

Adapted From *The Chosen Highway*
by Lady Blomfield

A Dramatic Reading by Marlene Macke *
2017

MC: Next we will ask _____ to share memories of Baha'u'llah from the point of view of Bahiyiyh Khanum, the daughter of Bahá'u'lláh and sister of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, called by the Persian Bahá'ís "Varaqiyih 'Ulya (the Greatest Holy Leaf)"

_____: I remember . . . very happy days with my beloved father and mother, and my brother Abbas, who was two years my senior. My father was Mirza Husayn-'Ali of Nur, who married my beautiful mother, Asiyih Khanum, when she was very young. She was the only daughter of a Persian Vizier, of high degree, Mirza Ismaik, He, as well as Mirza Abbas Buzurg, my paternal grandfather, possessed great wealth. When the brother of my mother married my father's sister, the double alliance of the two noble families roused much interest throughout the land. "It is adding wealth to wealth," the people said. Asiyih Khanum's wedding treasures were extensive, in accordance with the usual custom in families of their standing; forty mules were loaded with her possessions when she came to her husband's home.

For six months before the marriage a jeweller worked at her home, preparing jewelry—even the buttons of her garments were of gold, set with precious stones. (These buttons were destined to be exchanged for bread, on the terrible exile journey from Tihiran to Baghdad.) I wish you could have seen her as I first remember her, tall, slender, graceful, eyes of dark blue - a pearl, a flower amongst women. I have been told that even when very young, her wisdom and intelligence were remarkable. I always think of her in those earliest days of my memory as queenly in her dignity and loveliness, full of consideration for everybody. . . .

Even in the early years of their married life, they, my father and mother, took part as little as possible in State functions, social ceremonies, and the luxurious habits of ordinary highly-placed and wealthy families in the land of Persia; she, and her noble-hearted husband, counted these worldly pleasures meaningless, and preferred rather to occupy themselves in caring for the poor, and for all who were unhappy, or in trouble. From our doors nobody was ever turned away; the hospitable board was spread for all comers.

Constantly the poor women came to my mother, to whom they poured out their various stories of woe, to be comforted and consoled by her loving helpfulness. Whilst the people called my father "The Father of the Poor," they spoke of my mother as "The Mother of Consolation," though, naturally, only the women and little children ever looked upon her face unveiled. So our peaceful days flowed on. We used to go to our house in the country sometimes; my brother Abbas and I loved to play in the beautiful gardens, where grew many kinds of wonderful fruits and flowers and flowering trees. . . .

One day I remember very well, though I was only six years old at the time. It seems that an attempt had been made on the life of the Shah by a half-crazy young Babi. My father was away at his country house in the village of Niaviran, 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! 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. . . . Our palace, and the smaller houses belonging to it were very soon stripped of everything; furniture, treasures, all were stolen by the people.

Mirza Musa, my father's brother, who was always very kind to us, helped my mother and her three children to escape into hiding. She succeeded in saving some few of the marriage treasures, which were all of our vast possessions left to us. These things were sold; with the money my mother was able to pay the gaolers to take food to my father in the prison. . . . Oh, the terrible anxiety my beloved mother suffered at that time! Surely greater than any woman, about to become a mother (as I afterwards knew), could possibly have strength to bear.

The prison into which my father had been cast was a terrible place, seven steps below the ground; it was ankle-deep

* See more about this document at https://bahai-library.com/macke_dramatic_readings

in filth, infested with horrible vermin, and of an indescribable loath-someness. Added to this, there was no glimmer of light in that noisome place. Within its walls forty the Babis were crowded; murderers and highway robbers were also imprisoned there. My noble father was hurled into this black hold, loaded with heavy chains; five other the Babis were chained to him night and day, and here he remained for four months. . . . Any movement caused the chains to cut deeper and deeper not only into the flesh of one, but of all who were chained together; whilst sleep or rest of any kind was not possible. No food was provided, and it was with the utmost difficulty that my mother was able to arrange to get any food or drink taken into that ghastly prison.

Meanwhile, the spirit which upheld the Babis never quailed for a moment, even under these conditions. To be tortured to a death, which would be the Martyr's Crown of Life, was their aim and great desire.

They chanted prayers night and day.

Every morning one or more of these brave and devoted friends would be taken out to be tortured and killed in various ways of horror.

When religious fanaticism was aroused against a person or persons, who were accused of being infidels, as was now the case with the Babis, it was customary not simply to condemn them to death and have them executed by the State executioner, but to hand the victims over to various classes of the populace.

The butchers had their methods of torture; the bakers theirs; the shoemakers and blacksmiths yet others of their own. They were all given opportunities of carrying out their pitiless inventions on the the Babis.

The fanatics became more and more infuriated when they failed to quench the amazing spirit of these fearless, devoted ones, who remained unflinching, chanting prayers, asking God to pardon and bless their murderers, and praising Him, as long as they were able to breathe. The mob crowded to these fearful scenes, and yelled their execrations, whilst all through the fiendish work, a drum was loudly beaten.

These horrible sounds I well remember, as we three children clung to our mother, she not knowing whether the victim was her own adored husband. She could not find out whether he was still alive or not until late at night, or very early in the morning, when she determined to venture out, in defiance of the danger to herself and to us, for neither women or children were spared.

How well I remember cowering in the dark, with my little brother, Mirza Mihdi, the Purest Branch, at that time two years old, in my arms, which were not very strong, as I was only six. I was shivering with terror, for I knew of some of the horrible things that were happening, and was aware that they might have seized even my mother. So I waited and waited until she should come back. Then Mirza Musa, my uncle, who was in hiding, would venture in to hear what tidings my mother had been able to gather. My brother `Abbas usually went with her on these sorrowful errands.

We listened eagerly to the accounts she gave to my uncle. This information came through the kindness of a sister of my grandfather, who was married to Mirza Yusif, a Russian subject, and a friend of the Russian Consul in Tihran. This gentleman, my great uncle by marriage, used to attend the courts to find out some particulars as to the victims chosen for execution day by day, and thus was able to relieve to some extent my mother's overwhelming anxiety as these appalling days passed over us.

It was Mirza Yusif, who was able to help my mother about getting food taken to my father, and who brought us to the two little rooms near the prison, where we stayed in close hiding. He had to be very careful in thus defying the authorities, although the danger in this case was mitigated by the fact of his being under the protection of the Russian Consulate, as a Russian subject. Nobody at all, of all our friends and relations, dared to come to see my mother during these days of death, but the wife of Mirza Yusif, the aunt of my father.

One day the discovery was made by Mirza Yusif that our untiring enemies, the most fanatical of the mullas, were plotting the death of Mirza Husayn `Ali Nuri, my father. Mirza Yusif consulted the Russian Consul; that powerful friend determined that this plan should be at once frustrated. An amazing scene took place in the Court, where the sentences of death were passed. The Russian Consul rose and fearlessly addressed those in court:

"Hearken to me! I have words of importance to say to you" (his voice rang out, the president and officials were too amazed to reply). "Have you not taken enough cruel revenge? Have you not already murdered a large enough number of harmless people, because of this accusation, of the absurd falseness of which you are quite aware? Has there not been sufficient of this orgy of brutal torture to satisfy you? How is it possible that you can even pretend to think that this august prisoner planned that silly attempt to shoot the Shah?"

"It is not unknown to you that the stupid gun, used by that poor youth, could not have killed a bird. Moreover, the boy was obviously insane. You know very well that this charge is not only untrue, but palpably ridiculous. "There must be an end to all this. "I have determined to extend the protection of Russia to this innocent nobleman; therefore beware! For if one hair of his head be hurt from this moment, rivers of blood shall flow in your town as punishment. You will do well to heed my warning, my country is behind me in this matter."

. . . Very soon afterwards we heard that, fearing to disregard the stern warning of the Russian Consul, the Governor gave orders that my father should be permitted to come forth from that prison with his life. It was also decreed that

he and his family were banished. They were to leave Tihran for Baghdad. Ten days were allowed for preparation, as the beloved prisoner was very ill indeed. And so he came to our two little rooms. Oh, the joy of his presence!

Oh, the horror of that dungeon, where he had passed those four terrible months. Jamal-i-Mubarak (a name given to my father, i.e., literally the Blessed Beauty) spoke very little of the terrible sufferings of that time! We, who saw the marks of what he had endured, where the chains had cut into the delicate skin, especially that of his neck, his wounded feet so long untended, evidence of the torture of the bastinado, how we wept with my dear mother. He, on his part, told of the steadfast faith of the friends, who had gone forth to meet their death at the hands of their torturers, with joy and gladness, to attain the crown of martyrdom. The glory had won so great a victory that the shame, and pain, and sorrow, and scorn were of comparatively no importance whatever! Jamal-i-Mubarak had a marvellous divine experience whilst in that prison. We saw a new radiance seeming to enfold him like a shining vesture, its significance were to learn years later. At that time we were only aware of the wonder of it, without understanding, or even being told the details of the sacred event.

My mother did her best to nurse our beloved, that he might have some strength to set out upon that journey on which we were to start in ten days' time. . . . This journey was filled with indescribable difficulties. My mother had no experience, no servants, no provisions, and very little money left. My father was extremely ill, not having recovered from the ordeals of the torture and the prison. No one of all of our friends and relations dared to come to our help, or even to say good-bye, but one old lady, the grandmother of Asiyih Khanum. Our faithful servant, Isfandiyar, and the one negro woman who did not fear to remain with us, did their best. But we three children were very young, my brother eight, and I six years old. Mirza Mihdi, the "Purest Branch," was very delicate, and my mother allowed herself to be persuaded to leave the little fellow, only two years old, with her grandmother, though the parting with him was very sad.

At length we started on that fearful journey, which lasted about four weeks; the weather was bitterly cold, snow was upon the ground. On the way to Baghdad we sometimes encamped in wilderness places, but in that month of December, the cold was intense, and we were not well prepared! My poor mother! How she suffered on this journey, riding in a takht-i-ravan, borne on a jolting mule! And this took place only six weeks before her youngest son was born! Never did she utter one word of complaint. She was always thinking of some kindness for somebody, and sympathy she gave unsparingly to all in their difficulties. . . . When we came to a city, my dear mother would take the clothes and wash them at the public baths; we also were able to have baths at those places. She would carry the cold, wet clothes away in her arms - drying them was an almost impossible task; her lovely hands, being unused to such coarse work, became very painful.

We sometimes stayed at a caravanserai - a sort of rough inn. Only one room was allowed for one family, and for one night - no longer. No light was permitted at night, and there were no beds. Sometimes we were able to have tea, or again a few eggs, a little cheese, and some coarse bread. My father was so ill that he could not eat the rough food - my mother was very distressed and tried to think of some way of getting different food, as he grew more weak through eating nothing. One day she had been able to get a little flour, and at night, when we arrived at the caravanserai she made a sweet cake for him. Alas! - the misfortune - being dark, she used salt instead of sugar. So the cake was uneatable! Quite a tragedy in it way.

The Governor of Tihran sent soldiers with us to the frontier, where Turkish soldier met us and escorted us to Baghdad. When we first arrived there, we had a very little house, consisting of my father's room, and another one which was my mother's and in which were also my eldest brother, the baby, and myself. When Arab ladies came to see us, this was the only reception room. These ladies came because they had been taught by Tahiri, Qurratu'l-'Ayn, during her visit to Baghdad.

Asiyih Khanum, my dear mother, was in delicate health, her strength was diminished by the hardships she had undergone, but she always worked beyond her force. Sometimes my father himself helped in the cooking, as that hard work was too much for the dainty, refined, gentle lady. The hardships she had endured saddened the heart of her divine husband, who was also her beloved Lord. He gave this help both before his sojourn in the wilderness of Sulaymaniyyih, and after his return.

This whole section could be cut:

Meanwhile, Mirza Yahya (Subh-i-Azal), a younger half-brother of Bahá'u'lláh, who was afterwards the cause of many of our troubles and difficulties, arrived in Baghdad. He had fled into hiding at Mazindaran, at the time of the episode of the mad youth shooting at the Shah, and remained hidden for some time, then he thought that Baghdad might be a safer abode for him than any part of Persia, and for that reason he came. Now Mirza Yahya was filled with pride, arrogance, and fierce jealousy of Bahá'u'lláh. When he arrived at Baghdad he much resented the attitude of reverence shown by all the friends to his majestic elder brother. He claimed the leadership of the the Babís, asserting that His Holiness the Bab had named him His successor. This was manifestly an untruth. Mirza Husayn-'Ali Nuri wrote on one occasion a letter to the Bab, at the request of His young half-brother, he being too illiterate to write it himself. The Bab, in His reply, referred to this youth as "a Mirror." Thereupon Sub-i-Azal assumed the title of "the Mirror", as being particularly bestowed upon him; the fact being that the title, if not quite a general one, at least had been given to a number of the Babís. Now the Bab had thought out a plan of protecting Bahá'u'lláh by veiling Him from general recognition until the "appointed time." For, if it had been noised abroad prematurely that He was the "One Whom God shall make Manifest," the opposing forces would undoubtedly have

plotted to put Him to death, and the Great Design would, for that reason, have suffered delay. It was therefore above all things necessary to make sure and certain plans in two matters: (1) Bahá'u'lláh must be known (eventually by all the world) to have been recognized by the Bab as "Him Whom God shall make Manifest," of Whom He was the Forerunner, the Herald! Of this recognition there must be no shadow of a doubt, no possibility of uncertainty - no ground for controversy in the future. This was the sublime meaning of the Mission, for which He, the Bab, endured scorn and persecution and imprisonment, and would in a short time sacrifice His life. (2) The proclamation must not be made prematurely. The "Great One" must, for obvious reasons, be veiled until the "appointed time."

In order that these two most important plans should be successful, the Bab confided in Mirza Husayn-`Ali Nuri, Bahá'u'lláh, when "an event" should have happened to Himself. This charge was faithfully carried out by Mirza `Abdu'l-Karim Qazvini, and these precious things remained in the possession of Bahá'u'lláh until the days of Adrianople. When Subh-i-Azal asked to be permitted to see them Bahá'u'lláh consented - but they were never returned. Subh-i-Azal kept them to support his claim to leadership, asserting that the Bab had given to them to him!

To return to the arrangements made by the Bab for the protection of Bahá'u'lláh, by veiling His recognition until the "appointed time." Subh-i-Azal, not one of the nineteen Letters of the Living (he was one of the "Mirrors" - not the Mirror, as he afterwards declared), might well be thought by the uninitiated of these days of confusion, as well as by the uncomprehending open enemies of the Cause, to be a sort of leader of the Babis after the death of the Herald, the Bab. Her certainly could be counted upon to assume that position, so overwhelming was his vanity. Subh-i-Azal would thus, unconsciously, serve as a screen in attracting the attention of the people to himself, thus preventing the premature recognition of "Him Whom God should make Manifest" until His Own appointed time. One point has been raised, i.e., the danger to Subh-i-Azal himself of such a prominent position. Now it was his own arrogance which prompted him to seize the leadership, for which he was ludicrously unfitted, both by nature and by training - his character being weak, his intelligence small, and his indolence great. Moreover, he could be relied upon to hide himself very effectively when danger threatened, till it should be overpast!

The Babis, in general, concerned themselves very little with the pretensions of Subh-i-Azal, and the true disciples looked upon him as an ignorant and presumptuous youth, whose claims were absurd, but they had the desired effect of diverting attention from the personality of Bahá'u'lláh. When Subh-i-Azal arrived in Baghdad he tried to get the friends to acknowledge him as their leader. They paid scant attention to him, and just laughed at his haughty airs. He asserted that Jamal-i-Mubarak (Bahá'u'lláh) was preventing the acknowledgment of his position by the people.

At length my father decided to leave Baghdad for a time. During his absence, Subh-i-Azal could convince himself whether or not the Babis desired to turn their faces to him as their leader, as he, in the petty conceit of a small mind and undisciplined nature, asserted, would, if given an opportunity, prove to be the case. Before my father left for his retreat into the wilderness, he commanded the friends to treat Subh-i-Azal with consideration. He offered him and his family the shelter and hospitality of our house. He asked Mirza Musa, my mother and me, to care for them and to do everything in our power to make them comfortable. Our grief was intense when my father left us. He told none of us either where he was going or when he would return. He took no luggage, only a little rice, and some coarse bread. So we, my mother, my brother `Abbas and I, clung together in our sorrow and anxiety. Subh-i-Azal rejoiced, hoping to gain his ends, now that Jamal-i-Mubarak was no longer present. Meanwhile, he was a guest in our house. He gave us much trouble, complaining of the food. Though all the best and most dainty things were invariably given to him. He became at this time more than ever terrified lest he should one day be arrested. He hid himself, keeping the door of our house locked, and stormed at anybody who opened it.

As for me, I led a very lonely life, and would have liked sometimes to make friends with other children. But Subh-i-Azal would not permit any little friends to come to the house, neither would he let me go out! Two little girls about my own age lived in the next house. I used to peep at them; but our guest always came and shouted at me for opening the door, which he promptly locked. He was always in fear of being arrested, and cared for nothing but his own safety. We led a very difficult life at this time as well as a lonely one. He would not even allow us to go to the Hamman to take our baths. Nobody was permitted to come to the house to help us and the work therefore was very hard.

For hours every day I had to stand drawing water from a deep well in the house; the ropes were hard and rough, and the bucket was heavy. My dear mother used to help, but she was not very strong, and my arms were rather weak. Our guest never helped. My father having told us to respect and obey this tyrannical person, we tried to do so, but this respect was not easy, as our lives were made so unhappy by him.

_____ (*end, section to delete*)

During this time the darling baby brother, born after our arrival in Baghdad, became seriously ill. Our guest would not allow a doctor, or even any neighbour to come to our help. My mother was heart-broken when the little one died; even then we were not allowed to have anybody to prepare him for burial. The sweet body of our beautiful baby was given to a man, who took it away, and we never knew even where he was laid. I remember so clearly the sorrow of those days.

Delete if earlier section deleted: A little while after this, we moved into a larger house - fortunately Subh-i-Azal was too terrified of being seen, if he came with us - so he preferred to occupy a little house behind ours. We still sent his food to him, also provided for his family now increased, as he had married another wife, a girl from a neighbouring

village. His presence was thus happily removed from our daily life; we were relieved and much happier.

Now our great anxiety was concerning the whereabouts of Jamal-i-Mubarak. All this time my mother and Mirza Musa made every possible inquiry. My brother's distress at the prolonged absence was pathetic. On one occasion he prayed the whole night a certain prayer with the one intention, that our father might be restored to us. The very next day, he and our uncle, Mirza Musa, overheard two people speaking of a marvellous one, living as a dervish in the wold mountain district of Sulaymaniyih; they described him as "The Nameless One," who had magnetized the country-side with his love. And they immediately knew that this must be our Beloved.

Here at last was a clue! Without delay, Shaykh Sultan, our faithful friend, with one of the other disciples, set forth on their quest. Needless to say how our hearts went with them, and that our prayers for their success were unceasing. Hope now brought its brilliance into the dark shadow of our anxiety, which had saddened our lives for two years.

As these days of intensified waiting passed by, our faith as well as our hope increased and grew. We knew that in the days that were very near at hand, our wanderer, our father, would be once more with us. My mother had made a coat for him out of some pieces of precious Persian stuff (Tirmih - red cloth);* which she had carefully kept for the purpose out of the remains of her marriage treasures. It was now ready for him to put on. At last! At last! As my mother, my brother, and I sat in a breathless state of expectancy, we heard a step. It was a dervish. Through the disguise we saw the light of our beloved one's presence! Our joy cannot be described as we clung to him.

I can see now my beloved mother, calm and gentle, and my brother holding his father's hand fast, as though never again could he let him go out of his sight, the lovely boy almost enfolded in the uncouth garment of the dervish disguise. I could never forget this scene, so touching and so happy.

Many were the incidents of that two years' sojourn in the wilderness, which were told to us; we were never tired of listening. . . . One day, near a village in the mountains, Bahá'u'lláh saw a young boy weeping bitterly. My father, always compassionate for anyone in sorrow, especially if it were a child, said, "Little man, why art thou weeping?" The boy looked up at the one who spoke, and saw a dervish!

"Oh Sir!" and he fell to weeping afresh. "The schoolmaster has punished me for writing so badly. I cannot write, and now I have no copy! I dare not go back to school!"

"Weep no longer. I will set a copy for thee, and show thee how to imitate it. And now thou canst take this; show it to thy schoolmaster."

When the schoolmaster saw the writing which the boy had brought, he was astonished, for he recognized it as of the royal penmanship, this amazing script. "Who gave this to the?" said the master.

"He wrote it for me, the dervish on the mountain."

"He is no dervish the writer of this, but a royal personage," said the schoolmaster.

This story being noised abroad, caused certain of the people to set out to find this one, of whom many wonderful things were said. So great was the throng which pressed in upon him, that he had to go further away; again and again, he moved from place to place, hiding himself from the crowds, in the caves of the mountains, and in the desert places of that desolate land.

One evening the Sufis of that country-side, assembled together, were discussing a mystical poem, when a dervish arose in their midst and gave so wonderful an interpretation of its meaning that awe fell upon the gathering. All his hearers were silent for awhile, and then they came together close round him and entreated him to come again to teach them. But his time was not yet. When one said sorrowfully, "Oh Master! Shall we then see thee no more?"

"In a time to come, but not yet, go to the city of Baghdad, ask for the house of Mirza Musa Irani. There shalt thou hear tidings of me." the "Nameless One" replied. He went out from their midst and again retreated into the desolate places.

Many were the events of importance to the progress of the Cause that took place during the sojourn at Baghdad. The following was told by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the friends at Abu-Sinan in 1915. Whilst at Baghdad many learned mullas and others came into the Holy Presence, several of whom became His devoted friends; one of those was Kayvan Mirza, grandson of Fath - `Ali Shah. This gentleman came and asked Mirza Muhit to obtain permission for an audience at some midnight in secret.

The reply was: "When I was in the wilderness of Kurdistan I composed this poem: If thou hast in thine heart one desire for thy life, then come not hither! But shouldst thou be prepared to sacrifice soul, and heart and life, come and bring others! Such is the path if thou desire to enter the Kingdom of Light, If thou art not of those able to walk this path-- Begone, and trouble us not!"

Mirza Muhit conveyed this reply to Kayvan Mirza. He chose to "Begone," his heart failed him!

. . . Now followed a period when we might have had a little peace. The Governor had become a friend; the fanatics did not dare to show openly a very fierce hostility. Some of the proceeds of our property, which our friends had succeeded in rescuing and keeping for us, had begun to arrive from Persia. Several of the faithful the Babis, who had followed Bahá'u'lláh and his family into exile, had opened little shops, where their absolute honesty had begun to attract buyers. Many learned and interesting people gathered round Bahá'u'lláh, appreciating his wisdom, and the

helpful counsel he gave when different perplexing problems were laid before him: "Surely his knowledge must be from Heaven!" the people said. As he spoke to them of the "Most Great Peace" which will come to the world, and shewed his kindness to all who were in trouble and in want, and became known to the poor as "Our Father of Compassion," they understood how it was that for the teaching of true peace and brotherhood and loving-kindness he was driven into exile, and all his vast possessions taken from him. As the truth of the matter was gradually realized, more and yet more people came to him from all the surrounding country.

"There is something of another world in this Majestic Person," they said. Accounts of what had taken place during his sojourn in the wilderness of Sulaymaniyyih were also told abroad. As the people pondered on these things, many were amazed, and referenced the mysterious and majestic guest who tarried in their midst.

When his ever-watchful enemies, the most fanatical and bigoted of the mullas, became aware of the influence of his mere presence on all who came to him, and of the profound impression he had made in the land, they again set themselves to work against him. The authorities at Constantinople were approached with sundry plausible tales of the harm that was being done by him to the religion of the people, and requests that he might be driven from Baghdad. At length the Governor came to Bahá'u'lláh in great distress, telling him that a decree had arrived from Constantinople. By this decree Bahá'u'lláh was commanded to leave Baghdad; He would be escorted by Turkish soldiers to an unknown destination. Our peace was at an end!

When it became known that this departure was to take place, great was the consternation among the friends. We had to make preparation for a journey, we knew not how long, to a place we knew not where. The friends came weeping helplessly, "What shall we do? What is going to happen to our Beloved? What?" There was such turmoil that we could not proceed with our preparations.

At this juncture Najib Pasha, who had become a reverent admirer of Bahá'u'lláh, invited him to bring some of the friends, and come to stay in his garden, a short distance outside Baghdad. This relieved some of the turmoil, and we worked hard to make ready for the departure. * * *

It was during Bahá'u'lláh's stay in this garden that the declaration was made to His eldest son, `Abbas Effendi, and a few friends, that He was "Him Whom God shall make Manifest," and in commemoration of this event the Feast of Ridvan (meaning Feast of Paradise) was instituted, and continues to be observed annually by the Bahá'ís throughout the world.

The story of this Declaration is told by H. M. Balyuzi in his short biography "Bahá'u'lláh." The following is an extract:

"Bahá'u'lláh moved to the garden of Ridvan, outside the gates of Baghdad. The Babís thronged there to see the last of their Beloved so cruelly torn from their midst. It was the twenty-first day of April. With tears in their eyes they gathered around Him. He was calm, serene, and unruffled. The hour had struck. To that company Bahá'u'lláh revealed Himself - He was the Promised One in Whose path the Bab had sacrificed his life, 'Him Whom God will make Manifest,' the Shah Bahram, the Fifth Buddha, the lord of Hosts, the Return of Christ, the Master of the Day of Judgment. A deep silence fell upon the audience. Heads were bent as the immensity of that Declaration touched the consciousness of men. Not a breath of dissent - one and all they threw themselves at His feet. Sadness had vanished; joy, celestial joy, prevailed."

Delete? Sub-i-Azal, always in fear for his own safety, left Baghdad about a fortnight before our departure, and joined our party on the way, having discovered our whereabouts. He, therefore, had heard nothing of the Declaration in the Ridvan. When we arrived at Constantinople; our band, being augmented by the way, numbered over seventy persons. We were taken by the Governor to an inn, where we were crowded together into the small space allotted to us. The Master asked the Governor to let Bahá'u'lláh and His family have a house apart. The house was given, but Subh-i-Azal and his family were invited by my father to share this house with us.

Amongst the the Babís were members of all classes, simple tradesmen, mullas, and nobles. The latter, as disguise, described themselves as tailors, cooks, confectioners, bakers, etc., so that they might be permitted to remain near Him they revered.

The Persian Consul-General became a friend of Bahá'u'lláh, and was a great help to the Bahá'ís. He suggested to my father that He should pay a visit to the court officials.

The reply was: "I have no wish to ask favour from them. I have come here at the Sultan's command. whatsoever additional commands he may issue, I am ready to obey. My work is not of their world; it is of another realm, far removed from their province. Why, therefore, should I seek these people?" This Consul was full of respect for such a majestic mind, and described this occurrence on his return to Tihnan, saying:

"I was extremely proud of my august compatriot. Frequently I feel ashamed of my fellow-countrymen, with good reason, for their almost invariable custom is to pursue high officials, begging for favours. The dignified aloofness of Bahá'u'lláh was a very refreshing experience."

After the return to Tihnan of this consul he met Mirza Rida-Qula, to whom he said, "Mirza Husayn-`Ali Nuri is a wonderful and great man; you are his brother I believe." To which Mirza Rida-Quli replied: "No indeed, Oh no! I am not his brother!" Such was the attitude of Bahá'u'lláh's kindred, and His own father's house; that is when they were

not actively vindictive, like Subh-i-Azal.

Whilst at Constantinople, the fame of the wisdom of Bahá'u'lláh had gone abroad, and many noble-minded people were anxious to come into His Presence. Such a profound impression was made on these visitors, that they spoke of the majesty of His person, and the holiness of His teaching to their friends. This made His enemies again uneasy, and they plotted on some pretext or another to get Him removed from Constantinople. This plan was successful, and our Beloved One was sent to Adrianople.

When we arrived at Adrianople we were at first in an inn, but we were permitted at length to abide in a hired house. Bahá'u'lláh at this time made a fuller Declaration of Himself as the expected "Him Whom God shall make Manifest," and Who had been heralded by the Bab. He wrote the Tablet of Declaration (Lawh-i-Amr), directing His amanuensis to take it to Subh-i-Azal, who, when he had read this, became very angry and "jealous fire consumed him."

He invited Bahá'u'lláh to a feast and shared a dish with Him, one half of which he had mixed with poison. For twenty-one days Bahá'u'lláh was seriously ill from the effects of this attempt. Incensed at this failure, Subh-i-Azal tried another plan. He asked the bath attendant (for a bribe) to assassinate Bahá'u'lláh whilst he should be taking His bath, suggesting how easily it could be done without fear of detection. This man was so shocked and horrified that he rushed out into the street unclotted.

Mirza Asadu'llah Kashani related to the writer, that when the friends brought the Tablet from Adrianople to Baghdad they spoke of the nefarious conduct of Subh-i-Azal, and that he had been forbidden all intercourse with the Holy Family. The friends were so enraged with him, that only the express command of Bahá'u'lláh prevented them from ridding the world of "so perjured a traitor."

Siyyid `Ali Yazdi narrated how Mirza Ja`far brought the wonderful Tablet to Yazd, telling that Jamal-i-Mubarak (Bahá'u'lláh) had, at Adrianople, made the Great Public Declaration, that He was "Him Whom God shall make Manifest." And so we, too, heard the soul-stirring news. We had always known in our hearts that Subh-i-Azal was not, could not be, the Promised One; he showed none of the signs; on the other hand, he had many faults, well known to the friends. "But Mirza Husayn-`Ali Nuri," they said, "He shows forth the Heavenly Attributes." Therefore it was that when the blessed Tablet came, we were ready and well prepared to recognize Him.

Delete? Subh-i-Azal's high claims were proven to be absurd as well as false, and the friends, when not enraged at his teaching, laughed him to scorn. At this time the trouble Sub-i-Azal caused, and the mischief he made, was so constant that the authorities lost patience, and it was decided to exile the Beloved One and His family yet again. Subh-i-Azal's conduct was, however, not the only cause of this further exile. Our ever-watchful enemies, fearing the great influence of Bahá'u'lláh, made use of the persistent annoyance of the traitorous half-brother as a pretext to induce the Government to banish the august prisoner to a place where no learned and important people would have access to Him. Subh-i-Azal's libels were amplified, and the Government officials were induced to believe them with this result: We were sitting one day in our house, when we heard discordant music, loud, insistent! We wondered what could be causing this uproar. Looking from the windows we found that we were surrounded by many soldiers.

The Governor was reluctant to tell Bahá'u'lláh that the order had come for still another banishment. He explained this to Sarkar-i-Aqa* ('Abdu'l-Bahá), and we were told that we had three days to prepare for the journey to `Akka. Then we learnt that we were all to be separated. Bahá'u'lláh to one place, the Master to another, and the friends to still another place. I well remember, as though it were only yesterday, the fresh misery into which we were plunged; to be separated from our Beloved; and He, what new grief was in store for Him? He accepted all vicissitudes with His calm, beautiful smile, cheering us with wonderful words.

One of the friends, Karbila'i Ja`far, in despair at the threatened separation, attempted to kill himself; he was saved, but was too ill to travel. Bahá'u'lláh refused to leave him unless the Governor of Adrianople undertook to have him well cared for, and sent after us when he should be recovered. This was done, and forty days after we arrived at `Akka, Karbila'i Ja`far joined us.

During our sojourn in Adrianople, Bahá'u'lláh's custom was to walk only in the garden of the house, which was also His prison. Here the friends crowded, weeping and wailing, refusing to be comforted. They determined to resist the separation; great was the tumult. Many telegrams were sent to the Government at Constantinople. At length we all started together on the journey to Gallipoli, and in three days we arrived, having travelled in carts and wagons. Here the Governor announced that he had received orders for our separation. He came to see Bahá'u'lláh and the Master, and becoming friendly, he tried to help us in our distress. Again many telegrams were sent to Constantinople; we stayed for a week waiting for the replies. At last permission was given for us all to embark together in a Turkish boat. In this small boat we, seventy-two persons, were crowded together in unspeakable conditions, for eleven days of horror. Then soldiers and two officers were out escort. There was an appalling smell in the boat, and most of us were very ill indeed.

At Adrianople were written some of the Epistles to the Kings and Queens of the earth, in which Bahá'u'lláh called upon them as "Servants of the Most High God and Guardians under Him of the people entrusted to their guidance," to join with Him, Bahá'u'lláh, to form an International Arbitration Council, that humanity should never again suffer the disgrace and misery of war. He proclaimed now more publicly that His authority was Divine, being directly

given to Him by God-that He was the Chosen One, Whom, under various names, all the religions of the earth were awaiting. The turmoil was great; the sacred influence radiating from Him reached a wider and still wider circle.

The fanatics, fearing anew this wonderful Personage, and foreseeing the loss of their prestige, and the end of their acquisition of worldly power and wealth if His teachings were accepted, that holy things were not to be sold to mankind, but must be given untarnished "without money and without price," decided to renew their attacks upon Him. The result was the further exile to `Akka that unhealthy town, the penal convict city, where Turkey sent the most hardened criminals. The idea was that Bahá'u'lláh's influence could not radiate from that pestilential city, where He would be closely guarded, also there was hope that He would not be able to live long in that place, where the air was so poisonous that "If a bird flies over 'Akka it dies!" became the proverb.

Therefore it was that the Great One, with the band of exiles who refused to be separated from Him, set forth on this fourth and last journey of banishment; they were, thanks to the traitor brother and bigoted religious enemies, labelled as malefactors, sowers of sedition, hardened criminals, enemies of the pure religion of God and of man. The faithful were commanded to shun these outcasts. Such was the character which preceded Bahá'u'lláh and His disciples to `Akka. The list of false charges was, moreover, directed to be read to the worshippers in the Mosques, so that all who injured the captives might flatter themselves that they "did God service."

In this way was manufactured the atmosphere of hatred which awaited the "Followers of the Light" when they arrived at the prison fortress city of `Akka "by way of the sea beyond Jordan - the valley of Anchor, which should be given as a door of hope." Thus, the world unknowing, were the prophecies being daily fulfilled.

Arriving at `Akka, Bahá'u'lláh said to the Master: "Now I concentrate on My work of writing commands and counsels for the world of the future, to thee I leave the province of talking with and ministering to the people. Servitude is the essence of worship. I have finished with the outer world, henceforth I meet only the disciples."

We had embarked so hurriedly that we had been unable to provide for the voyage - a few loaves and a little cheese, brought by one of the friends, was all the food we had for those indescribable days. A dear friend of the family, Jinab-i-Munib, was taken seriously ill. When the boat stopped at Smyrna, Sarkar-i-Aqa ('Abdu'l-Bahá) and Mirza Musa carried him ashore, and took him to a hospital. The Master brought a melon and some grapes; returning with the refreshing fruit for him - He found that he had died. Arrangements were made with the director of the hospital for a simple funeral. The Master chanted some prayers, then, heartsore, came back to the boat. Arrived at Alexandria, again came that spectre, the rumour of our immediate separation. The friends, though prostrated by sickness, worn out by the wretchedness of the voyage, and crushed by this repeated blow, determined to refuse submission. One friend, in his dire distress, jumped into the sea, but was saved. Bahá'u'lláh and the Master cheered us. "Why did you jump into the sea? Did you wish to give a banquet to the fishes?" asked Bahá'u'lláh.

Nabil, the historian, and another of the Bahá'ís, were in the prison near the port at Alexandria. In their chains they stood, gazing out of the small windows. To their amazement they saw Bahá'u'lláh and the Master standing amongst the friends on the deck of our boat. The prisoners succeeded in attracting the attention of one of our servants, who very cautiously went to them and heard them say: "We were brought here a week ago, we know not to what fate we are destined." Thence we proceeded to Haifa.

There was no place in which we could lie down in that vessel. There were also some Tartar passengers in the boat. To be near them was very uncomfortable; they were dirty beyond description. Our lack of food had reduced us to a seriously weak state of health.

At length we arrived at Haifa, where we had to be carried ashore in chains. Here we remained for a few hours. Now we embarked again for the last bit of our sea journey. The heat of that month of July was overpowering. We were put into a sailing boat. There being no wind, and no shelter from the burning rays of the sun, we spent eight hours of positive misery, and at last we had reached `Akka, the end of our journey. The landing at this place was achieved with much difficulty; the ladies of our party were carried ashore.

All the townspeople had assembled to see the arrival of the prisoners. Having been told that we were infidels, criminals, and sowers of sedition, the attitude of the crowd was threatening. Their yelling of curses and execrations filled us with fresh misery. We were terrified of the unknown! We knew not what the fate of our party, the friends and ourselves would be.

We were taken to the old fortress of `Akka, where we were crowded together. There was no air; a small quantity of very bad coarse bread was provided; we were unable to get fresh water to drink; our sufferings were not diminished. Then an epidemic of typhoid broke out. Nearly all became ill. The Master appealed to the Governor, but he was at first very little inclined to relax the strict rules, which he had been directed to enforce. The Mufti had read to the people in the Mosque a Farman full of false accusations.

We were described as enemies of God, and as the worst kind of criminals. The people were exhorted to shun these vile malefactors; this naturally caused the attitude of intense hatred and bitter antagonism with which we were regarded. After a while the Governor was persuaded by the Master to allow a little money instead of the uneatable rations which had been allotted to us; he also permitted one of the servitors, Mirza Ja'far, to go into the town, accompanied by a soldier to buy food. By this our condition was considerably bettered.

Bahá'u'lláh and His family were imprisoned in three little rooms, up many steps, for two years. During this time Dr. Petro, a Greek, became a friend, and having been able to make investigations, he assured the Governor that these prisoners, far from being vile criminals were high-minded persons and innocent of all harm. So closely were we watched that we had been in `Akka six or seven months without being able to get into touch with Mirza `Abdu'l-Ahád, a devoted Babi disciple, who had been sent by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to `Akka some time before our arrival and had opened a shop. . . . Having heard a rumour that the Beloved Ones had been sent to `Akka, a friend, Abu'l-Qasim Khan, and his wife, made that long and dangerous journey from Persia in order to find out the truth. Arrived in `Akka they met Mirza `Abdu'l-Ahád. He, fearing lest his secret should be disclosed, hurriedly hid the pair behind stacks of boxes at the back of his shop.

The news of their arrival was, with much difficulty, conveyed to Bahá'u'lláh. He sent them back to Persia, after a stay of only three days, so grave was the risk. These friends accordingly left `Akka. They had not even seen Bahá'u'lláh, but they were able to carry the news back to Persia that the Beloved Ones were really imprisoned in this desolate place.

The first Persian friends to telegraph to `Akka were the "King of the Martyred" and his brother, "The Beloved of the Martyred." The help they succeeded in sending was much needed, as we were past the end of our resources. Little by little the news of our whereabouts filtered through to the other friends in Persia. Shaykh Salman's self-constituted mission was to carry news from Bahá'u'lláh to Persia, and to bring back letter to Him. Many were the difficult and dangerous journeys made, mostly on foot.

Shaykh Salman it was who, when he was arrested at Aleppo, bearing a most important supplication from a friend in Persia to Bahá'u'lláh, wondering how he could prevent the enemy finding it, knowing the dire consequences of its falling into their hands, swallowed it. It was this devoted and resourceful friend who was entrusted with the significant mission of bringing Munirih Khanum from Isfahan to `Akka, she who was to become the wife of Sarkar-i-Aqa ('Abdu'l-Bahá) the Master, and my much loved sister.

When Nabil, the historian, came to `Akka he was unable to get into the city. He lived for some time in the cave of Elijah on Mount Carmel. Thence he used to walk (about ten miles) to a place beyond the wall of the fortress. From this point he could see the windows of those three little rooms of our prison; here he would wait and watch for the rare and much-coveted happiness of seeing the hand of Bahá'u'lláh waving from the small middle window.

Meanwhile the war between Russia and Turkey was in progress. More barrack room was required for the soldiers. By that time the Governor had become friendly and consented to allow the family to leave the fortress, and live in a little house which a Christian merchant had let to us.

How we rejoiced in our liberty, restricted though it was. Only three times had we been permitted to go out, for even an hour, from the prison barracks during the whole of that first two years. How tired we were of those three little rooms!

During the period of the sojourn in Baghdad, Bahiyyih Khanum, the Greatest Holy Leaf, was her mother's loving helper, working always beyond her strength, in the various household tasks. No childish pleasures or companions were hers. Always with eyes on her mother, alert to spare her any fatigue, she rejoiced beyond measure when she could minister in any way to her or her illustrious father.

"My mother," she said, sometimes gave lessons to my brother `Abbas; at other times Mirza Musa would teach Him, and on some occasions he would be taught by His father." "And your lessons?" I asked. "But I never had any time for studies," she said, in a tone which spoke volumes of absolute self-effacement, and this is the keynote of her whole life, no thought of her unselfishness entered her mind. . . . Her life was spent in prayer to God and service to her loved ones, from the time when, as a small child of six, she cowered in the dark house alone with the tiny Purest Branch, a baby of two, in her little arms, listening in terror to the yells of the infuriated, cruel mob, not knowing if they were murdering her father, or whether they had seized her mother and the little eight-year-old `Abbas. After those terrible days in Tihiran, and the not less terrible journey to Baghdad, during the sojourn in this city, she grew into a beautiful girl, very much like her lovely mother in grace of body and character, a gentle, slender maiden with large, grey-blue eyes, golden-brown hair, and warm, ivory-coloured skin. Her sense of humour was keen and her intelligence remarkable.

As she grew up, she implored her father to allow her to remain unmarried, that she might the better devote herself to her three dearly loved ones. And so it was. An old man, a friend of Bahá'u'lláh, told me that He once said to him: "I know no man worthy to marry such purity as my daughter." I said, "Khanum must have been very lovely?" "I have been told so; naturally, I never saw her."