

KHADIJIH BAGUM - The Wife of the Bab

By H. M. Balyuzi

'O well-beloved!...Thou shalt not be a woman, like other women, if thou obeyest God in the Cause of Truth...' - The Bab

Introduction

In the long years after the martyrdom of the Bab, His wife, Khadijih Bagum, would at times recount the story of her glorious but tragic life to the younger members of her family. Decades later, a niece, Maryam-Sultan Bagum, daughter of Haji Mirza Abu'l-Qasim, recalled all that she had heard from her saintly aunt; her grandson, Abu'l-Qasim Afnan, has now put on paper these recollections. Here is this invaluable account, in part purported to be a narration of Khadijih Bagum herself.

The Bab and Khadijih as Neighbouring Children

The Bab and His wife were not widely separated in age. The house of Haji Mirza Siyyid 'Ali, the maternal uncle of the Bab - who became His guardian when His father died - and that of Mirza 'Ali, the father of Khadijih Bagum, adjoined each other; and so the Bab and Khadijih Bagum were neighbours and playmates in their childhood. Mirza Siyyid Hasan (the Great Afnan of future years), a brother of Khadijih Bagum, was about the same age. Whenever the children of the two households came together to play, usually Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad (the Bab) chose not to join in their games, although He occasionally did, and was always kind and considerate.

Dreams the Bab among Flowers Wearing Coat of Verses

Years later, when Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad had gone to Bushihr (Bushire), Khadijih Bagum had a vivid dream in which she saw her young Cousin in a verdant plain, with flowers in profusion, facing towards the Qiblih (Mecca) in an attitude of prayer. He wore a "labbadih" (an outer coat) on which Qur'anic verses were embroidered with threads of gold. His face was radiant. She related that dream to her mother, and to the mother and grandmother of Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad. They assured her that it was her Cousin's assiduous attendance to His prayers which had vouchsafed her that splendorous vision. At this time Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad could not have been more than sixteen years old.

Dreams Fatimih asks her for Marriage to Imam Husayn

Still some years later, when Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad had returned to Shiraz from His visit to the holy cities of 'Iraq, Khadijih Bagum dreamt that Fatimih, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, had come

to ask for her hand in marriage to the Imam Husayn¹ Her mother, being told of this dream, rejoiced at the good fortune that awaited her daughter.

The Bab's Family Visit that Day

That very day, Khadijih Bagum recalled, the mother of Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad came to call on her mother, and His grandmother was also there. Whenever His grandmother came on a visit, Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad stated, all would hurry to greet her, would kiss her shoulders, and then wait at the threshold of the room for her permission to enter and take a seat. Only Khadijih Bagum's mother and the mother of Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad would first be seated with her. And in her presence all would keep silent until she addressed them.

To continue the story of that day, so auspicious in her life, Khadijih Bagum recounted: 'After they were all seated I took Sharbat (a fruit syrup) to them and left the room. Then my sisters, one of whom was married to Haji Mirza Zaynu'l-'Abidin² and the other to Haji Mirza Siyyid 'Ali, came and went into the room. Not long after, they all rose to go.'

Marriage Request

To Khadijih Bagum's surprise, the mother of Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad kissed her on the forehead before leaving. Seeing her puzzled look, her mother hastened to explain: 'That kiss implied that she has asked your hand in marriage to her Son. You see, the dream you had last night has come true.' Khadijih Bagum, hearing the news and being reminded of her wondrous dream, was greatly elated. The extraordinary respect and consideration which all the members of the family gave to Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad, and the accounts of His demeanour and bearing which she had heard from her elders, had already convinced Khadijih Bagum that her young Cousin stood head and shoulders above them all. She recalled: 'From that day I felt a great stirring within my heart. It seemed that the gate of God's mercy and abundant bounty had been flung open before my face. I felt immeasurably proud of my coming union.'

Wedding

Some two months passed before the wedding could be arranged. Marriage feasts were held in the house of Mirza 'Ali, the father of Khadijih Bagum, and in the house of the uncle of Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad who had been His guardian. Shaykh Abu-Turab, the Imam-Jum'ih of Shiraz, presided over

¹ The martyred third Imam, who was a son of Fatimih.

² Her name was Zahra Bagum; her husband was a cousin of the father of the Bab and great-grandfather of Abu'l-Qasim Afnan.

the ceremony and read the usual oration. As it was customary for a relative of the bridegroom to respond, His uncle Haji Mirza Siyyid 'Al'ai, accepted the suit. Later, the bride and the Groom were joined in wedlock in the house of Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad Himself.³

Khadijih Bagum recalled: 'His kindness towards me and His care for me were indescribable. He and His mother alike showered me with kindness and consideration.' The household in that small dwelling, destined to be the scene of the birth of a World Faith, consisted of the married couple, the mother of Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad, and two black servitors: Fiddih, the woman, and Mubarak, the man.

Dream of the Lion

Remembering those halcyon days preceding sorrows and suffering, Khadijih Bagum would say: 'No words can ever convey my wonderful feeling of good fortune.' But, not long after her marriage, she dreamt one night that a fearsome lion was standing in the courtyard of their house, and she herself had her arms around the neck of the lion. The beast dragged her twice round the whole perimeter of the courtyard, and once round half of it. She woke up, alarmed and trembling with fright, and related her dream to her Husband. His comment was: 'You awoke too soon. Your dream portends that our life together will not last more than two-and-a-half years.' Khadijih Bagum was greatly distressed, but her Husband's affection and His words of comfort consoled her and prepared her to accept every adversity in the path of God.

Child Ahmad

Before long it was realized that Khadijih Bagum was with child. And when the time came, her accouchement was exceedingly difficult and fraught with danger. Her mother-in-law reported to Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad that His wife was on the point of death. There was a mirror beside Him, on which He wrote a prayer, and instructed His mother to hold the mirror in front of His wife. That done, the child was safely delivered; but its life was short. Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad's mother was both grieved and angry. She remonstrated her Son that if He had such powers, why had He not made an attempt to preserve the life of the child, and spare His wife so much suffering? Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad replied with a smile that He was not destined to leave any progeny, an answer which infuriated His mother; but to her reproaches He said no more.

The child, a son who was named Ahmad by his

Father, was buried under a cypress tree in the compound of the tomb of Bibi-Du"kh taran.⁴

In the "Suratu'l-Qarab" (The Chapter of Kinship) of His mighty book, the "Qayyumu'l Asma", the Bab speaks of Ahmad: 'O concourse of Light! Hear My call from the point of Fire in this ocean of snow-white water on this crimson earth. Verily, I am God, besides Whom there is no other God. On the exalted throne a beloved noble woman, bearing the same name⁵ as the beloved of the First Friend,⁶ was wedded to this Great Remembrance;⁷ and verily I caused the angels of Heaven and the denizens of Paradise, on the day of the Covenant, to bear witness, in truth, to God's Remembrance.

O well-beloved! Value highly the grace of the Great Remembrance, for it cometh from God, the Loved One. Thou shalt not be a woman, like other women, if thou obeyest God in the Cause of Truth, the greatest Truth. Know thou the great bounty conferred upon thee by the Ancient of Days, and take pride in being the consort of the Well-Beloved, Who is loved by God, the All-Wise, the All-Praised. Be patient in all that God hath ordained concerning the Bab and His Family. Verily, thy son, Ahmad, is with Fatimih,⁸ the Sublime, in the sanctified Paradise.

There is this further reference to Ahmad in the "Suratu'l-'Abd" of the same mighty Book:

All praise be to God Who bestowed upon the Solace of the Eyes,⁹ in His youth, Ahmad. We did verily raise him up unto God...O Solace of the Eyes! Be patient in what thy God hath ordained for thee.

Verily he doeth whatsoever He willeth. He is the All-Wise in the exercise of His justice. He is thy Lord, the Ancient of Days, and praised be He in whatever He ordereth.

Bab's Daily Tasks

During those years of their marriage, Khadijih

³ The marriage took place in August 1842.

⁴ No one knows for certain who Bibi-Du"kh taran was. It is said that she was a member of the Royal House of the Atabaks of Fars—the Salghurids (1148-1270)—while others have claimed that since Bi-Bi-Du"kh taran means the matron or the Mistress of the Maidens, it is possible that she was the Abbess of a Christian order of nuns.

⁵ Khadijih.

⁶ The Prophet Muhammad.

⁷ The term 'Dhikr', here translated as 'Remembrance', was frequently used by the Bab to refer to Himself.

⁸ The daughter of the Prophet Muhammad.

⁹ The Bab oftentimes refers to Himself in the "Qayyumu'l-Asma" as Qurratu'l-'Ayn—the Solace of the Eyes.

Bagum related, her Husband had no definite occupation. He spent most of His time in the upper chamber of the house, engaged in devotions. At times, He went in the morning to His uncle's trading-house in the Saray-i-Gumruk (Customs Serai). And some afternoons He would go for a walk in the fields outside the city and come home at sunset. It was His wont to write His letters or His meditations in the early part of the evening, after performing the obligatory prayers pertaining to that period of the night.

Bab's Transfiguration

Khadijih Bagum recalled that one day in the late afternoon He came home earlier than usual. That evening, He said, He had a particular task to attend to, and asked that dinner be served earlier. Fiddih, the servant who did the cooking, was so informed, and the family had their evening meal in the room of the mother of Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad. Then He retired for the night.

Speaking of the events of that memorable night, which, according to recollections of members of the Afnan family, occurred some time before the Bab declared His mission, Khadijeh Bagum related: 'An hour later, when the house was quiet and its occupants had gone to sleep, He rose from His bed and left the room. At first I took no particular notice of His absence, but when it lengthened to more than an hour I felt some concern. Then I went out to look for Him, but He was nowhere to be found.

Perhaps, for some reason, He had left the house, I thought; but, trying the street door I found it locked from within, as usual. Then I walked to the western side of the house, looked up at the roof-top, and saw that the upper chamber was well lighted. This added to my surprise, because I had never known Him to go to that part of the house at that hour of the night, unless He had guests. And He always told me when a visitor was expected. He had not said that He was to have a guest that night. So, with both astonishment and trepidation, I went up the steps at the northern side of the courtyard. There I saw Him standing in that chamber, His hands raised heavenwards, intoning a prayer in a most melodious voice, with tears streaming down His face. And His face was luminous; rays of light radiated from it. He looked so majestic and resplendent that fear seized me, and I stood transfixed where I was, trembling uncontrollably. I could neither enter the room nor retrace my steps. My will-power was gone, and I was on the point of screaming, when He made a gesture with His blessed hands, telling me to go back.

This movement of His hands gave me back my courage, and I returned to my room and my bed. But all that night long I remained deeply disturbed. In

my fitful moments of sleep that scene in the upper chamber would present itself to my mind, adding to my consternation. I kept asking myself what grave event had come to pass to evoke such sorrow and such tears, inducing prayer and supplication of such intensity. Sleep was impossible that night, and then came the dawn, so foreboding, and I heard the muezzin's call to prayer.

'At sunrise Fiddih took the samovar and tea-things to the room of my mother-in-law and, as usual, He went to His mother's room to take tea. I followed him there, and as soon as my eyes alighted on Him, that attitude and that majesty which I had witnessed the night before took shape before me. I paled and shuddered involuntarily. His mother had, at that moment, gone out of the room, and He was quietly drinking His tea. He raised His face to me, and received me with great kindness and affection, bidding me be seated. Then He passed to me what was left of the tea in His own cup, which I drank. His kindness restored my courage, and when He asked me what it was that troubled me, I boldly replied that it was the change in Him which weighed heavily on my mind. "You are no longer", I told Him, "the same person I knew in our childhood. We grew up together, we have been married for two years, living in this house, and now I see a different person before me. You have been transformed." I further remarked that this had made me anxious and uneasy. He smiled and said that although He had not wished to be seen by me in the condition of the previous night, God had ordained otherwise. "It was the will of God", He said, "that you should have seen Me in the way you did last night, so that no shadow of doubt should ever cross your mind, and you should come to know with absolute certitude that I am that Manifestation of God Whose advent has been expected for a thousand years. This light radiates from My heart and from My Being."¹⁰ As soon as I heard Him speak these words I believed in Him. I prostrated myself before Him and my heart became calm and assured. From that moment I lived only to serve Him, evanescent and self-effacing before Him, no thought of self ever intruding.'

Khadijeh's Faith

The degree of Khadijeh Bagum's faith and the rank she attained are attested by Nabil:¹¹ 'The wife of the Bab... perceived at the earliest dawn of His Revelation the glory and uniqueness of His Mission and felt from the very beginning the intensity of its

¹⁰ These are the words of the Bab as recalled by Khadijeh Bagum in later years, and recorded decades after, and should not be taken as His exact words on that occasion. (Ed.)

¹¹ Nabil-i-A'zam, "The Dawn Breakers", p. 191 (U.S. edn.).

force. No one except Tahirih, among the women of her generation, surpassed her in the spontaneous character of her devotion nor excelled the fervour of her faith.' In the prayer of visitation which Baha'u'llah revealed for Khadijih Bagum after her death, He addresses her in these words:

Thou art she, who, before the creation of the world of being, found the fragrance of the garment of the Merciful.

Sadness of those days; Bab's Pilgrimage to Mecca and back

Whenever Khadijih Bagum spoke of the days of her marriage and the enforced separation from her Husband, and related the sufferings of the Bab, grief would so overwhelm her as to deprive her, for a while, of the power of speech. Her grief was felt, and shared by all who heard her.

Not many months after His declaration to Mulla Husayn-i-Bushru'i,¹² the Bab left Shiraz to go on pilgrimage to Mecca. The letter which He wrote to Khadijih Bagum from Bushihr (the port of embarkation) shows His degree of attachment to her. His letter opened with these words: 'My sweet love, may God preserve thee.'

The return of the Bab from His pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina signalled the commencement of fierce denials and persecutions which reached their climax with the martyrdom of the Bab Himself. His wife's sufferings and agonies of mind and soul, although not under public gaze, can well be imagined. There was, for example, the incident of the raid by the emissaries of the Darughih (Chief Constable) of Shiraz, which she particularly recalled in later years:

Arrest of the Bab

'It was summer-time in the month of Ramadan. We slept on the roof, and my mother-in-law slept in the courtyard. Farrashes¹³ of the Governor made their way to our home from a neighbour's roof. That Blessed Being rose up and told me to go downstairs. The intruders took away every book and every piece of writing that they found in the upper chamber. To Him they said, "You have to come with us to the house of 'Abdu'l-Hamid Khan (the Darughih)." Down below, I could hear Him expostulating with the Farrashes, demanding to know why they had broken into and forced their way into our house, in the dead of night. "It has been reported to us", they replied, "that some people have assembled in this house." Since they had by then discovered the untruth of this report, He asked if

they would now go away in peace. But they were not satisfied and took Him away. God knows what His mother and I suffered that night. We were thankful that His grandmother, an elderly lady, was not there. It was close to dawn when He came home. They had demanded money and, as He had no cash with Him, they had laid hands on the cashmere shawl round His waist and cut it up. 'Abdu'l-Hamid Khan had kept half of the shawl for himself.'

Haji Mirza Abu'l-Qasim, a brother of Khadijih Bagum, wrote the full story of that night in a letter to Haji Mirza Siyyid Muhammad, a maternal uncle of the Bab, who at that time resided in Bushihr. This letter is extant.

Bab Imprisoned by the Governor

Not long after that night when the privacy of His home had been stealthily invaded, the authorities arrested the Bab and detained Him, under lock and key, in the house of the Darughih. And it was rumoured in the city that he would be put to death in the same house. Haji Mirza Siyyid 'Ali, the uncle of the Bab who had been His guardian in His childhood, did his utmost to provide comfort and relief. He himself had been beaten up and was ailing, yet he was ceaseless in his efforts. And so was the sister of Khadijih Bagum, whose name was Zahra Bagum. At this time, when no male member of the family dared come to their house, Khadijih Bagum recalled, it was only her sister who would come, dressed as a beggar. The famous mosque of Shiraz, known as Masjid-i-Naw (the New Mosque), was close by. Here, in a secluded spot in the mosque, her sister would change her own chadur¹⁴ for one tattered and patched, and would then go to the house of the Bab to bring any news there was of Him to His mother.

Helpers and Comforters of the Bab

Amongst the notables of Shiraz, the one man ever ready to render assistance was Shaykh Abu-Turab, the Imam-Jum'ih. Zahra Bagum, together with the wife of Haji Abu'l-Hasan-i-Bazzaz (the Mercer),¹⁵ who was closely related to the Imam Jum'ih, visited regularly the house of this benevolent divine to obtain news and seek his intercession on behalf of the Bab. The Imam-Jum'ih would reply that he was powerless in the face of the open and relentless

¹² The First Letter of the Living to find and believe in the Báb.

¹³ Footman, lictor, attendant.

¹⁴ An outer garment which envelops a woman from head to foot, like a sack.

¹⁵ Haji Abu'l-Hasan was a fellow-pilgrim of the Bab, on the boat that took them from Bushihr to Jiddah. He was greatly impressed by the mien and bearing of Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad, his fellow-townsmen. Later, in Shiraz, he learned of the claim and the mission of Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad, the Bab, and gave Him his unswerving allegiance, which never faltered in the face of life-long persecution. Many were the hardships that he bore resolutely in His path and for His sake. Haji Abu'l-Hasan was the father of Mirza Muhammad-Baqir Khan Dihqan, a distinguished and greatly devoted Baha'i of the period which covered the Ministry of 'Abdu'l-Baha.

enmity of their own relative, and his advice was to try and calm down that vociferous man. He was referring to Haji 'Abdu'l-Husayn, a brother of the wife of Haji Mirza Siyyid Muhammad, who was foremost in denouncing, insulting, and persecuting the Bab.

Bab Sentenced to Death

But when the divines of Shiraz passed the verdict of death on the Bab, and had their infamous sentence confirmed by Husayn Khan, the Nizamu'd-Dawlih and Governor-General of the province of Fars, the Imam-Jum'ih refused to add his signature to theirs. Three of those divines - Shaykh Husayn, the Nazimu'sh-Shari'ah (known as Zalim, the Tyrant), Shaykh Mihdiy-i-Kujuri, and Shaykh Muhammad-'Aliy-i- Mahallati - presented themselves at the house of the Imam- Jum'ih in an effort to win him over to their side. Shaykh Abu-Turab rejected their plea, censured their reprehensible conduct, and turned them out of his house. By now Zahra Bagum, the mother of the Bab, and the wife of Haji Abu'l-Hasan had together persuaded the Imam-Jum'ih to find a way out of the impasse.

Bab Demanded to Recant in Public; Disease Empties City

And so, as well as declining to be associated with the death verdict pronounced by the divines, he made them agree to summon the Bab to Masjid-i-Vakil (the Vakil's Mosque),¹⁶ and there give Him the chance to repudiate His claim. One day, heralds were sent through the streets to call, in the name of the Governor, on the people of Shiraz to assemble, in the afternoon of a certain Friday, in Vakil's Mosque to hear the Bab's recantation.

And now to continue with Khadijih Bagum's recollections: 'We were all apprehensive lest something untoward should happen, but it was being said that once He had declared His repentance, He would be allowed to come home. This was comforting to us. On that Friday afternoon, we wished to send a woman to the mosque, to bring us news of the happenings there. But it was found to be impossible. Women were not admitted. However, news was brought to us that farrashes had taken Him to the mosque, where He had ascended the pulpit and spoken words which had kindled once again the wrath of the Governor and the divines, whereupon they had led Him back to confinement. Soon after, a cholera epidemic suddenly struck Shiraz, taking a heavy toll of lives. The people fled from the city and very few were left behind.

Bab Returns Home; Leaves for Isfahan

'One day, to our indescribable joy, He came home and stayed two or three days. Only Haji Mirza Siyyid 'Ali and two others of the believers knew of His release. But these were the last days of my life with Him. A few days before the arrival of the month of Ramadan, He announced that His sojourn in Shiraz was no longer advisable and that He would leave the city that very night. We, who had known how much He had suffered in Shiraz, were happy and contented that He could now reach a place of safety. In the afternoon He called on Haji Mirza Siyyid 'Ali and Haji Siyyid 'Ali and Haji Mirza Zaynu'l-'Abidin and his wife, who was my sister, to bid them farewell, returned home about sunset, and two hours later, all alone, left the house. His clothes and the necessities for the journey had been sent out of the city earlier. Accompanied by one of the believers He took the road to Isfahan.¹⁷

Waiting News of the Bab; Demands for Money

'Now, we were most of the time in the house of Haji Mirza Siyyid 'Ali, expecting the arrival, any minute, of a messenger with news of Him. The cholera epidemic was over and the Governor had returned to Shiraz. As soon as Husayn Khan was back, he sent his farrashes to seek Him. We pleaded ignorance of His whereabouts. 'Abdu'l-Hamid Khan, the Darughih, who had on his own authority allowed Him to depart from Shiraz, likewise denied having any knowledge of His destination. Then the farrashes of the Governor came to arrest my brother, Haji Mirza Abu'l-Qasim, who was ill in bed and unable to walk. So they threw him over their shoulders and carried him to the residence of the Governor. Of course he knew nothing, but Husayn Khan would not believe him, and began to remonstrate so vehemently that my brother could not withstand that torrent of abuse and lost consciousness. Indeed, he was driven almost to the point of death. Finally, Husayn Khan told him that he should produce his Brother-in-Law within fifteen days or pay a fine of 15,000 tumans.¹⁸ Whatever my brother said had no effect on the cruel Governor. Then Haji Muhammad-Sadiq-i-Isfahani, a friend and business associate of my brother, intervened to stand surety for him. The Governor's men once again hoisted Haji Mirza Abu'l-Qasim on to their shoulders and brought him home. He was thrown unceremoniously into the forecourt of the house and abandoned there. God knows what my brother and we went through during those two or

¹⁶ It was built by Karim Khan-i-Vakil (reigned 1750-79), the founder of the short-lived Zand dynasty.

¹⁷ In the last days of September 1846. A somewhat different account of this episode is given in Browne (ed.), "A Traveler's Narrative", p. 9 (U.S. edn.), and "The Dawn-Breakers", pp. 197-8 (U.S. edn.).

¹⁸ A substantial sum in those days.

three hours. One result of this ill-treatment was an affliction of the eyes. The pain was severe and my brother could not open his eyes, whilst tears streamed from them the whole time.

'Upon the expiration of fifteen days, the farrashes came again. They would not allow my brother even to mount his donkey, but took him away in the same manner as before. God be praised that just as Husayn Khan was demanding menacingly his 15,000 tumans from Haji Muhammad-Sadiq and my brother, a letter was brought to him from the Governor of Isfahan, Manu"ch ihr Khan, who had written that the Person whom Husayn Khan was seeking was in Isfahan, an honoured Guest of the Governor himself, and that no member of His family should be molested in any way. Husayn Khan had perforce to moderate his demand, and exacted 1,500 tumans instead. The Farrash-Bashi (Chief of the farrashes) and his men all demanded money and had to be satisfied.'

Haji Mirza Hasan-'Ali, a younger brother of Haji Mirza Siyyid 'Ali, lived in Yazd. Once every few months he would send a messenger to Shiraz with a letter for his sister, the mother of the Bab, to console and comfort her, and give her whatever news he had of the Bab. At times there was a letter from the Bab Himself, addressed to His wife, mother and grandmother. Haji Mirza Siyyid Hasan (later known as Afnan-i-Kabir), a brother of Khadijih Bagum, was in Isfahan during those years, but he never wrote to her a line about her Husband. Indeed, at that time Haji Mirza Siyyid Hasan was hostile to his Kinsman, the Bab.¹⁹

And now to continue with Khadijih Bagum's recollections: 'Then Haji Mirza Siyyid 'Ali left for Yazd. Of the young members of the family, Haji Mirza Javad²⁰ and Haji Mirza Muhammad-'Ali²¹ came to see us oftentimes and provided us with our means of livelihood. They were exceedingly kind. Whenever they met my mother-in-law, they invariably kissed her hand and spoke such words as would bring her peace of mind.

The Bab Moved from Prison to Prison

'A few months passed, until news reached us that He, the Qa'im of the House of Muhammad, had been taken to Tihiran,²² and then to Tabriz. These fragmentary pieces of news caused us great

distress. My mother-in-law appealed to her brother, Haji Mirza Siyyid 'Ali, to do something. Thus it was that he went from Yazd to Maku and in the end met a martyr's death in Tihiran.

Martyrdom of the Bab Hidden from the Ladies; Youth's Death

'Haji Mirza Siyyid 'Ali's martyrdom in Tihiran, and the martyrdom of that Blessed Person [the Bab] in Tabriz were concealed from the women of the family, and whenever we mentioned rumours that had come to our ears, the men would hotly deny them - all lies they would say.'

Of course the men of the family knew what had happened. Even before those dire events had come to pass, Haji Mirza Abu'l-Qasim, the brother of Khadijih Bagum, had found it impossible to stay in Shiraz, and had taken Mirza Javad, the eighteen-year-old son of Haji Mirza Siyyid 'Ali, with him to go on pilgrimage to Mecca. Mirza Javad had, only a year before, married his cousin, Khadijih Sultan-Bagum, a daughter of Haji Mirza Siyyid Muhammad. On the way back, the youthful Mirza Javad (now a Haji) fell ill and died at Jiddah, where he was buried.²³ Haji Mirza Abu'l-Qasim, now alone, visited the holy shrines of 'Iraq before returning home. More than a year had passed since the martyrdom of the Bab and that of His uncle, when Haji Mirza Abu'l-Qasim reached home with the sad news of the death of Haji Mirza Javad. The announcement of this youth's lamentable death perforce revealed the fact that his father was dead, too - cruelly beheaded in Tihiran. And the martyrdom of the Bab Himself could no longer be kept a secret. Now, all three were mourned together.

Mother of the Bab Leaves; House Rented

The mother of the Bab was inconsolable. The spiteful attitude and the lashing, wounding tongues of some members of the family, who were still bitterly hostile, intensified her agonies, until she could not bear any longer the injuries inflicted upon her and decided to take herself away from Shiraz. At first she wished to go to Mashhad - the most sacred city of Iran, where the remains of the Eighth Imam, 'Ali Ibn Musa'r-Rida, repose - and have her mother with her. But she changed her mind, leased the house of the Bab to Mirza Muhammad-Husayn-i-Bazzaz, and, accompanied by Bibi Gawhar²⁴ - a sister of Haji Mirza 'Abdu'llah Khan-i-Balyuz - and Haji Mubarak, the faithful black servant of the Bab, went to Karbila and resided there for the rest of her

¹⁹ A half-brother of Khadijih Bagum, Haji Muhammad-Mihdi - a poet of distinction whose soubriquet was Hijab, had gone to Bombay for commercial pursuits.

²⁰ Son of Haji Mirza Siyyid 'Ali.

²¹ Son of Haji Mirza Siyyid Muhammad.

²² Although summoned by the Shah to Tihiran, an order from the Prime Minister countermanded this, when the Bab was within thirty miles of the capital. (Ed.)

²³ A receipt exists, from a reciter of the Qur'an in Karbila, which lists the clothing and other belongings of Haji Mirza Javad. They had been given to him by Haji Mirza Abu'l-Qasim, and in return, he was to recite in public verses of the Qur'an on behalf of the deceased.

²⁴ A great-aunt of the present writer.

life. Later, Mirza 'Abdu'l-Majid and his wife, both believers, went to live in the same holy city. The wife of Mirza 'Abdu'l-Majid served the mother of the Bab with exemplary devotion.

Khadijih Leaves

Khadijih Bagum, recalling those days of desolation and distress, would say: 'Her departure from Shiraz added greatly to my burden of sorrow and deepened the sadness of my heart. I had no longer by my side a comforter whose love and sympathy and care had sustained me over the years. I went to live with my sister, the widow of Haji Mirza Siyyid 'Ali. She herself had lost both her husband and her only son within the space of one year. As great as was my sorrow, hers was even greater and I had to comfort her. The loyal, faithful Fiddih was with me.

Servants Unaware of the Bab's Martyrdom

'Of the servants and the maids whom we had in the house, no one knew of the martyrdom of that Blessed Being and the martyrdom of His uncle. It was not possible to talk of such matters with anyone. In Karbila, Haji Mubarak had purchased a broom with a green handle to sweep every day the courtyard of the Shrine of Imam Husayn. Since green is the colour of the House of Muhammad, Haji Mubarak meant to keep alive the hope that one day he would see again, with his own eyes, the luminous face of his beloved Master in this world. In Shiraz we told Fiddih and others that the Master and His uncle had gone to Bombay for the purposes of trade. When our house was being repaired Fiddih was so happy, saying all the time that the Master was on His way home, and the house was being repaired in preparation for His home-coming. The joy of this faithful soul was wonderful to behold and truly overwhelming. We were all deeply affected.

'When the captives of Nayriz and Zanjan were brought to Shiraz, they could not approach us nor could we approach them. But after a while the daughters of Hujjat and some ladies from Nayriz visited us in the house of Haji Mirza Siyyid 'Ali. Thereafter we were able to visit one another.

'Years passed, and Mirza Aqa²⁵ grew up. He was greatly attached to <missing...>

The Blessed Beauty [Baha'u'llah] was in Baghdad. Mirza Aqa wrote to Him on my behalf and I was honoured with a reply. Then came a day when Mulla Muhammad-i-Zarandi, Nabil-i-A'zam, travelled to Shiraz with a mandate from the Blessed Beauty to announce His Mission to the People of the Bayan²⁶

in this city. In the house of Mirza Aqa he told the believers gathered there that the Promised One of the Bayan had come, and they, one and all, pledged their loyalty. One day I asked him to come. I was behind a curtain, and as soon as I heard him say that the Blessed Beauty was "He Whom God shall manifest", promised in the "Bayan", I experienced the same feeling as I had that night, standing at the threshold of the upper chamber of our home, and became certain that what God had promised for the "Year Nine" had come to pass. I immediately put my forehead on the ground in adoration and thanksgiving. Then, I could only whisper: "Offer at His sacred threshold my most humble devotion." I did not hesitate for a moment and my submission was instantaneous and total.

'Again, years passed, and one day a letter came from Mirza Siyyid Hasan, my brother in Isfahan, announcing that Aqa Siyyid Yahya and his sister,²⁷ accompanied by Shaykh Salman,²⁸ were coming to Shiraz on their way to the Holy Land. Believers travelling to Shiraz always came to pay me a visit and I received them in the home of Mirza Aqa, my nephew. Women amongst the believers in Shiraz, who were few in number, used to call at the house of Haji Mirza Siyyid 'Ali to see me. I lived in that house and had it prepared to receive the travellers from Isfahan. But I heard that on their arrival they had gone to the house of Haji Mirza Siyyid Muhammad, which was close by. I went there myself and brought them to this house. My nephew, Haji Siyyid 'Ali,²⁹ was also in Shiraz at this time. They stayed for fifteen days, and those were some of the happiest days of my life.'

Here ends the story of Khadijeh Bagum, as told by her to the young members of her family.

Shaykh Salman visited Shiraz often, and whenever he came from 'Akka, he brought a Tablet from Baha'u'llah addressed to Khadijeh Bagum, and presents and tokens as well. Once he brought her a book in the handwriting of Zaynu'l-Muqarrabin - a gift from Baha'u'llah; another time a ring and shirts which Baha'u'llah had worn, with handkerchiefs and turban-cloths used round His "taj" - His headgear.

Munirih Khanum carried to the presence of Baha'u'llah three requests from Khadijeh Bagum. She longed for the house of her Husband to be repaired so that she might live there. She asked for the hand of Furughiyyih Khanum, a daughter of Baha'u'llah, on behalf of her nephew, Haji Siyyid 'Ali. And she begged for permission to travel to 'Akka

²⁵ The son of Haji Mirza Zaynu'l-Abidin and Zahra Bagum, sister of Khadijeh Bagum.

²⁶ Followers of the Bab.

²⁷ Munirih Khanum, who was to become the wife of 'Abdu'l-Baha.

²⁸ The celebrated courier of Baha'u'llah.

²⁹ The son of Haji Mirza Siyyid Hasan.

and have the bounty of attaining the presence of her Lord, in Whose path her Husband had gladly offered His life. Baha'u'llah granted all her requests. The house of the Bab received the repairs needed, and Khadijih Bagum transferred her residence there. But, before long, the succession of visitors to that house aroused the wrath of the adversaries. Haji Farhad Mirza, the Mu'tamidu'd-Dawlih, an uncle of Nasiri'd-din Shah, who, at the time, was Governor-General of the province of Fars, decided to have the house demolished. Mirza Abu'l-Hasan, the Munshi-Bashi (Chief Secretary), and Mirza Zaynu'l-'Abidin Khn-i-'Ali-Abadi, both of whom were Baha'is and members of the retinue of the Prince-Governor, close to his person, managed to avert that catastrophe.

For a while Khadijih Bagum had to live once again in the house of her sister, but eventually returned to the house of her Husband.

As for her second request, the marriage of her nephew to Baha'u'llah's daughter was to cause Khadijih Bagum untold sorrow. For Haji Siyyid 'Ali had promised her, should her request be granted and he be accepted as Baha'u'llah's son-in-law, that he would come from Yazd, where he resided and traded, and would take Khadijih Bagum with him to the Holy Land, that her eager desire to attain the presence of Baha'u'llah might be fulfilled. But when news of Baha'u'llah's consent to the marriage was received, this fickle nephew broke his promise and sent word that conditions prevented his coming to Shiraz, and that he was proceeding to the Holy Land via 'Ishqabad and hoped to arrange for her journey as soon as he could. Khadijih Bagum sensed that her chance to travel to the Holy Land was now gone forever; in those days a woman travelled only in the company of a close relative and such opportunities were rare.

Khadijih Bagum was heart-broken. Her health deteriorated and despite the attentions of several physicians, within two months of the receipt of that distressing intelligence, she passed away in the house of her glorious Husband, three hours before sunset on Monday, 2 Dhi'l-Qi'dih 1299 A.H. (15 September 1882). And strangely, the faithful servitor, Fiddih died two hours after the death of her mistress, in the same house. As her brother, Haji Mirza Abu'l-Qasim, has recorded, Khadijih Bagum's body was taken that night to the public bath, known as Hammam-i-Guldastih, which was adjacent to the Masjid-i-Naw, to be washed and prepared for interment. That same night she was buried within the Shrine of Shah-Chiragh,³⁰ in the section known

as

Sadru'l-Hifaz (to the north of the tomb of Mir Siyyid Ahmad), which was called Masjid-i-Zananih (Women's Mosque).

It was then forty years since that auspicious and joyous day of the marriage of the Bab to Khadijih Bagum. 'Be patient in all that God hath ordained concerning the Bab and His Family,' he had counselled her, and to His counsel she had clung faithfully to her last hour. Their life together in this world had lasted but two brief years, when there befell them a separation best described in the Bab's own words written during His journey to Mecca: 'My sweet love,...God is my witness that since the time of separation sorrow has been so intense that it cannot be described...'

As we contemplate the life of this heroic, steadfast woman - ennobled by her instant recognition of both the Bab and Baha'u'llah - sadness gives way to pride and praise, and to the tranquillity of the words with which her beloved Husband closed His letter to her: "Peace be upon thee and the mercy of "God and His blessings.'

Foreword

My father died on 12 February 1980. This publication commemorates the first anniversary of his passing.

Within a few weeks of his death the first volume of his projected four-volume work on the life of Baha'u'llah was published, with the title, "Baha'u'llah, The King of Glory . The second volume was largely written, with only a few incompleting chapters, and this will be published. The format and contents of the third and fourth volumes had also been discussed, and the introduction to volume three written.

In November of the previous year he had suffered a heart attack. As he recovered from that illness, so he seemed to gain a physical strength such as had been denied him through many long years of crippling ill health. With this renewed vitality there came a surge of creative energy that saw him laying plans for several more books. Such was his eagerness to progress, that even whilst still in hospital recovering, he commenced a translation into Persian of his "Muhammad and the Course of "Islam ; he had by then completed a revision, this time written in Persian, of "Edward Granville Brown and the Baha'i Faith , incorporating much new material not included in the first, English-language version.

Further archival material was constantly being made available to him, stimulating him to still greater ambitions in the pursuit of Baha'i

³⁰ The tomb of Mir Siyyid Ahmad, a son of the Seventh Imam, Musa'l- Kazim.

scholarship, his great passion. His life of 'Abdu'l-Baha he would rewrite, in a much expanded form to the present volume. Biographies of his kinsmen, members of the Afnan family, were planned, as was a biography of his father; all this, and much more. But it was not to be.

With the same suddenness that this new lease of life had been granted him, it was taken away, and his pen stilled. Yet it had not been in vain. For it was during these last four months of my father's life that he made his legacy to the Baha'i World and, in so doing, sowed the seeds for the fruition of his most dear wish: that his work should continue and that the study of the history of the Faith should grow to its recognition as a major scholastic discipline.

In letters dated 10 November and 20 November 1979 he has left instructions that all his books and documents are to be kept together perpetually, 'for the benefit of all who seek knowledge', and that they are to form the nucleus of the 'Afnan Library', founded in the name of his father, Muvaqqari'd-Dawlih, and dedicated to Khadijih Bagum, the wife of the Bab. Once established, the Library will be made available to all students and scholars wishing to research the history of the Faith.

It is this dedication of the Library to Khadijih Bagum that lends to this small volume a special significance amongst my father's writings; for it testifies to his deep love and admiration for this noble soul. Khadijih Bagum, through the lineage of her brother, Haji Mirza Hadi, the father of Shoghi Effendi, and likewise of my father's maternal grandfather and paternal grandmother, and also, through the lineage of her younger brother, Haji Mirza Siyyid Hasan (known as Afnan-i-Kabir - the Great Afnan), the aunt of his maternal grandmother. After the martyrdom of her Husband, Khadijih Bagum removed to the house of the widow of Haji Mirza Siyyid 'Ali, the uncle who had reared the Bab from his infancy; and this house was close to the house in Shiraz where my grandfather was born and grew up. My grandfather would have related to my father how as a child he had played with Aqa Mirza Hadi at the feet of Khadijih Bagum, receiving instructions from her in the teachings of the Bab and of Baha'u'llah; and how later, as a young man, my grandfather came to act as amanuensis for the wife of the Bab, writing letters on her behalf to Baha'u'llah.

On hearing of the death in Karbila of Fatimih Bagum, the mother of the Bab, my grandfather was sent by his uncle, Haji Mirza 'Abdu'llah Khan, to that city, to attend to the affairs of his aunt, Bibi Gawhar, who had remained with Fatimih Bagum ever since her departure from Shiraz that the death occurred

of Khadijih Bagum, and this sorrowful news was conveyed to him in a letter from Haji Mirza 'Abdu'llah Khan in which he writes:

'What a grievous loss! What a heart-rending event! May God be my witness! She was a Princess of her Age, a rare gem in her Era, a saintly soul. In her lifetime, none could value her worth.'

Thus it is clear how, from his earliest years, my father would have come to share the reverence of his family for the wife of the Bab; and the reader will appreciate why this amongst all his unpublished writings was chosen to mark the first anniversary of his death.

In the forewords to his books my father always made sure that all who had assisted in their preparation and publication were acknowledged and thanked. Here I would beg the grace of all who helped with this booklet, in allowing me to defer my own thanks to a later occasion, so that I may the greater emphasize my boundless gratitude to one person, whose absolutely selfless devotion to the welfare of my father I have no means of adequately describing: his cousin, Abu'l-Qasim Afnan. The story told in this booklet is largely based on the written narrative of Abu'l-Qasim Afnan, the true custodian in this age of the traditions of the Afnan family. Suffice it to mention, as a small illustration, that much of the unique archival material which Abu'l-Qasim had in his possession, and which he unhesitatingly and without qualification made available to my father, he could equally readily have chosen to use himself in his own writings. No man could ever have desired a finer, truer friend.

Finally, it may prove useful if I refer the reader to two of my father's other books, "The Bab and "Baha'u'llah, The King of Glory. For in these are to be found many of the persons and incidents mentioned in this essay, but in their wider context. The reader's path may also be eased if, whilst reading the essay, reference is made to the Genealogy of the Bab prepared by the Guardian of the Faith, Shoghi Effendi, to be found in Nabil's Narrative, "The "Dawn Breakers.

Robert Balyuzi

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