

MÍRZÁ ABU'L-FADL

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From these ageless Windows to the Past another window is opening to the humble but magnificent life of Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl-i-Gulpáygání. Designated as an apostle of Bahá'u'lláh by the Guardian, he was the greatest scholar in the Faith whose writings rank second to the Holy Writings and the writings of Shoghi Effendi.

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá was in Paris in 1913, He sent a cable to a believer in Cairo ,where Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl was residing, stating that everything should be done for the comfort of Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl who was as His own self. In the memorial held after his passing, 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated, "In servitude to the threshold of Bahá'u'lláh he was My partner and associate."

Who was this man? Every believer must know about his life and accomplishments and read his writings which are studied extensively in the East for deepening as well as for proofs of the Faith.

He was born in 1844, the year of the Declaration of the Báb, in the town of Gulpáygán in central Irán. This town was founded by Humay, the daughter of Darius, the Great. His name was Muhammad. At the completion of his learning, he took the name of Abu'l-Faḍl which means the father of knowledge , but 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed him Abu'l-Faḍá'il, meaning the father of knowledges. In one Tablet, 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated that he not only was the father but the mother and brother of knowledge.

In the prime of his youth he traveled to Isfáhán and Arák, cities in Irán, to perfect his studies in Persian and Arabic. In his twenties he acquired the knowledge of all sciences

accessible. Many years later one of his students gave the following account. In 1866 when Abu'l-Faḍl was twenty-two years old the first edition of a comprehensive Arabic dictionary called Fírúzábádí was published in Tabríz.

At that time Abu'l-Faḍl was in Isfahán. A student brought a copy of that dictionary for Abu'l-Faḍl's criticism. It had about 1400 pages. In one evening he looked it over and said two words had wrong accentuation. After a long and careful examination by the learned scholars in Isfahán, it was found that the statement of Abu'l-Faḍl was accurate. Imagine! Scanning 1400 pages in one evening!

By the time he was twenty-nine, his studies were completed ,and in that year, 1873, he let his hometown of Gulpáygán and headed for Tehrán. Short time after his arrival he was appointed as the superintendent and professor in College of Hakím Háshim, the first-class Arabic college in Tehran.

Three years later when he was at the height of his career as the head of this theological college, a student approached him for help to answer the argument of a Bahá'í. Being a scholar Muslim, he did his best and was quite content that he had the answer to anything and everything.

There was a merchant who had a shop in a bazaar who was a Bahá'í, and his house used to be the place of meetings of seekers and teachers. His name was 'Abdu'l-Karím-i-Isfahání . In 1875, Abu'l-Faḍl became acquainted with him, but for a while did not know that he was a Bahá'í and occasionally used to visit him in his shop.

Then a small incident happened that changed the course of Abu'l-Faḍl's life. As it was

customary that on Friday afternoon, which is the weekend in the East, to go to the countryside, Abu'l-Fadl with a few clergy decided to go to the shrine of Sháh 'Abdu'l-'Azím which is in the outskirts of Tehrán. On their way out, one of the donkeys lost a shoe so they went to the nearest blacksmith. Ustád Husayn--i-Na'i-band (shoe fitter), who was illiterate, saw the large turban of Abu'l-Fadl which indicated his vast knowledge. He was tempted to start a conversation as he was working on the shoe like most barbers and hairdressers do. He said he was so honored that they went to his shop and wished to have permission to ask a question that had bothered him for a long time. The permission was granted.

He said, "Is it true that in a tradition of Shí'ih Islam it is stated that each drop of rain is accompanied by an angel from heaven? And that this angel brings the drop to the Ground?"

Abu'l-Fadl said, " It is true."

Ustád Husayn-i-Na'i-Band said, "Is it true that when there is a dog in a house no angel ever visits that house?"

Abu'l-Fadl, not guessing the connection, affirmatively answered, "Yes."

Ustád Husayn-i-Na'i-Band said, "In that case, no rain should ever fall on a house where a dog is kept!"

All of a sudden the great clergy was confounded by an illiterate blacksmith! His rage had no bounds and his companions noticed his shame. They whispered to him that the blacksmith was a Bahá'í . This incident left a deep impression on Abu'l-Fadl.

The blacksmith reported this incident to 'Abdu'l-Karím, and suggested that because of

his hurt pride Abu'l-Faḍl might welcome an encounter with a Bahá'í teacher to prove his own superiority. When 'Abdu'l-Karím invited Abu'l-Faḍl to take part in a discussion with a Bahá'í teacher he accepted. The teacher was not highly learned but quite spiritual and answered all questions and arguments in simple but convincing terms.

It may sound strange that uneducated people could be made a channel for the knowledge of God. Bahá'u'lláh states in the *Kitáb-i-Iqán: The source of knowledge is God and He bestows it upon those with pure heart.* (*Kitáb-i-Iqán*, p. 3) Detachment is essential for such sanctity of heart. It does not mean poverty and asceticism, but in particular it is detachment from love of self. Abu'l-Faḍl was surprised that he could not refute the arguments of someone who was not a learned man. He asked 'Abdu'l-Karím to arrange a meeting with a learned Bahá'í near his own caliber so he could prove his superiority and the falsity of the claims of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. 'Abdu'l-Karím was wise. He did not comply with his wishes because Abu'l-Faḍl's motive was selfish.

In a few meetings Abu'l-Faḍl was baffled by the simple arguments and the depth of understanding of those Bahá'ís about the mysteries of the Holy Book and Qurán. He was quite humbled and his pride hurt. Later on he met with learned Bahá'ís. In a meeting with Nabíl-i-Akbar or Fádli-i-Qáini, at the end he is quoted to say, "By God! No one could ever be found capable of withstanding the force of arguments of this great man of knowledge."

To his own account, he spent about eight months in these discussions and now his purpose defeated and humbled, he began to search after truth. He established close association with followers of all religions and from friend and foe investigated the facts about

the Faith. He prayed day and night for guidance. Before reaching the final stage of certitude he went through a great deal of intellectual struggle. His head accepted the facts but his heart was not yet touched by the light of faith and assurance.

The story of his reading the Kitáb-i-Iqán is interesting. He recounted himself that he read it with an air of superiority and was not impressed by it, and even commented that if that book was the proof of Bahá'u'lláh's claim, he himself could write a better book. The following day a prominent woman arrived at the college and asked for a scribe to write an important letter for her. The students referred her to Abu'l-Faḍl as the outstanding writer. Abu'l-Faḍl took up his pen but could not write the first sentence and several times he scribbled on the corner and even drew lines on his fingernails until the woman lost her her patience and said mockingly, "If you have forgotten how to write a simple letter why don't you say so instead of keeping me waiting while you draw lines on your fingernails?" He states that he was overcome with feeling of shame as a result of this incident and then suddenly remembered his remarks of the night before. This incident was a clear answer to his arrogance. When Abu'l-Faḍl found himself utterly confounded by the proofs and arguments of both learned and unlearned Bahá'í teachers, he entertained the idea that not until Bahá'u'lláh performed a miracle for him would his heart be satisfied.

Bahá'ís explained that miracles could not be considered conclusive proof for the messengers of God, but Abu'l-Faḍl insisted.

He wrote a few questions on a paper, placed it in an envelope, sealed it with his own seal and handed it to 'Abdu'l-Karím for safekeeping. He then put another blank sheet of

paper in another envelope and asked 'Abdu'l-Karím to forward it to Bahá'u'lláh. He said if his questions were answered he would entertain no doubt about the truth of the Cause.

'Abdu'l-Karím and Abu'l-Faḍl took both envelopes to the house of Hájí Muhammad-Isma'íl-Dhabíh so that letter could be sent to Bahá'u'lláh. When they arrived Hájí was not home. His wife welcomed them and they went inside. They entered a room in which there were books and a chest containing the Holy Tablets. She gave them permission to open the chest and study the writings. Since 'Abdu'l-Karím could not read, he asked Abu'l-Faḍl to read to him.

Abu'l-Faḍl states there was the tablet of Ra'ís addressed to Álí Páshá, the prime minister of Turkey, but revealed in honor of Hájí Muhammad, their host. It was on a blue paper. "As I read it I came across the story of puppet show of Sultan Salím which Bahá'u'lláh saw as a child in the wedding of one of His brothers in Tehrán." As you recall. Bahá'u'lláh saw how the puppet man folded all puppets including the Sultan and his ministers and put them all in his suitcase.

Abu'l-Faḍl says, "I was fascinated by it. Then I came across His following words, 'Soon will We dismiss the one who was like unto him, and will lay hold on their chief (meaning Sultan 'Abdu'l-'Azíz) who ruleth the land, and I, verily am the Almighty, the All Compelling.' Upon reading this I was struck with awe and for half hour became speechless. I contended in my own thought that Bahá'u'lláh has made these prophecies to mislead the ordinary people and keep His hold on His followers. Otherwise, it would not be possible for a prisoner to address the king who has imprisoned Him, and now was going to send Him to the worst exile,

in such wrathful language. After all, He was a prisoner, single and alone without any help. While these satanic thoughts flooded my mind, yet I was grateful to God that I was never inclined to dislike Him or be discourteous to Him.

“I told ‘Abdu'l-Karím that to possess the power of life over created things is a miracle. I took my envelopes and tore them and declared that the fulfillment of these prophecies would constitute the proof. I also had ‘Abdu'l-Karím pledge to me that no one would talk about the Faith to me any more until these prophecies became fulfilled. I thought that going to the house of Hájí was an act of providence which would relieve me from further discussion with Bahá'ís. However, the believers did not completely leave me alone and occasionally came to see me with their discussions.

“Five or six months passed from the day I read the Tablets. One day I saw two prominent Bahá'ís talking on the street. Trying to shun them, I pulled my ‘abá over my head and tried to cross the street, but they saw me and called me by my name. They said a telegram has arrived about dethronement of Sultan ‘Abdu'l-‘Azíz and the proof of word of God is established. This was a severe blow. I flared up with rage and said, 'It is not my concern. I am not his relative.' But they reminded me of my condition. I almost convulsed with rage and did not say goodbye and left. I did not go to where I was planning to go and went straight home. Knowing the immensity of this test, I was overcome with emotion and tears uncontrollably flowed from my eyes. I begged God to assist me. In this condition, ‘Abdu'l-Karím came with two other people. I left the house and was in no shape to face them and did not return home until late. They left and came back in two or three days. I apologized for my

behavior on that evening and said now we must wait and see if the prophecy, ‘We will lay hold on their chief’ be fulfilled, since it does not mean natural death- he must be killed.

“By this time, the zeal for my finding the truth had reached its climax and found myself able to discover the mysteries of the Qurán. A few days passed and the news of the assassination of Sultan ‘Abdu'l-‘Azíz was flashed by telegram. I went out of my mind. I was so agitated that even aimed a few blows at myself. At one time I fought God, another time I would deny Him, then I would repent and beg Him for assistance and guidance. I could neither eat or sleep. I only drank tea, smoked and wept.

“One night I was aroused from my slumber and began to admonish myself that it has been about one year since you have been associating and arguing with these Bahá’ís . Even the uneducated ones have proven more depth in the mysteries than you, the so-called learned man . Also, you have witnessed their character and virtues. Why do you interpret their words as the breathing of the evil whisperers. Isn't it that they are inspired and assisted by the Holy Spirit.

“I arose and performed my ablutions and said prayers. I then took the tablet of Rá’ís which had been in my possession a long time and began to read it tearfully. It was then when I heard the voice of God. I gained my certitude and felt such love and devotion towards Bahá'u'lláh. That joy and ecstasy is indescribable. I knew that if I served those who guided me for the rest of my life or to lay down my life in their paths, I could never repay them for giving me the spiritual life. Before dawn I hastened to ‘Abdu'l-Karím's house and kissed the threshold of his door and prostrated at his feet. He was very embarrassed and said my

behavior was not warranted because God is the One who guides the people and not man.”

He was 32 years old when in September of 1876 he became a believer. While searching he used to openly discuss Bahá'u'lláh's claim and forecast about Sultan 'Abdu'l-'Azíz to his numerous students. The average person could never do this but in his position as a scholar and steadfast Muslim there were no threats but quite a bit of envy and jealousy on the part of other clergy. As soon as he became a believer, he could not hide it and was forced to leave his position as head of Tehrán Theological College, and in December by the order of Kámrán Mírzá, who was a prince and the governor of Tehrán, was imprisoned for about five months. He, and other Bahá'ís , through the intervention of Hájí Mírzá Husayn Khán (Mushíru'd-Dawlih), who was the minister of war, were freed.

This great scholar earned his income by writing letters for the illiterate enough to satisfy his hunger and the expenses of a donkey to take him around. He traveled to all parts of Persia and briefly was imprisoned in Hamadán and expelled from that city. He converted many people and deepened the believers. A few wealthy believers wished to deputize him to teach on their behalf and free himself from his struggle to earn his daily income. He thanked them and said he always relied on God for his needs. Many times his meal consisted of soaking a dry bread in water. On his traveling to teach the Cause, he used to stay in cárávanserái and seldom stayed with any of the friends.

He served the Faith for forty years and was continuously in a state of prayer and devotions with complete detachment. In refusing any money from the believers, he wrote them that although at times the need necessitated selling of his clothes, but always God

provided for him and if people would stop sending money and letters to him necessitating answers, he could spend his time transcribing tablets and thus earning a living. He stated in another letter that Bahá'u'lláh has blessed him with these words, "O Abu'l-Faql, the All-Bountiful has been and will be with thee."

Mr. Taherzadeh states: "After he became a believer he acquired such spiritual insight and faith seldom seen among the followers of Bahá'u'lláh. The reason for this was first the purity of his heart which like a pure iron became fully magnetized by the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh. A few, if any, of the Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh have surpassed him in qualities and perfections. The second reason was his vast knowledge like an eye was helped by the light of Bahá'u'lláh and discovered the mysteries invisible to ordinary man. He truly recognized the station of Bahá'u'lláh to the degree attained only by a few. With such recognition he considered himself to be so unworthy that he felt unable to seek permission to attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. Abu'l-Faql stated that when one declares his faith in Bahá'u'lláh, if truly he recognizes His station, that is the beginning of nothingness."

In 1882, when conversion of a large number of people of nobility from every religious background alarmed the statesmen and caused envy and hatred of the clergy, new plots were made by the prince governor and the clergy. Large number of prominent Bahá'ís were arrested, and in that process Abu'l-Faql for one month was confined in the house of the governor. Several controversial meetings and debates were held in the presence of the governor. Great efforts were made by these enemies to get the order of Násiríd-din-Sháh for general massacre of all Bahá'ís to stop the process of conversion, but to satisfy them the

king said they could imprison Bahá'ís in chains and fetters. This time he was imprisoned for twenty-two months, two weeks of which he and twenty-three other prominent believers were kept in underground dungeon under heavy chains. Abu'l-Faḍl states that for six months they received daily news of plots of enemy and expected death at any moment.

After release he had seven months of peace in Qulhak in a resort place in outskirts of Tehrán when he was arrested and imprisoned by the prince for the third time. This one lasted six months and he finally was released on February 5, 1886.

It was in that year when he received a tablet from Bahá'u'lláh commanding him to travel. Bahá'u'lláh stated "...arise in His name and invite the people of the world to come to him so he could tell them of *The Most Great Announcement*, show them *The Most Exalted Horizon* and enable them to hear *The Voice of God*." He was honored by Bahá'u'lláh in several tablets. At first he was hesitant to write anything. He states, "In the early years of my conversion I refused to write books because the Supreme Pen was moving. Finally in 1887 when in *Ádhírbáyján* I had the honor of meeting Varqá the Martyr who encouraged me to write. Varqá stated that while in Akká at the presence of Bahá'u'lláh he heard Him encouraging the believers to write about the truth of the Faith. Then Varqá said, "I inquired if Bahá'u'lláh deemed it advisable to employ Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl in this service and He said He has commanded it."

"In 1888 while in Hamadán I took the pen and my first writing was in answer to the questions of a Jewish doctor of Tehran called Sharh-i-Ayát-i-Muvarakḥih which is not translated in English. Soon after that, due to agitation of clergy I was imprisoned for five

days and expelled from that city. In those days Bahá'í teachers would employ three methods for proving the truth of the Faith: First, based on rational and intellectual proofs; Secondly, on prophecies of the Holy Books , and the third method was used only in certain cases when a person didn't wish to find the truth and wished to win the argument. This method was to use the arguments of that person to prove the case. Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl was expert in all three methods.

One example is his dialogue with Reverend Doctor Robert Bruce, a British missionary in Isfahán which is interesting to listen to. You need to know that in that time there was famine and this missionary had political and financial influence over the governor and was boasting about that as well as his superior upbringing and education in the most advanced country. Here is the encounter between him and Abu'l-Faḍl:

Abu'l-Faḍl : Would you please tell me the extent of your contribution?

Bruce : So far I have donated one half million tumáns for famine relief and if necessary I could provide several times more.

A-F: What is your political influence?

B: Should fanatical Muslims close my church I could direct the governor, who is the son of Zillus-Sultán, to open it with his own hands.

A-F: What are your educational qualifications?

B: I am graduate of a university from a foremost country.

A-F: Being so richly endowed with such influence and knowledge, how many souls have you been able to convert to Christianity since you came to Isfahan?

B: About thirty.

A-F: Of these, how many are steadfast and do sincerely believe?

B: (After a brief pause) About ten to fifteen.

A-F: Of these, how many will remain steadfast and are willing to give their lives in the face of persecution?

B: Perhaps two or three.

A-F: With your permission, I wish to recount my position. I have no assets and at times have nothing to subsist on. My position and political influence is such that for being a Bahá'í I could be put to death, with those killing me receiving honor from the government. As to my knowledge, I received my education in religious schools, but I am the product of an ignorant and dark society. In spite of all these shortcomings, I have spoken to about one hundred people since my arrival in this city a month ago. Twenty-four souls among them have embraced the Faith and every one of them is willing to lay down his life as many other Bahá'ís have done. Now, in your fair judgment, who in this day is assisted by the Holy Spirit, you or I?

Reverend Bruce had no answer – a simple checkmate made by Abu'l-Faḍl. He later met Dr. Bruce in Tabríz which is another story on page 266, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Volume 4* by Taherzadeh.

In 1899 at the instruction of Bahá'u'lláh, he moved to Ishqábád in Russian Turkamanistán. There he met Captain Alexander Túmánsky, an Orientalist who had befriended the believers. His correspondence with the captain after Abu'l-Faḍl moved to Bukhárá, and later Samarkand, are valuable readings.

There in Ishqábád, two months after his arrival, he witnessed the events of the martyrdom of Háji Muhammad-i-Isfahání, a prominent believer. Abu'l-Faḍl served as the Bahá'í spokesman to the Russian government. This event took place in September of 1889. Following investigation and trial, the two who committed the murder were sentenced to death. The families and friends of these two begged the believers and the family of the martyr for forgiveness. On the day of execution, gallows were erected and the graves were dug. At the moment of execution it was announced that the honorable Bahá'ís have interceded, and therefore the sentence has been reduced to exile to Siberia. Bahá'u'lláh made a reference to this in Lawḥ-i-Dunyá (Tablet of the World), and called it a princely act. However, later Abdu'l-Bahá stated that people have no right to forgive a crime and the sentence must be carried out for the protection of society (*Paris Talks*, page 154)

This event in which Abu'l-Faḍl played an important role increased the prestige of Bahá'ís and paved the way for initiation of enterprises such as schools, libraries and the first House of Worship.

In Ishqábád when Abu'l-Faḍl read Bahá'u'lláh's tablet in his honor, he had no idea what Bahá'u'lláh meant by "gazes upon the horizons." Up to that time his horizons had been limited to Irán and southern Russia. Within two years after the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, the course of events showed him many new horizons.

After Ishqábád, accompanying his teacher, Nabíl-Akbar, he went to Bukhárá where shortly after Nabíl-Akbar passed away. Then he went to Samarkand. Both Bukhárá and Samarkand are in Uzbekistán, then a province of Russia.

Lack of success in direct teaching and ascension of Bahá'u'lláh in 1892 put him in a quiet mood. As he walked in the bazaars of golden Samarkand, studying the dusty books, he could not imagine that his future laid in the bustling cities of the West and ^{not} the territories of Tamerlane. In 1894 on instruction of Ábdu'l-Bahá, he moved to the Holy Land. His spirit was galvanized when in Haifa for ten months he basked in the sunshine of love of the Master. The next twenty years were filled with traveling, teaching and writing.

His first assignment was to go to Cairo, Egypt, where Al-Azhar University represented the school of higher Islamic learning. He, as instructed by Ábdu'l-Bahá, did not talk openly about the Faith. Being supposedly from Shí'ih of Islam from Irán was enough handicap for him to be accepted. Soon he became known for his interpretation of religious scriptures. Scholars and professors of Al-Azhar, recognizing his depth, sat at his feet. Some believed he was endowed with divine powers. After he disclosed his religion about thirty of these scholars became Bahá'ís, but the students who became Bahá'ís were immediately expelled from the University.

One of the students, Baru'd-Dín Qází, recounted the following: "I thought Abu'l-Faḍl was a prophet so one day I told him, 'Master, what is your station?' He said, 'I have none.' I said, 'Why do you hide from me? If you are a prophet please tell me and I will accept and follow you.' Abu'l-Faḍl laughed and postponed the answer to a later time. After a while I had to leave for Palestine and Abu'l-Faḍl advised me to attain the presence of Ábdu'l-Bahá. I obeyed and discovered the truth."

There in Cairo, Abu'l-Fadl corresponded with people of China, India, Russia, Irán and

Holy Land. Many of these were referred to him by ʿAbdu'l-Bahá for interpretation of scriptures or defending attack on the Faith. The first explanation and discussion about the Faith in the Middle Eastern press was by Abu'l-Faḍl in the popular Egyptian magazine Al-Muqataf, which provoked severe objections by Muslim fundamentalists which provided another opportunity for answer and further explanation.

There he wrote his famous book of Faráid (the Matchless Gems) which was written in Persian in response to attack of a Muslim clergy from Caucasus and published in 1898. It found little audience in Arabic-speaking Egypt. It is eight hundred pages and was printed from the very original draft without any addition on the margins or corrections. This was an example of mastery of his writing ability.

He became well-known in Egypt not only as the learned exponent of the Faith but also as defender of Islam against missionary opposition. Then he wrote in Arabic Duraru'l-Bahíyih which was published in 1900 and we have its translation in English under the title of *Miracles and Metaphors*. Actual meaning of Arabic name is *The Brilliant Pearls* which was in answer to a learned man from India. This book caused a fury. The clergy in Cairo issued a declaration which could have meant his death, had it not been for the British rule.

In December of 1900, ʿAbdu'l-Bahá sent Laura Clifford Barney, the compiler of *Some Answered Questions* to Egypt to accompany Abu'l-Faḍl to the West. After three month's stay in Paris, Abu'l-Faḍl sailed for the United States. It is interesting to mention that May Bolles (mother of Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum), summering in Paris, insisted on staying longer in Paris by the instructions of Abdu'l-Bahá, but her mother insisted that they leave for

England. The mother's request to 'Abdu'l-Bahá for consent to go to England was denied.

Then the mother of May asked for intercession of Abu'l-Faḍl who wrote a letter on her behalf which also was denied. It was not until after Thomas Breakwell embraced the Faith in Paris that 'Abdu'l-Bahá permitted May, who taught Mr. Breakwell, to leave Paris.

The reason 'Abdu'l-Bahá sent Abu'l-Faḍl to the United States was to guard the early believers in the States against the mischief of Khayru'lláh. Khayru'lláh was a charismatic Bahá'í teacher who came to the US in 1892. He made many new Bahá'ís but was corrupted by his success. He wished to canonize his teachings where were a mixture of Bahá'í teachings and mystic and psychic concepts. He was disturbed when 'Abdu'l-Bahá did not agree, and he began to rebel and join forces with Muhammad 'Alí , the archbreaker of the Covenant.

'Abdu'l-Bahá also sent 'Alí -Kulí Khán (Nabílu'd-Dawlih) to translate for Abu'l-Faḍl, whose stay in the United States was a few months short of four years. He held regular classes for the believers and seekers in Washington D.C., New York, Chicago and Boston. In Green Acre, Maine, where professors of philosophy from Harvard mingled with artists as well as the people of influence, Abu'l-Faḍl towered above them all. He was not a public speaker or charismatic person. Rather a reclusive scholar, but he filled the auditoriums of th US with large audiences, all eager to partake of his knowledge.

So impressed was 'Abdu'l-Bahá with the depth and ability of Abu'l-Faḍl that He advised him to write a treatise expounding the Faith and 'Alí-Kulí Khán was to translate it. He was so humble that he claimed the scope of such a subject was beyond his ability. 'Alí-Kulí Khán

stated that he pulled *The Bahá'í Proofs* out of Mirzá Abu'l-Faḍl. It was composed in Arabic under the name of Hujaju'l-Bahiyih. *The Bahá'í Proofs* which is the English translation by 'Alí-Kulí Khan is like an introduction to a much greater book which never was completed.

It was first published in 1902. This was his contribution for teaching the Cause in a predominantly Christian society. In it he explains the timeless truths of the Faith, the coming of the Day of God, oneness of religions, also God being absolute unity beyond characterization. Being what it is, it remains an irreplaceable classic of Bahá'í literature. He deepened the believers in the Covenant and prepared them for the visit of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

On November 29, 1904, the day he left the US, he said, "Thirty-two years ago when I left my home town I still was a Muslim. My mother, sister and brothers gathered to say goodbye. Three years later when I became a Bahá'í they abandoned me and left me alone. Now consider the bounties of our Master who has granted me hundreds of friends." The last ten years of his life were spent in Egypt in the cities of Cairo and Alexandria with occasional trips to Beirut and Haifa.

Reverend Peter Easton first visited 'Abdu'l-Bahá in September, 1911, in London which he then followed by a venomous attack on the Faith through articles in the newspaper, *Evangelical Christendom*. Mirzá Abu'l-Faḍl was then in Beirut. When informed by the students in the American University of Beirut about that article, from his sick bed he wrote one of his most effective writings called *The Brilliant Proof* (Burhán-i-Lámé). 'Abdu'l-Bahá received the first copy of it on June 19, 1912, the day He named New York City as the City of the Covenant. He praised the book and ordered immediate translation of it.

Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl was a genius in explaining subtle philosophical points, and he said he received that gift when Bahá'u'lláh, in a tablet addressed to a believer in Isfahán, wrote, "I beg of God to enable Faḍl to teach His truth and to unveil that which is hidden and treasured in His knowledge with wisdom and explanation." He was like an expert deep diver who would immerse in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and discover gems and pearls easily missed by the rest. He was the first believer who through logic and reason showed that there were seven major religions before this Dispensation, and the term "Seven Heavens" used by the prophets symbolizes that.

He was the first to demonstrate with logic why the pagans due to worshipping idols and images are considered polytheistic, while their origin is one God. This parallel is easily found in some religions such as Christianity which is considered monotheistic. He was the first to establish the genealogy of Bahá'u'lláh through research showing His descent from Zoroaster and Yazdgird, the last king in Sássánid dynasty.

The four books of his which are translated into English are *The Bahá'í Proofs*, *The Brilliant Proof*, *Miracles and Metaphors*, and *Letters and Essays*. According to Balyuzi and Taherzadeh, two famed scholars, Bahá'í history so far has not recorded anyone equal to Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl in learning coupled with rare detachment and humility. His detachment, prayer and meditations were the cornerstone of his life, and with them he polished the mirror of his heart so it perfectly reflected the light of the Faith to those who came in contact with him.

Abu'l-Faḍl stated that knowledge is nothing but comprehension of the reality of things,

and the reality can only be reflected in hearts which are pure. That purity is attainable through prayer and spiritual concentration. To know his greatness and humility, 'Alí-Kulí Khán states you had to watch him in the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Whose knowledge would reduce him to utter nothingness like a pebble on the vast ocean shore.

Isabel Frazer, who saw him frequently in a suburb of Alexandria in Egypt, wrote this about him after his death: "...with all his book-learning, he was not at all bookish...the same dignity and impressiveness with which he discussed a verse of the Qurán with the learned sheiks, he put into the meeting of some sojourning American, often finishing with a personal pleasantry, for he was a ready humorist and made his guests instantly at ease. He had the placidness of a child and the air of one who was never in a hurry and had plenty of time to make radiantly happy the place where God had placed him...One day when I was at his house, there were about twenty sheiks who had come over from Alexandria to visit him. One who seemed to be the leader was a very learned and gorgeously attired young sheik, who said with some pride that he had been educated in the oldest university in the world. He was the editor of a magazine in Alexandria and had come to interview Mírzá Abu'l-Faḡl, who for more than an hour had been listened to with absorbed attention. His talk was interspersed with an occasional jest and his sharp eye would glance from one face to another to see if his point was understood...Suddenly 'Abdu'l-Bahá appeared. Mírzá Abu'l-Faḡl faced the door, the rest had our backs to it and did not see Him; there was a moment of silence and Mírzá Abu'l-Faḡl stood with his head bowed, his whole attitude changed. He immediately became the most humble and respectful of servitors. Then quickly arranging a chair for 'Abdu'l-Bahá,

he told Him in a low voice, in answer to His questions, the subject under discussion...”

His steadfastness in the Covenant and obedience to ‘Abdu'l-Bahá had no bounds. He would rather die than to think of a small deviation from the teachings and laws. One believer, Husayn-Rúhí said, “When I arrived in Egypt, I shared the Lawh-i-Dukhan (Tablet of Purity) with Abu'l-Faḍl. I had not yet finished reading when he threw his cigarette case in the street and said that was the end of smoking for him. He was a chain smoker, rolled his own cigarettes and lit a new one with the old. He said that he had been smoking for fifty-five years and was addicted and said, 'Soon you will see that a member of my body will become paralyzed.’” It did not take very long when one of his arms became paralyzed which lasted for two years. The doctors strongly urged him to resume smoking but he refused, saying he preferred to die than to disobey ‘Abdu'l-Bahá.” That tablet does not forbid smoking. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá states in it “smoking tobacco which is dirty, smelly and offensive is an evil habit which is highly injurious to the health.”

To the end of his life, this solitary man, though grown frail, was busy with his research and writing.

In 1910, when ‘Abdu'l-Bahá chose Ramleh, a suburb of Alexandria for rest, He rented a house near His residence for Abu'l-Faḍl, who loved his quiet life in Alexandria, the life of books and ideas. When some American ladies on pilgrimage insisted on visiting Abu'l-Faḍl frequently he dealt with them with consideration and humor. They would call from the porch, “Oh Abu'l-Faḍl, we wish to see you.” An elderly voice from inside would answer, “Abu'l-Faḍl is not here.”

In January 1913 from Paris, 'Abdu'l-Bahá cabled a well-known believer in Cairo that everything should be done for the comfort of Abu'l-Faḍl, who He said was as His own self. In June of that year while in Port Said, Egypt, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was disturbed by the news of Abu'l-Faḍl's continued illness and sent His son-in-law and another believer to Alexandria to see everything was done for Abu'l-Faḍl.

A few days before 'Abdu'l-Bahá's departure from Egypt for the Holy Land, Abu'l-Faḍl went to Cairo. In January, which is the coldest month in Cairo, his strength failed rapidly and when confined to bed, he was transferred to the house of one of the believers who used services of the best doctor and nurses. Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl died of endocarditis on January 21, 1914, at 4 PM at the age of seventy. The nurse in attendance said his final words were "Khoda, Khoda" (God, God). With these words of greeting he joined the One in Whose service he labored for so many years. He was laid to rest next to the grave of Lua Getsinger in Cairo Cemetery.

Next day the news was given to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Haifa as he sat down for lunch. He did not say a word. He arose without eating and went to His room where He stayed alone until late in the afternoon. In the evening when the believers gathered in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's house, He received them and spoke to them about Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, but was frequently interrupted with silence when He was flooded with emotion. He spoke with His eyes closed.

In another day He stated, "How erudite and learned Abu'l-Faḍl was. He had the knowledge of all religious books and the intricate laws and customs of many countries in the East and the West. He knew the doctrines of every sect and party. In the servitude to the

threshold of Bahá'u'lláh he was My partner and associate. During the hours of grief he was the source of My consolation. In his humility he lived in the station of nothingness. I never heard the word 'I' from him. While weak and sick he refused to accept a servant and would prepare tea himself for his visitors. He had been imprisoned several times but I never heard him complain about his hardship. The only time he spoke was about the praise of Mullá Riḍá-i-Yazdí , how eloquently he presented the Faith to the prince governor. No matter how much We want to console Ourselves, We cannot. While in Alexandria every time my heart was depressed, I used to go and meet him, and at once my depression vanished. He was very truthful. He never harbored deceit or revenge.”

What an honor to have such exalting eulogy by no less a person than ‘Abdu'l-Bahá Himself. Indeed, it was a well-deserved bounty. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá named a door in the Shrine of the Báb after his name, and the Guardian designated him as one of the nineteen Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh. Only if we could emulate his humility.

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ADDENDUM REGARDING THE TABLET OF RA'ÍS

Considering the immensity of three tablets of Bahá'u'lláh and their grave effect on the fate of the three most powerful officials of, and the mighty Turkish Empire itself, prompted me to make this addendum to the talk on Mírzá Abu'l-Faḡl.

The part mentioned about the Tablet of Ra'ís and how the fulfilment of its prophecies brought unshakable certitude to Mírzá Abu'l-Faḡl was what he had told to Hájí Mírzá Haydar Alí, who later recounted it. The Tablet of Ra'ís mentioned in that part was a general term used by Hájí Mírzá Haydar Alí for three momentous tablets revealed by the Pen of Glory within the span of two to three years, addressing the two highest ministers of the Turkish Empire. 'Alí Páshá was the prime minister called "Ra'ís" (chief) by Bahá'u'lláh, and Fu'ád Páshá was the foreign minister. These two alternatively changed their two positions.

Also a few words about the title of Dhabih, (Za-bee) meaning "Sacrifice" conferred by Bahá'u'lláh on two believers will identify the two individuals. One believer was Siyyid Isma'il Zavarayyi, the erudite believer who in Baghdád after seeing a glimpse of Bahá'u'lláh's glory ended his own life. The other was Hájí Muhammad Isma'il Káshání, the brother of Hájí Mírzá Jání, the first Bábí in Káshán who hosted ~~the~~ Báb in his house for three nights and later was martyred.

The other title of Hájí Muhammad Isma'il is "Anís" which means Companion, also conferred by Bahá'u'lláh. He was the one in whose house the three well-known tablets of Bahá'u'lláh were perused for the first time by Mírzá Abu'l-Faḡl.

After the passing of Dhabih, who had glimpsed the unbearable glory of Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'u'lláh wrote to his son that his father wished to offer his life in the path of God, and in the sight of God he has the station of a martyr and thus was honored with the title of Dhabih.

Now about the three tablets, Suriyih-Ra'ís, Tablet of Ra'ís and Tablet of Fu'ád, and the summary of their contents, this summary is extracted from *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh* by A. Taherzadeh, Volumes 2 and 3.

Hají Mírzá Isma'il (Dhabih) arrived in Adrianople in August of 1868 when Bahá'u'lláh's house was surrounded by soldiers as the first step towards His exile to Akká. Dhabih could not attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh so he wrote a letter to Him.

Súriyih Ra'ís was revealed in Arabic while Bahá'u'lláh was on His way to Gallipoli to be exiled to Akká. It was revealed in honor of Dhabih but was addressed to Alí Pasha, the prime minister of the Turkish Empire. With Bahá'u'lláh's permission, Dhabih attained His presence in the public bath in Gallipoli.

The first part of this Súrih is addressed to Álí Páshá whom Bahá'u'lláh calls Ra'ís, severely rebukes him for causing all of the tribulations to the believers and cruel injustice to Bahá'u'lláh. Further, He identifies Álí Páshá with those who denied the Manifestations of the past and declares how this Cause before long will encompass the world. He predicts that Adrianople would pass out of their control and blood would flow everywhere. The second part of this Súrih is in response to a question by Dhabih about the nature of the soul.

A few months after the revelation of Súriyih Ra'ís, in the early stage of His imprisonment in a cell in the barracks of Akká, and soon after the death of three of His

followers, the momentous Tablet of Ra'ís was revealed in Persian and was addressed to the same prime minister 'ÁlÍ Páshá. In it, Bahá'u'lláh refers to 'ÁlÍ Páshá as the one who considers himself to be the most exalted among men and Bahá'u'lláh as the lowest servant. He admonishes him for his cruelties in committing a number of innocent women and children to the harsh life of that grim prison and how on the first night of their arrival they were denied food and water. Remember, it was on an extremely hot and windless day in August which took the sail boat all day to cross the bay from Haifa to Akká. There was no shade and inadequate water to drink.

In this tablet, Bahá'u'lláh recounts that as a child at the wedding of one of His brothers in Tehrán He saw the puppet show about Sultán Salím and He watched with curiosity the puppet man at the end folding up the Sultán and his men, putting them all in a suit case. Then He counsels him not to rely on his pomp and glory as they will soon be coming to an end. He emphatically warns him that God's chastisement will assail him from every direction and how confusion will overtake his people and the government, and he will never be able to repent or make amends.

It is interesting that after the revelation of this tablet, Bahá'u'lláh's scribe asked Him what would happen if 'ÁlÍ Páshá truly repented. Bahá'u'lláh stated that every word would inevitably be fulfilled and all the people of the world would be unable to change one word of that tablet.

Now about the Tablet of Fu'ád. Fu'ád Páshá was the foreign minister and collaborator with 'ÁlÍ Páshá in exiling Bahá'u'lláh to Akká in 1868. He was dismissed in 1869,

one year after the revelation of Súrih of Ra'ís and subsequently died in France. In the early years in Akká, Bahá'u'lláh revealed the Tablet of Fu'ád , and in it declared that God had taken his life as punishment and describes in strong terms the agony of his soul. In this tablet Bahá'u'lláh prophesied the downfall of 'Alí Páshá and Sultán 'Abdu'l-'Azíz in the following terms: "Soon will We dismiss the one who was like unto him (meaning 'Alí Páshá) and will lay hold on their chief who ruleth the land (meaning Sultán 'Abdu'l-'Azíz), and I verily am the Almighty, the all-Compelling."

Shortly after the revelation of the Tablet of Fu'ád, 'Alí Páshá was disgracefully dismissed from his position as the prime minister and died in 1871. Five years later Sultán 'Abdu'l-'Azíz, as prophesied in the Tablet of Fu'ád, was dethroned and imprisoned by the revolutionaries and was killed a few days later.

Then in the disastrous war of 1877-78, the Russians and their Bulgarian allies reached the gates of Constantinople, at one time the powerful capital of the Turkish Empire. No one could have fathomed that such an invincible empire would soon crumble and form the independent countries on today's map.

As foretold ten years earlier in the Súrih-Ra'ís, Adrianople was occupied by the enemies of the Turkish Empire and truly blood flowed everywhere.

No wonder that these fulfillments were more than a miracle to Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl and brought him the bounty of immovable conviction. Let us be fair in our judgment and reflect on these mind-boggling events and recognize the power which elevated Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl to the highest station of servitude.