

Kurratu'l-'Ayn (Tahirih) in the Tarikh-i-Jadid / Tarikh Badi Bayani

Translated by E G Browne in the New History, p. 270-284

Now, since occasion hath arisen, it behoves us to say somewhat concerning *Jenáb-i-Táhirá*. She, as has been already stated, was the daughter of Hájí Mullá Sálíh of Kazvín, was a sincere friend and admirer of [[the late Sheykh <Ahmad Ahsá'í> and]] Hájí Seyyid Kázim <of Resht>, and in virtue, piety, and learning had no equal. It was from the late Seyyid¹ that she received the title of Kurratu'l-'Ayn. And since he had, before his death, gladdened his chosen disciples with tidings of the approaching manifestation of the promised Proof², therefore was she also one of those who were anxiously expecting the appearance of the Truth, and seeking, with prayer and fasting, knowledge and faith. So, when Mullá Huseyn of Bushraweyh, who was <subsequently> entitled *Jenáb-i-Bábu'l-Báb*, fell to making enquiry, and resolved to set out from Nejef the holy to prosecute his search, she wrote a letter expressing in general terms her devotion to, and belief in, the subsequent Manifestation. And when *Jenáb-i-Bábu'l-Báb* at length attained to the honour of meeting His Supreme Holiness, and had recognized his true nature, he presented her letter, and she became included amongst the Letters of the Living³, and reached the loftiest degree of truth and knowledge. A little time after this, she enjoyed opportunities of perusing some of the verses, exhortations, devotional works, and doctrinal treatises of His Holiness, by which her conversion was definitely effected. So steadfast in faith did she become that [although she was both rich and noble] she disregarded wealth, child, name, and position for her Master's service, and set herself to proclaim and establish his doctrine with clear proofs and demonstrations. So subtly did she expound the mysteries of the Divine Unity that even of the late Seyyid <Kázim>'s disciples, who were the elect of the age, the most part were unable to follow her thought. [[After the death of the late Seyyid, at the time of her conversion⁴]] she instituted a course of lectures, in which, seated behind a curtain, she instructed the [[Sheykhís]]⁵. Her followers submitted themselves to a religious discipline so severe that they were brought nigh unto death, while [[so scrupulous were they that]] for the most part they would not eat victuals prepared in the bazaars, especially cooked

meats and butcher's meat. Such scrupulousness and caution on their part soon attracted attention, and was reported in various shapes to the governor, who determined to arrest Kurratu'l-'Ayn. She <being apprised of this> sent to him the following message:- "I advance no claim save a claim to learning. Assemble the doctors, both Sunní and Shi'ite, that we may confer and dispute, so that the truth and falsity of either side, and the wisdom and learning of both parties, may be made apparent to all persons of discernment." Thereupon it was decided that she should not leave Kerbelá until a definite reply to this request should arrive from Baghdad. As, however, this reply was delayed, she left the town without a passport, in such wise that none of the gatekeepers or officers appointed for the supervision of passports saw or stopped her. On reaching Baghdad, she proceeded to the house of the chief Muftí, with whom she held a discussion wherein she obtained a manifest advantage. [[The Páshá of Baghdad forwarded to the Sublime Porte a detailed report of her case, including this discussion, and asked for instructions as to the course which he should pursue. In reply, there came an order that she should remain no longer in 'Irák<-i-'Arab>, but that <the Páshá> should make his excuses to her for sending her back to Persia, and that she should there abide.]]

Accordingly she set out for 'Irák[[-i-'Ajam]]. On her way thither she proclaimed in the clearest and most explicit manner certain subtle mysteries of the Divine Unity to which but few ears had been privileged to listen, and which most of the profoundest philosophers had hesitated to formulate and divulge. <Some of her companions,> such as the late Sheykh Sálíh the Arab, Sheykh [[Táhir]] the Preacher, Mullá Ibráhím of Mahallát, [[the late Sheykh Sultán the Arab,]] and some others, who were endowed with the requisite capacity and understanding, comprehended these lofty themes; but others, unable to grasp them, raised objections, and wrote a letter to His Supreme Holiness complaining of her. To each was returned an answer adapted to his capacity and understanding, the substance of this answer being <in each case> that her homilies and dissertations on the Divine Unity were divinely inspired, and that her name should henceforth be called *Táhirá*⁶. [[After this, those same persons who had raised objections,]]⁷ being made acquainted with the inner meaning of her words, began to ask her pardon and to make their excuses.

So that Blessed Leaf⁸ went to Kirmánsháhán, where she thoroughly preached the doctrine. Thence she proceeded to Hamadán (where also she converted many), intending to visit the capital, and to acquaint His late Majesty Muhammad Sháh with the truth [of the matter]. Her father, however, being made aware of <her movements>, sent and brought her to Kazvín, where he

¹ This statement, together with most of what is here related concerning Kurratu'l-'Ayn, is taken from Hájí Mírzá Jání's history (*Suppl. Pers.* 1071, ff. 107^b-110^b).

² See pp. 31-33 *supra*.

³ Cf. Gobineau, p. 328.

⁴ In the text, "*hangámí ki musharraf shudé búd*", literally, "at the time when she" [or "he"] "had been honoured." The implied pronoun appears to refer to Kurratu'l-'Ayn rather than to Seyyid Kázim; and therefore, as she appears never to have actually met the Báb (cf. Gobineau, p. 310), we must understand "*musharraf*" as equivalent to "*musharraf bi-sharaf-i-Imán*" ("honoured with the dignity of belief"), which is a common expression among the Musulmáns. With the Bábis the word more often signifies "honoured with an actual interview." Cf. my first article on the Bábis in the J. R. A. S. for 1889, p. 519.

⁵ [people]

⁶ "The Pure."

⁷ [⁷<So they,>]

⁸ As the Báb is often styled "The Tree of Truth" (Shajara-i-Hakikat), so those who believe in him are sometimes called "Leaves". The title of Waraka-i-'Ulyá ("The Supreme Leaf") was conferred by Behá'u'lláh on one of his wives. See *Traveller's Narrative*, vol. ii, p. 361.

talked much with her, and, as has been already mentioned, said, "Any claim which you, with your learning and intelligence, had put forward I should have accounted worthy of full acceptance; but how can I accept the word of this Shírází lad?" To such speeches, however, she refused to listen; nor, do what they might, would she consent to be reconciled with her husband Mullá Muhammad, who was the son of Hájí Mullá <Muhammad Takí>, [[and was accounted her cousin]]. <In reply to all such proposals of reconciliation> she answered, "He, in that he rejects God's religion, is unclean, while I am 'Pure'⁹: between us there can be naught in common [[nor any equality]]." So she refused to be reconciled to her husband.

After this befell the catastrophe of Hájí Mullá <Muhammad> Takí's murder. Now the cause of this was that [[in every assembly and gathering]] he was wont to curse and revile the late Sheykh Ahmad <of Ahsá>, displaying herein the most obstinate pertinacity. A certain Mírzá Sáib, [[who was a native of Shíráz and]] one of the Báb's followers, formerly devoted to the late Sheykh Ahmad, had heard [[in Kazvín]] that Hájí Mullá [Muhammad] Takí regarded the late Sheykh as an apostate and a heretic, and was in the habit of cursing him. He therefore waited upon the Hájí [[after the performance of public prayer]]¹⁰, and enquired his opinion of Sheykh Ahmad. The Hájí cursed and reviled him [[exceedingly]]. Thereupon Mírzá Sálíh (agreeably to the tradition handed down from the Imáms "whosoever curseth our followers hath cursed us, and whosoever curseth us hath cursed the Apostle of God, and whosoever hath cursed the Apostle of God is an infidel") knew him for an evil man and an apostate, and, in accordance with the tradition above quoted, became assured of his infidelity, and deemed it incumbent on himself to slay him. So, without communicating his design to anyone, he went by night, and, by the altar¹¹, inflicted on him several <mortal> wounds. And this thing was the consequence of the Hájí's conduct on the occasion of the Báb's passing through Kazvín. For His Holiness, as he passed through Kazvín, had, with the design of proving others and admonishing them by this transaction, written <a letter> to him, saying, "I am of the offspring of the Prophet; I am wrongfully entreated; and I have come to your city. How would it be if you were to afford me some succour?" But the Hájí tore the letter in fragments and made several unseemly remarks. When they reported this to His Holiness, he said, "Was there no one to smite him on the mouth?" Wherefore the Lord brought it to pass that he was smitten in the mouth with a spear-head, that he might no more speak insolently of the saints of religion¹².

Now after the attack on Hájí Mullá Muhammad Takí, a great disturbance arose in Kazvín. For the people attributed this deed to *Jenáb-i-Táhirá*, and suspected her

followers, though neither she nor they were privy to it. So they arrested [nearly seventy]¹³ persons, and, though Hájí Mullá Muhammad Takí¹⁴ said of each one brought before him, "It was not he," cast them into prison and tormented them in divers ways. Amongst others they beat Sheykh Sálíh the Arab with many stripes, and would have branded him. [[They also brought *Jenáb-i-Táhirá* to the government house, along with one of her servants, and fell to tormenting her, thinking that perhaps she might make some statement; neither would they believe her, though she declared on oath that she had absolutely no knowledge of this event. For the heirs of the murdered man, amongst whom was *Jenáb-i-Táhirá's* husband Mullá Muhammad, persisted in affirming that this deed had been committed by her followers and with her consent. And she meanwhile was engaged in tearful and humble prayer to Him who is the Fulfiller of all needs.]]

Suddenly Mírzá Sálíh of Shíráz [[, seeing the torments to which a number of innocent and virtuous persons were being subjected, could no longer maintain silence, but, impelled by common fairness and uprightness, devotedly]] advanced the foot of manful courage, and made full confession, setting forth in detail the motives which had impelled him to commit the murder, and adding, "I considered myself obliged by the duty which I owe to Religion and the Sacred Law to do this deed." In such wise did he express himself that <even> the governor of Kazvín applauded his eloquence and boldness. [[When they reproached him, saying, "Why didst thou act thus towards so learned a divine?" he replied, "Who, then, was he but one who had culled from the garden of Abú Hanífa¹⁵ a single nosegay, in virtue of which he claimed to be a learned divine?" The people were amazed at the readiness of his replies; but the heirs <of Hájí Mullá Muhammad Takí> and those who were specially prejudiced against Kurratu'l-'Ayn and the others arrested on this charge, and who bore them an invincible hatred, not anticipating such truth, loyalty, fairness, and courage from an assassin, refused to credit this confession, or to pay any heed to it. But the youth adhered to his statement, and, on their refusing to believe it, described in detail the manner in which he had done the deed, adding, "If you desire to verify my statement, go, and take out the spear-head wherewith I slew him from beneath the stool¹⁶ under which I cast it, that you may know that my account is a true one." So they went and took out the spear-head from under the stool, and the truth of his statement was <thus> conclusively proved. They therefore cast him into prison and put him in fetters, and the sons of the murdered Hájí Mullá <Muhammad> Takí went to the prison to vex and revile him. Mírzá Sálíh, losing control of his temper, cried

¹³ [[a great number of]]

¹⁴ The wounds inflicted on Hájí Mullá Muhammad Takí did not at once prove fatal. According to the *Kisásu'l-'Ulamá* he survived the attempt on his life by several days.

¹⁵ Abú Hanífa, Málik, Sháfi'í, and Ibn Hanbal were the founders of the four orthodox schools or sects of the Sunnites; learned theologians, no doubt but of little account in Shi'ite, much less in Bábí eyes.

¹⁶ This word is doubtful. It appears to read ### to which I can assign no suitable sense. I therefore conjecture ###.

⁹ *Táhirá*. See the end of the preceding paragraph.

¹⁰ [in the place of prayer]

¹¹ *Míhráb*, properly the niche or alcove in the mosque which shews the direction of Mecca.

¹² Some verses from the *Masnaví*, differently given in C. and L., are here omitted.

out, "I have sent him to hell, and I will now send you after him." So saying, he sprang forward with such energy that he dragged his chain, wrenched out from the ground the long iron staple to which it was attached, and hurled it at them with such vigour that they fled in terror in all directions. The long staple struck the door of his cell and pierced it; whereat the prison warders were so greatly alarmed that they shut the door upon him and locked it.

[[Notwithstanding all this¹⁷ they would not release those others <whom they had arrested>, but, anxious only to establish a reputation for filial piety, continued to account them accomplices and accessories.]] And although Hájí Mullá Muhammad Takí had declared with his dying breath that he forgave his murderer¹⁸, [Mullá Muhammad]¹⁹ his son caused [five]²⁰ of the prisoners to be sent in fetters and chains from Kazvín to Teherán in the bitter cold of the winter season. Amongst these [five] ^{ibid}, one was an old man of ailing health [[named Hájí Asadu'lláh]]; whom, though he was perfectly innocent, and ignorant <of the charge preferred against him>, they dragged from a bed of sickness and led away; and who, on reaching Teherán, expired [[in prison]] from his illness and the fatigues of the road. But Mírzá Sálíh, the actual murderer, [[who had himself confessed, and whom Hájí Mírzá Ákásí had consigned to the custody of Mírzá Shafí' the *Sáhib-díván*,]] escaped from prison by night, [[and, making straight for the Castle of <Sheykh> Tabarsí, joined himself to the people of God, amongst whom he attained to martyrdom²¹.]]

Those [[three]]²² innocent persons remained in prison, but though the son of Hájí Mullá [Muhammad] Takí made the most strenuous efforts to obtain from the administrators of the Sacred Law in Teherán an order for the execution of one of the prisoners, he was not successful. Then he accused the Bábís of being this and that; and His Majesty [[Muhammad]]²³ ²⁴ Sháh ordered the learned *mujtahid* Áká Mahmúd of Teherán, [[the son of Áká Muhammad 'Alí of Kirmánsháhán,]]²⁵ to investigate and ascertain their tenets. So [they brought them²⁶ before him, and when he had²⁷ met [and conversed much with] them ²⁸ the falsity of Mullá Muhammad's assertions [concerning this sect] became evident. Finally <Mullá Muhammad> went before His Majesty the King, and rent his shirt, and began to weep, saying, "They have slain Hájí Mullá [Muhammad] Takí, [[and shall no one's blood be shed <in atonement>?]]"²⁹

The King answered, "The murderer, who has himself confessed, has escaped [from prison]. If thou desirest the lawful application of the *lex talionis*, then no administrator of the Sacred Law will sentence an innocent man to suffer death instead of the escaped murderer. But if thou seekest for illegal retaliation, then why dost thou introduce the name of law? Go, kill one <of them>." So they took Sheykh Sálíh the Arab, a godly man, endowed, as was proved in several ways, with a pure heart³⁰, and consummated his martyrdom [[by blowing him from a gun]].

Then <Mullá Muhammad> prayed that he might be permitted to take the [[two]]³¹ other prisoners [[, one of whom was Sheykh Táhir of Shíráz the preacher, and the other Mullá Ibráhím of Mahallát,]] to Kazvín, in order that he might do honour to his father's memory by causing them to walk round his grave, after which he would let them go. To this His Majesty the King agreed [, not guessing the extent of his godlessness and priestly cunning]. So <Mullá Muhammad> took [[them]]³² with him to Burkán, and on the way thither inflicted on them all manner of hurts and torments. After this he took them to Kazvín [[. On the day when he was taking them]] to make them walk round his father's grave, ³³ he made known his intention ³⁴ to the whole populace, [that they might make]³⁵ a general attack <on the prisoners>[. So, as soon as they brought them forth to make them walk round the grave, Sheykh Táhir] and Mullá Ibráhím ³⁶ [were]³⁷ done to death with a cruelty surpassing all imagination. [[Sheykh Táhir was bound to a tree and tortured to death by his assailants, and a number of the mob brought leaves and set fire to the foot of the tree.]] And the body of the poor victim was consumed with fire. [[Then they bore both the bodies out of the city gates and cast them into a hollow, and only after some days did they allow a grave to be dug in that place and the corpses to be laid therein.]]

So the heirs <of Hájí Mullá Muhammad Takí>, being of a highly-considered family of divines and administrators of the Sacred Law, and regarding themselves as the authorized representatives of this Law, and the exponents of Religion, in retaliation for the death of one person slew [four]³⁸ ³⁹ innocent men who had no complicity in the matter; although the actual murderer had before his flight declared that, in accordance with <what he regarded as> his religious obligation, he had on his own account done this deed without the

¹⁷ *i.e.* the confession of Mírzá Sálíh.

¹⁸ Hájí Mírzá Jání adds that Mullá Muhammad himself made this statement.

¹⁹ [[still]]

²⁰ [[six]]

²¹ See p. 82 *supra*. That the Sheykh Sálíh there mentioned is identical with this Mírzá Sálíh is clearly shown by Hájí Mírzá Jání's account of his death, in which he is described as "the murderer of Hájí Mullá Muhammad Takí of Kazvín."

²² [four]

²³ [Násiru'd-Dín]

²⁴ This appears to be an anachronism. Hájí Mírzá Jání only says "the King."

²⁵ [who was unrivalled in his time]

²⁶ *i.e.*, as it would appear, the three remaining prisoners.

²⁷ [[he]]

²⁸ [[and]]

²⁹ [how can it be right that his murderer should not be slain?]

³⁰ Hájí Mírzá Jání says that Sheykh Sálíh was believed by some (of the Bábís) to be (a re-incarnation of) "the Pure Soul" (###); concerning whom see *el-Fakhrí* (ed. Ahl-wardt), p. 195 *et seq.*

³¹ [three]

³² [the three men]

³³ [and]

³⁴ [and gave his directions]

³⁵ [[who made]]

³⁶ [and the other prisoner]

³⁷ [[was]]

³⁸ [[three]]

³⁹ C. has "three" here, but, like L., "four" in the next sentence. Mírzá Asadu'lláh, the old man who died of cold and exposure, seems to be reckoned as the fourth victim. I am by no means certain, however, that there was not another victim (unnamed), for the higher numbers, which I have relegated to the foot of the page, are confirmed by Hájí Mírzá Jání.

complicity of any one else. And these four innocent and unwitting men they slew thus shamefully and cruelly with the knowledge of His Majesty the King and all the Musulmán clergy and laity; nor did one of all these pious divines and Muslims ask by what religion and what law such a sentence was ever ordained or sanctioned. Assuredly from the first creation of the world until now never in any one of all these different creeds was such a thing done; [never according to any law, civil or ecclesiastical, was such a sentence pronounced;] and never in any age has such a deed been heard or seen. Nor is it likely that such a sentence should be pronounced or such a deed sanctioned in the name of any religion at any future time, unless it be by these same occupants of the seat of authority and <self-styled> executors of the Holy Imám.....⁴⁰

To resume. After these events *Jenáb-i-Táhirā*, [[to escape from the reproaches, rebuffs, suspicions, and unkind treatment of her relations, set out secretly for Teherán; whence, intending to preach God's religion, and to join herself to *Hazrat-i-Kuddús*⁴¹, Mullá Huseyn *Jenáb-i-Bábu'l-Báb*, and the other believers in Khurásán, she]]⁴² proceeded to Khurásán. Near Sháhrúd⁴³ she met *Jenáb-i-Kuddús* [and his followers, whose number amounted to three hundred and thirteen men. *Hazrat-i-Kuddús* became the Tongue of the *Ká'im*, and, ere His Supreme Holiness had laid claim to this rank, formally announced himself as the *Ká'im*, even as tradition runs; and, in brief, spoke that word which the *Ká'im* must speak. His followers hesitated <at first> to admit <his claim; but afterwards>, having searched every realm of their being and found no truth but His Holiness, they listened and confessed⁴⁴. Then *Jenáb-i-Táhirā* ascended into a pulpit and exhorted the believers⁴⁵, setting forth the mysteries of the Divine Unity and the renewal <of all things>. Thereafter so great a mass of writings, comprising prayers, homilies, and doctrinal treatises, emanated from that much-wronged woman that the eye of time has never beheld anything like it. Thus, for instance, Mullá 'Abdu'l-'Alí and Mullá Jawád of the Sheykhí sect addressed certain questions to His Supreme Holiness (the soul of the world be his sacrifice!). He replied to them; but they, not understanding <his answer>, made objections. *Jenáb-i-Táhirā*, being apprized of this, wrote two or three thousand verses to confute their objections and to establish the thesis of His Supreme Holiness. This she did in such wise as to fill all persons of learning with

wonder and astonishment at her scholarship, for she proved the utterances of His Holiness in every point by verses from the Kur'án and traditions of the Imáms. On the dispersal of <the assembly at> Badasht, she was taken prisoner and conveyed to Teherán⁴⁶. For some while she was in the house of Mahmúd Khán the *Kalántar*⁴⁷, where she exhorted and counselled the women of the household⁴⁸, till one day she went to the bath, whence she returned arrayed in white garments, saying, "Tomorrow they will kill me." Next day the executioner came and took her to the Nigáristán⁴⁹. As she would not suffer them to remove the veil from her face (though they repeatedly sought to do so), they applied the bow-string over her veil, and thus compassed her martyrdom. Then they cast her holy body into a well in the garden⁵⁰. Her words shall be recorded in another place, so that the extent of her virtue, chastity, godliness, and purity may become known to all persons of discernment.]⁵¹ For her utterances conclusively prove that she was divinely inspired and fortified, such eloquence and grace of speech [and such comprehensive knowledge] being unattainable and inconceivable [even for men]. We must, however, return to our previous topic, lest the thread of our proper narrative be unduly prolonged.

Info

Home Page : <http://www.paintdrawer.co.uk/david>

More on Tahirih : [click here](#) or navigate from home page
-> Research -> Bahai -> Tahirih

⁴⁰ About a page of similar diatribe is here omitted.

⁴¹ See n. 1 at the foot of p. 95 *supra*.

⁴² [having procured a divorce from her husband Mullá Muhammad,]

⁴³ *Suppl. Pers.* 1071, f. 110^b. The event described is there referred to the "third year of the Manifestation", "wherein," says Hájí Mírzá Jání, alluding to a tradition of Kumeyl, "was revealed the meaning of ###." See *Traveller's Narrative*, vol. ii, p. 352, n. 1.

⁴⁴ These two sentences are so ambiguous, especially as regards the pronouns, that I give them in the original:- ###. It is abundantly clear from Hájí Mírzá Jání's history that *Hazrat-i-Kuddús* advanced the most extravagant claims, and that many of the Bábis were disposed to regard him as superior to the Báb. He not only declared himself to be Christ come back to earth, but even went so far as to say, "*Whosoever hath known me is become a polytheist, and whosoever hath not known me is become an infidel, and whosoever asketh 'why,' or 'wherefore,' or 'how' concerning me is become a reprobate.*"

⁴⁵ Cf. Gobineau, pp. 181-4.

⁴⁶ It was, apparently, only after the fall of Sheykh Tabarsí that she was given up to the authorities by the people of Núr, where she (together with Subh-i-Ezel, as Hájí Mírzá Jání states in his history) had taken refuge. Cf. *Traveller's Narrative*, vol. ii, pp. 312-3. It is worth noting that Hájí Mírzá Jání calls her "the Mother of the World" (###).

⁴⁷ See Gobineau, pp. 292-5.

⁴⁸ See my *Traveller's Narrative*, vol. ii, p. 31.

⁴⁹ A palace in Teherán built by Fath-'Alí Sháh. It derives its name from the pictures and portraits wherewith the walls of several of its rooms are ornamented, and is situated in the northern quarter of the city, not very far from the English Embassy.

⁵⁰ Cf. my *Traveller's Narrative*, vol. ii, pp. 313-4.

⁵¹ [[An account of her subsequent history until the time when she attained to the rank of martyrdom, together with an appendix containing some of her exhortations, prayers, and teachings, will be written in another place; so that the extent of her virtue, chastity, godliness, and purity, as well as the services which she rendered to the Desired Appearance [*Tal'at-i-Maksúd*, i.e. Behá'u'lláh], (who, at that time hidden behind a veil, was <only> known as *Jenáb-i-Behā*) and the wisdom and excellence whereunto by his help she attained, may become known to all persons of discernment.]]