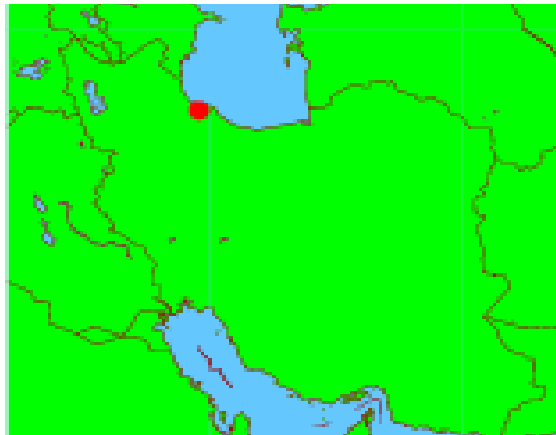


# **Memoirs of a Bahá'í in Rasht: 1889-1903**



**By  
Mírzá Yahyá ‘Amídu’l-Atibbá Hamadání**

**Translated by  
Ahang Rabbani**

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## Translator's Foreword

Rasht is the seat of the Gilan province in the northern Iran occupying the western half of the south Caspian littoral.



The genesis of the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths in Rasht dates back to the Bábí period when apparently a number of its inhabitants embraced the Báb's movement. By early 1850s, in the confused state following the Báb's martyrdom, the Bábí community fractured and various pockets of the Bábís turned to different Bábí leaders for inspiration and guidance. It was around 1271 AH [1854] that one of the Rasht's Bábís, a certain Karbalá'í Ibráhím Samsár ["dealer of second-hand goods"] Rashtí twice went to Adharbayjan and met Mírzá Asadu'lláh Dayyán, and became a staunch follower of him, a sentiment which he shared with other Bábís of the region as well.<sup>1</sup> At the present, not much is known of these Dayyánís and they presumably disappeared as a group.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mázandarání, *Tárikh Zuhúru'l-Haqq*, vol. 8, p. 757.

<sup>2</sup> Mázandarání, *Tárikh Zuhúru'l-Haqq*, vol. 6, p. 923.

Around 1270 AH [1853], several Bábís migrated from Qazvin to the nearby Lahijan, which was the major town of Gilan at that time. One of them, Siyyid Javád, had been a Shaykhí in Qazvin – which had a robust Shaykhí-Bábí community – and succeeded in converting a number of residents to the Báb’s Faith. Siyyid Javád however threw his lot with Mírzá Yahyá Azal and tried to keep his group of Bábís isolated from the other Bábís of Lahijan who had become followers of Bahá’u’lláh. On an occasion when Siyyid Javád was away in Qazvín, one of his associates, Mírzá ‘Alí Ashraf (known later as the poet ‘Andalíb), searched out the Bahá’ís and became convinced that Baha’u’llah was the new Manifestation. Soon Mírzá ‘Alí Ashraf succeeded in converting Siyyid Javád as well as the others Azalís.<sup>3</sup>

Some time earlier, Hájí Nasír Qazvíní, a well-known survivor of Shaykh Tabarsí, and his family had settled in Rasht and commenced trading. Though several of his family members were Bahá’ís and known in the city as such, no one from Rasht had embraced the Faith.<sup>4</sup> In 1870s in Lahijan, Mírza ‘Alí Ashraf ‘Andalíb was encouraged by the Qazvíní Bahá’ís of that town to migrate to Rasht where he settled in Saráry Mírzá Bábá and began teaching the Faith. Soon he was joined by Siyyid Javád Qazvíní, Áqá Muhammad Ismá’íl and Áqá Muhammad-Ibráhím Lahijání, who had been taught by ‘Andalíb, and they commenced informed the locals of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh.

Through these efforts, a number of locals, including the following, embraced the Cause: Mírzá Mihdí; Mírzá Báqir Bassár and his brothers, Mírzá ‘Alí and Áqá ‘Alí-Asghar and their families; Mullá Yúsuf-‘Alí and his brother, Áqá Husayn, and their father, Mullá Muhammad<sup>5</sup>; Karbalá’í Qásim and his brother, Áqá Ridá Zargar; Áqá Rasúl Qannád [“the confectioner”]; Áqá Muhammad-Javád; and the Sádát Khams.<sup>6</sup> By 1296 AH [1879] there were some

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<sup>3</sup> Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá’ís in the Time of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 62-64.

<sup>4</sup> Mázandarání, *Tárikh Zubúru’l-Haqq*, vol. 6, p. 928.

<sup>5</sup> Mázandarání, *Tárikh Zubúru’l-Haqq*, vol. 6, p. 923, notes that the newly-converted Mullá Muhammad was 70 years old. In 1295 AH [1878], when the laws of the obligatory prayers had not been promulgated, he inquired of his religious duties. He was given a collection of prayers that he was to recite each day after reciting “Alláh’u’Abhá” ninety-five times.

<sup>6</sup> The five brothers, known as Sádát Khams – a title bestowed by Bahá’u’lláh – were merchants and had obtained Russian citizenship with the surname Baqiroff. Two of the brothers were able to negotiate a contract with the holder of the Imperial concession for the surfaced road between Anzali and Tehran for the provision of traveler’s services along the route - rest-houses, food, accommodation, and other necessities. Because of this, they became very rich. After their conversion, they were to render important services to the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, particularly Siyyid Nasru’lláh who lived in Tehran and offered the major share of the expenses of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s travels in Europe and America. Siyyid Ahmad, son of one of these brothers, traveled to Europe, attended ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Paris and traveled with him

twenty Bahá'ís in that town and their number continued to gradually increase and included Mírzá Áqá Hakím ["physician"] and Mírzá Ibráhím Jadíd and some others. With great caution, they would come together at nights for Bahá'í meetings.<sup>7</sup>

A widespread persecution of Bahá'ís erupted in 1300 AH [1882] which greatly affected Bahá'í communities in several Iranian cities. In Rasht, eleven Bahá'ís were imprisoned. Hájí Nasír and another believer died in prison.<sup>8</sup>

In order the study the early Bahá'í community of Rasht, presently four documents or accounts are known to the translator:

1. Memoir of Mírzá Mihdí Tabíḅ. In his seminal work, Hasan Balyuzi refers to this memoir: "In Rasht, Samandar spent most of his time meeting enquirers in the home of a physician, Mírzá Mihdí Khán. This zealous Bahá'í, a native of Hamadan of Jewish background, has written an absorbing autobiography, which unfortunately has not seen the light of day."<sup>9</sup> A rendering of this autobiography will be forthcoming by the present translator.
2. *Tárikh Zubúru'l-Haqq*, volume 6, pages 923-974. This section covers the introduction of the Faith in Gilan province and has much biographical information on the early believers of Rasht. It is hoped that extracts from this account would be added as appendix to the present volume shortly.
3. *Tárikh Zubúru'l-Haqq*, volume 8, part 2, pages 757-799. This account deals with the Bahá'í community of Gilan in general, and Rasht to a great length, during 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ministry. Portions will be extracted by the present translator to annotate the present volume.
4. The present document by Mírzá Yahyá 'Amídu'l-Atibbá Hamadání, covering the period 1889 to 1903. The author was a physician in Hamadan of Jewish ancestry. He migrated to Rasht in 1889 and in 1926 wrote his recollections of the events and prominent believers that he had encountered in that city. He passed away two years later in 1347 AH

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in 1913 when he visited Stuttgart, Budapest and Vienna. For more details see: Ruhu'llah Mihrabkhani, *Khandán Sadát-i Khams*; Germany: 'Asr-i Jadid, 1994.

<sup>7</sup> Mázandarání, *Tárikh Zubúru'l-Haqq*, vol. 6, p. 928.

<sup>8</sup> Mázandarání, *Tárikh Zubúru'l-Haqq*, vol. 6, p. 928-930; and Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís in the Time of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 69-72.

<sup>9</sup> *Eminent Bahá'ís in the Time of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 214.

[1928]. In the present rendering, subheadings, footnotes and clarifying comments in square brackets have been added.

A debt of gratitude is owed to Prof Juan R. Cole, who in mid 1990s graciously shared with me a copy of this important manuscript which he had located in the Afnan Library in England. This manuscript has been since digitally published by H-Bahai at: <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~bahai/arabic/vol5/rasht/rasht.htm>. I am also indebted to Dr. Moojan Momen for several important comments when a draft was posted on Tarjuman list in February 2007.

*Abang Rabbani*  
*February 2007*  
*Houston, Texas*

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In the Name of God, the Eternal, the Never-Ending!

Since in accordance with the instructions of Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, the Guardian of God's Cause, the friends of God are collecting information on historical events of the Faith in all cities of Iran, this ephemeral servant, Mírzá Yahyá 'Amídu'l-Atibbá Hamadání, who, out of divine grace, for many years has been under the shadow of this blessed Cause, and has in person witnessed many events of Rasht, deemed it necessary to write such aspects of the Faith's history in this city that I have participated in. I compose these pages as a tribute and means of remembrance of the righteous friends and undertake this writing on Safar 1345 AH [August 1926]. I beseech the esteemed reader to offer a prayer of forgiveness and a supplication for divine confirmations upon my soul.

## **Arrival at Rasht**

In 1307 AH [1889], I came to Rasht as a physician. Two other friends, who were Bahá'ís from Hamadan also, accompanied me as well: Mírzá Áqá-Chí, the son of Músá; and Mírzá Áqá Ján Ibráhím-Zádih. We arrived in Rasht on Wednesday, 22 'A1 [16 November 1889]<sup>10</sup> and took residence in Caravansary Abú-Tálib, near Masjid Safá, across from Sardár Mansúr's house.

At the time of our arrival in Rasht, the entire bazaar and all the shops had been destroyed by fire, except a section of buildings that had remained safe from fire and was across from the homes of authorities, which belonged to the exalted Prince Kamran Mírzá, the famous Nayibu's-Saltanih. After three days, we met a certain Mírzá Ilyás Kalímí ["the Jew"] Isfahání. He was a dealer of second-hand goods. Through him, we rented one of the above-mentioned apartments and took our residence there, so that we would have time to learn

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<sup>10</sup> Assuming by "A 1" the author means Rabí'u'l-Avval, then according to calendars available to the present translator, 22 Rabí'u'l-Avval 1307 AH was on a Saturday.

the ways and customs of the people of Rasht before assuming our previous professions.

### Meeting Other Bahá'ís

After a month's stay at that location, through the insistence of my travel companions, we asked the aforementioned Mírzá Ilyás about Bahá'ís in that area. Confidentially he introduced one of the believers named Áqá Mashhadí Qásim Zargar ["the jeweler"], the son of Mashhadí Rafi' Zargar. With necessary wisdom and caution, I located him and one early morning went to his shop on the pretext of asking him to design an ink-vessel for my use. In this way I was able to meet him in person.

Two days later, I went again and confidentially stated, "I am one of your spiritual friends [i.e. a Bahá'í] and together with a few other friends have recently arrived in Rasht. I came previously on the pretext of purchasing an ink-vessel to meet you." On hearing this however, a fear and apprehension overcame him that is truly beyond description.

A week later, I went again to meet him and stated, "I am Jewish."<sup>11</sup> With this, he gained utmost confidence and showed friendship and trust. Through my insistence, he named several people and stated that they were among the wronged friends [i.e. Bahá'ís] who keep their [religious] identity a secret, emphasizing that meeting them must be done through utmost wisdom. The friends he introduced included: Áqá Mírzá Áqá Hakím ["physician"], the son of Dávúd Hakím; Áqá 'Alí Arbáb Qazvíní, the son of Hájí Nasír the martyr; the Sádát Khamsih ["the five siyyids"] who were: Áqá Siyyid Ridá, Áqá Siyyid Mahmúd, Áqá Mír[zá] 'Alí-Naqí, Áqá Siyyid Asadu'lláh<sup>12</sup> known as the Barát-Báz ["the financier"] and Áqá Siyyid Nasru'lláh.

He gave specific instructions for meeting Áqá Mírzá Áqá Hakím. As such, one day I inquired of his residence and went to see him on the excuse of being ill. After six days of associating, through the introduction of the aforementioned Ustád Qásim Zargar, I expressed fraternity and my convictions [to the Bahá'í Faith], but with utmost vehemence he refuted [the Faith].

However, I disregarded his heated denial and repudiation and the next day went to see him. Again, he expressed similar sentiments of denying, but with utmost affection and warmth, I proved that I was a friend of Áqá Mírzá Áqá Ján Kalímí Hamadání. Once he had gained complete trust, he flung open the gates of friendship and companionship.

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<sup>11</sup> Early Iranian Bahá'ís often continued to identify themselves with their former religions, so by this statement the author means he is a Bahá'í of Jewish descent.

<sup>12</sup> He is the recipient of an important tablet from Bahá'u'lláh known as *Lawh Ittibad*; text in, *Ad'iyyah Hadrat Mabbub*, Germany 1980, pp. 388-406.

## Attending a Bahá'í Meeting

Two weeks later, he stated, “Today, an hour before dusk, come so we can go to a certain place.” At the appointed hour, together with Áqá Mírzá Áqá Ján, I went to his house so together we could proceed to the location he had in mind. On seeing Áqá Mírzá Áqá Ján, he complained, “Only one of you may come with me as it would not be possible for the two of you to accompany me.” As such, Áqá Mírzá Áqá Ján returned to his house and with the utmost caution and prudence, we proceeded to the intended destination. Along the way, at times he would hide himself under the ‘abá so the passer-bys would not recognize him or discover our intention. That distinguished personage was wearing a silk turban known as Khalíl-Khání.

With utmost difficulty and struggles, by dusk we reached our destination, which was the home of Áqá ‘Alí Arbáb, who was known in those days as ‘Alí Bábí. It was there that we attained the presence of the honored Háji Mírzá Haydar-‘Alí and the esteemed [Shaykh Kázim] Samandar.<sup>13</sup> After the customary embracing and pleasantries, Háji Mírzá Haydar-‘Alí gave an exposition of my background and services to the gentlemen that were present. After this introduction, everyone present had gained complete confidence and trust in me. After tea was served, we spent the entire night, which was during the spring season, to spiritual discourse and heavenly discussions, which are beyond words to describe and can only be experienced by those who have embarked on this divine journey. The whisper of prayers and the chant of divine verses and the melody of celestial tablets revealed by the Birds of Paradise enthralled our spirits and enchanted our hearts.

We spent the entire night in the presence of the friends and decided to meet the following night so our association would be complete. At dawn, when the light of day had not yet broken, in accordance with wisdom and prudence, we bid our host farewell. Together with Áqá Mírzá Áqá Tabíb<sup>14</sup>, I left the residence and after a while, we each took a separate route, and I followed a guide to my residence. When I arrived, Áqá Mírzá Áqá Ján inquired of the previous night’s occurrences and I shared with him all the details.

Four days later, Ustád Qásim Zargar, who was fashioning an ink-vessel for me, came by with the promised object and stated, “Remain here at your house until one hour into the night. At that time I will come and meet you and together we will go to the home of Áqá Siyyid Ridá, who is of the Sadát Khams.”

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<sup>13</sup> Balyuzi notes, Samandar “was in Rasht for three months, and held a special class to teach the *Bayán*,” *Eminent Babá'ís in the Time of Babá'u'lláh*, p. 212.

<sup>14</sup> Tabíb and Hakím are interchangeable, meaning a physician.



During that time, the Mushíru's-Saltanih, who ruled as the governor on behalf of the Nayibu's-Saltanih, was dismissed from office and the exalted Prince Mu'ayyadu'd-Dawlih, the son of the Hisámu's-Saltanih – an uncle of Nasiri'd-Din Shah – had become the governor of Rasht. With that, a little more security for the Baha'is was afforded. Even though all meetings took place with great wisdom and prudence, the difficulties and strains that had occurred after the tragic martyrdom of Háji Nasír during the governorship of 'Abdu'lláh Khán was no longer the case.<sup>15</sup>

At any rate, according to Ustád Qásim's promise, it was one hour into the night when we left for the residence of Áqá Siyyid Ridá. To observe wisdom, at times we walked together and at other times separately, until eventually we reached Áqá Siyyid Ridá's home and on meeting the friends, utmost joy, bliss and pleasure was attained. After tea, conversation commenced. Háji Mírzá Haydar-'Alí instructed the gathering on how we should interact and converse with public in accordance with the conditions of the time. At the end, we recited holy verses and chanted prayers. That night was spent in such a way with our friends. In the morning, we bid each other farewell and left for our own abode.

### **Early Teaching Work**

During that tense period, I had no fear or trepidation [in teaching the Cause] and spoke about it with several citizens of Rasht with utmost wisdom, delicacy and caution. It went thusly until 1309 AH [1892], when I became known as being associated with this Sacred Faith [i.e. being known as a Bahá'í].

The gentlemen who in secret and without knowledge of each other met and were engaged in teaching the Cause of God were: Áqá Mashhadí Bâqir 'Attár; Mullá Yusúf Rawdih-Khán; Mashhadí Husayn and his brother Mashhadí 'Alí 'Attár; the illustrious Bassár; Mashhadí Ismá'íl; Áqá 'Alí Arbáb; Áqá Mírzá Áqá Hakím; Ustád Qásim Zargar; Áqá Ridá; and Áqá Naqí.

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<sup>15</sup> Haji Nasir was first a Bábí and fought in Shaykh Tabarsi. He went on to render important services and his martyrdom is lamented by Bahá'u'lláh: "Previous to these forty years controversies and conflicts continually prevailed and agitated the servants of God. But since then, aided by the hosts of wisdom, of utterance, of exhortations and understanding, they have all seized and taken fast hold of the firm cord of patience and of the shining hem of fortitude, in such wise that this wronged people endured steadfastly whatever befell them, and committed everything unto God, and this notwithstanding that in Mazindaran and at Rasht a great many have been most hideously tormented. Among them was his honor, Háji Nasír, who, unquestionably, was a brilliant light that shone forth above the horizon of resignation. After he had suffered martyrdom, they plucked out his eyes and cut off his nose, and inflicted on him such indignities that strangers wept and lamented, and secretly raised funds to support his wife and children." *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 71-72.

After 1309 AH [1892] when I became known in Rasht as a Bahá'í, due to harassments of the nayibs and farrashes, who were the main instigators of absolutism, I changed my residence which was originally across from the government house to a location behind the church. After being thusly separately from my beloved friends and being established behind the church in apartments known as Khajih Arákil Masihí ["the Christian"], I announced the site of my doctor's office. Since at that time there were no sign-makers, I wrote my name and title on a cardboard, hung it over the door and began practicing medicine. During leisure times, I would associate with my spiritual friends and the teachers of God's Cause, and at times, I would take seekers to teaching gatherings [i.e. firesides] or invite the seekers to my home.

Some time later, a number of the 'ulamá of Rasht, who expressed goodwill towards me but were harboring doubts as to whether I was a Jew or a Muslim, invited me one day to profess my faith in Islam in order to gain assurance about my convictions. I proved the validity of Islam in such way and depth that no reservation remained for anyone.

The government at time [in Rasht] was with the exalted Prince the Mu'ayyadu'd-Dawlih. He severely punished a number of ruffians and troublemakers who were harassing the population of Rasht and would cause difficulties for the friends of God as well. As such, the people were thoroughly relieved and pleased. In every regard, the governor was considered towards the people and their needs, particularly towards the much-wronged Bahá'í community. Because of this attention by the just governor, the friends who were under some strain and were harassed, gained some measure of ease and tranquility. The teachers of the Cause were engaged, day and night, in spread of the Faith and the diffusion of the divine fragrance. And due to my profession, I was able to associate with certain prominent citizens and develop friendships and after gaining confidence, would introduce them to the honored Bassár, the teacher of God's Cause. In proceeded along these lines until 1310 AH [1893].

### **Prominent Friends**

After some time, I befriended one of the eminent authorities of Rasht, brigadier-general Nusratu'lláh Tálsh who was in charge of the garrison protecting Anzalí boarder [with Russia]. He invited me to his estate situated at Kirkán-Rúd, some four days' journey from Rasht. At the same time that we were departing, my spiritual friends [i.e. Baha'is] Áqá Mírzá Áqá-Chí also left for Tabriz and Áqá Mírzá Áqá Ján for Anzalí.

I was in my office one day when a distinguished man entered and after the customary pleasantries, he introduced himself. He was Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-Husayn Shírází Barát-Báz ["the financier"], the Amínu's-Sarih, and was one of the partners of Hájí Amínu'l-Darb in Tehran. After some

exchanges, he stated that he wished to stay in Rasht and asked me to rent him a suitable building for this purpose. He advanced some funds for this purpose as well.

After three days, I found him a house that belonged to the deputy-chief of the tribes around Rasht. He took his residence there. That distinguished personage asked me to transfer my residence to one of the rooms of that house so we could be together. In course of our association, it became clear that he was a prominent merchant of Shiraz and was a Bahá'í. However, he observed utmost caution and only in secret would meet with other Baha'is.

After my two spiritual friends [with whom I shared residence] had left each for Tabriz and Anzalí, I was alone. Therefore, I sent a telegraph to Hamadan requesting my brother, Mírzá Nabí, to come. He arrived three weeks later and joined my practice of medicine.

Three months later, I left with brigadier-general Nusratu'lláh Khán for his native town of Talish. My brother was entrusted to Áqá Mírzá [Muhammad-]Husayn Amínu's-Sarih. For five or six months, I was in Talish sightseeing or engaged in practice of medicine.

I then returned to Rasht since the Cause was growing with the utmost vigor there. With great enthusiasm and spirit, I embarked on propagating the Faith and two individuals enrolled under the banner of the Cause. One was Áqá Hasan, who was known as Arbáb Idárih-Chí Tíhrání, and the other was Áqá Muhammad-Ridá, the brother of Mashhadí Qásim Zargar.

## **Dervish Qalandar**

In 1312 AH [1894], I left for Hamadan to renew ties of kinship and friendships of the past. I was there for two months when a telegram was received from brigadier-general Nusratu'lláh Khán inviting me to Talish. As I embarked on preparation for the journey, I encounter a certain Hájí Qalandar Dervish who was engaged in teaching the divine Cause. We became friends and when he had completed his services to the Faith in Hamadan, he decided to leave for the Holy Land by way of Rasht and Russia. Three days later, Dervish left and I left shortly thereafter.

On the third day of journey, I arrived by dusk time at a Caravansary in Ávih and once again saw Hájí Ghulám-Husayn Dervish, known as Hájí Qalandar. After staying for one night in Ávih, together we left for Rasht. He stayed for forty days at my house, which was behind the church. He wished to rent a residence so he could stay longer in Rasht to serve the Cause of God and his own profession. The house that was rented for this purpose was behind the government house and belonged to Muhammad Khán, the governor's chamberlain. I too transferred my residence there. I resumed my practice of medicine and Hájí Qalandar took a position in bazaar in the shop of Áqá Siyyid

Ridá Pútín-Dúz [“the boot-maker”] as an engraver. We were together for two years.

On occasions, Háji Qalandar, would recount the history of His Holiness the Primal Point’s [i.e. the Báb’s] appearance from the beginning until the end of the incident of martyrdoms of many of martyrs in Shiraz. He would talk about the appearance [of the Báb], the conversion of Háji [*sic*] Mullá Muhammad-Husayn, the Bábu’l-Báb, until the departure of His Holiness the Primal Point [the Báb] for Mecca.

Háji Qalandar had studied medicine several times during his sojourn in India, which had lasted 32 years and was spent in association with the ascetics. He would teach his knowledge of medicine to my brother and I.

In short, I became thoroughly known throughout Rasht at that time. For several reasons, Háji Qalandar grew weary of his stay in Rasht and decided to visit the Holy Land and pay homage to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. For this purpose, he left Rasht for Badkubih.

## **Varqá and Ruhú’lláh**

After Háji Qalandar’s departure, in 1314 AH [1896] I changed my residence and moved to a house belonging to the late Najaf-Qulí Áqá in the Hasan-Ábád neighborhood. Early in my stay in the new residence, the illustrious teacher of the Cause, Varqá, and his esteemed sons, Mírzá ‘Azízu’lláh and Rúhu’lláh – who was in name Rúhu’lláh and in essence truly Rúhu’lláh<sup>16</sup> – came to Rasht from the Holy Land and from the presence of our divine Beloved. They enkindled and enthralled everyone with the spirit of faith.

They spent their first night of stay in the home of Mírzá Murtidá-Qulí Massáh<sup>17</sup>. The second night was spent at Áqá ‘Alí Arbáb’s house, and the third night at the residence of this ephemeral servant, where the chant of prayers by Rúhu’lláh enchanted and mesmerized every hearing soul. All the believers were at their presence all three nights and immensely enjoyed their sweet and awakened discourse.

Thereafter, they left for Zanzan where they stayed a while with Varqá’s father-in-law, the honored Háji Mírzá ‘Abdu’lláh. After some time though, the fire of tribulations and persecutions raged in Zanzan and the enemies learned of their stay and informed the governor of Zanzan. As a result, Varqá, Rúhu’lláh and two other believers, namely, Háji Imán and Áqá Mírzá Husayn were seized and with tied hands and feet sent to Tehran.

Upon arrival in Tehran, the Sipahsálár, who later was titled the Atábak-‘Azam, instructed these wronged ones to be imprisoned in the dungeon. After

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<sup>16</sup> Lit. the Spirit of God.

<sup>17</sup> Massáh may not be a correct reading by the present translator.

they were in captivity for some time, the incident of assassination of Nasirí'd-Dín Shah by the hand of Mírzá Ridá Kirmání in [the Shrine of] Sháh 'Abdu'l-'Azím took place in 1314 AH [1896]. Pursuant to this, those two distinguished personages, namely, Varqá and Rúhu'lláh, were brought out of dungeon and made to drink from the cup of self-renunciation – and thus they hastened to the Supreme Concourse and the Abhá Horizon.

### **Bahá'í Teachers in Rasht**

In that same year, a number of teachers and propagators of the divine Cause arrived in Rasht. They included: Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí; [Shaykh Kázim] Samandar; Hájí Ghulám-Husayn Dervish Hamadání known as Dervish Qalandar; Áqá Mírzá Ahmad Qazvíní; Áqá Ibn-Asdaq; Hájí Amín; and Áqá Muhammad-'Alí Khán Bahá'í. These were some of the sacred souls that came to Rasht.

After 1314 AH [1896], the illustrious Ibn-Abhar came to Rasht and took his residence in the home of Áqá 'Alí Arbáb Qazvíní. All believers would come and attain his presence and were overjoyed with his discourse.

### **First Spiritual Assembly in Rasht**

A few days later, he invited the friends to elect the first consultative assembly, which is known as the Spiritual Assembly. The believers, with utmost joy and unity, participated in the election and chose the membership of the Spiritual Assembly.

It was in that gathering that we learned Jamál [Burújirdí] had arrived in Rasht and had taken his residence in the abode of Muhammad-'Alí Qahvih-Chí. The latter was one of the Bahá'ís and had a teahouse across from Siyyid Abú-Ja'far and his house was close to the office of Hájí Amínu'l-Darb. It was agreed that several of the friends would ensure that he [Burújirdí] did not associate with any of the friends. In those days, a certain Mihdí Káshí, who was an engraver, was secretly in contact and aligned with Burújirdí. In short, after a few days, we heard that Burújirdí had departed from Rasht.

### **Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí's Visit**

In 1319 AH [1901], the nightingale of divine orchard, Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí, arrived in Rasht from Tehran on his way to the Holy Land.<sup>18</sup> He took his abode in the home of Áqá 'Alí Arbáb Nasíroff.

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<sup>18</sup> With the development transportation infrastructure in Russian territory, the ship from Rasht to Baku became a common route for Bahá'í pilgrims to 'Akká. Often prominent Bahá'í figures traveled through Rasht and would stay there for some time.

Back in 1314 AH [1896], I had briefly discussed this mighty Cause with a certain Muhammad-‘Alí Khán, the Mafákhiru’l-Mulk, who was from Isfahan. However, we had agreed that whenever one of the accomplished teachers of the Cause arrived, he would be introduced to him so a more thorough conversation could take place. Therefore, at this time I informed the Mafákhiru’l-Mulk and he met Hájí Mírzá Haydar-‘Alí in my home and for three days and nights they held discussions. At the end, he was won over to the Cause and drank his fill from the cup of certitude. He was so attracted and enkindled that it remains indescribable.

The Mafákhir was a cotton merchant and entered into an agreement with Hájí Mírzá Haydar-‘Alí to trade this commodity in the course of that year and to split the profits, with the Hájí’s share being sent to the Holy Land. Their discussions ended on that note.

In those days, a certain Siyyid ‘Abdu’l-Karím, who was from Kashan, together with his family and kinfolks, arrived in Rasht. They took their residence in my house. I commenced close association and friendship with him and after some discussions about the Cause, he accepted the Bahá’í Faith.

One day, the Mafákhir gave his consent that the Siyyid [‘Abdu’l-Karím] could come each day on behalf of Hájí Mírzá Haydar-‘Alí and examine the merchant books. Siyyid Káshí [‘Abdu’l-Karím] remained true to his commitment. Muhammad-‘Alí Khán Mafákhir, on the other hand, after some trades amassed a considerable profit but did not fulfill his pledge and consequently, God dealt with him justly too.

However, from the day of his belief until 1335 AH [1916], he accumulated a vast fortune in Rasht and occasionally would render a service to the Faith. Alas, that while confirmations was his lot when he became a believer, disappointment was his fate when he left.

## **Bahá’í Teachers**

After Hájí Mírzá Haydar-‘Alí had departed to attain the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the Holy Land, the honored Bassár commenced teaching the Cause. The names of teachers who would come to Rasht or resided in that town are mentioned: Hájí Amín; Ibn-Asdaq, the Shahíd ibn Shahíd<sup>19</sup>; Áqá Mírzá Mihdí Akhaván-Safá; Áqá Mírzá Ibráhím Khán, titled the Ibtiháju’l-Mulk; Ghulám-‘Alí Khán, titled the Mudabbiru’l-Mamálik; Mírzá Muhammad-‘Alí Khán Tihrání; and Áqá Mírzá Áqá Hakím, the Sárimu’l-Atibbá.

## **Sympathetic Governor**

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<sup>19</sup> Lit, martyr son of martyr. Mullá Muqaddas Khurasaní was granted the station of martyr, as was his son, without either one dying a martyr’s death.

At that time, the governor of Rasht was [Muhammad-Valí Khán] Amír-Tunukábuní, the Nasru's-Saltanih<sup>20</sup>, who later was given the rank of Sipah-Dár [lieutenant general]. Because of the governor's care, compassion, and concern, the divine friends had become exceptionally enkindled and enflamed, exceeding each other in activities and service to the Cause. The esteemed governor, who was attracted to the Faith, was particularly protective of the believers. At all times, reports of Bahá'í activities was presented to him and the believers, with great audacity and without the need for dissimulation<sup>21</sup>, would undertake their activities. The illustrious Sipah-Dár, too, would carefully conceal and protect the community.

### Teaching Christians

During that period, a Christian priest by the name of Monsieur Marcar, who was of the Protestant denomination, accepted this mighty Cause, would frequent the gatherings of the friends and with utmost vigor and enthusiasm was teaching the God's Faith. At the same time, Monsieur Schuler, a Protestant priest who was a missionary from the United States to Iran, arrived in Rasht. After a while, Monsieur Marcar befriended him and spoke to him of the Cause. Further, Monsieur Marcar asked the Spiritual Assembly, "If you deem it appropriate, a special gathering should be organized and Monsieur Schuler be invited so a thorough discussion of the Faith can be undertaken." On behalf of the Assembly, the Ibtiháju'l-Mulk came to me and stated, "This gathering will be in your house."

On the night of 17 Rabí'u'th-Thání 1318 AH [14 August 1900], about 28 of the Christians along with Monsieur Schuler came to my residence and several teachers of the Faith were present as well.

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<sup>20</sup> Muhammad-Valí Khán, the Nasru's-Saltanih (who later received titles of Sipahdar A'zam and Sipahsalar A'zam), was a native of Tunukabun in province of Mazandaran. For some time he was the governor of Tunukabun and in 1885 became Brigadier-General. He received the title the Nasru's-Saltanih in 1887. After several other posts, he became governor of Rasht in 1899, a post that he held for 4 years and 4 months until his dismissal. He later achieved prominence as a leader of the Constitutional Movement. In February 1909, he was the leader of the Nationalist forces, as they took the town of Rasht. He headed the march on Tehran, entering it in July 1909 and thus forcing Muhammad-'Alí Shah's abdication. In the new regime, he served several times as Prime Minister until his death in January 1926 in Tehran. The French diplomat A.L.M. Nicolas reports that in his meeting with him in 1912, the Nasru's-Saltanih was very sympathetic to the Báb's movement; (The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, p. 534). The Nasru's-Saltanih met 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1913 in Paris.

<sup>21</sup> The original term, *bikmat*, is often translated as wisdom. In context of many primary historical source documents of the Bábí and early Bahá'í period it refers to dissimulation of one's faith as means of self-preservation.

At first, Áqá Mírzá Muhammad Khán Bahá'í spoke. Afterwards, using the Holy Bible, Monsieur Marcar produced proofs, evidences and arguments in support of this Revelation. Observing that the evidences presented had completely defeated him, with great vehemence and fervor, Monsieur Schuler rose and protested, "I must go home and bring another Bible," when a Bible was already available at the meeting. When Monsieur Schuler objected so strongly, Monsieur Hambarson, a Christian merchant who through Áqá Shu'a'lláh – a merchant from Milan – had learned about the Faith in Tiflis [Tbilisi, Georgian], rose and pulled his pistol to shoot him. However, the Mudabbiru'l-Mamálík quickly seized the pistol and removed it from Monsieur Hambarson's hand. Vociferous protests and complains of Christians intensified. The confirmations of Sanctified God poured forth, however, and the meeting concluded. Since my residence was near the government house, the governor became thoroughly aware of the details of this incident and raised no objections to the believers.

Because of the priest's inability to respond [to Bahá'í arguments] at that gathering, several Christian attendees accepted the truth of this mighty Cause [i.e. became Bahá'ís]. Therefore, from then on, each week a number of Christians would attend the Bahá'í gatherings and meetings – some held in the home of Áqá 'Alí Arbáb and some in my residence. The believers at that time were at utmost safety and security.

### **Cleric Opposition to the Governor**

In the year 1319 AH [1901], the following 'ulamá in Rasht rose against the just government of lieutenant-general Nasru's-Saltanih Tunukábuní: Mullá Muhammad [known as] Hájí Khummámí; Hájí Siyyid Yúsuf Mujtahid; Hájí Mullá Muhammad Síqlání; Hájí Áqá Ridá; Mullá Mihdí Sharía'tmadár; Hájí Siyyid 'Abdu'lláh; Mullá Muhammad Kadú-Sará'í; Mullá Saghari-Sázání; Shaykh Muhammad-'Alí Sígár-Vadí; Hájí Bahru'l-'Ulúm Najafí; Shaykh 'Alí Sígár-Vadí; Shaykh 'Alí Vayksará'í; Mullá Yúsuf Dabílí; and some 20 other antagonistic clerics – all outwardly accomplished and spiritually lifeless. They gathered in Chahar-Mahal<sup>22</sup>, and for a while planned and connived on ways that would bring about the governor's dismissal from office – thinking that after his dismissal, they would implement their evil plots and injure and harm the innocent and meek friends of God [i.e. Baha'ís].

At that time, because of Governor Nasru's-Saltanih's considerations and support, Bahá'ís of Rasht would freely organize gatherings and with utmost joy and felicity were engaged in teaching the Cause of God. In fact, in nine

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<sup>22</sup> Lit, four neighborhoods. The present translator is uncertain whether it refers to a specific location or four different neighborhoods in Rasht.



neighborhoods, without any fear or worries, and without any dissimulation, they were engaged in service to the Faith. The enemies and ill-wishers learned of these things and reported the details to the concourse of the ‘ulamá. In their report they emphasized that several new Bahá’í teachers had recently arrived and would include all the specifics and particulars in these reports so that a pretext could be created for tumult. The believers though continued with their activities with much pride and no secrecy<sup>23</sup>.

## **Bahá’í Photographers**

Several months passed. During their period a multitude were awaiting turmoil and troubles. It was then that two Bahá’ís, Áqá Mírzá ‘Alí Khán ‘Akkás [“the photographer”] and Áqá Mírzá Áqá Khán ‘Akkás-Báshí, arrived in Rasht. After meeting several times with the friends and believers, they started emphasizing their photography craft in order to advance their business. Each day, Baha’is being completely enchanted with this novelty, would invite the two newly-arrived believers. These two distinguished photographers, however, carried their intentions to extreme and suggested that a group photo of the entire Bahá’í community be taken. After a few days, this matter was taken to the Spiritual Assembly, which did not deem it advisable, stating, “[The conditions in] these days are not conducive for this request and we must wait another time.”

## **The Picture**

However, since God – Sanctified and Exalted be He – always tests His servants, after a few days, through another mean, they secured the Assembly’s permission. That it, as the day of Declaration of His Holiness the Primal Point [i.e. the Báb], which coincided with the anniversary of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s birth, was approaching, the Spiritual Assembly granted its consent for a group picture be taken on that auspicious Day. The honored Colonel Jahán-Bakhsh Khán, who was the chief-of-staff of the governor, Qásim Khan, invited all the friends to gather in his house for lunch where a community photograph would be taken. He was a member of the Spiritual Assembly and because of his request, it was agreed that on the Day of Declaration a feast be held in his residence and a photograph be taken that would include a portrait of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Afterwards, 12 copies of this picture were to be prepared and the glass-negative be kept by the Assembly to ensure bounds of prudence were observed.

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<sup>23</sup> The author refers to *bí hikmatí* which literally means “lack of wisdom”, but in this context the phrase is understood by the translator to mean lack of secrecy in holding Bahá’í gatherings.

On the Day of festivities, all Baha'is gathered and before lunch, a group picture was taken. Afterwards, everyone had lunch and the gathering was concluded.

After some time, the evildoers reported this event to the assemblage of the 'ulamá which afforded them the pretext [they were looking for]. Each one rose in a different way and manner, with schemes and conspiracies, to harass the friends [i.e. Bahá'ís] and cause tumult.

### **Distribution of the Picture**

A month after the picture was taken, the two photographers made a copy of the picture and sold that copy to a certain Mashhadí Luft-'Alí Bandar-Chí Pírbázárí. The latter, had pretended to be a member of the Bahá'í community and took the picture, decoratively framed it and hung it in his house. His shop was located in the Pírbázár quarter and as such, he instructed his carriage-driver with a written instruction to go to his residence and fetch that picture for transference to Pírbázár. The carriage-driver did as bidden, but on the way stopped at the Caravansary Mutasham, when the frame fell from his hand and broke. Several people that were there came over quickly and picked up the picture. They hollered a few obscene words to the carriage-driver and took the picture with them. The carriage-driver returned to Pírbázár.

That night, one of the merchants whose office was in the same Caravansary, had a Rawdih-Khání ["prayer vigil"] in his house. His name was Áqá Siyyid Ridá Sayf-Sádát. This Qazvíní merchant took the picture and hid it. When the Rawdih-Khání was concluded, the picture remained with him. Several days later, Áqá Sayf-Sádát consulted with several hostiles and antagonistic Twelver Shí'í and together they went before the concourse of the 'ulamá and presented the picture.

Through the plans of the assemblage of the 'ulamá, that very picture became the cause of turbulences – and [the stage of quiet planning] was from 7 Jamádíu'th-Thání [11 September 1902] until 11 Dhí'l-Hajjih 1320 AH [11 March 1903].

Their first step was to give the picture to Mírzá Táhir, the son of Mustawfí, one of the prominent citizens of Rasht, in order for him to reproduce 50 copies, one for each of the city's 'ulamá. In turn, each cleric, on his own accord, was to disperse the picture across the province of Gilan, so turmoil, disturbances and mischief could precipitate.

### **Igniting the Protests**

In that same year, a certain Mashhadí Taqí Zargar with his brother Mashhadí Ridá, who were both goldsmiths, were engaged in their profession. These two

were brothers of Áqá Mashhadí Qásim Zargar who was mentioned earlier [in these pages]. These two brothers were working in their shop when a woman, sent there on the instigation of the ‘ulamá, came in for purchase of some gold jewelries. After the usual discussions, she procured the item, paid and left. When she was leaving, [she looked at the picture-frame] and according to instructions that she had been given previously, raised the cry of “Our religion is lost!”

It is well evident what a mighty clamor resulted. As she cried hysterically, the other shopkeepers in the bazaar rushed into the shop of two [Bahá’ís], and with utmost severity and cruelty dealt with those two wronged brothers. At last, they dragged the men to the home of Mullá Muhammad Khummámí, the renowned Hujjatu’l-Islám. It must be clear what befell the two men; to such extent, that pen is unable to recount more. Moreover, given the situation described, it must be evident the manner that the ‘ulamá of Rasht behaved as they strongly opposed the governorship of the Nasru’s-Saltanih. The governor, on the other hand, was proud, brave and courageous, though he could not change the course of events.

The ‘ulamá connived some more and this time wrote a statement with large lettering, pretending that it is from the much wronged Bahá’ís of Rasht. This letter was addressed to the renowned Hujjatu’l-Islám and contained every manner of insult, offense, obscenity, and unseemly accusations. This document was their instrument for further agitation and turmoil.

Shortly, the governor sent instruction to Áqá Shaykh Mihdí Sharí’atmadár to urgently send Áqá Taqí and Áqá Ridá Zargar to the government house. When they were sent there, they were dismissed [from captivity].

## **A Death and Planned Burial**

Subsequent to the release of those two distinguished men, Ustád Hashim Banná Qazvíní, the brother of Dervish Báqir who was known as Dervish Mas‘úd, was stricken with paralysis and passed away two days later. In short, day by day, the concourse of the ‘ulamá were getting closer to their objective. When Dervish Mas‘úd learned of the death of his brother, Ustád Hashim, he began arrangements for the funeral procession, which would include marching and howling demonstrators, rising of standards, and the sound of drums and trumpets. Ustád Hashim’s father-in-law, Siyyid Hasan Baqqál [“grocer”], who was one of the mischief-makers and ruffians of Rasht, urgently learned of the funeral details and informed several of the troublemakers. Together they went to the home of the Bahru’l-‘Ulúm and reported the details. In turn, the Bahru’l-‘Ulúm informed very seminarian student and akhund in Rasht with instruction that they should impede the funeral.

The governor learned of this plan. He sent several of his farrashes and their chief, the Muntasru'd-Dawlih, to ensure that the deceased would have a funeral procession.

### **Attack on Bahá'ís**

When this information reached the assemblage of the 'ulamá, they decided to attack and plunder the home of Bahá'ís and massacre them. For this purpose, during the night they hung the letter that they had forged from Bahá'ís containing all manners of insult and obscenities heaped on the Hujjatu'l-Islam Háji Khummámi, on the entrance of the Hujjatu'l-Islam's home.

Mullá Muhammad Háji Khummámi himself was not aware of this plan and early in the morning came out of his house to find a large placard hung on his house's entrance, all containing insults, abuse and curses, while his other door was covered with filth and refuse. He also was deeply perturbed that several passer-bys were standing there loudly reading the letter. Quickly, he [i.e. the Hujjatu'l-Islam] informed the bazaar for the shopkeepers to close their shops and raise the cry, "Our religion is lost!"<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> According to *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, pp. 375-376, on 16 May 1903, Alfred Churchill sent a dispatch in the care of Major Archibald Douglas, who was Military Attaché to Tehran Legation, to Sir Arthur Hardinge (Churchill to Hardinge No. 28, 16 May 1903: FO 248 792):

I am taking advantage of the departure of Major Douglas to communicate to your Excellency the latest news respecting the Babi agitation, which is if anything more acute, owing to an obscure placard discovered this morning on the door of the Mujtehed Haji Hummami.

This placard, purporting to have been written by a Babi, heaped the foulest abuse on Haji Hummami and his female relatives. The Ulema were held up to contempt for being powerless and Syed Assadullah, the head of the Transport Company, the Ferrash Bashi and Haji Mirza Mohamed Arbabi were praised as being the high protectors of Babis and members of the glorious community.

It requires little perspicacity to recognise that the offending document was not composed by a Babi but by some evil-disposed person anxious to cause trouble. The Mollahs however insist that it was the work of the Babis and a meeting took place in the house of Haji Hummami this morning.

The wildest rumours are current throughout the town. The latest information I have is that two of the principal Babis were called to Government House this afternoon and that a Jew who has in turn been Mussulman, Babi and then Mussulman again was sticked this afternoon by order of the Nasres Saltaneh in connection with the placard incident. This shows that the Nasres Saltaneh's hand has been forced to a certain extent but it is difficult to obtain reliable information.

In light of his responsibilities, the governor also moved quickly to restore order throughout the city. He gave instructions for the troops, cavalries and artilleries to be stationed around the government house and to remove the insurrection, and to ensure that no harm would come to the wronged believers – perchance that the God’s lambs would be secure from the vicious wolves.

The situation grew intense when the ruffians, hooligans and hoodlums launched their attack. However, when the ‘ulamá saw the guns and artilleries and realized that the tumult and uprising would result in their own uprooting, they withdrew their hands from bloodshed, mischief and sedition, relinquishing their earlier plans and hopes.

On that day, however, the ‘ulamá sent the aforementioned picture to all parts of Iran, causing all manner of cruelty and brutality. In every town, the fire of incitements and seditious rose high, particularly in Yazd, Nayriz and Isfahan, in such wise that even the field of Karbala had not witnessed such incidents.<sup>25</sup> Even the foreign governments became aware of brutalities of this tyrannical, bloodthirsty [Shí‘i] sect and testified to the meekness of this party [Bahá’ís].<sup>26</sup>

### **Siyyid Mutivalí**

There was a certain Áqá Siyyid Husayn, who was from Mazandaran and had been entangled in troubles [and some time ago] had fled to Rasht. He was in that same picture mentioned above, seated with great dignity. To observe wisdom, he had enrolled as one of the special attendants of [the Hujjatu’l-Islam] Hájí Khummámí to the point that he was entrusted with administration

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Some days ago a dervish was arrested for reviling Babis in the Bazaars. The Governor General caused his head to be shaved and expelled him from the town. This gives rise to much talk to the effect that dervishes singing in praise of Ali and true-believers who dig up the corpse of a renegade Mussulman are sticked, shaved and have their ears cut off.

I am told that a telegraphic petition complaining of the conduct of the Governor General has been sent to Menjil for despatch to Tehran from the Telegraph office there.

I will not fail to communicate to your Excellency any further occurrences which may take place.

<sup>25</sup> Karbala is the scene of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn and his companions and marks one of the most significant events in the entire Shí‘i history.

<sup>26</sup> In the summer of 1903, a widespread persecution of Baha’is in Isfahan led to a pogrom of Baha’is in Yazd and surrounding towns. By September, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had written a long treatise detailing the occurrences and had a copy translated into English and published in the West, which resulted in many Americans and Europeans becoming aware of the intense persecution of Baha’is in Iran. For a history of this incident (and a new translation of this watershed document), see, Ahang Rabbani, “‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Treatise on the Persecution of Bahá’ís in 1903”, <http://ahang.rabbani.googlepages.com/persecutionin1903>.

of some religious endowments. Because of this, he was referred to as, Áqá Siyyid Husayn Mutivalí [“custodian of endowments”].

Without being aware of the occurrences, near noon one day during the course of upheavals, he attended the Rawdih-Khání of the Hujjatu'l-Islam. After the prayer session was concluded, Áqá Hájí Khummámí instructed one of his attendants, “Remove Siyyid Mutivalí’s turban, beat him over the head, and expel him from the gathering.” After this, the endowments were also removed from his administration. Of certainty, it must be clear what befell that wronged and debilitated believer, who after a few days left Rasht.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> According to *The Bábí and Babá’í Religions*, pp. 373-374, the British Consul at Rasht, Alfred Churchill, reported on these episodes in a dispatch dated 8 May 1903 to Sir Arthur Hardinge, the British Minister at Tehran (Churchill to Hardinge, No. 22, 8 May 1903: FO 248 792):

I have the honour to report that a disturbance took place on Sunday last, the 3rd instant, between a Babi jeweller and some Mussulmans.

The indirect cause of this disturbance was a photograph of a section of the Rasht Babi community which through the bad faith of a photographer has been circulating throughout the town. Two individuals passing by the jeweller's shop in the Bazaar made some jocular remarks in regard to this photograph, whereupon the owner of the shop is reported to have roared out that he was a Babi and would allow no one to insult his religion.

This resulted in a dispute followed by a general melee in which students from a neighbouring college took part. No great harm however appears to have been done, the combatants, Gileks[peasants of Gilan] inordinately afflicted with cacoethes loquendi,[a mania for speech] having no doubt exhausted themselves during the preliminary clamour.

The Governor General sent for the Babi and his brother and detained them until the next day in order to keep them out of harm's way. On Monday the jeweller opened his shop and has not been molested in any way since.

A copy of the photograph found its way into the hands of Haji Hummami, one of the principal and perhaps the most learned of the Resht Ulema, who was astounded to see that a Syed,[footnote this that it is Siyyid Husayn Mutivali] his trusted henchman and Mutevalli [custodian] of a Saint's tomb near Sangar, was one of the group of Babis. The Syed had timely warning and has prudently kept out of the way of the Mujtehed who threatens to beat him severely. I am told that the Haji and others of the Ulema have decreed that the Syed and other Babis must divorce their Mussulman wives but that the Nasres Saltaneh has intimated to them that no interference will be allowed as it is the desire of H.M. the Shah that religion should be free. I am also told that the Nasres Saltaneh has sent for a further detachment of one hundred soldiers who are to come from Kasvin and I may mention that since last Sunday the small force stationed at Resht has been served with ball cartridges.

## The Funeral

[To return to the funeral account], after three days and nights, through the insistence of believers and instructions of the esteemed governor, the Muntasru'd-Dawlih, the chief of farrashes picked up the remains [of Ustád Hashim]. He sent word to Dervish Mas'úd who came with his followers and buried the body of Ustád Hashim near Bagh Shah, at a location known as Khalbásh-Kallih.<sup>28</sup>

This news reached the 'ulamá. The next morning the 'ulamá and the local thugs marched to Bagh Shah and exhumed the remains of that distinguished man from his grave. They tore it into pieces and set it on fire.

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There has been some talk on the part of the Mollahs of boycotting the Babis, who it was proposed, should not be allowed to enter the public baths but I trust that the firm and sympathetic attitude of the Governor General will prevent the execution of any plans which the Mollahs may have formed with the object of creating disturbance at the expense of the community at Resht.

I am informed that the Babis here amount to about one thousand persons of both sexes including at least one Greek and some Armenians.

<sup>28</sup> According to *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, pp. 374-375, on 10 May 1903, Alfred Churchill dispatched the following report (Churchill to Hardinge No. 24, 10 May 1903: FO 248 792):

With reference to my despatch No. 22 of the 8th instant, I have the honour to report a further incident created by the demise of a Babi mason yesterday.

The relatives proposed the customary obsequies according to Mussulman rites but the arrival of the usual paraphernalia in the shape of bier and wooden sweetmeat trays caused some excitement in the neighbourhood which speedily resulted in the gathering of a large mob from all parts of the town.

A disturbance being feared, the Governor General requested the Shariat Madar to arrange matters. The Mujtehed did so in a very commendable manner as, although the crowd remained in the vicinity of the house during the whole of the day, no breach of the peace occurred.

During the night the corpse was secretly taken in the direction of the Boosar Toll Station by some soldiers, farrashes and two servants of the Shariat Madar, who dug a grave and interred the body.

Nothing further of importance has occurred but there can be no doubt that the people are excited. My Russian colleague is of opinion that the rise of prices has to a great extent irritated the lower classes and points out the recent disturbances at Meshed due to the same cause.

It is certain that the dearness of the common necessities of life is much felt at Resht and, with your Excellency's permission, I will on a future occasion revert to the question.

This news reached the governor. Immediately he sent his men to seize the evildoers and without trial to punish them appropriately. The instigators were beaten severely with sticks and the thugs had their ears and noses cut off, and as an admonishment to others, were paraded throughout the city.

## **Public Uprising**

As result of this incident, a public uprising took place. Some rushed to the government house, some went towards the home of the Mudabbiru'l-Mamálik, some towards the home of Mírzá Ibráhím Ibtiháju'l-Mulk and some attacked the home of Áqá 'Alí Arbáb. The roar of "Our religion is lost!" and "O Muhammad!" and "O 'Alí" had filled the entire city. However, they were not able to injure or hurt the believers.<sup>29</sup>

For three days this upheaval continued. The Shari'atmadár, who was a capable and competent man, quickly came to the government house and commenced discussions towards diffusing this mighty uproar which on one hand was witnessing the attack of hooligans and on the other, the unrest throughout the city.

In short, after three days, it was determined that the way to subdue the uprising was for several of the Baha'is to leave Rasht. It was believed that with their exit, the situation would be calmed. The group [to leave town] was to consist of: the Ibtiháju'l-Mulk; the Mudabbiru'l-Mamálik; Háji Mírzá Ahmad

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<sup>29</sup> According to *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, pp. 374-375, on 15 May 1903, Alfred Churchill reported (Churchill to Hardinge No. 26, 15 May 1903: FO 248 792):

With reference to my despatch No. 24 dated the 10th instant, I have the honour to further report that a number of malefactors exhumed and mutilated the body of the Babi mason, which they subsequently proceeded to burn with naptha.

For this outrage many arrests were made and two rogues lost an auricle apiece besides being sticked. The executioner was also bastinadoed for being implicated as were likewise the other persons who had been arrested.

A servant of the Mujtehed Haji Hummami was arrested in connection with this outrage and was, I understand, well sticked but he was released in consequence of the threatening proceedings of the Haji in his mosque. The Mujtehed stopped the 'Rozeh' which was being held and sent for the religious students for the purpose, it is said, of releasing his servant by force.

The release of this man, however, smoothed matters over for the time being but I fear that at the present juncture it will require little to cause an explosion if the Mollahs do not keep quiet.

It is generally suspected that the Nasres Saltaneh is himself a Babi. Whether this is the case or not there can be no doubt that he is helping them in every way.



Qazvíní; Mírzá Ibráhím Jadíd Siyáh-Kulí; Dervish Mas‘úd; Mírzá Husayn Khán, the son of Raff‘u’l-Mulk; Colonel Jahán-Bakhsh Khán, the chamberlain of the Governor Qásim Khán; Karbalá’í ‘Abbás ‘Alláf; Mashhadí Ridá; Mashhadí Taqí Zargar; Siyyid Husayn Mutivalí; Mírzá Áqá Sárimu’l-Atibbá; the I’tidáu’l-Vizarih, the chief of the post office; ‘Alí Dá’í; Mírzá Tarázu’lláh; and this lowly servant, Yahyá. The Sanctified Lord looked upon Áqá ‘Alí Arbáb and his family with the eye of compassion since there was no mention of them in the discussions.

When the above-named were about to be expelled from town, Siyyid Mutivalí, who previously had left town, arrived back in Rasht. The troublemakers learned of his arrival, seized him, removed his turban and placed a paper hat on that wretched soul and unclad, throw him out of the house. In streets and bazaar that illustrious man suffered bitterly at the hand of ungodly and did not have a moment of rest nor comfort. Eventually, Mírzá Ibráhím Jadíd gave him room in his house for a few days and protected him.

The troubles in Rasht began to spill to other towns as well. In Lahijan, Áqá Mashhadí Ghulám-‘Alí Tájir [“merchant”] was expelled from his residence and twenty other believers were harassed, tormented and beaten.

Even in such places as Siyáh-Kul and Langar-Rúd, and any other location where the lamp of divine Faith was lit, they tried to extinguish its light.

The news reached the governor. He charged someone to see to the protection and support of the divine friends. However, that wretched soul, who was bereft of knowledge of God, arrived like a Shimr<sup>30</sup> in Lahijan and commenced searching for the reminder of the companions of the Prince of the Martyrs so he would slay them too.<sup>31</sup> That tyrannical and bloodthirsty man, whose name must be preserved for posterity, was the Jalílu’l-Mamálik. His older brother, Mu‘ín Humáyún had rendered great services in Shiraz to the friends of God.

Soon the upheavals and tumults reached Port Anzali, which is Iran’s large port. Several of Bahá’ís lived there, including Áqá Mírzá Áqá Tihrání, and some others. They too were engulfed in the persecution and maltreatment of the bloodthirsty people.

It was about that time that it was heard that Hájí Mírzá Haydar-‘Alí had arrived from the Holy Land in Port Anzali, bearing a world of tidings and soul-stirring news. The people there, however, attacked the customhouse [to injure him], but two or three of the believers were able to protect him. The Hájí inquired from Rasht what he should do to remain safe. In turn, the Spiritual

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<sup>30</sup> Shmir was the persecutor of Imam Husayn on the field of Karbala.

<sup>31</sup> Meaning the officer in charge of protecting the Bahá’í community instead turned into its persecutor.

Assembly contacted the governor and inquired about the means of his protection. The instruction was for Hájí Mírzá Haydar-‘Alí to arrive at one of the friends’ homes under the cover of darkness. He was then to be conveyed confidentially to Tehran. In accordance with this plan, Hájí Mírzá Haydar-‘Alí came to Rasht and then proceeded to Tehran.

### **Banishment of Bahá’ís**

In Rasht, subsequent to discussions between the concourse of the ‘ulamá and the governor, it was decided to exile a number of friends, whose names were recorded previously, in order to clam the uproars and turbulences. The governor sent his men in the early morning of 27 Rabí‘u’th-Thání [23 July 1903] to summon those intended to exile to the government house. This included: Mírzá Ibráhím, the Ibtiháju’l-Mulk; Colonel Jahán-Bakhsh Khán; Mírzá Ibráhím Jadíd; Ghulám-‘Alí Khán, the Mudabbir [u’l-Mamálik]; and this humble servant.

When we had arrived at the government house and seeing each other, the honored Ghulám-‘Alí Khán the Mudabbir commenced dispute and protest with the governor’s chief of farrashes. Through the urging of Colonel Jahán-Bakhsh Khán, Mírzá Ibráhím and I decided to go before the governor and beseech him to annul and withdraw the order for our exile. However, when we came before the governor and he saw us, particularly the wretched Áqá Mírzá Ibráhím, he shouted, “Take them outside and beat them with sticks until I come myself!” They took Mírzá Ibráhím, but Colonel Jahán-Bakhsh Khán and I escaped through another door and were deprived of the great bounty of being beaten by sticks!

However, the honored Mírzá Ibráhím bountifully partook of this bounty and while beaten would cry out, “Yá Hadrat ‘Abbás, Yá Hadrat ‘Abbás!” From another entrance of the government house, I reached him and at that point, they stopped beating him because in those days I carried some influence and was esteemed by those that worked in the government offices and for this reason, they decided to abandon further corporal punishments. They took him to prison instead.

Quickly I left the government house to see what had befallen my friends. A carriage was immediately summoned and I boarded the Mudabbiru’l-Mamálik and the Ibtiháju’l-Mulk and conveyed them to Idarih Ráh-Choussée [Highway Office] which in those days was in the lease of Áqá Siyyid Asadu’lláh Barát-Báz, who in those days owned the transportation system. I asked for a half of an hour reprieve from an officer who had arrived to conduct the men

[on their exile] to Tehran so a change of clothing could be brought from their residences. They were then sent off to Tehran.<sup>32</sup>

After this occurrence, the Nimrod-like fire caused by the ‘ulamá, troublemakers and ruffians was extinguished.

Colonel Núru’lláh Khán, who was among the staunch and steadfast Bahá’ís, came to the government house in company of ten of his cavalry soldiers, so they could accompany the exiled men from Rasht to Sanjil. Several of the governor’s officers brought the following believers to the government house as they were supposed to be seen by the ‘ulamá before being sent on exile. The governor intended for their exile to commence once they had arrived outside the city limit, but the ‘ulamá insisted that they must be conducted through the bazaar so everyone would be certain of their fate and thus grow quiet. In short, the men that were brought were: Áqá Mírz’Husayn Khán, the son of the Rafi’u’l-Mulk; Karbalá’í ‘Abbás ‘Alláf; Mashhadí Ridá Zargar; Mashhadí Taqí Zargar; Áqá Mírzá Bâqir Dervish, known as Dervish Mas’úd; Áqá ‘Alí Dá’í Babbágh; Áqá Siyyid Husayn Mutivalí; Áqá Ustád ‘Abdu’lláh Qannád; Áqá Mashhadí ‘Alí Qahvih-Chí Isfahání; and Áqá Mashhadí Husayn Qazvíní, who had a shop near Kháhar-Imám. These named believers attained the honor of service to the Faith by being banished.

The following believers, however, were deprived of this mighty bounty and were not exiled: Mírzá Ibráhím Jadíd Siyáh-Kalí; Colonel Jahán-Bakhsh Khán; Áqá Mírzá Muhammad-‘Alí Khán Tíhrání, who worked in the telegraph office; the I’tidáu’l-Vúzará; Hájí Mírzá Ahmad Tájir Qazvíní; Monsieur Kalaws<sup>33</sup>; Mírzá Ishaq Khán Kashání; Áqá Mírzá Áqá Tabíb, known as the Sáramu’l-Atíbbá; and this ephemeral servant. In consideration of their

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<sup>32</sup> *The Bábí and Bahá’í Religions*, p. 376, records that on 19 May, Alfred Churchill reported [Churchill to Hardinge No. 29, 19 May 1903: FO 248 792]:

In continuation of my despatch No. 28 of the 16th instant, I have the honour to report that the Vezir Nizam, who arrived from Europe last week, has not yet left for Tehran having been instructed to remain at Resht to cooperate with the Governor General so long as the agitation against the Babis continues.

Two prominent Babis, the Ebtehaj ol Mulk and the Mudabber el Memalek, left Resht on the 17th instant and matters have since taken a more favourable aspect giving rise to the hope that the agitation will gradually subside before more harm results.

The best remedy would be a heavy fall of rain which would be of great benefit to the crops and would at the same time prevent people gathering at the numerous rozeh khanehs and taziehs which are being held in all parts of the town as is customary here.

<sup>33</sup> The present translator is uncertain of the correct spelling.

professions and occupation, these individuals were not pursued any further by the governor or by the ‘ulamá.

### **Continued Harassment of Bahá’ís**

After these occurrences, it was decided that the Bahá’ís – both men and women – would not be permitted to use public baths. Moreover, instead of shaving the Bahá’í heads, the barbers were cutting their scalps.

In short, two months later, the wretched Siyyid Mutivalí, who had been hiding in various places, came out one day, without turban [which would be the sign of his lineage], for the purpose of earning a living. However, he encountered two of the ‘ulamá who ruthlessly had forced him to their own residence. The two were: Áqá Siyyid Ismá’íl Mujtahid Rashtí and Áqá Siyyid ‘Abdu’lláh Rashtí, who was related to the Hujjatu’l-Islam. There he was told, “Either you must deny and curse [the Bahá’í Faith] or we will tear you into pieces.”

This news reached the new governor, the Hakímu’l-Mulk. [It should be noted that] he had been installed in office when two months after the upheavals caused by the ‘ulamá, then governor, the Nasru’s-Saltanih, was dismissed from the office.<sup>34</sup>

I am not sure how Siyyid Mutivalí had managed to escape from the two clerics after all his cloths had been torn and he had been stripped of every garment. Nevertheless, he had ran into the street and a Muslim – who apparently was not a Muslim but was one of the believers to this Mighty Cause – had found him and covered him with his own thin, black summer ‘abá and shown him the path of flight.

In utmost state of wretchedness, injuries and fatigue, Siyyid Mutivalí came to the residence of my brother, Áqá Mírzá Nabí – a home that belonged to a non-Bahá’í. It was midnight when they informed me, so I went and brought him to my own home where he stayed in secret. Two days later, I took him to his own residence and after consulting the friends, a week later he was sent to Badkubih and then to ‘Ishqabad.

At that time, Áqá ‘Alí Arbáb lived in a caravansary located behind the town’s large-square. Half of this building belonged to Áqá Siyyid Asadu’lláh, who was [one of the] Sádát Khams, and although he was a believer, he would hide his allegiance and strenuously avoided all the Bahá’ís of Rasht. One of the

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<sup>34</sup> According to Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá’í Religions*, p. 376, “the agitation died away gradually, but the courage and efficiency of Nasru’s-Saltanih was not rewarded. Indeed a short while later he was removed from his Governorship and left Rasht on 1 June 1903;” (reference is made to correspondence between the British Consul in Rasht, Alfred Churchill to Sir Arthur Hardinge No. 31, 6 June 1903: FO 248 792).

rooms in this caravansary was occupied by Áqá ‘Alí Arbáb. Several other residents of this caravansary were among the ruffians and agitators and they sternly told Áqá Siyyid Asadu’lláh, “You must expel ‘Alí Bábí from this location.”

That distinguished man obeyed and informed Arbáb that he was to vacate the premise. It must be clear what strain was placed on him until he left that caravansary. After he had left that location, through the intercessions of Mírzá Ibráhím Jadíd and the Mafákhiru’l-Mulk, he found a room in Saráy-Kamrániyih, which was located behind the government house. This room though was so foul that no one could stand even an hour in there. However, through the payment of a large sum, this was the only room he could acquire. Áqá ‘Alí Arbáb, Áqá Mírzá Tarázu’lláh and Áqá Ghulám-‘Alí lived in that room.

Arbáb was owed a few thousand tumans in Rasht. A few days after he had transferred his residence to the new location, Hájí Khummámí proclaimed that all that owed money to ‘Alí Bábí were excused from paying him even a small coin and that this debt was forgiven to everyone much the same that mother’s milk was free to the babe. He added that only if Arbáb had a son and the son was a Muslim, then the money was owed to the boy. For a long time Arbáb tried to negotiate with those that owed him money, but at the end he was not able to collect even a single coin.

Mention of Áqá Mírzá Áqá Tabíb, the Sarámu’l-Atibbá, was made earlier. That desolate soul one day had gone to the public bath known as Hammám Hájí Mírzá Nasír. He had not started his bath and had not gone into the pool when this news was taken to Hájí Khummámí. The Hujjatu’l-Islam sent a gang of his evildoers, who were his seminarian students, to the bath and they dragged him outside, unclad, wearing only a torn towel. In such a way, he was paraded in the streets and bazaar. I saw him when this incident was occurring and through expenditure of a considerable sum was able to win his ransom and save him from the claws of those bloodthirsty wolves.

From the beginning of the turbulences on 11 Dhi’l-Hajjih 1320 AH [11 March 1903] until its conclusion was two months. During this period, the wretched, wronged believers were seized in the hands of ferocious tyrants and each day they were tormented and tortured through a new excuse. Praise unto God that this wronged community shone brilliantly on the field of trial and emerged steadfast and sincere. Although outwardly the Baha’is of Rasht did not suffer martyrdoms, alas, each hour of day was like drinking from the chalice of self-renunciation. The martyrs of other towns in Iran suffered only once as a martyr; but the believers of Rasht, despite their fewness, were to suffer unabated and most bitterly over a long period.

It was three days after the passing of the Hakímu'l-Mulk, who was the governor of Rasht and had died suddenly through a heart attack, that I bid my friends goodbye and left for Talish.

### **A Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá**

After these incidents, I have nothing worthy of readers to present. Therefore, I conclude with the text of a Tablet that I received during the course of those upheavals which I include in these pages of history.

*Rasht. The honored Mírzá Yabyá Khán, the 'Amídu'l-Atibbá, upon him rest the glory of God!*

*He is God!*

*O firm servant of God! Even though clouds of tribulations repeatedly poured forth rains of afflictions, the field of suffering was spread, the ensemble of trial was readied, the chalice of persecution was disseminated and the friends drank their fill and became target of oppressions and cruelties – this servant too was a partner and participant in each of these ordeals, and a denizen of the corner of this territory of calamity and difficulties. Do not be sad. Do not grieve. Whatever occurs, of certainty, is ordained and appropriate. This is the prerequisite of faithfulness in the love of God. It is decreed and ordained for the friends of God.*

*Days pass away. Continually every day and night witnesses new events. All created things are target of the arrow of destiny and subject to every calamity. It is by this reason that the contingent world is subject to change and revolution, and subordinate to hardships and adversities.*

*The difference is that all others suffer trials in path of self-desires, while the divine friends accept the dart of trials in the path of God. The first is futile, while the latter will bear results more precious pearls and jewels. Therefore, give thanks unto Lord that in the path of God you suffered difficulties.*

*The hope of the faithful is that from His infinite bounties, this hardship will transform into blessings, and this anguish will become the mighty recompense and the greatest bestowal.*

*Upon thee be salutations and praise,  
'A. 'A.<sup>35</sup>*

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<sup>35</sup> Present translator is grateful to Adel Shafipour for bringing to his attention that this Tablet also appeared in *Makátib 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, vol. 6, pp. 112-113. The current rendering has benefited from an eloquent draft translation posted by Dr. Khazeh Fananapazir on Tarjuman internet discussion group on 18 February 2007.

**Colophon**

This history of the Cause was written in the city of Rasht on 1 Rabí‘u’l-Avval 1345 [9 September 1926], by the least of writers, the ‘Amídu’l-Atibbá Hamadání.