

name was Muhammad. At the completion of his learning, he took the name of Abu'l-Fadl

which means the father of knowledge, but 'Abdu'l-aha addressed him

Abu'l-Faṣā'il, meaning the father of knowledges. In one Tablet, 'Abdu'l-aha stated that he

not only was the father but the mother and brother of knowledge.

In the prime of his youth he traveled to Isfahan and Arak, cities in Iran, to perfect his

studies in Persian and Arabic. In his twenties he acquired the knowledge of all sciences

accessible. Many years later one of his students gave the following account. In 1866 when

Abu'l-Fadl was twenty-two years old the first edition of a comprehensive Arabic dictionary

called Firuzabadi was published in Tabriz.

At that time Abu'l-Fadl was in Isfahan. A student brought a copy of that dictionary for

Abu'l-Fadl's criticism. It had about 1400 pages. In one evening he looked it over and said

two words had wrong accentuation. After a long and careful examination by the learned

scholars in Isfahan, it was found that the statement of Abu'l-Fadl was accurate. Imagine!

Scanning 1400 pages in one evening!

By the time he was twenty-nine, his studies were completed, and in that year, 1873, he

let his hometown of Gulpaygan and headed for Tehran. Short time after his arrival he was

appointed as the superintendent and professor in College of Hakim Hashim, the first-class

Arabic college in Tehran.

Three years later when he was at the height of his career as the head of this

theological college, a student approached him for help to answer the argument of a Baha'i.

Being a scholar Muslim, he did his best and was quite content that he had the answer to

anything and everything.

There was a merchant who had a shop in a bazaar who was a Baha'i, and his house used

to be the place of meetings of seekers and teachers. His name was 'Abdu'l-Karim-i-Isfahani .

In 1875, Abu'l-Fadl became acquainted with him, but for a while did not know that he was a

Baha'i and occasionally used to visit him in his shop.

Then a small incident happened that changed the course of Abu'l-Fadl's life. As it was

customary that on Friday afternoon, which is the weekend in the East, to go to the

countryside, Abu'l-Fadl with a few clergy decided to go to the shrine of Shah 'Abdu'l-'Azim

which is in the outskirts of Tehran. On their way out, one of the donkeys lost a shoe so they

went to the nearest blacksmith. Ustad Husayn-i-Na'i-Band (shoe fitter), who was illiterate,

saw the large turban of Abu'l-Fadl which indicated his vast knowledge.

He was tempted to

start a conversation as he was working on the shoe like most barbers and hairdressers do.

He said he was so honored that they went to his shop and wished to have permission to ask a

question that had bothered him for a long time. The permission was granted.

He said, "Is it true that in a tradition of Shilih Islam it is stated that each drop of rain is

accompanied by an angel from heaven? And that this angel brings the drop to the Ground?"

Abull-Fadl said, " It is true."

Ustad Husayn-i-Na'i-Band said, "Is it true that when there is a dog in a house no angel

ever visits that house?"

Abull-Fadl, not guessing the connection, affirmatively answered, "Yes."

Ustad Husayn-i-Nali-Band said, "In that case, no rain should ever fall on a house where

a dog is kept!"

All of a sudden the great clergy was confounded by an illiterate blacksmith!

His rage

had no bounds and his companions noticed his shame. They whispered to him that the

blacksmith was a Bahá'í. This incident left a deep impression on Abu'l-Fadl.

The blacksmith reported this incident to 'Abdu'l-Karim, and suggested that because of

his hurt pride Abu'l-Fadl might welcome an encounter with a teacher to prove his own

superiority. When 'Abdu'l-Karim invited Abu'l-Fadl to take part in a discussion with a Bahá'í

teacher he accepted. The teacher was not highly learned but quite spiritual and answered all

questions and arguments in simple but convincing terms.

It may sound strange that uneducated people could be made a channel for the knowledge of God. Bahá'u'llah states in the *Kitab-i-Iqan*: The source of knowledge is God

and He bestows it upon those with pure heart (*Kitab-i-Iqan*, p. 3) Detachment is essential for

such sanctity of heart. It does not mean poverty and asceticism, but in particular it is

detachment from love of self. Abu'l-Fadl was surprised that he could not refute the

to arrange a

arguments of someone who was not a learned man. He asked 'Abdu'l-Karim

meeting with a learned Bahá'í near his own caliber so he could prove his superiority and the

falsity of the claims of the Bab and Baha'u'llah. 'Abdu'l-Karim was wise. He did not comply

with his wishes because Abu'l-Fadl's motive was selfish.

In a few meetings Abu'l-Fadl was baffled by the simple arguments and the depth of

understanding of those Bahá'ís about the mysteries of the Holy Book and Quran. He was

quite humbled and his pride hurt. Later on he met with learned Bahá'ís. In a meeting with

Nabíl-i-Akbar or Fadl-i-Qaini, at the end he is quoted to say, "By God! No one could ever be

found capable of withstanding the force of arguments of this great man of knowledge. "

To his own account, he spent about eight months in these discussions and now his

purpose defeated and humbled, he began to search after truth. He established close

association with followers of all religions and from friend and foe investigated the facts about the Faith. He prayed day and night for guidance. Before reaching the final stage of certitude

he went through a great deal of intellectual struggle. His head accepted the facts but his

heart was not yet touched by the light of faith and assurance.

The story of his reading the Kitab-i-Iqan is interesting. He recounted himself that he

read it with an air of superiority and was not impressed by it, and even commented that if that

book was the proof of Baha'u'llah's claim, he himself could write a better book. The following

day a prominent woman arrived at the college and asked for a scribe to write an important

letter for her. The students referred her to Abu'l-Fadl as the outstanding writer. Abu'l-Fadl

took up his pen but could not write the first sentence and several times he scribbled on the

corner and even drew lines on his fingernails until the woman lost her patience and said

mockingly, "If you have forgotten how to write a simple letter why don't you say so instead of

keeping me waiting while you draw lines on your fingernails?" He states that he was

overcome with feeling of shame as a result of this incident and then suddenly remembered

his remarks of the night before. This incident was a clear answer to his arrogance. When

Abu'l-Fadl found himself utterly confounded by the proofs and arguments of both learned and

unlearned Baha'f teachers, he entertained the idea that not until Baha'u'llah

performed a

miracle for him would his heart be satisfied.

~aha'fsexplained that miracles could not be considered conclusive proof for the messengers of God, but Abu'l-Fadl insisted.

He wrote a few questions on a paper, placed it in an envelope, sealed it with his own

seal and handed it to 'Abdu'l-Karim for safekeeping. He then put another blank sheet of paper in another envelope and asked 'Abdu'l-Karim to forward it to Baha'u'llah. He said if his

questions were answered he would entertain no doubt about the truth of the Cause.

and Abu'l-Fadl took both envelopes to the house of Haji Muhammad-'~bdu'l-~arim

Isma'il-[lhabih so that letter could be sent to Bah'u'llah. When they arrived Hajji was not

home. His wife welcomed them and they went inside. They entered a room in which there

were books and a chest containing the Holy Tablets. She gave them permission to open the

chest and study the writings. Since h~bdu'l-~arim could not read, he asked Abu'l-Fadl to read

to him.

Abu'l-Fadl states there was the tablet of Ra'is addressed to Ali PashB, the prime

minister of Turkey, but revealed in honor of Haji Muhammad, their host. It was on a blue

paper. "As I read it I came across the story of puppet show of Sultan ~ a l l m which Baha'u'llah

saw as a child in the wedding of one of His brothers in ~ehrh." As you recall. Bah'u'llah

saw how the puppet man folded all puppets including the Sultan and his ministers and put

them all in his suitcase.

Abu'l-Fadl says, "I was fascinated by it. Then I came across His following words,

'Soon will We dismiss the one who was like unto him, and will lay hold on their

chief (meaning

Sultan 'Abdu'l-kziz) who ruleth the land, and I, verily am the Almighty, the All Compelling.'

Upon reading this I was struck with awe and for half hour became speechless. I contended in

my own thought that Baha'u'llah has made these prophecies to mislead the ordinary people

and keep His hold on His followers. Otherwise, it would not be possible for a prisoner to

address the king who has imprisoned Him, and now was going to send Him to the worst exile, in such wrathful language. After all, He was a prisoner, single and alone without any help.

While these satanic thoughts flooded my mind, yet I was grateful to God that I was never

inclined to dislike Him or be discourteous to Him.

"I told 'Abdu'l-Karim that to possess the power of life over created things is a miracle. I

took my envelopes and tore them and declared that the fulfillment of these prophecies would

constitute the proof. I also had 'Abdu'l-Karim pledge to me that no one would talk about the

Faith to me any more until these prophecies became fulfilled. I thought that going to the

house of Haji was an act of providence which would relieve me from further discussion with

Bahá'ís. However, the believers did not completely leave me alone and occasionally came to

see me with their discussions.

"Five or six months passed from the day I read the Tablets. One day I saw two prominent Baha'ís talking on the street. Trying to shun them, I pulled my %ba over my head

and tried to cross the street, but they saw me and called me by my name. They said a

telegram has arrived about dethronement of Sultan 'Abdu'l-kziz and the proof of word of God

is established. This was a severe blow. I flared up with rage and said, 'It is

not my concern. I

am not his relative.' But they reminded me of my condition. I almost convulsed with rage and

did not say goodbye and left. I did not go to where I was planning to go and went straight

home. Knowing the immensity of this test, I was overcome with emotion and tears uncontrollably flowed from my eyes. I begged God to assist me. In this condition, hbdul-

Karim came with two other people. I left the house and was in no shape to face them and did

not return home until late. They left and came back in two or three days. I apologized for my behavior on that evening and said now we must wait and see if the prophecy, 'we will lay hold

on their chief' be fulfilled, since it does not mean natural death- he must be killed.

"By this time, the zeal for my finding the truth had reached its climax and found myself

able to discover the mysteries of the Quran. A few days passed and the news of the

assassination of Sultan hbdul-hi2 was flashed by telegram. I went out of my mind. I was so

agitated that even aimed a few blows at myself. At one time I fought God, another time I

would deny Him, then I would repent and beg Him for assistance and guidance. I could

neither eat or sleep. I only drank tea, smoked and wept.

"One night I was aroused from my slumber and began to admonish myself that it has

been about one year since you have been associating and arguing with these ~aha'fs. Even

the uneducated ones have proven more depth in the mysteries than you, the so-called

learned man . Also) you have witnessed their character and virtues. Why do you interpret

their words as the breathing of the evil whisperers. Isn't it that they are inspired and assisted

by the Holy Spirit.

"I arose and performed my ablutions and said prayers. I then took the tablet of R%

which had been in my possession a long time and began to read it tearfully. It was then when

I heard the voice of God. I gained my certitude and felt such love and devotion towards

BahB'u'llah. That joy and ecstasy is indescribable. I knew that if I served those who guided

me for the rest of my life or to lay down my life in their paths, I could never repay them for

giving me the spiritual life. Before dawn I hastened to hbdul-'arfm'shouse and kissed the

threshold of his door and prostrated at his feet. He was very embarrassed and said my

behavior was not warranted because God is the One who guides the people and not man."

He was 32 years old when in September of 1876 he became a believer. While

searching he used to openly discuss Baha'u'llah's claim and forecast about Sultan 'Abdu'l-kziz

to his numerous students. The average person could never do this but in his position as a

scholar and steadfast Muslim there were no threats but quite a bit of envy and jealousy on the

part of other clergy. As soon as he became a believer, he could not hide it and was forced to

leave his position as head of Tehran Theological College, and in December by the order of

Kamran Mfrza, who was a prince and the governor of Tehrbn, was imprisoned for about five

months. He, and other Baha'is, through the intervention of Haji Mirza Husayn Khan

(MusJfru'd-Dawlih), who was the minister of war, were freed.

This great scholar earned his income by writing letters for the illiterate enough to satisfy

his hunger and the expenses of a donkey to take him around. He traveled to all parts of

Persia and briefly was imprisoned in Hamadan and expelled from that city. He converted

many people and deepened the believers. A few wealthy believers wished to deputize him to

teach on their behalf and free himself from his struggle to earn his daily income. He thanked

them and said he always relied on God for his needs. Many times his meal consisted of

soaking a dry bread in water. On his traveling to teach the Cause, he used to stay in

cities and seldom stayed with any of the friends.

He served the Faith for forty years and was continuously in a state of prayer and

devotions with complete detachment. In refusing any money from the believers, he wrote

them that although at times the need necessitated selling of his clothes, but always God

provided for him and if people would stop sending money and letters to him necessitating

answers, he could spend his time transcribing tablets and thus earning a living. He stated in

another letter that Bahá'u'lláh has blessed him with these words, "O Abu'l-Fagl, the All-

Bountiful has been and will be with thee."

Mr. Taherzadeh states: "After he became a believer he acquired such spiritual insight

and faith seldom seen among the followers of Baha'u'llah. The reason for this was first the

purity of his heart which like a pure iron became fully magnetized by the spirit of Baha'u'llah.

A few, if any, of the Apostles of Baha'u'llah have surpassed him in qualities and perfections.

The second reason was his vast knowledge like an eye was helped by the light of Bahá'u'lláh

and discovered the mysteries invisible to ordinary man. He truly recognized the station of

Baha'u'llah to the degree attained only by a few. With such recognition he considered

himself to be so unworthy that he felt unable to seek permission to attain the presence of

BahB'u'llah. Abu'l-Fadl stated that when one declares his faith in BahB'u'llah, if truly he

recognizes His station, that is the beginning of nothingness."

In 1882, when conversion of a large number of people of nobility from every religious

background alarmed the statesmen and caused envy and hatred of the clergy, new plots were

made by the prince governor and the clergy. Large number of prominent Baha'is were

arrested, and in that process Abu'l-Fa\$ for one month was confined in the house of the

governor. Several controversial meetings and debates were held in the presence of the

governor. Great efforts were made by these enemies to get the order of Nasirid-din-Shah for

general massacre of all Baha'is to stop the process of conversion, but to satisfy them the

king said they could imprison Baha'is in chains and fetters. This time he was imprisoned for

twenty-two months, two weeks of which he and twenty-three other prominent believers were

kept in underground dungeon under heavy chains. Abu'l-Fadl states that for six months they

received daily news of plots of enemy and expected death at any moment.

After release he had seven months of peace in Qulhak in a resort place in outskirts of

Tehrdn when he was arrested and imprisoned by the prince for the third time. This one lasted

six months and he finally was released on February 5, 1886.

It was in that year when he received a tablet from Baha'u'llah commanding him to

travel. BahB'u'llah stated "...arise in His name and invite the people of the world to come to

him so he could tell them of The Most Great Announcement show them The Most Exalted

Hor/zonand enable them to hear The Voice of God," He was honored by BahB'u'llah in

several tablets. At first he was hesitant to write anything. He states, "In the early years of my

conversion I refused to write books because the Supreme Pen was moving. Finally in 1887

-

when in Adhirbijan I had the honor of meeting Varqa the Martyr who encouraged me to

write. Varqa stated that while in Akka at the presence of BahB'u'llah he heard Him

encouraging the believers to write about the truth of the Faith. Then Varqa said, "I inquired if

Baha'u'llah deemed it advisable to employ Mirza Abu'l-Fag1 in this service and He said He has

commanded it."

"In 1888 while in Hamadan I took the pen and my first writing was in answer to the

questions of a Jewish doctor of Tehran called Sharh-i-Ayat-i-Muvara&ih which is not

translated in English. Soon after that, due to agitation of clergy I was imprisoned for five

days and expelled from that city. In those days Baha'i teachers would employ three methods

for proving the truth of the Faith: First, based on rational and intellectual proofs; Secondly, on

prophecies of the Holy Books , and the third method was used only in certain cases when a

person didn't wish to find the truth and wished to win the argument. This method was to use

the arguments of that person to prove the case. Mirza Abu'l-Faql was expert in all three

methods.

One example is his dialogue with Reverend Doctor Robert Bruce, a British missionary

in Isfahan which is interesting to listen to. You need to know that in that time there was

famine and this missionary had political and financial influence over the

governor and was

boasting about that as well as his superior upbringing and education in the most advanced

country. Here is the encounter between him and Abu'l-Fa\$

Abu'l-Fag1 : Would you please tell me the extent of your contribution?

Bruce : So far I have donated one half million tumans for famine relief and if necessary I

could provide several times more.

A-F: What is your political influence?

B: Should fanatical Muslims close my church I could direct the governor, who is the son of

gillus--~ulta'n,to open it with his own hands.

A-F: What are your educational qualifications?

B: I am graduate of a university from a foremost country.

A-F: Being so richly endowed with such influence and knowledge, how many souls have you

been able to convert to Christianity since you came to Isfahan?

B: About thirty.

A-F: Of these, how many are steadfast and do sincerely believe?

B: (After a brief pause) About ten to fifteen.

A-F: Of these, how many will remain steadfast and are willing to give their lives in the face of

persecution?

B: Perhaps two or three.

A-F: With your permission, I wish to recount my position. I have no assets and at times have

nothing to subsist on. My position and political influence is such that for being a Baha'i I

could be put to death, with those killing me receiving honor from the government. As to my

knowledge, I received my education in religious schools, but I am the product of an ignorant

and dark society. In spite of all these shortcomings, I have spoken to about one hundred

people since my arrival in this city a month ago. Twenty-four souls among them

have

embraced the Faith and every one of them is willing to lay down his life as many other Baha'is

have done. Now, in your fair judgment, who in this day is assisted by the Holy Spirit, you or I?

Reverend Bruce had no answer - a simple checkmate made by Abu'l-Fa\$
He later

met Dr. Bruce in Tabriz which is another story on page 266, The Revelation of Baha'u'Ylah,

Volume 4 by Taherzadeh.

In 1899 at the instruction of BahB'u'llah, he moved to Ishqabad in Russian Turkamanistan. There he met Captain Alexander Tumansky, an Orientalist who had befriended the believers. His correspondence with the captain after Abu'l-Fadl P moved to

Bubara ,and later Samarkand, are valuable readings.

There in Ishqabad,two months after his arriva!, he witnessed the events of the martyrdom of Haji Muhammad-i-lsfahani, a prominent believer. Abu'l-FaGI served as the

BahEi'i spokesman to the Russian government. This event took place in September of 1889.

Following investigation and trial, the two who committed the murder were sentenced to death.

The families and friends of these two begged the believers and the family of the martyr for

forgiveness. On the day of execution, gallows were erected and the graves were dug. At the

moment of execution it was announced that the honorable Baha'is have interceded, and

therefore the sentence has been reduced to exile to Siberia. BahEi'u'llah made a reference

to this in Lawh-i-Dunya (Tablet of the World), and called it a princely act. However, later

Abdu'l-Baha stated that people have no right to forgive a crime and the sentence must be

carried out for the protection of society (Paris Talks, page 154)

This event in which Abu'l-Fag1 played an important role increased the prestige

of

Bahá'ís and paved the way for initiation of enterprises such as schools, libraries and the first

House of Worship.

In Ishqabad when Abu'l-Fa\$ read Baha'u'llah's tablet in his honor, he had no idea what

Bahá'u'llah meant by "gazes upon the horizons." Up to that time his horizons had been

limited to Iran and southern Russia. Within two years after the ascension of Baha'u'llah, the

course of events showed him many new horizons.

After Ishqabad, accompanying his teacher, Nabil-Akbar, he went to Bukbara where shortly after Nabil-Akbar passed away. Then he went to Samarkand. Both Buuara and

Samarkand are in Uzbekistan, then a province of Russia.

Lack of success in direct teaching and ascension of Baha'u'llah in 1892 put him in a

*

quiet mood. As he walked in the bazaars of golden Samarkand, studying the dusty books, he

could not imagine that his future laid in the bustling cities of the West and the territories of

A

Tamerlane. In 1894 on instruction of hbdul-~aha,he moved to the Holy Land. His spirit was

galvanized when in Haifa for ten months he basked in the sunshine of love of the Master

The next twenty years were filled with traveling, teaching and writing.

His first assignment was to go to Cairo, Egypt, where Al-A~harUniversity represented

the school of higher Islamic learning. He, as instructed by kbdu'l-~aha,did not talk openly

about the Faith. Being supposedly from ~ h ? i of h Islam from Iran was enough handicap for him

to be accepted. Soon he became known for his interpretation of religious scriptures.

Scholars and professors of Al-Aghar, recognizing his depth, sat at his feet. Some believed he

was endowed with divine powers. After he disclosed his religion about thirty of these scholars

became Baha'is, but the students who became Baha'is were immediately expelled from the

University.

One of the students, Baru'd-Dh Qa'zi', recounted the following: "I thought Abu'l-Fadl

was a prophet so one day I told him, 'Master, what is your station?' He said, 'I have none.'

I said, 'Why do you hide from me? If you are a prophet please tell me and I will accept and

follow you.' Abu'l-Fagl laughed and postponed the answer to a later time. After a while I had

to leave for Palestine and Abu'l-Fadl advised me to attain the presence of hbdu'l-~ah5.I

obeyed and discovered the truth."

There in Cairo, Abu'l-Fadl corresponded with people of China, India, Russia, Iran and

Holy Land. Many of these were referred to him by kbdu'l- aha for interpretation of scriptures

or defending attack on the Faith. The first explanation and discussion about the Faith in the

Middle Eastern press was by Abu'l-Fadl in the popular Egyptian magazine Al-Muqataf, which

provoked severe objections by Muslim fundamentalists which provided another opportunity for

answer and further explanation.

There he wrote his famous book of Faraid (the Matchless Gems) which was written in

Persian in response to attack of a Muslim clergy from Caucasus and published in 1898. It

found little audience in Arabic-speaking Egypt. It is eight hundred pages and was printed

from the very original draft without any addition on the margins or corrections. This was an

example of mastery of his writing ability.

He became well-known in Egypt not only as the learned exponent of the Faith but

also

as defender of Islam against missionary opposition. Then he wrote in Arabic Duraru'l-

Bahiyih which was published in 1900 and we have its translation in English under the title of

Mkacles and Metaphors. Actual meaning of Arabic name is The Brilliant Pearls which was

in answer to a learned man from India. This book caused a fury. The clergy in Cairo issued a

declaration which could have meant his death, had it not been for the British rule.

In December of 1900, 'Abdu'l-aha sent Laura Clifford Barney, the compiler of Some

Answered Questions to Egypt to accompany Abu'l-Fadl to the West. After three month's stay

in Paris, Abu'l-Fag1 sailed for the United States. It is interesting to mention that May Bolles

(mother of Amatu'l-Baha Rllhiyyih Khanum) , summering in Paris, insisted on staying longer

in Paris by the instructions of Abdu'l-Baha, but her mother insisted that they leave for

England. The mother's request to 'Abdu'l-aha for consent to go to England was denied.

Then the mother of May asked for intercession of Abu'l-Fag1 who wrote a letter on her behalf

which also was denied. It was not until after Thomas Breakwell embraced the Faith in Paris

that 'Abdu'l-aha permitted May, who taught Mr. Breakwell, to leave Paris.

The reason kbdu'l-aha sent Abu'l-Fadl to the United States was to guard the early

believers in the States against the mischief of Yfiayru'llah. KJayru'llah was a charismatic

Bahifi teacher who came to the US in 1892. He made many new Baha'is but was corrupted

by his success. He wished to canonize his teachings where were a mixture of Baha'i

teachings and mystic and psychic concepts. He was disturbed when 'Abdu'l-Baha did not

agree, and he began to rebel and join forces with Muhammad Ali, the archbreaker of the

Covenant.

C

Abdu'l-Baha also sent 'Ali-Kuli Khan (Nabilu'd-Dawlih) to translate for Abu'l-FaGI,

whose stay in the United States was a few months short of four years. He held regular

classes for the believers and seekers in Washington D.C., New York, Chicago and Boston. In

Green Acre, Maine, where professors of philosophy from Harvard mingled with artists as well

as the people of influence, Abu'l-FaGI towered above them all. He was not a public speaker

or charismatic person. Rather a reclusive scholar, but he filled the auditoriums of the US with

large audiences, all eager to partake of his knowledge.

So impressed was 'Abdu'l-Baha with the depth and ability of Abu'l-Fadl that He advised

him to write a treatise expounding the Faith and Kuli Khan

was to translate it. He was so

humble that he claimed the scope of such a subject was beyond his ability. Kuli Khan

was

and

stated that he pulled The Baha'i Proofs out of Mirza Abu'l-Fadl. It was composed in Arabic

under the name of Hujaju'l-Bahiyih. The Baha'i Proofs which is the English translation by

Ali-Kuli Khan is like an introduction to a much greater book which never was completed.

It was first published in 1902. This was his contribution for teaching the Cause in a

predominantly Christian society. In it he explains the timeless truths of the Faith, the coming

of the Day of God, oneness of religions, also God being absolute unity beyond

characterization. Being what it is, it remains an irreplaceable classic of Baha'i literature.

He deepened the believers in the Covenant and prepared them for the visit of

hbdu'l-~aha.

On November 29, 1904, the day he left the US, he said, "Thirty-two years ago when I

left my home town I still was a Muslim. My mother, sister and brothers gathered to say

goodbye. Three years later when I became a Baha'i they abandoned me and left me alone.

Now consider the bounties of our Master who has granted me hundreds of friends."

The last ten years of his life were spent in Egypt in the cities of Cairo and Alexandria with

occasional trips to Beirut and Haifa.

Reverend Peter Easton first visited 'Abdu'l-aha in September, 1911, in London which

he then followed by a venomous attack on the Faith through articles in the newspaper,

Evangelical Christendom. Mirza Abu'l-Fagl was then in Beirut. When informed by the

students in the American University of Beirut about that article, from his sick bed he wrote one

of his most effective writings called The Brilliant Proof (Burhan-i-Lame). hbdu'l-~ahi

received the first copy of it on June 19, 1912, the day He named New York City as the City of

the Covenant. He praised the book and ordered immediate translation of it.

Mirza Abu'l-Fagl was a genius in explaining subtle philosophical points, and he said he

received that gift when Baha'u'llah, in a tablet addressed to a believer in Isfahan, wrote,

"I beg of God to enable Fagl to teach His truth and to unveil that which is hidden and

treasured in His knowledge with wisdom and explanation." He was like an expert deep diver

who would immerse in the writings of Baha'u'llah and discover gems and pearls easily missed

by the rest. He was the first believer who through logic and reason showed that there were

seven major religions before this Dispensation, and the term "Seven Heavens" used by the prophets symbolizes that.

He was the first to demonstrate with logic why the pagans due to worshipping idols and

images are considered polytheistic, while their origin is one God. This parallel is easily

found in some religions such as Christianity which is considered monotheistic. He was the

first to establish the genealogy of Baha'u'llah through research showing His descent from

Zoroaster and Yazdgird, the last king in Sassanid dynasty.

The four books of his which are translated into English are The Baha'i Proofs, The Brilliant Pro06 Miracles and Metaphors, and Letters and Essays. According to Balyuzi

and Taherzadeh, two famed scholars, Baha'i history so far has not recorded anyone equal to

Mirza Abu'l-FaGI in learning coupled with rare detachment and humility. His detachment,

prayer and meditations were the cornerstone of his life, and with them he polished the mirror

of his heart so it perfectly reflected the light of the Faith to those who came in contact with

him.

Abu'l-Fadl stated that knowledge is nothing but comprehension of the reality of things,

and the reality can only be reflected in hearts which are pure. That purity is attainable

through prayer and spiritual concentration. To know his greatness and humility,

' A l i - ~ u l m

i a n

states you had to watch him in the presence of h b d u ' l - ~ a h a , Whose knowledge would reduce

him to utter nothingness like a pebble on the vast ocean shore.

Isabel Frazer, who saw him frequently in a suburb of Alexandria in Egypt, wrote this

about him after his death: "...with all his book-learning, he was not at all

bookish...the same

dignity and impressiveness with which he discussed a verse of the Quran with the learned

sheiks, he put into the meeting of some sojourning American, often finishing with a personal

pleasantry, for he was a ready humorist and made his guests instantly at ease. He had the

placidness of a child and the air of one who was never in a hurry and had plenty of time to

make radiantly happy the place where God had placed him...One day when I was at his

house, there were about twenty sheiks who had come over from Alexandria to visit him. One

who seemed to be the leader was a very learned and gorgeously attired young sheik, who

said with some pride that he had been educated in the oldest university in the world. He was

the editor of a magazine in Alexandria and had come to interview Mirza Abu'l-Fa\$, who for

more than an hour had been listened to with absorbed attention. His talk was interspersed

with an occasional jest and his sharp eye would glance from one famto another to see if his

point was understood...suddenly fibdull-f aha appeared. Mirza Abu'l-Fagll faced the door, the

rest had our backs to it and did not see Him; there was a moment of silence and Mirza

Abu'l-FaGI stood with his head bowed, his whole attitude changed. He immediately became

the most humble and respectful of servitors. Then quickly arranging a chair forhbdu'l- ah^,

he told Him in a low voice, in answer to His questions, the subject under discussion ...'I

His steadfastness in the Covenant and obedience to 'Abdu'l- aha had no bounds. He

would rather die than to think of a small deviation from the teachings and laws. One believer,

Husayn-Ruhi said, "When I arrived in Egypt, I shared the Lawh-i-Dukhan (Tablet

of Purity)

with Abu'l-Fadl. I had not yet finished reading when he threw his cigarette case in the street

and said that was the end of smoking for him. He was a chain smoker, rolled his own

cigarettes and lit a new one with the old. He said that he had been smoking for fifty-five years

and was addicted and said, 'Soon you will see that a member of my body will become

paralyzed." It did not take very long when one of his arms became paralyzed which lasted for

two years. The doctors strongly urged him to resume smoking but he refused, saying he

preferred to die than to disobeyhbdudl-aha."That tablet does not forbid smoking.

"Abdu'l-aha states in it "smoking tobacco which is dirty, smelly and offensive is an evil habit which is highly injurious to the health."

To the end of his life, this solitary man, though grown frail, was busy with his research

and writing.

In 1910, when hbdudl-aha chose Ramleh, a suburb of Alexandria for rest, He rented a

house near His residence for Abu'l-Fadl who loved his quiet life in Alexandria, the life of

books and ideas. When some American ladies on pilgrimage insisted on visiting Abu'l-Fadl

frequently he dealt with them with consideration and humor. They would call from the porch,

"Oh Abu'l-Fadl, we wish to see you." An elderly voice from inside would answer, "Abu'l-Fadl

is not here."

In January 1913 from Paris, hbdudl-aha cabled a well-known believer in Cairo that

everything should be done for the comfort of Abu'l-Fadl, who He said was as His own self.

In June of that year while in Port Said, Egypt, 'Abdu'l-Baha was disturbed by the news of

Abu'l-Fadl's continued illness and sent His son-in-law and another believer to Alexandria to

see everything was done for Abu'l-Fa\$

A few days before 'Abdu'l-Baha's departure from Egypt for the Holy Land, Abu'l-Fa\$

went to Cairo. In January, which is the coldest month in Cairo, his strength failed rapidly and

when confined to bed, he was transferred to the house of one of the believers who used

services of the best doctor and nurses. Mirza Abu'l-Fa\$ died of endocarditis on January 21,

191% at 4 PM at the age of seventy. The nurse in attendance said his final words were

"K_hoda, Khoda" (God, God). With these words of greeting he joined the One in Whose

service he labored for so many years. He was laid to rest next to the grave of Lua Getsinger

in Cairo Cemetery.

Next day the news was given to 'Abdu'l-Baha in Haifa as he sat down for lunch. He did

not say a word. He arose without eating and went to His room where He stayed alone until

late in the afternoon. In the evening when the believers gathered in 'Abdu'l-Baha's house, He

received them and spoke to them about Mirza Abu'l-Fadl, but was frequently interrupted with

silence when He was flooded with emotion. He spoke with His eyes closed.

In another day He stated, "How erudite and learned Abu'l-Fa\$ was. He had the knowledge of all religious books and the intricate laws and customs of many countries in the

East and the West. He knew the doctrines of every sect and party. In the servitude to the

threshold of Baha'u'llah he was My partner and associate. During the hours of grief he was

the source of My consolation. In his humility he lived in the station of nothingness. I never

heard the word 'I' from him. While weak and sick he refused to accept a servant

and would

prepare tea himself for his visitors. He had been imprisoned several times but I never heard

him complain about his hardship. The only time he spoke was about the praise of Mulla

Riga-i-Yazdi , how eloquently he presented the Faith to the prince governor. No matter how

much We want to console Ourselves, We cannot. While in Alexandria every time my heart

was depressed, I used to go and meet him, and at once my depression vanished. He was

very truthful. He never harbored deceit or revenge."

What an honor to have such exalting eulogy by no less a person than 'Abdu'l-Ghafa

Himself. Indeed, it was a well-deserved bounty. 'Abdu'l-Ghafa named a door in the Shrine of

the Bab after his name, and the Guardian designated him as one of the nineteen Apostles of

Baha'u'llah. Only if we could emulate his humility.

References

1. Baha'i Proofs, Mirza Abu'l-Fadl
 2. Letters & Essays I I
 3. Miracles and Metaphors " "
 4. Baha'u'llah The King of Glory, H. M. Balyuzi, Hand of the Cause
 5. The Revelation of Baha'u'llah, Volumes 3 & 4, Adbf Taherzadeh
 6. 'Abdu'l-Ghafa, H. M. Balyuzi, Hand of the Cause
- ADDENDUM REGARDING THE TABLET OF RA ' ~

Considering the immensity of three tablets of Baha'u'llah and their grave effect on the

fate of the three most powerful officials of, and the mighty Turkish Empire itself, prompted me

to make this addendum to the talk on Mirza Abu'l-Fadl.

The part mentioned about the Tablet of Ra'is and how the fulfilment of its prophecies

brought unshakable certitude to Mirza Abu'l-Fadl was what he had told to Hsji Mirza Haydar

Ali, who later recounted it. The Tablet of Ra'is mentioned in that part was a general term

used by ~ a jMirza

r Haydar Ali for three momentous tablets revealed by the Pen of Glory

within the span of two to three years, addressing the two highest ministers of the Turkish

-

Empire. x l i ~a'sh6was the prime minister called "Ra'is" (chief) by Baha'u'llah, and ~ u ' a ' d

-

pasha'was the foreign minister. These two alternatively changed their two positions.

-

Also a few words about the title of Dhabih, (Za-bee) meaning "Sacrifice" conferred by

Baha'u'llah on two believers will identify the two individuals. One believer was Siyyid Isma'il

Zavarayyi, the erudite believer who in Baghdad after seeing a glimpse of Baha'u'llah's glory

ended his own life. The other was H&jji Muhammad Isma'il Kashani , the brother of ~ 6 j i

Mirza Jani, the first Babi in Kashan who hosted fheBab in his house for three nights and later

was martyred.

The other title of H6ji Muhammad Isma'il is "Anis" which means Companion, also conferred

by Baha'u'llah. He was the one in whose house the three well-known tablets of Baha'u'llah

were perused for the first time by Mirza Abu'l-FadI.

After the passing of Dhabih, who had glimpsed the unbearable glory of Baha'u'llah,

Baha'u'llah wrote to his son that his father wished to offer his life in the path of God, and in the

sight of God he has the station of a martyr and thus was honored with the title of DJabih.

Now about the three tablets, Suriyih-Ra'is, Tablet of Ra'is and Tablet of Fu'ad, and the

summary of their contents, this summary is extracted from The Revelation

of Baha'u'llah by A.

Taherzadeh, Volumes 2 and 3.

Haji Mirza Isma'il (Dhabih) arrived in Adrianople in August of 1868 when Baha'u'llah's house was surrounded by soldiers as the first step towards His exile to Akka.

Dhabih could not attain the presence of Baha'u'llah so he wrote a letter to Him.

Sdriyih Ra'is was revealed in Arabic while Baha'u'llah was on His way to Gallipoli to be

exiled to Akka. It was revealed in honor of Dhabih but was addressed to Ali Pasha, the

prime minister of the Turkish Empire. With Baha'u'llah's permission, Dhabih attained His

presence in the public bath in Gallipoli.

The first part of this Sdrih is addressed to kii Pds&16whom Baha'u'llah calls Ra'is,

severely rebukes him for causing all of the tribulations to the believers and cruel injustice to

Baha'u'llah. Further, He identifies 'Ali PB&S with those who denied the Manifestations of the

past and declares how this Cause before long will encompass the world. He predicts that

Adrianople would pass out of their control and blood would flow everywhere. The second part

of this ~ u ' r i his in response to a question by Lhabih about the nature of the soul.

A few months after the revelation of ~u'riyihRa'fs, in the early stage of His imprisonment in a cell in the barracks of Akka, and soon after the death of three of His followers, the momentous Tablet of Ra'is was revealed in Persian and was addressed to the

same prime minister xli ~dst~shB.

In it, Baha'u'llah refers t o g l i Pfis38 as the one who considers

himself to be the most exalted among men and Baha'u'llah as the lowest servant. He

admonishes him for his cruelties in committing a number of innocent women and children to

the harsh life of that grim prison and how on the first night of their arrival they were denied

food and water. Remember, it was on an extremely hot and windless day in August which

took the sail boat all day to cross the bay from Haifa to Akka. There was no shade and

inadequate water to drink.

In this tablet, Baha'u'llah recounts that as a child at the wedding of one of His brothers

in Tehran He saw the puppet show about Sultan Salim and He watched with curiosity the

puppet man at the end folding up the Sultan and his men, putting them all in a suit case.

Then He counsels him not to rely on his pomp and glory as they will soon be coming to an

end. He emphatically warns him that God's chastisement will assail him from every direction

and how confusion will overtake his people and the government, and he will never be able to

repent or make amends.

It is interesting that after the revelation of this tablet, Bah3u'llah's scribe asked Him

what would happen if 'Ali Pdsbishsl truly repented. Baha'u'llah stated that every word would

inevitably be fulfilled and all the people of the world would be unable to change one word of

that tablet.

Now about the Tablet of Fu'ad. Fu'ad Pasha was the foreign minister and collaborator with %liPSsJ6 in exiling Baha'u'llah to Akka in 1868. He was dismissed in 1869, one year after the revelation of Su'rih of Ra'is and subsequently died in France. In the early

years in Akka, Baha'u'llah revealed the Tablet of Fu'ad , and in it declared that God had taken

his life as punishment and describes in strong terms the agony of his soul. In this tablet

Baha'u'llah prophesied the downfall of Ali PasJa and Sultan hbdu'l-hziz in the

following

terms: "Soon will We dismiss the one who was like unto him (meaning 'Ali PBsJB) and will lay

hold on their chief who ruleth the land (meaning Sultan 'Abdu'l-'kiz), and I verily am the

Almighty, the all-Compelling."

Shortly after the revelation of the Tablet of Fu'ad, k ~P&&I i was disgracefully

dismissed from his position as the prime minister and died in 1871. Five years later Sultan

'Abdu'l-hziz, as prophesied in the Tablet of Fu'ad, was dethroned and imprisoned by the

revolutionaries and was killed a few days later.

Then in the disastrous war of 1877-78, the Russians and their Bulgarian allies reached

the gates of Constantinople, at one time the powerful capital of the Turkish Empire. No one

could have fathomed that such an invincible empire would soon crumble and form the

independent countries on today's map.

As foretold ten years earlier in the Scrih-Ra'is, Adrianople was occupied by the

enemies of the Turkish Empire and truly blood flowed everywhere.

No wonder that these fulfillments were more than a miracle to Mirza Abu'l-Fadl and

brought him the bounty of immovable conviction. Let us be fair in our judgment and reflect

on these mind-boggling events and recognize the power which elevated Mirza Abu'l-Fadl to

the highest station of servitude.

— Mirza Abu'l-Fadl: The Greatest Scholar (Used by permission of the curator)