of the century.

Though close to the Great Salt Desert, Mashhad is not a desert city like Yazd but in fact is quite lush and fertile, particularly in winter and spring when it enjoys frequent rains. When I landed here today by plane with my interpreter, a retired major general, a shower had just washed the dusty streets and the cotton and sugar beet fields were green and fruit orchards coming into blossom on the surrounding broad plain. As a Baha'i friend drove us to town along poplar-lined roads, we could see also numerous mulberry trees which provide the principal raw material (worm food) for the silk industry. As we reached the first squared-off blocks of houses and approached the heart of the city its oriental character became apparent in the loose turbans of white cloth commonly worn like coiled dish towels with one end dangling in back. Lots of faces are Mongoloid and some almost Chinese though often very dark of skin. Exotic street scenes include camels being led under the plane trees beside the small canal separating the two sides of one of the main double streets, a cluster of youths betting coins on which of the six numbered faces of spinning brass top will end uppermost, a file of seven porters with huge trays of cakes and sweets on their heads hurrying to a wedding feast, three old men haggling in a radish market in front of six-foot piles of radishes, a large crowd of pilgrims with bulky bundles awaiting a bus to start them on a month-long journey to Mecca and back, and two mullas at the door of a mosque greeting each other with respectful salaams (bowing with hand over heart) and conversing quietly with palms-up gestures and bland, benign expressions.

House of Babiyyih

The most important thing for a visiting Baha'i to see in Mashhad is the famous house of Babiyyih built by Mulla Husayn at the behest of Quddus before they went to Fort Tabarsi and which may be said to be the first building on Earth constructed as a Haziratu'1-Quds (which means in Persian "The Sacred Fold"). So we went there by way of a street with poplars so light in color they seemed to be birch trees. When we got to a muddy alley in the immediate neighborhood (apparently near the southeastern edge of town), we separated as a normal precaution against attracting attention, and walked quietly ahead past several women in black *chadurs* and a couple of squatting beggars, filing inconspicuously through a narrow gate to find ourselves suddenly in the garden of Babiyyih. It was also a sort of courtyard perhaps fifty feet square surrounded by low, unpretentious buildings that would have seemed very ordinary to one unacquainted with their history. But to us of course these structures had a magical quality for we recalled that this area was open grass land in the spring of 1848 when Mulla Husayn, who had just arrived on foot from visiting the Bab in Mah-Ku some 1200 miles away, chose the lot of land, bought it early in May and, with his own hands and probably those

of a few helpers, built the houses by the end of June in time to move in, along with Quddus, and held many important meetings there during the first three weeks of July — for on July 21 both these heroes left, at the Bab's command, for their glorious destiny at Fort Tabarsi from which they would never return.

Mulla Husayn, we were told, lived in the larger quarters on the north side of the courtyard and slept in a bedroom about nine by twelve feet with an eleven-foot wooden ceiling, the walls indented with double rows of niches in traditional style except that the upper ones have unusually fancy pointed arches at the top. The main meeting room is approximately fourteen by twelve feet but here the niches are rounded at the top, a small fireplace is in an alcove to the rear (north wall), while three outside doors and two small windows open on the courtyard. Quddus occupied the humbler south side of the courtyard with lower (ten-foot) ceiling and only a single row of oblong niches. His room was originally rectangular, I am told, but due to later construction of a street on the south side of the property, has now been reduced to a wedge shape with a single outside door and two little windows facing the courtyard. The storeroom of the north building, which could also serve as a hiding place in time of danger, is a windowless, dark closet about nine by six feet behind Mulla Husayn's bedroom.

The relatively ample courtyard has at least one old tree possibly planted by Mulla Husayn himself, in which a turtle dove was sitting most of the time we were there. The Persians call it an "anob" tree and its edible fruit consists of orange-colored, one-inch "beans" that look something like rose hips. There are also several young pine trees in the garden, some pears in blossom, a grape arbor, lots of roses and a central pool, while poplars are visible rising here and there above the low flat roofs from outside.

The custodian of this holy house is a very dark and wizened old man with a gentle face named Gholam Husayn Bidari, which seems appropriate as Bidari means "ever awake" which he must be to maintain such a well-kept garden and buildings despite the hostile Muslim neighbors all around. He is a mason by trade and has the distinction of having actually worked on construction of the Baha'i temple in 'Ishqabad more than sixty years ago. The street outside this sacred house and garden is traditionally known as Babiyyfli Street and many still call it that although the Muslims, trying to erase its memory, have troubled themselves to give it some other name.

The Story of a Baha'i in Mashhad

Repairing to another part of the city, my guides took me to call on a seventy-four year old sick Baha'i who honored me with tearful kisses and told such a touching story that I cannot bear not to repeat it, nor is it possible to forget how he looked as he sat on the edge of his bed in his black bathrobe and woolen sailor's cap atop his greasy, unshaven but enraptured face. It seems that his father, a Muslim, had wanted him to become a droshky driver when he was in his teens and, discovering that he preferred to take up reading and writing, violently opposed this outlandish idea on the ground that it might lead to his becoming a Babi, as these "scheming heretics" were still called in many parts of Persia. The boy had never heard the name Babi before but somehow it fascinated him

despite the evil implication his father gave it, so he secretly bided his time to learn more about these dangerous literary monsters. A few years later when he was a servant in the great household of the Grand Vazir in Tihran he chanced to be scolded for not being able to read, and again he thought how wonderful it would be if only he could comprehend a book and he hoped he could find someone, even a Babi, who might teach him this unimaginable magic.

Shortly thereafter he found himself jobless and semi-starving in Rasht on the Caspian Sea where one night he dreamed he met a holy man with blue eyes and a white beard who smiled on him and asked if he needed any help. "O yes," replied the hungry youth, clutching the old man's robe. "Then you must be patient," said the old man and he repeated this for what seemed a long time eventually introducing him to a man who, he said, would presently offer him an important job. The young man did not know how much he could trust this curious dream but a few weeks afterward he was overjoyed to encounter in a narrow alley of the bazaar the very man he had been introduced to and, better still, the man recognized him in return and, comparing accounts, they discovered they had both had the same dream at the same time. And by this means the youth got a job which led to his being taught to read and write, through which he discovered the Baha'i Faith and heard that the holy man of his dream was 'Abdu'l-Baha. By this time he was a successful merchant and his life took on a whole new purpose, much of which was evident from the attractive pictures still on his walls and the large library of books behind glass-fronted bookcases and his oft-expressed praise of God for all his blessings, one of them being that his daughter in dying had dreamed she was about to be a guest of 'Abdu'1-Baha. Perhaps he was gladdest of all, however, in knowing that his Muslim neighbors had come to appreciate his character and deeds and one of them had even allowed he was absolutely sure he was a "good man" despite his being a Baha'i.

The next afternoon we were in our hotel when a messenger arrived to inform us that a local Baha'i farmer with a Muslim wife had just been molested by her fanatical brothers abducting her and threatening to kill her if she tried to return to him or their three children. They also destroyed his crops and commandeered his farm, hoping thus to make him destitute, and when he appealed to the police they refused to listen to him, even kicking him out the door as a "filthy Baha'i" ...

My interpreter, a member of the Persian National Assembly and a respected military figure who outranked the brigadier general responsible for the Mashhad police, immediately took action to right the wrong — with the result that the farmer is likely at least to get his farm back, though extracting the wife unharmed from her bitter family is another thing again. Such occurrences unfortunately are still only too common in Persia.

Journey Through Northern Iran

by Guy Murchie

Editorial Note: This is another in a series of articles written by Guy Murchie from his diary kept on his travels to Irán in 1964 and printed with the permission of the Universal House of Justice. The photos were taken by Sir. Murchie.

April

Babel

In Babol, which was called Barfurush last century and is located near the southern shore of the Caspian Sea, we visited places sacred to the memory of Quddus, who was born, lived and died here and ranked second only to the Bab Himself in the Babi Cause. Here too is the old caravanseri to Sabzih-Maydan where Mulla Husayn's band of Babis foregathered preparatory to going to Fort Tabarsi, during which meeting three of them were shot dead by Muslims while sounding the adhan or call to prayer (at his command) from the roof. The third Babi was just able to finish it before he fell (see *The Dawn Breakers* p. 337-38)-The Thursday Bazaar here, where some of the martyrdoms took place, still follows its ancient tradition of having a market day for peasants of the region every Thursday, just as neighboring towns meet on other days of the week. Yet today, a Tuesday, we passed fish lying displayed on the sidewalks and 30 ducks waddling loose in the fowl market followed by geese, chickens and a few turkeys. At a 400-year-old mosque near by several dozen sheep huddled just outside the open door through which we could see and hear the solemn funeral chants going on for the chief mulla who died on Sunday.

Near the edge of town we walked through a park and broad square that cover what on May 16, 1849 was a prairie of long grass where Quddus in chains was tortured and paraded naked before a savage crowd before being torn to pieces and burned at the Sabzih-Maydan. Orange trees, palms and stately pines decorate the park where the heirs of that awful carnage today stroll heedlessly under the blue sky, enjoying a peace that Quddus, among many others, died to give them.

April 8

Amul

Approaching Amul, some 25 miles west of Babol on the Caspian coast, we drove along a road lined with beautiful old pollared willows, figs, mulberry trees and poplars, here and there farmers plowing with black oxen in paddy fields and in one place a woman carrying a basket of fish on one arm and a baby in the other. We stopped in the town in a deserted square (about 50 yards on each side) where stood the old mosque and courtyard where Baha'u'llah was bastinadoed some 115 years ago. The

brick building had been turned into a mosque, we were told, in 1839, and now has a rather thick octagonal minaret, but the basic structure is much older and before it was a mosque it served as a theatre, whose painted murals of mounted saints on parade and birds fighting in a rose garden are still plain to see.

Mazindarán

It was in the court behind the mosque evidently that Baha'u'llah was subjected to the torture, which consists of having one's feet tied in a raised position by ropes while one lies on one's back on the ground, the bare soles then whacked with rods (often of stout bamboo) until they are a bloody pulp. The acting governor of Amul had ordered the bastinadoing to appease a crowd of fanatical siyyids who were demanding the death of this "heretic." But the acting governor secretly sympathized with Baha'u'llah and, after the punishment, had Him led through one of the big grilled doors of the mosque and imprisoned in a corner room out of which, by quietly opening a hole in a wall at night, he conducted Him to the safety of his own home. A gentle rain, typical of Mazindaran province, was falling as we looked around the mosque and soon the old orange tree in the courtyard started dripping as if weeping from its memory of this brutal blasphemy of so long ago, while a broad-tailed hawk slowly circled like an unassailable seraph far overhead. We ended our visit to Amul with a look at the 165-year-old bridge of twelve pointed arches over the Haras River and from which a Babi named Mulla Nematollah from Fort Tabarsi was thrown limb by limb into the water to a death which, if only his murderers could have realized it, was not the oblivion they intended but rather a glorious immortality.

April 15

Qazvin

Qazvin, 80 miles west of Tihran, is the native city of Tahirih and was once so prominent it was the capital of the country and even the great Caspian Sea derived its name from it. As we walked through its now poorly-kept streets to visit the ruins of her father's house, the most distinctive feature of the town seemed to be the extraordinary tameness of the crows, both black and gray ones, cawing and napping among the poplar trees and walking the mud walls on every hand. Although they are probably the commonest birds in Persia, elsewhere in the country they behave about as shy as crows in America — yet, for some reason, here they are almost like park pigeons, walking the streets with the people and sitting confidently on fenceposts within a foot of passersby. And their nests are tenement rooker-ies, sometimes a hundred to a single great poplar, touching each other and continuing downward in tiers to within three feet of the ground. Could it be that, in some mysterious way, these birds have inherited a faint influence from Tahirih's audacious casting off of her chadur veil?

The first place we stopped was inside a large garden owned by Baha'is that Baha'u'llah Himself

approved as the site for a future temple. And next door was a house containing a vaulted brick cellar with a closet in which Tahirih once hid for three days when Muslim fanatics were seeking to kill her. Perhaps half a mile farther on we drew near to the large house where Tahirih grew up but we had difficulty getting to it because what is left is now surrounded by Muslim neighbors and a mosque. But at length, after inquiries at several doors, we were admitted by a round-about route through two other houses and entered a roofless area of perhaps half an acre of ruins surrounding an overgrown garden. We took a couple of pictures of the partly demolished rows of wall niches, some of which may once have held books of the extensive library that extraordinary woman grew up with, and could imagine her walking gracefully through the long halls or writing an ode under a mulberry tree beside the fountain. As we left, a youngish man approached from a dark passage shouting, "Why are they taking pictures of the house? Is it a shrine of the heretics?" His fanatical rancor alarmed my guides enough so that they hastily summoned a cab and we departed the area, forcefully reminded by this rabble-rousing demonstration that enemies of the new age are still all too plentiful and ready with their brickbats, hardly yet much less dangerous than they were in the days of "the Pure One" herself.

As my interpreter and I rode out of Qazvin on a ramshackle bus for Zanjan 100 miles further northwest, we soon left the wooded region west of the town which is covered with pistachio and walnut orchards almost as dense as a forest while numerous flocks of white sheep and black goats graze under the trees. People also rode by on donkeys, well wrapped against the north wind, and occasionally the bus stopped to pick up some ill-kempt wayfarer, such as one who entered crying "Praise be to Muhammad!" to which the other passengers responded with a sort of cheering shout in unison. As we careened westward over the wash-boarded gravel, wallowing through mud holes and fording many small rivers, the wheat and barley land gave way to sparse brown grass with the inevitable poplars and willows only in stream beds but, more and more often, a scraggly vineyard harboring a busy platoon of crows. Several times we passed camel caravans, plodding over the yellow earth, and in one of them rode a new-born baby camel tied into a snug bundle upon his mother's back. Later we saw two dozen brownish vultures homing in on a camel carcass at which as many more were already feeding.