

beginning of 1876. On one occasion he was astonished at the perceptiveness of an illiterate farrier whom he was told was a Bahá'í. He came to know a cloth-seller called Aqa `Abdu'l-Karim. Although this man was uneducated, Gulpaygani came to appreciate his moral qualities and the keenness of his mind. Aqa `Abdu'l-Karim used to discuss with Gulpaygani difficult religious questions, quite unexpected for someone of no learning. Eventually it emerged that Aqa `Abdu'l-Karim was a Bahá'í and that many of the points that he had been making were derived from Bahá'í scripture. Gulpaygani was at first sad that such a good man should be a Bahá'í but then became curious and asked to meet others.

For several months Gulpaygani met with some of the leading Bahá'ís including Nabil-i-Akbar (q.v.), Aqa Mirza Haydar `Ali Ardistani, and Mirza Isma`il Dhabih. While he was in the house of the last-named, he read two of Bahá'u'lláh's tablets, the *Lawh-i-Ra`is* (q.v.) and the *Lawh-i-Fu'ad*, which contain prophecies of the fall of the Ottoman vizier `Ali Pasha and of Sultan `Abdu'l-`Aziz, and of the loss of Edirne to the Sultan. He determined that if the events portrayed in those tablets came to pass, he would believe in Bahá'u'lláh. A few months later, precisely the events foretold occurred and Gulpaygani became a Bahá'í on 20 September 1876.

As soon as he became a Bahá'í, Gulpaygani began to talk to others about the new religion. Word soon spread of his conversion and he was dismissed from his post at the religious college. It happened that Manikji Sahib, who had come from India as the representative of the Indian Parsi (Zoroastrian) community, was looking for a teacher for a school that he had established for Zoroastrian children, and he invited Gulpaygani, who accepted gladly. A number of the prominent Zoroastrian converts to the Bahá'í Faith were his pupils at the school (including Ustad Javanmard and Mulla Bahram Akhtar-Khavari).

During the next ten years that Gulpaygani spent in Tehran, he actively taught the Bahá'í Faith in the capital. He played a role in the production by Mirza Husyan Hamadani of the *Tarikh-i-Jadid* (The New History), an account of the history of the Babi and early Bahá'í religions, commissioned by Manikji. He was also imprisoned on three occasions: first in December 1876, when he was imprisoned for five months, after it became known that he had become a Bahá'í; second in 1882-83, when some fifty of the prominent Bahá'ís of Tehran were arrested on the orders of the governor Kamran Mirza and at the instigation of one of the religious leaders of the city, Sayyid Sadiq Sanglaji, and held for nineteen months (BBR 292-95); and in October 1885 for six months, again on the orders of Kamran Mirza.

3. Travels within Iran. Upon his release from his last imprisonment in February 1886, Gulpaygani received letters from Bahá'u'lláh asking him to travel and teach the Bahá'í Faith. Accordingly, in March 1886, he set off on three years' travels around Iran. He stayed for one and a half months in Kashan and then went on to Isfahan, where he taught many and over twenty became Bahá'ís. He then paid a brief visit to Yazd before going to Tabriz, where he arrived in December 1886. In both Isfahan and Tabriz, Gulpaygani met the English

missionary Dr. Bruce, with whom he had several debates.

In many towns, Gulpaygani would arrive without informing the Bahá'ís at first and would stay in a caravanserai in the hope of being able to teach a few people about the Bahá'í Faith. This is what he did when he arrived in Hamadan in mid-August 1887, but one of the Bahá'ís recognized him and insisted that he move in with a Bahá'í family. Here numerous people enquiring about the Bahá'í Faith were brought to him and many became Bahá'ís. These included several from among the Jews of Hamadan and two Qajar princes, Muhammad Mahdi Mirza, Mu'ayyadu's-Saltanih, and his son Muhammad Husayn Mirza. Gulpaygani also briefly visited Kirmanshah but encountered much opposition there from Azalis (q.v.) and an `Aliyu'llahi chief. He therefore visited Sanandaj in Kurdistan in February 1888, and returned to Hamadan before proceeding to Tabriz in the summer of 1888, and then on to Kashan and Yazd, where he met with Shaykh Muhammad Yazdi, one of the leading Azalis. From Yazd he traveled north to Tabas and Mashhad, where he arrived in early June 1889.

4. Travels in Central Asia. Mirza Abu'l-Fadl arrived in Ashkhabad (`Ishqabad) from Mashhad on 16 July 1889. A short time later, on 8 September 1889, one of the most important events in the history of the Bahá'ís of that city--the assassination of one of the most prominent of the Bahá'ís there, Haji Muhammad Rida Isfahani--occurred. Gulpaygani immediately helped the Bahá'í community to respond to this event and later he was the spokesman for the Bahá'ís at the trial of the assassins. This event established the independence of the Bahá'í Faith from Islam both for the Russian government and for the people of Ashkhabad.

After these events, Gulpaygani remained for a time in Ashkhabad and tried to persuade the Bahá'ís to use their freedom there to try various ventures, especially the publication of a Bahá'í magazine. Unfortunately he was thinking too far ahead of the rest of the community and it was not until 1922-23 that this was undertaken.

Gulpaygani's aim in coming to Turkmenistan had been to take the Bahá'í Faith to more remote regions. Therefore, after eight months in Ashkhabad, Gulpaygani moved to Samarqand in February 1890. Here he succeeded in converting the first Afghan Bahá'í, Dr. `Ata'u'llah Khan, and a few of the local `ulama, who preferred, however, to keep their new allegiance secret. In 1308/1890-91, he returned to Ashkhabad. Nabil-i-Akbar also arrived there and thus for a short time the two greatest scholars in the Bahá'í world were in residence in that city. During his periods in Ashkhabad, Gulpaygani also met with the Russian scholar Tumanski (q.v.) and assisted him with his research and translations relating to the Bahá'í Faith. By 1309/1891-92, however, Gulpaygani had traveled to Bukhara, where he stayed for a time and succeeded in locating the only extant manuscript of a medieval geographical treatise, the *Hududu'l-`Alam* (Minorsky xlii-xliii), the text of which was later published in Russia and translated into English. He returned to Ashkhabad without, it appears, having converted anyone to the Bahá'í Faith.

5. Haifa and Egypt. Following the passing of Bahá'u'lláh, Gulpaygani was invited to come to Akka by `Abdu'l-Bahá. Unfortunately, just at this time, there was no one in Ashkhabad able to take over Gulpaygani's tasks. This continued until Gulpaygani's cousin Sayyid Mahdi Gulpaygani (1863-1928) arrived in Ashkhabad, which allowed Gulpaygani to proceed to Akka where he arrived in September 1894. During that visit Gulpaygani observed for himself the activities of the followers of Mirza Muhammad `Ali (q.v.), who even attempted to recruit him to their ranks.

`Abdu'l-Bahá spoke with Gulpaygani about the lack of success in teaching the Bahá'í Faith which he had experienced in Bukhara and Samarqand and suggested a different strategy which Gulpaygani put into action when he arrived in Egypt after ten months in Akka. On his arrival in Cairo, Gulpaygani did not contact the Bahá'ís but rather began going to the University of al-Azhar, the foremost institution of learning in the Muslim world. Within a short time, his profound learning caused a group of the students of the University to gather around him. From among these he picked a few who were more open-minded and began to speak to them about the Bahá'í Faith. Eventually some thirty of these students became Bahá'ís. Up to this time, although there was a considerable number of Bahá'ís in Egypt, all of them were Iranians. Now Gulpaygani converted a number of learned Egyptians, including many who later played an important role in the development of the Bahá'í Faith in Egypt: Shaykh `Abdu'l-Jalil Bey Sa`ad (q.v.), Shaykh Badru'd-Din al-Ghazzi, Shaykh Muhiyu'd-Din Kurdi, and Shaykh Faraju'llah Kurdi. Gulpaygani also made friends with a number of writers and magazine publishers. Articles both about him and by him appeared in the Egyptian press. While in Egypt he was generally known as Shaykh Fadlu'llah Irani or Jurfadqani (Jurfadqan being the Arabic form of Gulpaygan).

Matters proceeded in this vein for some two years until the assassination of Nasiru'd-Din Shah in Iran in 1896. When news of this reached Egypt, Za`imu'd-Dawlih, an enemy of the Bahá'ís, decided to use the rumor that the assassination had been carried out by a Bahá'í as a pretext to instigate a general massacre of the Bahá'ís. This reached a climax in the Iranian embassy when Za`imu'd-Dawlih began denouncing the Bahá'ís one day. Gulpaygani, who was present, immediately leapt to the defense of the Bahá'ís, asserting that they could not have done such a deed. When challenged, Gulpaygani asserted that he himself was also a Bahá'í. It was thus that his allegiance became publicly known. Then in 1897-1900, his two books Fara'id and Al-Duraru'l-Bahiyyih were published, and the `ulama of Egypt and especially of al-Azhar became increasingly agitated and issued a decree that he was to be considered an infidel.

6. Journey to Europe and America. In July 1900, Gulpaygani visited Akka once again, and, after a brief trip to Lebanon, `Abdu'l-Bahá asked him to go to America. Following the defection of Ibrahim Kheiralla (q.v.), it had become necessary to send someone to the United States both to counter the attempts of Kheiralla to cause a division among the American Bahá'ís and also to correct

the inaccurate representations of Bahá'í teachings that Kheiralla had propagated. Three others had been sent, Haji `Abdu'l-Karim, Haji Mirza Hasan, and Mirza Asadu'llah Isfahani, but had not been successful, and the first two were recalled.

Laura Clifford Barney (q.v.) went to Egypt in the spring of 1901 to bring Gulpaygani to Paris, where Anton Haddad translated for him. Paris was at this time the most important Bahá'í community in Europe and many were becoming Bahá'ís who in later years would be famous in the religion (see "France.2"). During Gulpaygani's time there, more than thirty became Bahá'ís (Gail 150).

From Paris Gulpaygani went to America in the autumn of 1901 and proceeded immediately to Chicago where the largest Bahá'í community was. Many of the American Bahá'ís, used to Isfahani's mystical discourses and interpretations of their dreams, are reported at first to have found Gulpaygani's intellectual presentation of the Bahá'í Faith too cold and unemotive. Gradually, however, increasing numbers of American Bahá'ís came to appreciate Gulpaygani's clear and authoritative presentation of the Faith. In December 1901, Gulpaygani transferred to Washington where he continued to give talks to both the Bahá'ís and inquirers. He also worked steadily on an introductory book on the Bahá'í Faith, which `Abdu'l-Bahá had instructed him to write. Gulpaygani neglected himself and failed to eat properly for much of his sojourn in America. On the suggestion of Ali Kuli Khan, who translated for Gulpaygani for most of his North American sojourn, Ahmad Sohrab was sent from Egypt to be Gulpaygani's personal attendant.

In July and August of 1903, Gulpaygani went to Green Acre where he lectured and met the varied group of people who gathered there in the days before it became a wholly Bahá'í institution. Eventually, word came from `Abdu'l-Bahá that Gulpaygani should return to the Middle East. Bahá'ís from throughout the United States attended a large farewell meeting, which was held for him in New York on 29 November 1904 (his farewell address was published as a small booklet, Washington, 1904).

7. Last years. Gulpaygani spent his last years living in Egypt. He also visited both Haifa and Beirut. He was in Egypt when `Abdu'l-Bahá arrived there in August 1910. While `Abdu'l-Bahá was staying in Alexandria from May until August 1911, he especially procured a place for Gulpaygani so that the latter could live near him. Towards the end of 1912, Gulpaygani became increasingly ill. Aqa Muhammad-Taqi Isfahani (q.v.) persuaded Gulpaygani to move to his house in Cairo. He remained there until his passing on 21 January 1914. `Abdu'l-Bahá's eulogies of Gulpaygani can be found in Bahá'í Proofs (19-27).

All of Mirza Abu'l-Fadl's biographers agree that he possessed immense learning and a fine critical mind, combined with complete devotion to the Bahá'í Faith and great humility. His writings show a keen understanding of contemporary currents of thought remarkable in a man who only knew oriental languages. Although almost all of his writings are based on the scriptures of the Bahá'í Faith, he developed these and applied them to a wide range of specific issues

and questions. His *Fara'id*, for example, parallels in many ways some of the issues raised in Bahá'u'lláh's *Book of Certitude* (q.v.), but he develops these themes and provides specific examples of the relevant Islamic Traditions. His writings also include presentations of the Bahá'í Faith adapted for those of Jewish and Christian backgrounds. He developed a variety of concepts that continue to be important in the presentation of the Bahá'í Faith to the present day. One of his concepts, for example--that even religions that appear to consist of idol-worship and are condemned as heathen were in fact originally true religions from God, the original pure teachings of which have been lost over the ages mainly through the action of religious leaders--has clear implications for the encounter of the Bahá'í Faith with ethnic religions in Africa and other parts of the world.

8. Works. Gulpaygani wrote on a wide range of subjects within a general Bahá'í framework. His style both in Arabic and Persian is elegant and compelling. After his death, his papers, which included several unfinished works, were taken by Shaykh Muhammad `Ali Qa'ini to Ashkhabad, where Gulpaygani's nephew, Sayyid Mahdi Gulpaygani also lived. Unfortunately these were lost at the time of the Russian Revolution.

a. *Sharh-i-Ayat-i-Mu'arrakhih* ("In Explanation of Sacred Verses that Prophecy Dates"), a work on the prophecies in the scriptures of Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism about the date of the coming of the Promised One. It was written at the request of Muhammad Mahdi Mirza Mu'ayyadu's-Saltanih in Hamadan in 1888. It was published twice: once on its own in India, and once with the *Risalih Ayyubiyih* in Shanghai in 1344/1925.

b. *Risalih Ayyubiyih* (Treatise addressed to Ayyub). While Gulpaygani was in Hamadan, a great many Jews inquired about the Bahá'í Faith. One Bahá'í of Jewish background, Hakim Mirza Ayyub wrote to Gulpaygani from Tehran asking him a number of questions related to the Torah and the prophecies relating to the coming of the Promised One. This treatise was sent in reply in 1305/1887.

c. *Faslu'l-Khitab* (The Decisive Utterance). This was a large book written by Gulpaygani in Samarqand in 1308/1892 in reply to an attack by a fundamentalist Shi`i cleric of Adharbayjan which was forwarded to Gulpaygani by Mirza Haydar `Ali Usku'i. Much of the subject matter resembles the *Fara'id*. One of the subjects dealt with is the question of why there are Traditions in the Shi`i books that point both to the persecution and even martyrdom of the Promised One and to his triumph. At present no copy of this is known.

d. *Fara'id* (The Peerless Gems). This book which is generally considered Gulpaygani's greatest was composed in six months, being completed in February 1898. It was written in reply to an attack on the *Book of Certitude* (q.v.) by the Shaykhul-Islam of Tiflis, Mirza Hasan Tahirzadih `Abdu's-Salam. It was published in Cairo in 1315/1898 and sparked off some seven or eight rebuttals of it by Iranian `ulama. (For a summary of its contents, see "Apologetics and Introductory Literature.1.a.")

e. *Al-Duraru'l-Bahiyyih* (The Shining Pearls). A collection of essays on the

history of religion in Arabic, published in Cairo by Shaykh Faraju'llah Kurdi in 1900. As it was in Arabic, it was responsible for making him generally known as a Bahá'í in Egypt. (It has been translated into English by Juan Cole as *Miracles and Metaphors*.) The "Risaliyyih Iskandaraniyyih" written for Husayn Ruhi, giving proofs for the prophethood of Muhammad from the Christian and Jewish scriptures, and a treatise in explanation of the verse of the Qur'an "Then it is ours to explain it" (Q 75:19), were published together with *Ad-Durar al-Bahiyih* (and are included in the English translation).

f. *The Kitab-i-Ibrar* (Book of Justification). This book is referred to in a few of Gulpaygani's works and evidently dealt with the issue of the Covenant (q.v.). No manuscript of it, however, appears to be extant.

g. *Al-Hujaju'l-Bahá'íyyih* (The Bahá'í Proofs). This was the book that Gulpaygani composed in America (see 6 above) in which he gives a defense and exposition of the Faith from a Christian point of view. It was translated by Ali Kuli Khan and published in New York in 1902 as *The Behai Proofs*. It was for many years, until the publication of Esslemont's *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, the standard Bahá'í textbook in America. The English translation also includes a short treatise on the history of the Bahá'í Faith which Gulpaygani wrote while at Green Acre.

h. *Burhan-i-Lami`* (The Brilliant Proof). A pamphlet written in reply to a Christian clergyman, Peter Easton. It was printed in Chicago in 1912 with English translation.

i. *Kashfu'l-Ghita'* (The Uncovering of Error). When E.G. Browne published the *Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* with its Persian and English introductions that contained much material hostile to the Bahá'í Faith, a number of Bahá'í scholars worked on refutations of this book. Gulpaygani also began to work on such a book, but when heard that work on a similar book in Iran under the guidance of the Hands of the Cause (q.v.) had reached an advanced stage, he suspended work on his book awaiting a manuscript from Iran. Unfortunately he never got back to this book and at his death the manuscript was incomplete. When Mirza Abu'l-Fadl's papers were sent to his cousin Sayyid Mahdi Gulpaygani in Ashkhabad, the latter undertook to complete the work. The final work was published in Ashkhabad. Of the 438 pages of the book some 132 are attributed to Mirza Abu'l-Fadl. The final work, however, has a tone and vehemence completely uncharacteristic of Mirza Abu'l-Fadl and `Abdu'l-Bahá instructed that it should not be distributed.

There are numerous shorter epistles of Gulpaygani written in answer to specific questions addressed to him; some of these have been published in a number of compilations of his works:

j. *Majmu`iy-i-Rasa'il-i-Hadrat-i-Abi'l-Fadl*. Published in Cairo in 1920 by Shaykh Muhiyu'd-Din Kurdi. Contains 16 letters and treatises.

k. *Rasa'il wa Raqa'im*. Compiled by Ruhullah Mihrabkhani and published in Tehran in 1977. It contains 23 treatises, followed by four groups of letters

(containing seven letters, thirty-six letters, five letters, and eleven letters respectively). Some of the treatises in this volume have been translated into English by Juan Cole in *Letters & Essays*. Among these treatises are:

i. Two treatises on the Covenant. In 1329/1911, a work was published in Cairo consisting of two treatises, a longer one, written in 1317/1899, and a shorter one, written in 1314/1896. These deal with the actions of the Covenant-breakers (q.v.), and bring forward proofs from the Bible and Qur'an for the Covenant and the position of `Abdu'l-Bahá (Rasa'il 9-28).

ii. "Risalih Iskandariyyih" (Treatise of Alexander). This treatise was written in Samarqand in reply to a request of E.G. Browne (q.v.), that Gulpaygani write something of the history of the life of Bahá'u'lláh, explain a point that he had made in the Ayyubiyyih, and identify the author of the *Tarikh-i-Jadid*. Gulpaygani named it in honor of Alexander Tumanski who had also requested information about Bahá'u'lláh (Rasa'il 48-89; Letters 43-83).

iii. "Al-Bab wa'l-Babiyyih" (The Bab and Babism). After the episode in Egypt following the assassination of Nasiru'd-Din Shah, the editor of the magazine *Al-Muqtataf*, Dr. Ya`qub Sarruf, commissioned this brief account of the history of the Bahá'í Faith (Rasa'il 291-303; Letters 95-109).

iv. "Risalah at-Tarablushiyyih" (Letter to Tripoli). Written in reply to questions regarding the previous treatise (Rasa'il 182-201; Letters 111-34).

v. A treatise that Gulpaygani wrote on the genealogy of Bahá'u'lláh was confiscated when he was arrested in Tehran 1882 and thus lost, but years later a Bahá'í wrote to `Abdu'l-Bahá asking about this question and `Abdu'l-Bahá referred him to Gulpaygani, who wrote a second, shorter treatise, tracing Bahá'u'lláh's ancestry to the last Sasanian king, Yazdigird III, a document that was of great importance in the conversion of the Zoroastrians (Rasa'il 41-47).

l. *Mukhtarat min Mu'allafat Abi'l-Fada'il*. A compilation of works in Arabic (Maison d'Editions Bahá'ies, Brussels, 1980), including *Al-Hujaj al-Bahiyyih*, and twelve other treatises, including "at-Tarablushiyyih," "al-Bab wa'l-Babiyyih," and others mentioned above.

A number of Gulpaygani's works which are known from references to them in other writings are, however, lost. Among the papers sent to Ashkhabad and subsequently lost were a number of treatises mostly incomplete: a reply to Muhammad Khan Kirmani, the Shaykhi leader who had written a refutation of the *Fara'id*; and *Raddu'r-Rudud* (Refutation of the Refutations), a reply to the various refutations of the *Fara'id* that had been written. Among Gulpaygani's works are also several that are not Bahá'í works, including *Anjuman-i-Danish*, a book of biographies of scholars and litterateurs, which was probably lost when he was arrested in Tehran in 1882; and a history of Iran, which were among the papers sent to Ashkhabad after his death.

Apart from the works already mentioned, he was involved in the composition of *The New History of the Bab* (*Tarikh-i-Jadid*). He carried on a vast

correspondence, often answering questions on the interpretation of scripture referred to him by `Abdu'l-Bahá, and typescripts of his lectures were an important source of information about the Bahá'í Faith for the American Bahá'í community for the first decade of the twentieth century.

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There have been several biographies of Gulpaygani. The most thorough and systematic of these is Ruhullah Mihrabkhani, *Sharh-i Ahval-i Jinab-i Mirza Abu'l-Fada'il Gulpaygani*. There is also a lengthy manuscript biography by Haji Mirza Haydar `Ali Isfahani. MH 2:235-382. TS 196-200. ZH 8b:1122-1137. Ali Kuli Khan wrote a brief biographical account that appears as an introduction to *The Bahá'í Proofs*. See also articles by Ali Kuli Khan, Isobel Fraser, and Husayn Afnan in *SoW* 2 March 1914, 4:314-19, and by `Abdu'l-Bahá and Shaykh Amin Effendi in the Persian section of the same issue, pp. 1-4. *Payam-i-Bahá'í*, no. 122 (Jan. 1990) is dedicated to Gulpaygani and includes the publication for the first time of two autobiographical chronicles of the dates and main events in Gulpaygani's life, pp. 55-63. It also includes articles by Ruhullah Mihrabkhani, Vahid Ra'fati, `Izzatu'llah Jazayiri, Manuchihr Hijazi, Hushang Ra'fat, Firaydun Vahman, Amin Banani, and Hishmat Mu'ayyad. See also M. Gail, *Summon up Remembrance* 143-213, 218-19. V. Minorsky (trans. and ed.), *Hudud al-Alam*, Leiden, 1937.

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