



**BLACK
PEARLS**

SERVANTS IN THE HOUSEHOLDS OF
THE BĀB AND BAHĀ'U'LLĀH

AFNAN

BLACK PEARLS

*Servants in the Households of the
Báb and Bahá'u'lláh*



THE INNER COURTYARD
of the House of the Báb in Shiraz, now destroyed.

BLACK PEARLS

Servants in the Households
of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh

by
Abu'l-Qasim Afnan



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To
Hand of the Cause of God,
ENOCH OLINGA,
the Father of Victories

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FOREWORD

By Moojan Momen

THE WORD *slave* brings to mind, for most people in the West, the evils of the Atlantic slave trade which brought millions of Africans to work on the plantations of the Americas. Slavery in the Islamic world was, however, a very different phenomenon. While slaves in the Americas were fated, whatever their abilities and even if freed, to remain in dire poverty at the very bottom of society, slaves in many Muslim societies had great opportunities for improving their circumstances and climbing the social ladder. The highest offices of state, even the position of grand vizier, even kingship itself, were not outside their grasp.

Slavery has, of course, existed from prehistoric times, and the influence of Islam was mainly directed towards improving the situation of slaves. The Qur'an directs the owners of

slaves to treat them well (4:36) and highly commends the freeing of slaves (90:13). Beyond this, in the traditions (*ḥadīth*) and the holy law (*sharī'a*) there are many more injunctions which had the effect of making slaves in the Islamic world much more comfortable and secure than those in the West. The master is enjoined to show kindness to his slaves, and to refrain from excessive punishments, to give them food and clothing of a standard equal to the master's own, to give them only moderate work to do, and to set them free whenever possible. Although female slaves might become concubines of their masters, the children of these unions were born free and had equal rights of inheritance with the other children of the master of the house. Indeed, female slaves once they had borne children had more or less the same status as the other wives of their master, since they could not be sold separately from their children and they automatically became free upon the master's death. In some respects their position was more favorable than that of their master's wives, since they could not be divorced.

Islam has seldom used slaves for large-scale

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agricultural work, as was normal in the Americas. The main functions of slaves were either domestic service, military service, or concubinage. Slaves were usually considered part of one's household and treated with consideration. Any slave with talent could expect to advance. For the male slaves, domestic service could mean eventually being put in charge of the household. Military slaves had even greater potential mobility. The most promising of these could expect to be placed in command of whole battalions, or even to be given the governorship of a town or province. Egypt was, for some two hundred and fifty years, ruled by slave-kings (the Mamlukes). When each king died, his successor was chosen from among the most powerful of the slave-generals in the army. The Ottoman government, for several centuries, was run by slaves who were educated in special schools and then became government functionaries of all grades. The best of them rose to be ministers, and even Grand Viziers.

For female slaves, the path to social advancement lay in becoming the concubine of the king or of a powerful noble. Once these slave women

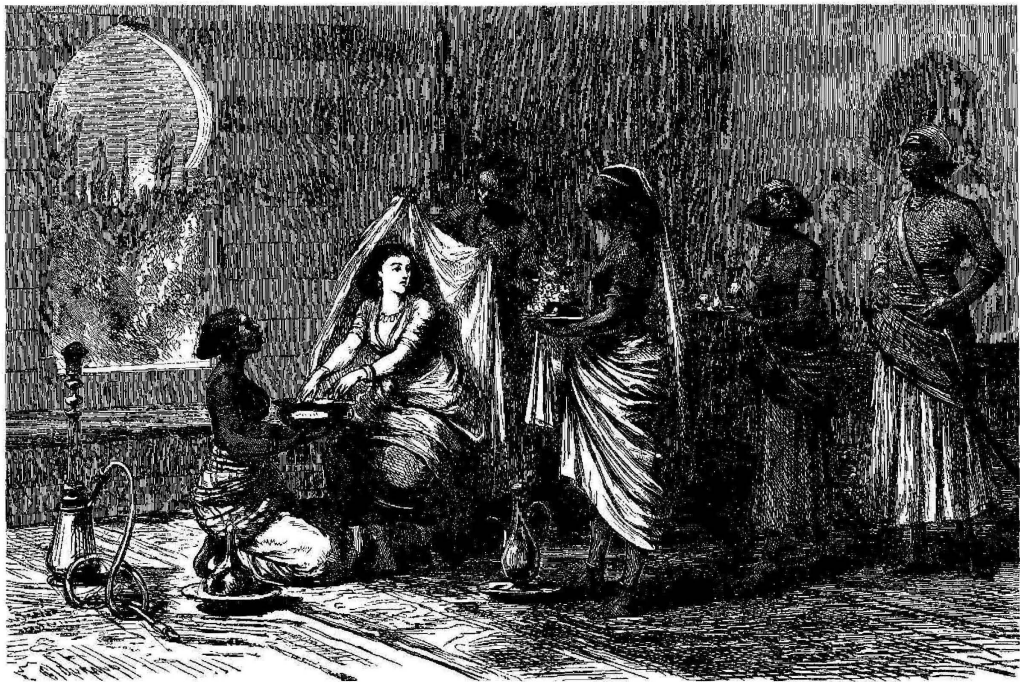
had given birth to their masters' children, especially male children, their status changed. They were frequently freed to become one of the four allowed wives of their master (although many would plead not to have this happen, as it could open the way for them to be divorced). Among several dynasties of Islamic rulers, it became customary to have only slave wives. Thus, for example, the majority of the Abbasid caliphs and Ottoman sultans had slaves as mothers. Once the former ruler died, the mother of the new ruler became one of the most powerful figures in the kingdom. She was the head of the ruler's harem and frequently his only trusted adviser.

Curiously, over many centuries, the best educated and most powerful people in the Islamic world were either slaves or freed slaves. This meant that slavery was often the only means of advancement for those of peasant stock. And so, although the largest source for black slaves was capture in war or kidnapping from the East African coast, the largest supply of white slaves (particularly in later times) came through poorer families selling their children or themselves into

slavery. In times of famine, the numbers selling themselves would be particularly large since, for the most part, Muslim slave owners observed their legal obligations to feed and clothe their slaves.

There was little breeding of slaves in Islamic society (in contrast to the Americas), and the children born of free men and slave women were freeborn. In addition, it became customary to free slaves after a number of years of good service. Therefore, the actual numbers of slaves in the Islamic world could only be maintained by a continuous supply of new slaves from outside. Once the slave trade was suppressed, mainly due to the efforts of the British in the second half of the nineteenth century, slavery in Islam gradually faded away.

In theory, all Muslims are equal regardless of race, and the majority of slaves in the Middle East converted to Islam. Although this was usually not forced, it was often a precondition to advancement and eventual freedom. In practice, the Muslim world has seen a degree of racial prejudice which has varied from time to time and place to place. It appears to have been



Historical Pictures Service, Chicago

AN ARTIST'S CONCEPTION
of a white slave-concubine in a Middle Eastern
harem attended by other black slaves.

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least in the earliest days of Islam. Several of the most important figures of the Abbasid period, including the Caliph al-Mahdi, are known to have been born of black mothers or are described as having been black, indicating some presumed African ancestry. The mothers of several of the Shí'í Imáms are recorded as having been African slaves. The mother of the seventh Imám was a Berber, that of the ninth Imám was Nubian, and that of the tenth came from Morocco. Therefore, the later Imáms must have been dark-skinned.

But in later times, prejudice against blacks increased. A recent survey of medieval Persian poetry has demonstrated prejudice and stereotyping of blacks similar to that which occurs in the West today.¹ Nevertheless, its occurrence was not uniform, and it was still possible in these times for blacks to become governors of towns and to hold other prominent positions in the Muslim world.²

By the mid-nineteenth century, the sources of white slaves for Iran had almost completely dried up because of the Russian occupation of the Caucasus and Central Asia. The only con-

tinued source of slaves was from Africa. These captives were almost entirely used for domestic service (rather than concubinage). Indeed, with respect to females, Africa was almost the only source of servants for domestic service. It was difficult for Muslims to employ women within the household in any other way because Islamic law forbids the close association of men and women who are not married and not close relatives, except in a master-slave relationship. African slaves—whether men or women—were usually very well treated and regarded as members of the family. Their circumstances of life were certainly no worse than those of domestic servants in nineteenth-century households in Europe or America. They were usually freed after the death of their master, or after a number of years in service.

The above is not, of course, intended to be an apology for slavery in the Islamic world. There were also abominable aspects to slavery in Islam. The transport of slaves from Africa often involved much suffering and death. The purpose of this brief introduction is to demonstrate that there were considerable differences between

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the conditions of slavery in the West and its reality in the Muslim history.

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NOTES

1. Minoos Southgate, "The Negative Images of Blacks in some medieval Iranian writings," *Iranian Studies*, vol. 17 (1984) pp.3-36.

2. See the example quoted in Graham W. Irwin, *Africans Abroad* (New York, 1977) pp.69-72.

PREFACE

by Abu'l-Qasim Afnan

UNTIL QUITE RECENTLY in human history, slavery has been prevalent throughout the world. Everywhere, in times of war and aggression, innocent people were captured, taken into bondage, and sold as slaves. These customs were so deep-rooted that the major religions sanctioned and even institutionalized the practice of slavery. In the Jewish scriptures, slavery was made lawful but subjected to regulations (See Lev. 25: 39–55). And the Apostle Paul, in the New Testament, appears to have condoned it (1 Tim. 6:2–3). Later, in the fifteenth century, Nicholas V gave papal sanction for the Portuguese, under Henry the Navigator, to capture and enslave pagans.

There seems little doubt that the prophet Muhammad never looked favorably on the practice of slavery; at most he only tolerated it. Nonethe-

less, there are numerous passages in the Qur'an which Muslims have taken to endorse the ownership of slaves (Sura 4 [Women]:91; Sura 24 [Light]:30-32; Sura 90 [The City]:12; Sura 33 [The Confederates]:49-51). But, it was a freed slave, Bilál ibn Ribáḥ, the Ethiopian, whom Muḥammad designated as the first muezzin of Islam—even though he was a stutterer, and when chanting the *adhán*, the call to prayer, he would pronounce the letter "*sh*" as "*s*."

It was only toward the end of the eighteenth century that so-called civilized man first thought seriously of abolishing the institution of human slavery. The first attempt of the French legislature in 1794, to enforce a law outlawing slavery ended in failure. The British, through much of the nineteenth century, waged a battle against the practice in the Middle East and elsewhere. Most of their efforts proved futile, however, until the Pen of Bahá'u'lláh issued the divine decree and proclaimed unequivocally the law of God.

During the 1800s, throughout the Middle East, but particularly in Iran and in the Ottoman Empire, slavery flourished. The victims were not restricted to any special class, race, or color. Dark-skinned Africans and white-skinned

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Georgians or Caucasians might be included among the common slaves in the cities of Iran—even though the white slaves usually received preferential treatment and lived under better conditions.

These slaves were normally captives brought to Iran from foreign lands. Most of these unfortunates went through life remembering and cherishing their homelands and their mother tongues. There arose, in consequence, a small but beautiful mixture of languages in Persia which even found expression in poetry. One Bahá'í poet, Shúrídih Shírází, who has eulogized both 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Mírzá Abú'l-Faḍl, wrote a charming poem in this mixed creole language.

Slaves were a part of every wealthy household. Dirty and menial tasks were their daily work, and they could be treated cruelly. The rulers made eunuchs of young boys and took them into women's quarters of their palaces as servants. The eunuchs were respected and trusted by the ladies of the household and were often taken into their full confidence. Unlike ordinary slaves, these eunuchs sometimes came to occupy places of prominence in society.

Not until the revelation of the Kitáb-i Aqdas

by Bahá'u'lláh (1873) was the practice of slavery condemned and forbidden to all believers. But before this, in His Tablet to Queen Victoria, Bahá'u'lláh had promised the queen a great reward because of the efforts of her government to abolish trading in slaves.

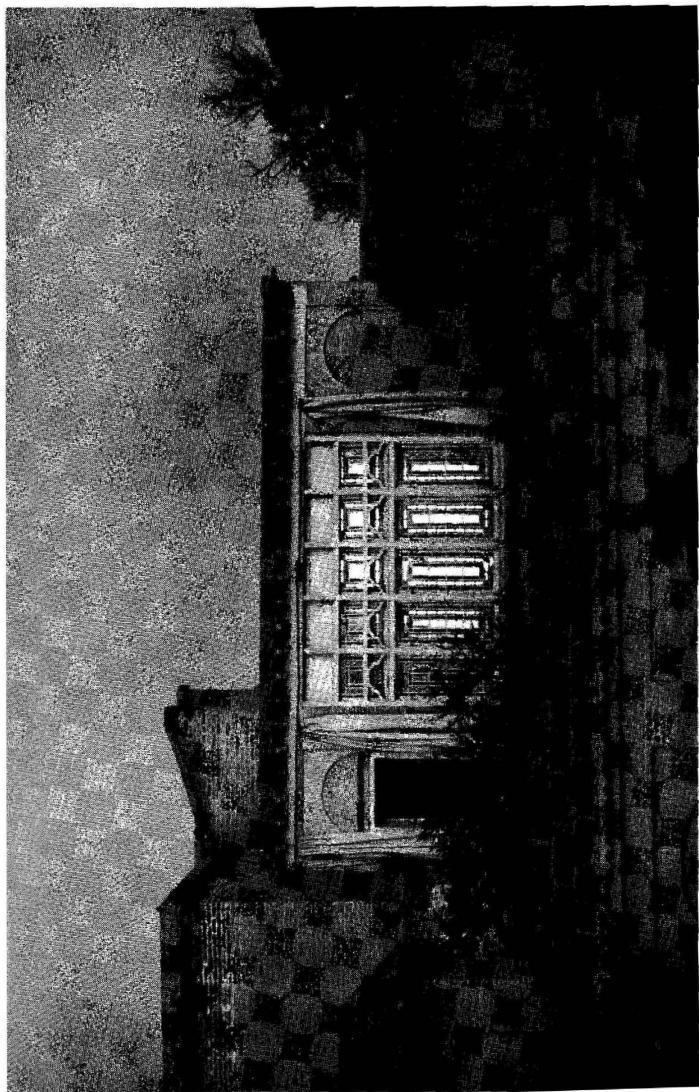
Here are collected the stories of those black slaves who found the Most Great Revelation and came to serve the families of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh at various times. Despite their unfortunate condition, they each attained to the highest station of spirit in this life, receiving the assurance of the pleasure and acceptance of the Holy Ones.

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Farzad Katirai who kindly translated this article from Persian into English. I am also grateful to Dr. Khazeh Fananapazir who assisted with the translation. I must also thank Foad Ashraf who translated into English the reminiscences of Badí'í Bushrú'í regarding Isfandíyár, the servant of Bahá'u'lláh.

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BLACK PEARLS

*Servants in the Households of the
Báb and Bahá'u'lláh*



THE HOUSE OF THE BÁB IN SHIRAZ,
the upper chamber.

ḤÁJÍ MUBÁRAK

RECORDS INDICATE that both sides of the family of the Báb (paternal and maternal), in keeping with their social position and the customs of the time, owned black slaves. The behavior of both families toward their slaves, however, was reputed to have been exceptional. They were unflinching in their generosity and kindness, and it was often said of them that they treated their servants just as members of their own families.*

In 1842, upon His return to His home in Shiraz from a six-year sojourn in Bushihr and Karbala, the Báb—as was the custom—acquired a young Ethiopian slave. The man was nineteen

*The last slave purchased by my forefathers was a Swahili youth named Salmán. He was acquired in Shiraz around 1870, well before the revelation of the Kitáb-i Aqdas in which Bahá'u'lláh forbids slavery. Eventually, Salmán was sent to serve in the family of Dá'í Ḥusayn, a remarkable Bahá'í who lived in the town of Ábádih. Salmán's descendants can still be traced.



**THE HOUSE OF THE BÁB IN SHIRAZ,
the room occupied by Mubárak.**

ḤAJÍ MUBÁRAK

years old and was named Mubárak (meaning, *blessed*). The bill of purchase, which still exists among the Báb's business accounts, is dated 1842 and indicates that the price paid was fourteen *túmáns* (about twenty-eight dollars).

Ḥájí Mírzá Abú'l-Qásím, the brother-in-law of the Báb,* had purchased Mubárak from slave traders when he was a child of only five years and had adopted him into his own family. The education and upbringing that Mubárak received was exemplary. The Báb, approving of his instruction and his abilities, purchased him and brought him to the holy household. His quarters were arranged in the southern courtyard of the Báb's house.

I VIVIDLY REMEMBER that my grandmother, the daughter of Ḥájí Mírzá Abú'l-Qásím, would often recall Mubárak's extreme modesty and politeness. She would say that, while intelligent, quick of understanding, and possessing a great capacity to learn, he nonetheless displayed the

*The great-grandfather of Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith.

utmost meekness and humility and showed kindness to all. She would describe his manners and demeanor as being regal, and would remark that they well befitted his service in the holy house. More than anything else, though, she remembered him as a loyal and faithful servant of the Báb and His mother.

BY THE TIME of His return to Shiraz in 1842, the Báb had largely discontinued His commercial activities. Those business affairs that remained were attended to at the offices of His uncle. Here, Mubárák was of assistance. He was entrusted with the task of settling the Báb's outstanding accounts, and he discharged his duties with superb competence.

More importantly, it was Mubárák who had the signal distinction, on the afternoon of May 22, 1844, of receiving and welcoming into the home of the Báb—with his unique warmth and affection—his Master and Mullá Ḥusayn, who that night would become the first believer in the new Revelation. Nabíl-i A'ẓam, the Bahá'í historian, recounts in *The Dawn-Breakers* how the Báb, met Mullá Ḥusayn that day outside the city

of Shiraz and invited him to His home. Mullá Ḥusayn continues:

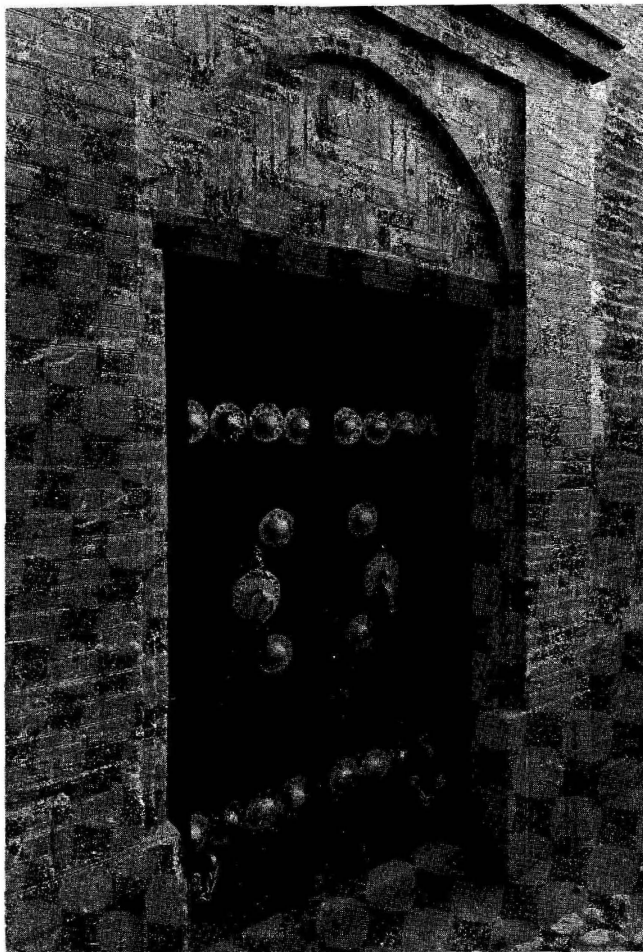
“We soon found ourselves standing at the gate of a house of modest appearance. He [the Báb] knocked at the door, which was soon opened by an Ethiopian servant. “Enter therein in peace, secure,”* were His words as He crossed the threshold and motioned me to follow Him. His invitation, uttered with power and majesty, penetrated my soul. I thought it a good augury to be addressed in such words, standing as I did on the threshold of the first house I was entering in Shiráz, a city the very atmosphere of which had produced already an indescribable impression upon me. Might not my visit to this house, I thought to myself, enable me to draw nearer to the Object of my quest? ”†

It was none other than Mubárák who, throughout that night—the night of the revelation of the Báb’s station—waited, sleepless and vigilant, outside the chamber, ready to serve when called upon.

In *The Dawn-Breakers*, Nabíl records Mullá Ḥusayn as having said:

*Qur’an 15:46.

†[Nabíl-i A’zam], *The Dawn-Breakers* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1932) trans. by Shoghi Effendi, pp. 53–54.



ENTRANCE TO THE HOUSE OF THE BÁB
in Shiraz. The door opened by Mubárak to
welcome Mullá Ḥusayn and the other Letters of
the Living.

“During those days I was, on several occasions, summoned by the Báb to visit Him. He would send at nighttime that same Ethiopian servant to the masjid [the mosque where Mullá Ḥusayn resided], bearing to me His most loving message of welcome. Every time I visited Him, I spent the entire night in His presence. Wakeful until dawn, I sat at His feet fascinated by the charm of His utterance and oblivious to the world and its cares and pursuits.’”*

It was also Mubáarak who was found by Mullá Ḥusayn, at the hour of dawn, standing outside the gates of the holy house, waiting to greet the arrival of the second Letter of the Living, Mullá ‘Alí-y-i Bastámí. Mullá Ḥusayn had been charged by the Báb to reveal His station to no one. Eighteen disciples, the Báb had promised, each independently, unwarned and uninvited, would find Him. Nabíl tells the story of the second disciple:

. . . whilst wrapt in prayer, Mullá ‘Alí-y-i Bastámí had a vision. There appeared before his eyes a light, and, lo! that light moved off before him. Allured by its splendour, he followed it, till at last it led him to his promised Beloved. At that very hour, in the mid-watches of the night, he arose and, exultant with joy and radiant with gladness, opened the door of his

**The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 66.

chamber and hastened to Mullá Ḥusayn. He threw himself into the arms of his revered companion. Mullá Ḥusayn most lovingly embraced him and said: "Praise be to God who hath guided us hither! We had not been guided had not God guided us!"

That very morning, at break of day, Mullá Ḥusayn, followed by Mullá 'Alí, hastened to the residence of the Báb. At the entrance of His house they met the faithful Ethiopian servant, who immediately recognised them and greeted them in these words: "Ere break of day, I was summoned to the presence of my Master, who instructed me to open the door of the house and to stand expectant at its threshold. 'Two guests,' He said, 'are to arrive early this morning. Extend to them in My name a warm welcome. Say to them from Me: "Enter therein in the name of God."'"*

Throughout the eventful months which followed, Mubárák dedicated himself to serving the Letters of the Living and the other believers who journeyed to Shiraz. He served them both in the holy house and in the home of Ḥájí Mírzá Sayyid 'Alí, later known as Khál-i A'zam, the uncle of the Báb who eventually would die a mar-

**The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 68.

tyr's death.* So trusted was Mubáarak that the Báb, during this time, committed numerous Tablets and verbal instructions—some addressed to the Letters of the Living—to his care for safe delivery.

When the number of the Letters of the Living was complete—when all eighteen of the first disciples had found Him—the Báb summoned each of them and assigned to each a mission intended to proclaim the new Faith. As for the Báb Himself, He prepared to embark on a pilgrimage to Mecca. The only believers who were given the privilege of accompanying Him were Quddús, the first in rank among the Letters of the Living, and Mubáarak.

THROUGHOUT the whole of that strenuous journey, Mubáarak never parted from his Master. He continually received the Báb's blessings and expressions of appreciation. On one occasion, en

*Hájí Mírzá Sayyid 'Alf was executed in Tehran in 1850, and is counted as one of the Seven Martyrs of Tehran. See *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 446-49.

route to the pilgrimage, as related by Nabíl,* a saddlebag containing many of the Báb's Tablets and holy Writings was stolen. This account of the incident was narrated by Mubárah himself:

At dawn, His Holiness broke His journey near a well. I unpacked the loads from the backs of the camels and prepared to settle down. Just as the Báb began to pray, a bedouin appeared as swift as lightning, snatched the saddlebag filled with the papers of the Báb, and fled. I immediately gave chase, hoping to apprehend him and retrieve the documents. In the midst of His prayers, however, the Báb motioned me to desist, and after His prayers were completed, He showered much affection and kindness upon me, assuring me that God would grant my recompense, as all goodly deeds are rewarded by Him. He continued to speak, saying that, had I pursued him, the Arab could not have escaped. But Divine Providence intended that these papers would, by means of his actions, come to reach such persons as would not otherwise be possible. Then addressing me, He said: "Grieve not at his action, for this was decreed by God, the Ordainer, the Almighty."

As part of the ritual of Muslim pilgrimage, while in Mecca, the Báb sacrificed nineteen

**The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 132.

lambs—nine in His own name, seven in the name of Quddús, and three for Mubáarak, securing for him too the full rites of pilgrimage.

The Báb remained in Mecca for twenty-seven days and then spent the same length of time in Medina. Afterwards, He and His companions embarked for Muscat by way of Jidda. The Báb had earlier, on his journey to Mecca, become acquainted with the Sultan of Muscat and had received an invitation to stay at his home on the return journey. There are documents to indicate that the Báb remained in Muscat for a month and a half, for all of the month of Rabí'u'th-Thání and the first half of the month of Jamádíyu'l-Avval. During His sojourn, voluminous writings emanated from His pen and the newborn Faith was proclaimed to the chief clergymen of Najaf, Karbala, Bushihr, and Muscat. The recipient of one of His epistles was the erudite Shaykh Sulaymán, the mujtahid of Muscat.

On Friday, the seventh of Jamádíyu'th-Thání (June 4, 1845), the Báb arrived in Bushihr on the last leg of His journey home. He remained only a few days, and on the afternoon of Wednesday, the nineteenth of the same month, He departed for Shiraz, accompanied by Mubáarak.

A cousin of the Báb, Ḥájí Mírzá Muḥammad Taqí, Vakílu'd-Dawlih,* has recorded in a letter the story of that departure:

Despite repeated imploring by my father [Ḥájí Mírzá Sayyid Muḥammad†] that the Báb extend His stay in Bushihr, his request was not granted, and the Báb departed on the appointed day. His uncle was despondent on account of the Báb's leaving and wished that his nephew had remained. But later it became known that horsemen had been sent from Shiraz to arrest the Báb. He had refused to delay his departure, and therefore He encountered the soldiers en route. Otherwise His beloved uncle would have had to witness the sad events destined to befall Him.

Once He had left Bushihr, the haste with which He departed was soon diminished. The distance between Bushihr and Kirár-Takhtih, which is no more than fifty kilometers, took five days to cover. It was while the Báb was in the latter village that the horsemen dispatched from Shiraz by Ḥusayn Khán, the governor, arrived.

Throughout the remaining distance to Shiraz, the soldiers escorting the Báb were served and cared for by Mubárah with the thoroughness

*He later became the chief builder of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in Ashkhabad, Russian Turkestan.

†The uncle of the Báb to whom the Kitáb-i Íqán was later addressed by Bahá'u'lláh.

and courtesy that distinguished his every action. Later on in that same journey, Mubáarak broke away from the company of his Master to arrive in Shiraz some two hours earlier than the Báb and His guards. He was able to alert the Báb's uncle, Hájí Mírzá Sayyid 'Alí, to the imminent arrival of the Báb and the circumstances surrounding it. As a result, the uncle was able to be present when his nephew was conducted into the presence of H̄usayn Khán, the governor of Fars.

The next twenty-eight months of the Báb's residence in Shiraz were difficult times for all in the Báb's household. Mubáarak shared fully in the anxieties and tensions of those trying months. His Master was placed under house arrest, and Hájí Mírzá Sayyid 'Alí was pledged to insure His seclusion. Therefore, the Báb took up residence in the house of His uncle. An interior door leading to the house of the mother of the Báb, however, was kept secret. Through this door, the Báb was accessible. During this period, Mubáarak would guide the believers who were to be granted an audience through the adjacent house into His presence.

When the Báb left Shiraz for Isfahan, He committed the care of His mother and His wife to Mubáarak and to Fiḍḍih, the maidservant of the

household. He expressed the wish that they would endeavor to the best of their abilities to comfort them in His absence. So, despite his own intense attachment to the Báb and the suffering he had to endure in his separation from his Lord, Mubárák found himself in the position of having to console and cheer the mother, the grandmother, and the wife of the Báb.

THE BÁB WAS martyred in Tabriz on July 9, 1850, but the news of these dire events was kept from the women and the servants of the holy household. Naturally, as was the custom in wealthy families, the women lived secluded in their houses, except for visits to the homes of friends and relatives. It was more than a year after the martyrdom when circumstances came to the point that the secret could be kept no longer. Now, the women of the family learned of both the martyrdom of the Báb and that of his uncle, Ḥájí Mírzá Sayyid 'Alí, in Tehran, at the same time.* The mother of the Báb was beside herself with grief.

*See H. M. Balyuzi, *Khadíjih Bagum: The Wife of the Báb* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981) pp. 25–28.

To these calamities were added the spiteful words and malicious attitude of certain ill-wishers and mischief-makers within the family in Shiraz who had always been hostile to the Báb. Unable to bear these injuries any longer, the mother and the grandmother of the Báb decided to transfer their residence to Karbala. They selected a number of loyal and devoted believers to accompany them. Faithful Mubárák was asked by the mother of the Báb to join her entourage on the journey to Iraq.

Even until the time of his death, Mubárák was not told of the Báb's martyrdom. Likewise, the other servants of the household remained in ignorance of these events. The family wanted neither to distress them nor to allow their servants, who were the only ones of the house who were regularly seen in the marketplace, to become the source of delusive news or rumors. Both Mubárák and Fiddih were told that the Báb had voyaged to India to manage his mercantile affairs and would eventually return.

While in Karbala, Mubárák longed for the return of his Master. He made a broom to which he attached a green handle. Green is the color of Muḥammad's lineage: since the Báb was a descendant of the Prophet, Mubárák's broom was

made in remembrance of Him. Every morning at the hour of dawn, Mubárák would use the broom to sweep the courtyard around the sanctuary of the Shrine of Imám Ḥusayn. He vowed to perform this pious deed every day until the Báb would return. After completing this exercise, he would then proceed to procure the provisions required by the household and complete his other duties.

Mubárák was about forty years old when he came to Karbala with the mother of the Báb. Not long after this, however, he passed away, leaving his mistress deeply grieved. He was buried on the grounds of the Shrine of the Imám Ḥusayn. It is his everlasting honor that his Lord was pleased with his deeds and services.



THE HOUSE OF THE BÁB IN SHIRAZ,
doorway and stairs leading to the upper
chamber.

FIDḌIH

FIDḌIH (pronounced fez-ZEH) was an Ethiopian girl of tender years—probably no older than seven—when she was acquired by the Báb to be trained to serve in His household and to attend His wife. She was educated by the mother and the wife of the Báb, receiving instruction from both. At an early age, she showed a prodigious mastery of manners and etiquette. She excelled in the culinary arts and acquired a reputation for excellent needlework and embroidery. She was also faithful to her religious duties.

From the start, Fiḏḏih was regarded by all of the Báb's relatives as a member of their family and was treated accordingly. She herself was enthralled by the wife of the Báb, Khadijih Bagum, who also loved her dearly. Such was their affection for one another that neither could bear to be separated from the other for even a short while.

As Fiḍḍih grew up, she began to assist in the household. The wife of the Báb confided in her fully, and all of Khadījih Bagum's precious belongings were left in Fiḍḍih's care. While the mother of the Báb lived in Shiraz, Fiḍḍih devoted much of her time to nursing her and looking after every detail of her life. After her departure for Karbala, Fiḍḍih was able to dedicate herself fully to Khadījih Bagum to the exception of all others in her life. She never developed any warm friendship with anyone else, even though there were many other servants in the homes of the uncles of the Báb. Never would she appear in public except in attendance on Khadījih Bagum.

During the fifteen days when the future wife of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Munírih Khánúm, and her companions were the guests of Khadījih Bagum in the house of the uncle of the Báb, Fiḍḍih attended them as well.* In a letter addressed to Khadījih Bagum from the Holy Land, Munírih Khánúm mentions Fiḍḍih many times. She sends her warm greetings and expresses gratitude for her services.

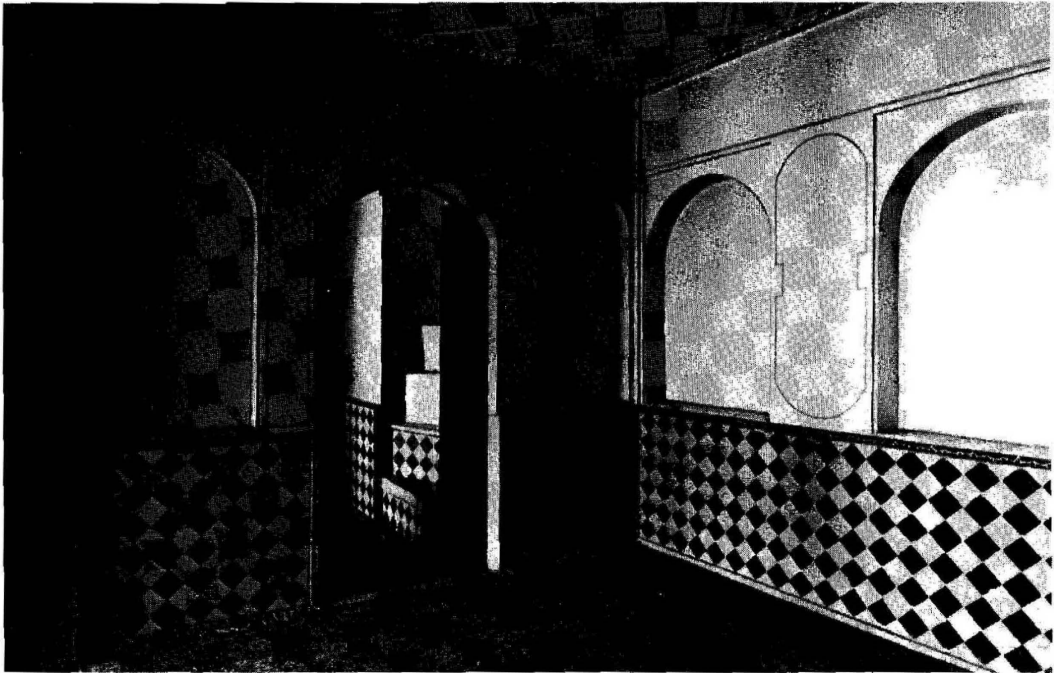
Like Mubárah, Fiḍḍih was never told of the

*See Munírih Khánúm, *Munírih Khánúm: Memoirs and Letters* (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1986) pp. 26-37.

martyrdom of the Báb. In 1877, at the command of Bahá'u'lláh, repairs were begun on the house of the Báb in Shiraz so that Khadjijh Bagum could live there once again. Fiddih was found rejoicing: she imagined that the repairs were being undertaken in anticipation of the Báb's return from His extended journey. Her joy was a heartbreaking testimony to her devotion. She had a pure soul and her spirit was abrim with love. Although she was not aware of the station and mission of the Báb, she was so enchanted by Him that she could not even fathom the thought that He could have been killed under such brutal circumstances.

FIDDIH REFUSED to even contemplate life without Khadjijh Bagum. She would always ask her mistress to pray that she would not continue to live after her beloved lady. In her own prayers she could be heard to supplicate God to accept her wish that, so long as He destined for the wife of the Báb to remain in this mortal world, Fiddih too might remain to serve her; but she begged never to see the day when her lady was no longer with her.

An account of the closing hours of Fiddih's



ROOM IN THE HOUSE OF THE BÁB
once occupied by the Báb's wife, Khadíjih Bagum.

life is contained in a letter written by Hájí Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh Khán* addressed to his wife and conveying the news of the passing of the wife of the Báb. At three and a half hours after sunset on Sunday, November 15, 1881, Khadíjih Bagum left this earthly realm. While arrangements were still in progress for her funeral and interment, true to her soul's desire, the spirit of Fidḍih winged its flight to join her beloved mistress. She was about forty-seven at the time of her death. Her mortal remains were laid in the precincts of the tomb of Bíbí Dukhtarán, a matron saint, near the grave of the Báb's infant son, Aḥmad.

AFTER FORTY YEARS of loyal and devoted service to the wife of the Báb, Fidḍih's prayer was accepted and her wish granted. She passed away on the night of Khadíjih Bagum's ascension to the Abhá Kingdom. In a Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh greatly favors her, assuring her of divine forgiveness.

The Tablet was revealed in honor of Khadíjih

*A paternal uncle of Muvaqqari'd-Dawlih, the father of the Hand of the Cause Mr. Hasan M. Balyuzi.

Bagum. I will paraphrase a short passage from that Tablet:

O thou who are the fruit of the Tree of My Life! Thy tribulations have caused the ocean of sorrow to surge and the breezes of forgiveness to waft. I testify that, as a blessing and bounty on Our part to thee, God hath forgiven every servant and maidservant who ascended on the eve or the day of thine ascension to the Abhá Horizon, the Exalted Paradise, save for those who have denied His rights and rejected what hath been manifested from Him to all men.

Thus hath God chosen thee, O My Leaf, for this most great bounty and this foremost and primal rank.

ISFANDÍYÁR

AMONG THE servants in the household of Bahá'u'lláh in Tehran was a black man, Isfandíyár. When the terrible persecutions of Bábís began, and Bahá'u'lláh was arrested and cast into a dungeon, Isfandíyár proved to be His only true and loyal manservant. He remained in the household to serve the holy family, despite great danger to his own life.

Bahíyyih Khánum, the Greatest Holy Leaf, the daughter of Bahá'u'lláh, has related the story of her father's arrest:

One day I remember very well, though I was only six years old at the time. It seemed that an attempt had been made on the life of the Sháh by a half-crazy young Bábí.

My father was away at his country house in the village of [Níyávarán], which was his property, the villagers of which were all and individually cared for by him.

Suddenly and hurriedly a servant came rushing in great distress to my mother.

"The master, the master, he is arrested—I have seen him! He has walked many miles! Oh, they have beaten him! They say he has suffered the torture of the bastinado! His feet are bleeding! He has no shoes on! His turban has gone! His clothes are torn! There are chains upon his neck!"

My poor mother's face grew whiter and whiter.

We children were terribly frightened and could only weep bitterly.

Immediately everybody, all our relations and friends, and servants fled from our house in terror, only one manservant, Isfandíyár, remained, and one woman. Our palace, and the smaller houses belonging to it were very soon stripped of everything; furniture, treasures, all were stolen by the people.*

More about this noble servant can be found in the memoirs of Badí'í Bushrú'í, who lived in the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá for many years. He relates the story as he heard it from 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

The period of tribulation in Tehran [after the attempt on the life of the shah in 1852] has already been mentioned. One thousand persons were killed, and the Blessed Beauty [Bahá'u'lláh] was cast into

*Lady Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust) pp. 40-41.

prison. He had a black servant named Isfandíyár who was the embodiment of all good qualities; and He had another black servant called Mubárák* who was completely the opposite. Isfandíyár had been entrusted with all of the confidential affairs of the Blessed Beauty.

It was suggested to the shah that if Isfandíyár were arrested, he could be made to reveal all this secret information. Therefore, a plan was hatched to find Isfandíyár. Sulaymán Khán [a prominent Bábí of Tehran who was arrested and martyred during the persecutions of this period] had a servant named 'Abbás who knew all the Bábís. Accompanied by fifty or sixty soldiers, 'Abbás was taken around the city, and he pointed out about thirty believers.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's mother† sent Isfandíyár away to Mazandaran [in northern Iran] where he might be safe. But he returned a week later. When asked why he had come back, he said: "I have debts to pay to the butcher and the baker in town. I don't want people to say, 'That servant of the Blessed Beauty has swindled us and run away.' I will not leave until all my debts are paid." And so he went through the city, sparing no effort to pay off all his obligations.

One day, while he was walking in the bazaar, 'Abbás—with his government escort—came upon Isfandíyár. 'Abbás saluted him with great formality, but he did not denounce him to the soldiers.

*He should not be confused with Hájí Mubárák, the servant of the Báb, whose story is told in the first chapter of this book.

†Ásíyih Khánum, the wife of Bahá'u'lláh.

Eventually, Isfandíyár returned to Mazandaran. Upon his arrival, the governor of the province, Mírzá Yahyá Khán, who knew him, engaged him as his head servant and placed all the affairs of his household in his hands. Some time later, when Mírzá Yahyá Khán and his entourage stopped in Baghdad on their way to pilgrimage to the holy cities, Isfandíyár had the privilege of visiting Bahá'u'lláh there. He begged for permission to remain in His presence.

The Blessed Beauty said to him: "Behold! This noble person gave you a refuge in his house when you were a fugitive. I do not now wish you to prove unfaithful to him and leave unless he approves."

Isfandíyár sent someone to Yahyá Khán on his behalf to beg to be released from service. But his master replied that he would never consent to let him go. And so, Isfandíyár stayed with Yahyá Khán. They returned to Mazandaran.

Isfandíyár, that unique and peerless servant, passed away in Mazandaran.*

'Abdu'l-Bahá has explained that the debts Isfandíyár paid after Bahá'u'lláh's arrest were not really his own, but were actually the debts of the holy household that he had incurred in the marketplace during the normal course of his

*Cf. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, Second Edition (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982) pp. 426-27.

duties. Nonetheless, he remained in Tehran for one full month, at a time when anyone even suspected of being a Bábí could be arrested and killed. He walked openly in the streets and bazaars; he sold his own possessions; and he found that he could earn a little money. Gradually, he paid all the creditors of the Blessed Beauty in full. Not a single penny remained unpaid. Then he presented himself to the holy family and bade them farewell; and only then did he quit the city.*

Many years later, while touring America, 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave this testimony to the services of this loyal servant:

If a perfect man could be found in the world, that man was Isfandíyár. He was the essence of love, radiant with sanctity and perfection, luminous with light. Whenever I think of Isfandíyár, I am moved to tears, although he passed away fifty years ago.†

*Ibid.

†Ibid., p. 426. Nabíl has related this story of this experience in the house of Bahá'u'lláh (c. 1849) sometime before the martyrdom of the Báb: "On another occasion, when I visited that same house, I was on the point of entering the room that Mírzá Yahyá occupied, when Áqáy-i-Kalím, whom I had previously met, approached and requested me, since Isfandíyár, their servant, had gone to market and had not yet returned, to conduct 'Áqá' ['Abdu'l-Bahá, who was at this time a

child of six] to the Madrisiy-i-Mírzá-Şálih in his stead and then return to this place. I gladly consented, and as I was preparing to leave, I saw the Most Great Branch, a child of exquisite beauty, wearing the kuláh [a lambskin hat] and cloaked in the jubbiy-i-hizári'í [a kind of overcoat], emerge from the room which His Father occupied, and descend the steps leading to the gate of the house. I advanced and stretched forth my arms to carry Him. 'We shall walk together,' He said, as He took hold of my hand and led me out of the house. We chatted together as we walked hand in hand in the direction of the madrisih known in those days by the name of Pá-Minár. As we reached His classroom, He turned to me and said: 'Come again this afternoon and take me back to my home, for Isfandfýár is unable to fetch me. My Father will need him to-day.' I gladly acquiesced, and returned immediately to the house of Bahá'u'lláh." (*The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 441.)

بنام خداوندکیت

یا مسعود مظلوم عالم از مقام محسود بد تو توجه نموده و ترا ذکر نیما
 چه که ز فرات ترا در سراق مشاهده نمودیم و عبرات را در حجب سیر افاق
 دیدیم ان ربک هُو الحق علام الغیوب به خاطر آران جنبی را که مظلوم محفل تو
 آمد اردت لقائه خضر امام و جهنک از حق می طلبیم ترا بر خط این مقام
 مؤید بر ما ید ان الملوک و المملوک فی الحق سواء مراتب نفوس
 هر یک به مقدار بوده و هست ان اگر کم عنده اتقاکم شاهد و گوهر
 انا نوصیک بحب افانی الذین و فوا بجهدی میثاتی و قاموا علی خدمته
 امری العسیر العظیم اکبها علی اهل البها الذین ما غرتهم الدنیا و ما منعتهم شها
 العلماء و ما ضعفتم شوکه الامراء قبلوا بقلوب نوراء الی تهرت الارباب

PERSIAN TABLET OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH
 revealed in honor of Mas'úd. See p. 38.

Calligraphy by M. Moughen

MAS'ÚD

AMONG THE BLACK servants trained under the benefaction of the uncle of the Báb, Khál-i Akbar, was Mas'úd who recognized the station of Bahá'u'lláh, became a steadfast believer, and even attained to the holy presence. The Báb's uncle had purchased Mas'úd when he was but a youth from slave traders who abducted him from Zanzibar. He gave him the name *mas'úd*, which means fortunate or felicitous. Khál-i Akbar paid for his schooling in a *maktab*, a traditional grammar school. Here, Mas'úd acquired a basic education, with a good grasp of arithmetic and diction. He spoke with the accent of his native land, though, and always found it difficult to enunciate certain numbers. Over the years, he became renowned in Shiraz as a sportsman, and particularly for excellent horsemanship. Mas'úd enjoyed cooking and would often prepare exquisite dishes which were admired by all.

In manners, demeanor, in all respects of propriety, and in relations with others, Mas'úd was meticulous. For this, Khál-i Akbar favored him with special affection and endeavored to teach him the Faith. Mas'úd was sincerely attracted and soon ranked among the foremost believers in Shiraz.

He was always a dependable assistant to the Báb's uncle, who trusted him and would confide in him totally. He, moreover, was a faithful assistant to the wife of the Báb. After the departure of Mubárák, it was Mas'úd who attended to all matters that required attention outside the house. His loyalty and devotion to the family were also unaffected by the death of Khál-i Akbar.

WHEN THE younger daughter of the Báb's uncle was granted permission to visit Bahá'u'lláh in the Holy Land, Mas'úd was chosen to accompany her and serve as her guide and protector. They were instructed to first embark on a pilgrimage to Mecca, and thenceforth to proceed to the Holy Land. Mas'úd remained in 'Akká for six months. He was captivated by Bahá'u'lláh. When in the presence of the Blessed Beauty, he

would become lost in wonderment as he surrendered himself to His life-giving words.

On one occasion, while in the Holy Land, he invited Bahá'u'lláh to a feast which he hosted, and he sought permission to prepare those dishes he was wont to prepare in Shiraz. Bahá'u'lláh consented and thereby conferred a unique honor upon Mas'úd.

It was Mas'úd's wish to remain in 'Akká to serve in the household of Bahá'u'lláh. His request was eventually presented to the Blessed Beauty, but He advised that Mas'úd should return to Shiraz and continue to serve in the household of Khál-i Akbar. He obeyed, and he escorted his charge—Khál's daughter—back home by way of Beirut. In Lebanon, they spent several months with the Afnán-i Kabír (the Great Afnán)* and his wife, who was also a daughter of Khál-i Akbar. From there, they returned to Shiraz by way of Bombay.

After his arrival in Shiraz, Mas'úd became greatly distressed by his separation from Bahá'u'lláh. His depression became so intense that it

*Hájí Mírzá Sayyid Ḥasan, the brother of the wife of the Báb. His wife had a major role in the early training and instruction of Mas'úd.

could not be controlled. He withdrew from the society of his friends and secluded himself. Unable to contain his pangs of sorrow, he finally sent a supplication to his Lord, pouring out his innermost feelings of grief and despair. In reply, he was honored with a Tablet from the pen of Bahá'u'lláh which I will paraphrase:

Shíráz. To his honor Mas'úd.

In the Name of God, the Single, the Incomparable!

O Mas'úd! The Wronged One of the World [Bahá'u'lláh] hath turned His countenance to thee from this Station, the All-Glorious, the All-Praised. We make mention of thee, inasmuch as We have witnessed thy lamentations on account of thy separation from Us, and We have beheld thy tears in thy remoteness from Him Who is the Central Orb of the universe. Verily, thy Lord is the True One, the Knower of things unseen.

Recall thou the time when this Wronged One came to thy home. Thou wished to meet with Him, and He came to thee—into thy home. We beseech the one true God to aid thee to preserve this distinction.

Verily, before the one true God, they who are the rulers and lords of men and they that are their subjects and vassals are equal and the same. The ranks of all men are dependent on their potential and capacity. Witness unto this truth are the words, "In Truth, they are most honored before God who are most righteous."

We exhort thee to show love toward the Afnán who have fulfilled my Covenant and Testament and who have arisen to serve my Cause, the Mighty, Most Great.

All glory be upon the people of Bahá whom the changes and chances of this world have not misled, whom the doubts and misgivings of the divines have not hindered, and who have not been weakened by the might and power of earthly rulers. These are the people of Bahá who have turned toward God, the Lord of Lords, with hearts that are radiant and luminous.

THE FAMILY of Khál-i Akbar made every effort to comfort and console Mas'úd in his depression. They insisted that he must marry, hoping that his new life would make him less despondent and sad. Although he felt spiritually unprepared for marriage, he acceded to their wishes and married an Ethiopian girl named Gulchihrih (gol-cheh-REH), who was also a servant in Khál's household. To them was born a daughter whom they named Sa'ídih (sa-eed-EH).

Despite his new family and the love and devotion that he showed to his wife and daughter, Mas'úd longed only for another opportunity to attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. Soon after his marriage, he ascended to the Abhá Kingdom.



GULCHIHRÍH, WIFE OF MAS'ÚD
who served Munavvar Khánum, the mother of
Hand of the Cause Hasan Balyuzi. She was the
last African servant of the Afnán family.

I REMEMBER Gulchihrih distinctly. She was a tall, slender woman with an attractive face. She was jolly, talkative and very fond of the water pipe. She came to the house of my father to care for my mother, and she lived with us for many years until her death.

Gulchihrih remembered her home and her childhood days in Africa. She would hold me on her lap and tell me about her life before she was taken as a slave. Not once was she able to finish her story without my breaking down and weeping for her. She would lovingly describe the wide, tree-lined avenues of her native town and the large home in which she lived.

She would say: "There was a brook running near our house where I would play with my brothers and sisters. Our parents warned us to beware of white men. One day, while playing with my friends, we spotted two camel riders approaching. As they drew near, the older children recognized who they were and fled. I could not keep up with them and was soon caught. One of them put a knife to my throat and threatened me. I dared not say a word.

They took me away, and eventually I was shipped to Bushihr." She would describe her father and mother, and aunts and uncles, and the love that existed among them. She remembered also that she had a newborn brother who was very dear to her.

Unfortunately, she knew nothing of the Faith that had been the center of her husband's life. Sa'ídiḥ, however, became a believer and was well versed in the teachings. She married Faraj, also in the household of Khál. Their union coincided with the marriage of my two uncles, and it was decided that all three celebrations would be held together. A grand wedding feast was held in honor of all three couples. Her marriage produced only one son, who was named Mas'úd in honor of his grandfather. This Mas'úd lived happily in Shiraz until 1968.



'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S RESIDENCE IN 'AKKÁ
known as the House of 'Abdu'láh Pasha. Shown
here in 1912.

ŞÁLIḤ ÁQÁ

I OFTEN heard my father* tell the story of Şálih Áqá the Berber, a servant in the house of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá whose sincerity and devotion became legendary. After the ascension of Bahá’u’lláh,† Bahíyyih Khánum, the Greatest Holy Leaf—‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s sister—was deeply grieved and depressed. Seeing her in this condition, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá recommended that she leave the Holy Land for a short while. Accordingly, she journeyed to Cairo in 1894, and spent several months there.

Hájí Mírzá Ḥasan Khurásání, a prominent Bahá’í, at the request of the Master, acted as the host of the Greatest Holy Leaf during her sojourn in Egypt. He employed Şálih Áqá to

*Hájí Mírzá Habíbu’lláh Afnán, the late custodian of the holy House of the Báb.

†May 29, 1892.

serve her, knowing that he was superbly qualified to undertake the responsibilities this entailed. Şálih Áqá had lived in the court of Ismá'íl Páshá, the viceroy of Egypt. He was accustomed to court life, therefore, and had mastered all of the manners and etiquette that pertained to the serving of a royal audience. He spoke excellent Arabic of the Egyptian dialect, and he was also fluent in Turkish of the Istanbuli dialect, which was the official language of the Ottoman Empire. He had been granted his freedom when the Egyptian dynasty ended, and he had eagerly accepted this opportunity.

After five months in Egypt, the Greatest Holy Leaf was prepared to return to Palestine. So pleased was she with Şálih Áqá's polite and modest composure, and his meticulous manners, that she thought him worthy to serve in the household of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He accepted her invitation to return with her retinue. In 'Akká he undertook to serve 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

In the trying days that followed Sálíh Áqá's arrival in the Holy Land, the Covenant-breakers arose with shameless arrogance to challenge and oppose Him. They sent false and malicious

reports to the Ottoman authorities claiming that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was preparing to raise the standard of revolt against the government. These enemies represented to the supersensitive Ottomans that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá intended to make ‘Akká and Haifa the new Mecca and Medina, that He had already raised the standard of rebellion in distant villages, that He had secretly raised an army of thirty thousand men. They declared that the real purpose of construction on the Shrine of the Báb was to provide a fortress and ammunition depot for that army on Mt. Carmel. And among their many other charges was the accusation that He had employed servants of the disbanded Egyptian court as His personal guard.

At this time, in 1896, my father and his brother were young men. They had plans to establish themselves in business in Cairo when they came to the Holy Land on pilgrimage. There they witnessed firsthand the story of Şálih Áqá. My father often told of how Şálih Áqá would don the colorful uniform of the royal court, with gilt buttons, scarlet trousers, and an Egyptian fez. In this impressive garb he would pace back and forth outside the house of ‘Abdu’l-

Bahá* in 'Akká, ready to welcome all guests. No doubt it was the sight of Şálih Áqá's imposing and dignified figure that engendered jealousy and malevolence in the hearts of the Covenant-breakers and gave rise to their defamatory report.

Every morning before sunrise, Şálih Áqá would open the doors to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's house and sprinkle water over the terraces. Regardless of whether or not 'Abdu'l-Bahá was at home, he insisted that the doors had to remain wide open to beckon the whole world to turn to Him. On one occasion, when the so-called Committee of Investigation was sent to 'Akká from Istanbul, there was great anxiety among the believers that the Master's safety might be in jeopardy. A number of friends gathered at the house of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to await His return for the midday meal.

By half past two, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had not yet returned, and this caused great concern among the believers. A sandstorm was blowing outside, and a good deal of dust came sweeping into the hall where all were seated. One of the friends,

*This is the house known as the house of 'Abdu'lláh Páshá.

becoming restless, rose to close the doors and lock out the wind and dust. Şáliḥ Áqá, with composure interrupted him and exclaimed: "What kind of believer are you to close these doors, which are the refuge of the whole world, just because of a storm! If you are unable to bear a little discomfort for His sake, then it would be best for you to return to your home." The believer became deeply ashamed and returned to his place.

DESPITE THE futility of their efforts, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was heartbroken that the Covenant-breakers, who were members of His own family, would stoop to such levels of treachery and deceit. At another time, the friends were gathered in the reception room of the Master's house, and He was discussing the shameful machinations of those enemies. Suddenly Şáliḥ Áqá entered the room. He paid his respects to the Master in the punctilious manner customary among Arabs and stood with his arms across his chest. 'Abdu'l-Bahá knew that he sought permission to speak, and He invited him to do so.

Şáliḥ Áqá then recounted a dream which he

had had and wished to describe for the Master: "I dreamed I was standing outside the walls of the city of 'Akká, atop a hill overlooking the countryside. And I saw a legion of soldiers encamped on the plain between 'Akká and Haifa. As far as my eyes could see were soldiers and munitions. Their numbers were countless, like the waves of the sea. So densely were they garrisoned that the tethers of their tents had been knotted together. I was amazed, utterly astounded. I asked myself whose armies could be at war, and which side was this that could field so vast an army. Who, I asked myself, could be the commander of so mighty an army? I could see in the distance, from my vantage point, lanterns of gold reaching to the heavens above one magnificent tent.

"Suddenly you, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, summoned me to saddle your horse. When I did, you rode toward the camp. Passing beyond the town gates, you approached the tents, and I could see the soldiers line the avenues to greet you and salute you. It was as if they knew who you were. You, too, acknowledged their salutes. The respect with which they welcomed you and the manner of the homage they paid you served to heighten the enigma of the whole scene.

“As you arrived at the heart of the camp and that glorious tabernacle came into sight, you dismounted and continued to approach the tent with utmost veneration. I was now lost in bewilderment. Who, I thought, could be the commander of this army that he could invoke such respect from you? As you reached the drapes of the tent, the Commander appeared. Immediately I knew that it was Bahá'u'lláh. You fell at His feet and sought to prostrate yourself, but He prevented you. He embraced you, and together you entered the tent.

“I could, from my elevated position, see inside the tent as well. Battle plans and maps hung on the walls and covered the floor. It was as if you were conferring about strategy, and Bahá'u'lláh was advising. He was charging you with the command of that mighty army.

“Just then, I awoke.”

All the while that Şálih Áqá was telling his dream, tears streamed from the eyes of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The friends too were in tears and appeared deeply moved. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asked him to step forward, embraced him, and kissed him on both eyes. He said: “O thou the radiance of whose glorious heart outshines the brilliance of thy polished skin. So pure is thy heart that

it serves as the receptacle of the splendor of Bahá'u'lláh.

“The tabernacle of which thou didst dream is the sanctuary of the oneness of mankind, raised by the hand of the might of Bahá'u'lláh. Those maps and charts which thou didst see were plans for the guidance and edification of mankind which Bahá'u'lláh has entrusted to my hands. The Commander was none other than Bahá'u'lláh Himself, the Fashioner of the world. The legions of soldiers were the invisible hosts from on high who, by the mercy of Bahá'u'lláh, have come to render their assistance.

“The meaning of the dream is this: We shall be victorious over the Covenant-breakers and the other enemies of the Faith from within and without.”

WHEN THE TIME came for my father and uncle to be dismissed from the presence of the Master, He summoned my father and told him that the service of Şálih Áqá had become a source of jealousy and envy on the part of the enemies of the Cause. He said: “Although I am unable to part with him, there are compelling reasons

why he must not remain in 'Akká. Therefore, I want to designate him as your guardian, to escort and assist you. I want to remind you that you must extend the utmost respect and courtesy to him at all times."

My father fell at the feet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, beseeching him and saying: "Whatever is your wish is my command. I shall unhesitatingly obey."

The following day, 'Abdu'l-Bahá summoned Şálih Áqá, my father, and my uncle. Addressing His servant, He said: "A friend has committed to my care something very precious which I must safeguard. I myself am unable to devote adequate time to the care required. I want to delegate the task to you. That which has been entrusted to me is the care of these two brothers. They are entering into commerce in a foreign land, and I want you to proceed to Cairo with them and to care for them as if they were your own sons."

Sálih Áqá could not hold back his tears. He implored the Master: "I know that you intend to drive me away from your gates. Had it been your wish to find a guardian for these two youth, with a single gesture of your hand you could have created a thousand."

‘Abdu’l-Bahá consoled him. He explained that the brothers were planning to enter into business in Cairo and were not accustomed to the way of life in that land. “I wish for you to go with them on my behalf and be their tutor.”

Şáliḥ Áqá departed for Cairo with my father, my uncle, and Mírzá ‘Ináyat Işfahání. There he lived for a few years until he passed away. The date of his death is uncertain.

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