

afforded this community through the equity of this great Monarch and renowned Czar, which bolted out the threat of inveterate enemies towards a handful of meek who have no other champion save the exalted God.

It is astonishing to recall that the land of Kharazm, which contains Turkmenistan, with 'Ishqabad situated within its borders, was the same violent realm where each year at least a thousands Iranian captives were put to the sword and Shi'ih women and daughters were subject of untold atrocities. And this was in addition to the multitudes [of the Iranian Shi'ih], who, worse than the Sudanese slaves, were sold in Bukhára, Samarqand and Kiev as well as other cities of Turkmenistan. However, it is now nine years that through the potency of the Russian Government, which has become the haven of justice in the East, the wolf and the sheep, and the beast and the prey, lay down together and drink from the same stream. Exalted is God, the Lord of Destiny!

[Meeting Haji Muhammad-Rida]

It was on 17 Dhi'l-Qa'dih 1306 A.H.[1] that in the company of the honored Afnans, I arrived in 'Ishqabad. The very first time that I was in the presence of the illustrious martyr [Haji Muhammad-Rida], I discovered in him the highest attainments of perseverance, tenderness, morality, fidelity and humility. He was a sincere helper to everyone and dealt with the friends and foes with affection and generosity. However, by reason of his steadfastness and fame in the Faith, he was constantly harassed and beleaguered by the proponents of enmity and hate, and in the same way that you observe in Iran, he too was falsely labeled and slandered. For instance, he was referred to as "the Imam Rida of the Babis" and - I take refuge unto God - they noised among the people that he harbored resentment towards the Sanctified Prophets. It should be noted that 'Ishqabad is now the gathering place of the troublemakers of Tabriz who, because of the policies and the skilled administration of Amir-Kabir, the Amir-Nizam of Azarbayjan province, have escaped here and are taking advantage of the liberties offered by the Russian Government.

In short, it had been over a year since a group of thugs had risen in opposition to that choice friend and were determined to slay that essence of goodness. The leaders of this band and the original advocates of this mischief were: Mulla Ahmad Tajjir [merchant] of Yazd; Mihdi Tajjir Kashani; Mulla Mihdi Ruzih-khan [soothsayer] of Tabriz; Mashhadi Samad Tabrizi; Mashhadi Jalil Tabrizi; and a large number of people of Iran and Caucasia.

It was in the latter part of Dhi'l-Hajjih[2] when the illustrious martyr requested this servant to draft a will for him, to which I consented. A few days passed. When one day we saw each other in the streets, he inquired, "Why have you not prepared the will?" "What is the haste?" I asked. "Time is short and affairs may fall into disarray," he responded.

Some days later, that is, on the first of Muharram[3], he came to this

servant's house in the company of Aqa Ghulam-Husayn, who was his close companion, trusted friend and business partner, and also accompanied by Aqa Mirza Mihdi Rashti. In accordance with his instructions, a will was prepared stating essentially: "All my possessions in 'Ishqabad, completely and in their entirety, I leave to my illustrious master Aqa Siyyid Ahmad Shirazi[4] who is of the Afnan of the Sacred Lote-Tree." Verbally, he added: "My residence and its furniture in Isfahan belong to me and are hereby bequeathed to my survivors. All my books and papers in Isfahan, whether Bahá'í or otherwise, must go to my two brothers (meaning, his two brothers who lived in Isfahan)." He emphasized that everything he was involved with in 'Ishqabad belonged to the esteemed Aqa Siyyid Ahmad, and that he only served as a caretaker for the properties of the exalted Afnan, on whose behalf he collected rents and who paid for the daily expenses of the illustrious martyr.

In short, this will was written in the presence of Aqa Ghulam-Husayn and Aqa Mirza Mihdi Tajjir Rashti.

[Muharram Commemorations]

Since the month of Muharram 1307 A.H.[5] had arrived, the Iranians of the city, much the same as in their native land, commenced setting up takiyyih[6] and organizing dastih[7], zakhm-zani[8] and ruzih-khani[9]. During these nights and days, the Shi'is committed such unseemly acts in front of the foreigners, which are unworthy of description or further mention. And it was in the course of these gatherings that they laid plans to slay the illustrious martyr. However, because of the presence of the Russian soldiers, they were unable to carry out their dreadful scheme during the 'Ashura period[10]. In this wise, the ten days of the 'Ashura came to an end and the ruzih-khanis were concluded.

[The Martyrdom]

On the twelfth of Muharram[11], however, about three hours into the morning, as the illustrious martyr was passing through the bazaar, two of the Tabrizi thugs, one known as Husayn and the other named 'Ali-Akbar and referred to as 'Ali-Baba, in full view of the public, surrounded and martyred Haji Muhammad-Rida with thirty-one stabs, cutting him into pieces, making the earth crimson with the noble blood of that essence of love, purity, faith and fidelity.

At the time of martyrdom, over five hundred of the shopkeepers were present who inwardly were of the same mind as the murderers and outwardly cheered them and shouted expressions of immense joy. Nevertheless, because of the alertness of the authorities, the perpetrators were unable to escape and immediately were seized. The city's medical examiner as well as the senior security officers came at once, but, alas, it was too late and his sanctified soul had winged its

flight to its heavenly habitation in the most exalted pavilion.

Even though the two thugs were chained and made captive by the hand of fate, and the city's security forces were vigilant and watchful, the fervor of the enemies and the uproar of the men of enmity was of such intensity that not one of the friends dared to go near the sacred remains laying on the ground. In this manner, until sometime after noon, the remains of that hallowed being remained in the dust of the same location.

Eventually, in accordance with the instructions of Aqa Muhammad-Rida Arbab, Aqa Ghulam-Husayn asked Mashhadi 'Ali-Haydar Shirvani, who was renowned for generosity, leadership and ability, to help him rescue the remains, hoping that with Shirvani's presence no other incident would occur. The honored Mashhadi 'Ali-Haydar consented and came to the location, but no one else had the courage to help and whoever they approached for assistance refused.

At last, Mashhadi Muhammad-Quli Urubadi, who was a pious and righteous young man, came forth and lifted the remains over his shoulders and brought it to the Caravansary which belonged to Aqa Siyyid Ahmad Afnan and was in the custodianship of the illustrious martyr. In the process, however, he had to sustain the intense and unrelenting attack of the enemies who rushed forth to commit every manner of unseemly atrocity. Having no other course, Aqa Ghulam-Husayn and Aqa Mashhadi 'Ali-Haydar closed the Caravansary's gate, but from the adjacent roofs, the foes continued to bombard them with rocks and subject them to every manner of insult and abuse, trying to prevent them from washing the blessed body. Under such conditions, the believers succeeded in washing the body and at midnight, with the utmost difficulty and hardship, buried that sanctified soul at a choice location outside the city of 'Ishqabad.

[Plot for General Massacre of Bahá'ís]

The following day, the uproar of the enemies reached a new height. News was received that they had laid plans for killing twenty-four of the believers, who were considered leaders of the Bahá'í community of 'Ishqabad. For this purpose they had collected and spent a very large sum in order to stir the naive people's sense of false pride by such nonsense as: "This matter is a matter of our Faith! We are Muslim and Iranian. This has nothing to do with the Russian Government for them to interfere!"

In short, on the afternoon of the second day, a group of Tabrizi ruffians rushed to the middle of bazaar and with drawn weapons attacked Aqa Mirza 'Abdu'l-Karim Tajjir Ardabili, Mashhadi Yusuf, Mashhadi Ibrabim Tajjir Milani, Mashhadi Muhammad-Quli Urubadi and some other of the believers. However, as the friends were vigilant, they were unable to inflict any injuries.

[Meeting General Kamaroff]

By then, the situation had become most difficult and perilous. Therefore, that same day at sundown, together with the above-mentioned friends and others of the believers, we went to the office of the distinguished

Komaroff, who was a General in the Russian Government and the Governor-General of Kharazm and Marv. After our arrival had been announced, while the rest of the friends stayed outside, this servant and the honored Aqa Mirza 'Abdu'l-Karim Ardibili were led into the General's presence. When we entered his office, permission was granted for us to sit. With the utmost gentleness and affection, he inquired after our situation. Our translator was the honored Mirza Ahmad Bayk, who was a Sunni from Caucasia with pleasing manners. It became evident that it had been reported to the General: "The slain person - and I take refuge unto God! - had insulted the chosen ones of Islam and on hearing this, the two murderers had been unable to restrain their anger and had killed him in a fit of rage and are now in prison."

This servant stated: "It is now over eight or nine years that under the protection of the Russian Government the [Bahá'í] community has been engaged in commerce and labor in 'Ishqabad and during this period you have not heard any mention of wrongdoing or misconduct committed by any of them. Even in the case of the illustrious martyr, who was killed with the most evident brutality, we had no intention of imposing on the favors of the authorities or filling a complaint. This was because of our awareness that the provincial officials always maintained law and order, and provided protection to the people. However, now the situation has gone past the point of patience and forbearance because news has reached us that the Shi'ih sect has arisen to slay a number of Bahá'ís. For the longest time the Shi'ih's have insisted on their accusation that we do not believe in God, the Prophet [Muhammad] and have enmity towards the Sanctified Imams. However, since these accusations have become old in Iran and the officials of the realm no longer heed such utter rubbish, they have therefore decided to raise these slanders here to create mischief."

The General inquired, "Do you believe in the Chosen Ones of Islam? Do you speak contemptuously of them?"

"We do not speak negatively of anyone," this servant responded, "and are disallowed from uttering the slightest insult or abuse even towards our staunchest enemies, much less the eminent figures of the religions or those sent by the Almighty God. And the truth of this statement is in the fact - and I take refuge unto God! - that if we had been derisive towards the chosen ones of Islam before the Muslims, surely we would have spoken more readily and with greater ease of such things in front of foreigners who disbelieve in the Immaculate Figures of Islam. Your Excellency can inquire of the prominent Russians or of the Christians in this region that have met and spoken with this servant of the manner in which we refer to the past Prophets."

The General responded, "Yes, I know that you never speak disrespectfully of anyone. I have your books and I am not unfamiliar with your views. However, it is possible that a person in the heat of anger would speak contrary to one's belief or traditions."

"This did not occur either," I stated, "since if the late Haji - and I take

refuge unto God! - had spoken an offensive word, then they should have brought a complaint to the authorities who would have dealt with him according to the law and would have punished him appropriately. In that event no one could have objected. However, since they decided to murder him on their own, this proves that the perpetrators are lying and had no justification for their deed."

He remarked, "That is indeed true."

We continued to have a marvelous discussion, but its details are beyond the available space in this missive. With his own hand, the General wrote the name of the felons and through the translator, Mirza Ahmad Bayk, sent clear and strong instructions about the security of the city and the friends to the Polkovnic[12], who was responsible for the city's security and military. Subsequently, we left his office.

[Official Investigation]

When that evening had concluded and the morning sun had risen, the thugs and the ruffians, who on the previous day had been intent on killing the friends, fled the city. Three of them, however, were captured, and these were: Asadu'llah, Ibrahim and Ghaffar. But, the last two men were innocent and were apprehended in error. When people learned of their imprisonment, fear seized the enemies and peace was restored throughout the city.

The officials of the Russian Government embarked on an investigation to discover the identity of the instigators of the mischief as it was evident to those endowed with understanding that two worthless thugs could not by themselves have mustered the audacity to perpetrate the murder of the illustrious martyr without the full backing of powerful elements. Therefore, an astute and competent native of Russia, who is known in the language of this realm as the "Salischi", was appointed to the task of interrogating the associates of the murderers and others suspected of instigating this incident. Thus he began to prosecute his charge and investigate the matter.

As a preface to a better understanding of the [subsequent] events, I should acquaint you with certain details. Prior to the arrival of this ephemeral servant in 'Ishqabad, there existed little friendly association or friendship between the Bahá'ís and the Christians. However, after the arrival of this servant in this region, doors of association, gatherings and discussions between the Russian and the Christian scholars and myself were opened. Majority of times and days, the learned ones of this region would come to the dwelling of this servant and discuss religious and scientific topics. The discussions, however, never exceeded those limits which could lead to severing of ties of affection or darkening of the horizon of friendship. Therefore, following my arrival in 'Ishqabad, the teachings and principals of the Faith became widely disseminated among the Christians, they completely recognized the scholarly and intellectual attainments of the Bahá'ís and our superior and more excellent achievements. Strong bonds of sincerity and brotherhood were established between the Christians and Bahá'ís, and they gained a thorough understanding of the profound difference between the beliefs of the enemies of the Faith and

those of the Bahá'ís, since they associated and dealt with both groups. In us they saw naught save knowledge, learning, righteousness, forbearance, affection and friendship and in our [Muslim] enemies they observed nothing but malice, hypocrisy, slander, lies and enmity. As such, the martyrdom of the Haji occurred, touched the hearts of these people and proved the wickedness of the enemies and our meekness in such manner that its description is well nigh impossible. Therefore, they exerted their utmost in discovering the purpose of the opponents in slaying the Haji and demonstrating their wicked intent to the Russian Government authorities. Towards this end, they confided to the Salischi and other eminent officials whatever they had seen or heard.

In short, for nearly two months, interrogations and investigations were conducted which resulted in the imprisonment of Mulla Ahmad Tajjir Yazdi, Mulla Mihdi Ruzih-khan Tabrizi, Mashhadi Samad Tabrizi and Mashhadi Jalil Turk. When these men, who were the true masterminds and instigators of the martyrdom, were seized, profound fear and fright overcame the enemies, and anxiety and apprehension shook them to the very core of their existence.

First, it was Mihdi Tajjir Kashi - the staunchest of our enemies - who immediately fled. After him, whoever had been involved in the martyrdom or had participated in the conspiracy also fled. In all, some sixty or seventy of them retreated in haste from 'Ishqabad. In Mashhad, Tihran and Tabriz they took refuge at the door of the Iranian officials and the 'ulama of that region. And those who had remained in 'Ishqabad would fabricate false tales and disseminate various fictitious rumors. Each day, they spread a new tale of the imminent arrival of such and so Amir with such and so General from Tihran to arrest the Babis and carry them off to Tihran in chains. They hoped that these rumors would overwhelm the friends with fear in the hope that they would leave 'Ishqabad for other regions. In every town of Azarbayijan and Khurasan, the 'ulama and the merchants had united in their support of our enemies and the persecution of the friends.

Indeed, during those days, the believers in 'Ishqabad exhibited such degree of forbearance which entitles them to every praise and acclaim. This is because in order to frighten the friends, the enemies conspired on such schemes that no other mind could fathom and were so thoroughly united in their opposition that no recourse seemed possible.

However, the believers placed their reliance solely on divine confirmations and the bounties of the Almighty God. The administration of justice by the Russian Government and the fact that His Majesty the King of Iran was ignoring the various false petitions presented by the foes, were sources of comfort and tranquility. During these days, from Quchan, Mashhad and Tabriz, Muslim merchants and other enemies telegraphed Tihran and spent a considerable fortune promoting their own nefarious designs. However, divine favors and bounties, which has invariably always reduced the oppressor and succored the meek, would neutralize the schemes of the enemies and bring to naught their campaigns of mischief. It is self-evident and clear that truth, righteousness, charity and honesty will always conquer and defeat oppression, enmity, lies, and malice.

In truth, the unfortunate people of Iran have acquired the same manners and behaviors that the ignorant 'ulama and unworthy leaders have shown and instilled in them and indeed this is their greatest misfortune and a potent sword in severing the cords of their self-worth and integrity. Forever they will be shamed and disgraced before the civilized world and will be considered barbarians and savages by the enlightened humanity.

[Preparation for Trial]

In short, nearly two months after these events, and the conclusions of the interrogations and investigations, when the renowned General - may he be preserved with glory and resplendence - reported the details to St. Petersburg and to the presence of His Majesty the exalted Czar. About the middle of the last Rabi'u'l-Avval[13], His Majesty the Emperor issued a royal command instructing the formation of the "Voennyi Sud" court, which in Russian refers to a military court. Voennyi Sud, which is also known as "Polevoy Sud"[14], is the highest level of the [military] judicial system and no one in the country, not even the person of the Emperor, can reject its ruling or reverse its decision, or dismiss its proceedings. Moreover, this is the only court with the authority to issue a death sentence.

And this is but one of the bounties of His Majesty the Czar and the illustrious General - may both be exalted with the effulgence of glory and happiness - towards this community, because if the case was submitted to other courts, the deliberations would have been prolonged, their impacts on the enemies lessened and would have been the cause of much concern to the friends.

After the case was sent to the Voennyi Sud, a government official by the title of Persetatil, who was among the most eminent military commanders and a man of profound knowledge, nobility and compassion, arrived in 'Ishqabad. The news of his arrival quickly spread throughout the city and every one of our foes began to wonder about his own fate, what he could do to exonerate himself. In short, fear and anticipation enveloped all.

On Saturday, 22 Rabi'u'l-Avval[15], which corresponded to the Russian 4 Noyábir, about one hundred and fifty subpoenas were issued by the court in the name of the Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís.

The documents read: "On 24 Rabi'u'l-Avval, corresponding to 6th of the Russian month, you must be present yourself at the Qilub[16] building at 9 in the morning for the trial of 'Ali-Akbar and eight others on the charge of assassination of the late Haji Muhammad-Rida."

A great commotion overtook the city when the subpoenas - known as "yavitis[17]" in Russian - were received and became the sole topic of conversations. In addition to sending emissaries to various parts of Iran and appealing to the royal court, the enemies sought the help of

prominent men of 'Ishqabad and day and night, the city's wise searched for remedies.

On the morning of the 24th, rank upon rank of the friends and foes, filled with hope and fear, some arriving in fayatun[18], proceeded towards the Qilub courthouse. Relying on divine confirmation and filled with assurance, the friends too directed their steps towards the courtroom. When we arrived, the proceedings commenced as will be outlined below, even though no description can help one visualize and imagine the true state of what transpired.

Qilub is one the governmental buildings in 'Ishqabad and in appearance is dissimilar to the governmental offices in Isfahan and Iran. It has a large hall in the middle of the building, which served as the trial-room and is about the same size as the main reception hall of the Chil-Sutun[19] building in Isfahan. This hall can accommodate about five hundred people and has a dais, which is about a meter high above the floor. In addition, there are three more rooms to the right, to the left and to the back of this platform.

When we entered the hall, saw that his honor Persetatil, who, with great ceremony and pomp, sat at the center of dais upon the seat of justice. To his right and left, there sat four governmental officials [Judges]. Before them was a table at one end of which a framed mirror was installed. The mirror had inscriptions by three of the Russian Emperors enjoining administration of justice in judicial proceedings and on the frame there was a golden eagle, which is the emblem of the Russian State.

On the right of the platform was the Perokyror [prosecutor], a Government official who spoke on behalf of the deceased, and he was joined by a clerk known as Sekretar [secretary]. On the left of the platform was the Zashtinik [defense], together with a secretary, who spoke on behalf of the defenders. In total, there were nine Judges serving on the court.

Inside the courtroom, city officials, military officers and prominent merchants of Russian, Muslim and Christian backgrounds were seated, observing the proceedings.

In accordance with the instructions of the distinguished General, Turkish and Persian translators from Russia and of Sunni religion were present and sitting to the left. In front of all, the nine criminals were sitting and from behind, soldiers known in their native tongue as "Saldat", surrounding them. A Shi'ih cleric was also present. Everyone observed complete silence.

[The Trial]

Upon arrival at the Qilub building, those that were involved in the trial, from plaintiff to defendants, their witnesses, the friends and the non-Bahá'ís were instructed to the room on the right-hand side of the courtroom

and guards were positioned so that no one would enter or exit without permission, and no one would speak with another.

First the Shi'ih cleric, following the court's instructions, swore in the defendants' witnesses in the name of God and by the Sacred Qur'an in accordance with the Islamic laws so they would not offer false testimony, show bias due to friendship or kinship, and speak naught save the truth. In the same fashion, the Shi'ih cleric was himself sworn in by the Justice of the court so he too would not speak other than the truth and give true testimony. Nevertheless, the testimony of the majority of them, including the person of the Shi'ih cleric, was so remote from equity and truth that everyone present, including the Justice of the court[20] and the government officials [Judges], readily realized their hollowness.

The Christians, who served as the witnesses for the friends, were sworn in by their priest who was also present. After that, the friends were summoned collectively and each was asked to state his religion and testify that he was a follower of Baha. The Justice of the court inquired from the honored Aqa Mirza 'Abdu'l-Karim Ardabili, "Who will serve as the Bahá'í mujtahid and the leading learned?" He asked this for the purpose of swearing-in ceremony of the Bahá'ís.

The Mirza responded, "We have no clergy, but have men of learning and knowledge." The Justice asked of them and Mirza introduced this servant.

The Justice then inquired of me, "In what manner do you take an oath in your community?"

I responded, "We have no such practice and no such law has been enjoined upon us. However, we abide by whatever the Government requires of us and with genuine happiness and contentment will follow the commands of the authorities."

He stated, "I now wish to establish a covenant with you and hold you to it as a solemn oath. Firstly, since I have heard that you associate with all people with the utmost sincerity, kindness and brotherhood, and do not consider differences in religion a reason for enmity and intolerance nor cause for departure from equity and humanity, therefore, I ask that in your testimony you treat these defendants the same way and do not utter untrue words about them. Secondly, since taking an oath is not a common practice in your religion, you must make sure that your witnesses speak no lie because otherwise I will sentence you to Siberia."

I responded, "God willing and with His aid, we will commit no such wrong and will completely abide by your instructions."

He then inquired, "Are your people and the Shi'ih community permitted to inter-marry and do such marriages occur?"

I submitted, "Since complete separation has not occurred as yet, inter-religious marriage may happen. In fact, there are cases where someone is

a Bahá'í while his father is a Shi'ih, or vice versa. Or many times it has been seen that out of two brothers, one is a Shi'ih and the other a Bahá'í. The same can be seen among cousins and other kinsmen. Therefore, we are commanded to associate, marry, and observe other social interactions."

Thereupon, the Justice of the court called on the Shi'ih cleric and asked, "Do your people marry Christian girls? That is, through legal, religious means?"

He responded positively. "Do they marry Jews?" Again, response was affirmative. "How about marrying fire-worshippers?" Once more, he responded positively.

The Justice realized that the Shi'ih was being frugal with truth.

After this, he began to question the witnesses of both sides, by starting first with the Bahá'í side.

That day, which was 24 Rabi'u'l-Avval, corresponding to the Russian 6 Noyábir, the process of questioning and trial continued from the morning till five hours into the night. Almost every three hours, they granted five minutes of recess so people could exit the building to rest, smoke, or refresh, before returning to the proceedings. During the trial no one was permitted to speak or smoke in the courtroom and even the Justice of the court and the Judges followed these rules. From two and half-hours to sundown until darkness, people were allowed to return to their homes, but had to come back at dusk at which time the court reconvened.

The second day of trial, which was Tuesday, 25 Rabi'u'l-Avval[21], corresponding to the Russian 7 Noyábir, continued in the same vein as the day before. From the morning until the middle of the night, the court proceedings were underway. This day was devoted to taking testimonies from the defense witnesses.

Once testimonies were completed during these initial two days, on Wednesday, 26 [Rabi'u'l-Avval], corresponding to the Russian 8 Noyábir, the court was adjourned due to national holiday in Russia.

[The Verdict]

On the morning of Thursday, 27 Rabi'u'l-Avval, once more everyone proceeded towards Qilub. Hearts were trembling and spirits were filled with trepidation not knowing what fate awaited behind the shroud of destiny and in whose favor would the all-encompassing Divine Will incline. We were anxious because that day marked the final day of proceedings and the verdict was to be pronounced on that occasion. Truly it was a stressful day and everyone's behavior testified to their inner agitation. The size of audience was greater than the two previous occasions. In fact, the courtroom was exceedingly crowded and the Justice of the court instructed that no one else should be allowed entrance.

When the court came to order, the Justice took his seat and at first, the Perokyror rose and with eloquent words and brilliant deduction - which thoroughly astonished the Russians, the Turks and the Iranians - spoke for over an hour, proving the guilt of the defendants. When he had concluded, the Zashtinik rose and speaking for nearly an hour, endeavored to dismiss the testimony of all the Bahá'ís. When his presentation came to an end, once more the Perokyror rose and demonstrated the errors of the defense's objections and in such wise these two great men debated before the Judges until one hour past noon.

When these discussions were concluded, the Justice turned to the defendants and said, "Prisoners! The Perokyror has proven the guilt of seven of you and your responsibility in this crime is clear and well-established. However, the guilt of one of you, namely, Asadu'llah, is less than the others. For the other six, he has requested the death penalty, recommending you to be hanged to the death for your actions. If you can show cause why capital punishment should not be administered in your case, speak now, perchance it would lessen your penalty."

After the Justice spoke these words, the defendants requested permission to change their translator to Yahya Bayk Qarabaghi, who knew Persian, Russian and Turkish. The Justice consented. Yahya Bayk who was present came forth to assume his duty. Thereupon, the defendants rose one by one and spoke in their own defense, words that most evidently were untrue.

When these appeals were completed, the Justice and the eminent Judges who had sat on his sides on the platform rose and retired to the room behind the main hall for the purpose of preparing documents on the court's decision. During this time, no one was permitted to enter their room. For two hours, the Judges continued their private deliberations, while everyone patiently awaited the outcome and wondered what the Hand of the Almighty had in store for them: who would be victorious and vindicated and who would be defeated and humiliated. In truth, a most strange and astonishing mood governed the audience, as everyone knew that the court's decision was final and irreversible.

It was nearly sundown when the Justice returned and with utmost dignity and poise stood at his designated spot, with everyone in the court also standing in silence. He then read aloud the decisions that he had written in private as the interpreter translated point by point. The summary of the decision was:

Regarding the case against the nine men who are accused of the murder of Haji Muhammad-Rida Isfahani and stand present, after thorough examination and investigation it has been determined that two of them, Ibrahim and Ghaffar, were blameless and are hereby released. 'Ali-Akbar, known as 'Ali-Babi Tabrizi, and Husayn Tabrizi are to be hanged to the death for their part in the murder of the Haji. Mulla Mihdí Ruzih-khan Tabrizi who from the pulpit cursed and insulted [the Bahá'ís], thereby inciting the people into mischief, is to be exiled and imprisoned for life in the farthest regions of Siberia. Mulla Ahmad Tajjir Yazdi, Mashhadi Samad Tajjir Tabrizi and Mashhadi Jalil Tabrizi, who

incited the ruffians are sentenced to fifteen years of "Qatur vajni rabut[22]" in Siberia. Asadu'llah is sentenced to 16 months of imprisonment and afterwards he is to be deported from Russia.

We hereby grant the distinguished General Komaroff, the Governor-General of 'Ishqabad and Turkmenistan, the authority to reduce these sentences.

Once the court's decision was read and translated, the spectators were dismissed, some joyous and some sad. Praise unto God, the Lord of both worlds.

The meaning of "Qatur vajni rabut" is: In cases where a person is found deserving of the death penalty and the esteemed Christian nation [of Russia] decides that by reason of compassion and wishing to avoid capital punishment at all costs, can instead be imprisoned in Siberia. Because of the bitter cold [in that region], it is not possible to farm or raise dairy animals in Siberia, but prisoners work in hard labor camps in mines or other locations. However, due to its considerable hardships and difficulties, the majority die under the most miserable conditions, and perhaps only one in a thousand survive to complete his sentence, and even then he is not permitted to return to his native town and must spend the rest of his days in the Siberian region, where he can work and earn a living. Because of these conditions, majority of those found guilty prefers death to imprisonment in Siberia.

[Effect of the Verdict:]

On the day that the court announced its verdict, the hand of destiny inscribed an astonishing event on the pages of history and delivered yet another bitter humiliation to the enemies. The details are as follows: When the Judges were engaged in private deliberation and none were yet aware what the final decision would be and which side would be rendered victorious by the all-conquering Providence, one of the men present in the court, without thinking or observing the protocols, had rushed outside and had announced to an spectator, "Mulla Ahmad and other defendants are freed!" The recipient of this news also, without pausing to consider or determine the veracity or falsehood of this remark, had in great haste, which according to the well-known hadith, "Haste is work of Satan!", and which is a character of the people of hate and oppression, boarded a fayatun [carriage] and had reached the bazaar, crying, "Glad tidings! Mulla Ahmad and others are liberated and are now free!"

On hearing this false news, a tremendous commotion had ensued, much like the great uproar and tumult that occurred on the day of the martyrdom of the Haji. People began to insult and mock the Bahá'í storekeepers, who were engaged in their work. The Muslims brought three sheep to be sacrificed in front of the shops of Samad, Mulla Ahmad and Mashhadi Jalil, and butchers stood knife in hand awaiting the arrival of the defendants to slaughter the sacrifice sheep. Meanwhile, they shouted every manner of insult at the friends and constantly cursed them in the most cruel and abusive way. Rank upon rank of people had gathered in the streets and squares, waiting to welcome the prisoners.

It was then that of a sudden, He, Who decrees destiny and rules with manifest might, turned the page and with the conclusion of the court's proceedings, the correct verdict became known to the people. Suddenly, all their joy turned into bitter sorrow, and their jubilation was transformed into humiliation and shame. Sheep that had been brought for sacrifice were quickly removed from the scene and everyone went into hiding much like thieves fleeing the law.

During these events, unaware of all that was transpiring outside, this servant was in the courtroom awaiting the Judges' decisions. When I came out, I saw a condition in the believers which remains beyond any written description. During that one-hour after the receipt of this false news and encountering their insult, abuse and mistreatment of the enemies, the friends had withstood such a calamity that they were hardly able to utter a word. In fact, for one or two hours, the Bahá'ís did not believe what this servant, or others who had been in the courthouse, reported to them, until they heard it directly from the enemies and saw with their own eyes how quickly they dispersed and sought a place to hide. "And thus decreed their Lord, the Powerful, the Sovereign, the Mighty, the Ancient."

If one was to closely compare the ways that the Russian and the Iranian Governments administer justice and conduct trials, he would be totally astonished in their difference. Because if such a murder had occurred in Iran, where eminent merchants had arisen in support of either the murderer or the victim, it is quite obvious what great sums would have had to be spent on both sides and what large bribes would have been received. Moreover, because of the persistent intercessions and interference, it would have not been possible to arrive at a just decision nor maintain the impartiality of the judge. In the case of the murder of the Haji, the governmental authorities in Russia did not accept a single coin from anyone and in fact, due to their devotion to equity and justice, no one dared to even mention the word "bribe" or mediate on behalf of defendants.

On the other hand, the Shi'ih community spent considerable fortune and sustained great losses in filling the pockets of the 'ulama and the influential men of Iran, in the hope that through their assistance, the attention of the Russian Government would be compromised from receiving punishment for their savage and despicable deeds. However, the all-conquering will of the Almighty did not allow bloodthirsty oppressors, who had openly perpetrated such an heinous act, to find respite under the blanket of safety. The integrity of the officials of the Russian Government - may God perpetually brighten their days - prevented these ruffians from transforming the security and justice of this region into the violence and oppression of another Iran.

[Bahá'í Mitigation:]

Since at the conclusion of the court's proceedings it was decreed in writing and was announced in the courtroom that the distinguished General Komaroff - may God unceasingly enrich his days with glory and good fortune -

could reduce the punishment of the criminals, therefore, Mulla Ahmad and other prisoners sent messages to their kinsmen, begging and pleading: "since the General has not yet signed the court order, go to the Babis and ask them to intercede with the General, perchance he would reduce our sentence and the door of liberty may open before us."

Consequently, as emissaries, they sent Haji Rida, who was a brother of Mulla Ahmad, and a number of other merchants, including, Rida Bayk Akbar, a learned and distinguished man who for many years had served the Russian Government and had attained an exalted position, and Yahya Bayk Qarabaghi, who was renowned in learning, sincerity, problem-solving and prevention of misconduct, and Aqa Muhammad-Rida Arbab Isfahani. These men came to this servant and Aqa Mirza 'Abdu'l-Karim, and asked that we attain the presence of the illustrious General and intercede on behalf of the prisoners.

The following day, this servant, Aqa Mirza 'Abdu'l-Karim, Aqa Ghulam-Husayn Isfahani and Aqa Mashhadi Yusuf, went to the General's house. In the courtyard outside the Governor's residence, we met Haji Rida and some other Shi'ihis who had gone to plead mitigation of sentence of the prisoners, but were not permitted into the Governor's presence. After speaking with us, they thought best to join our group in order to gain an audience with the General. So, together we proceeded.

Once our arrival was announced, permission was granted for us to go in and Mirza 'Abdu'l-Karim spoke about the purpose of our visit. Simultaneously, Javad Bayk translated his words into Russian. In response, the General stated, the essence of which is:

To the Russian nation, the Shi'ih community has become the source of shame and infamy throughout the world as it has been His Majesty the Emperor's view all religions are considered the same.

You should be praised since despite all the injuries perpetrated against you by the defendants, you have arisen to intercede on their behalf. Is it not true that if a Babi had murdered a Shi'ih in 'Ishqabad, in turn the Shi'ihis would have killed every member of your community in Iran? I am well pleased with you. However, I cannot promise that I will reduce their punishment. But should I decide to reduce their sentence, I will keep in mind to advise you beforehand.

After that, once more Aqa Mirza 'Abdu'l-Karim rose to plead intercession for the prisoners. For the second time, the General spoke words close to his initial comments.

Haji Rida and other Shi'ihis were present in this meeting and heard what transpired.

On the following day, it was rumored throughout the city that the Siberian sentence of the prisoners had been reduced and also it was noised that the two condemned would be hanged on 4 Rabi'u'th-Thani[23].

[Day of Punishment:]

In accordance with the instructions of the officials, two gallows were raised near the royal prison and a hole, two or three meters deep, was dug under them, where bodies could fall. The murderers themselves were forced to construct these gallows and the hole.

The occurrences of these events greatly burned the inside of people and were giving an ever-present admonishment to the unruly ruffians in the observance of the legal codes and the importance of the civilized ways.

When the sun of the morning of 4 Rabi'u'th-Thani rose, everyone knew that it marked the day of hanging of the two condemned. An astonishing commotion and a great tumult could be seen everywhere. Due to their ignorance and prejudice, people [Muslims] were most agitated, but because of the power of the authorities, unable to utter any objections. Signs of mischief was evident on everyone's face which betrayed their inner anger and rage.

First, in accordance with the command of the Russian authorities, Turkmen cavalry surrounded the execution field. Chief military officers and prominent citizens were present by the Governor's instructions. A large multitude had also gathered to observe the event. Since the compassionate Christian people disdain killing, and to the extent possible even their military men avoid such an act, therefore, a Turkman was hired to place the ropes on the neck of the prisoners, sending them to where they belonged. The Shi'ih cleric was present, so the prisoners could repent and utter Islamic confession of faith[24]. When everything was ready, the two murderers were brought to gallows.

With a condition that cannot be described, the Shi'ih cleric took their repentance and they uttered words of confession. Thereupon, the executioner placed the ropes around their necks, when of a sudden, contrary to everyone's expectation, the all-encompassing Hand of the Almighty ordained otherwise. That is, at that point, the Perokyror stood and read aloud an official decree, which was immediately translated. Its essence was this:

Since the representatives of the Babi community have requested the distinguished General to mitigate the punishment of the offenders, consequently, the General, as means of expressing his good-pleasure, gratitude and admiration for these [Bahá'í] representatives, has commuted the death sentence of these men and has decided against their hanging. These two are to be removed to Siberia for fifteen years of "Qatur vajni rabut" sentence, and because of this mercy, may they eternally be thankful to the Government.

When this decree was read to the population, every tongue spoke in praise and gratitude of divine bestowal and with the utmost cheer and joy people returned home, while the prisoners were removed to their cell.

In truth, this incident greatly enhanced the position of the friends and increased their standing and prestige. From what some in the audience have described, this intercession so profoundly touched the eminent Christians

present on the field of execution that some were moved to tears, saying, "Consider the devotion of the Babi community to the qualities of forgiveness, leniency, compassion, kindness and forbearance that they even intercede on behalf of those who slay them, and in such wise show mercy towards those who spend days and nights plotting their murder!"

[Aftermath:]

From the beginning of the incident of the martyrdom until now, the divine benediction and bounties have ceaselessly encompassed the friends and the exalted and blessed Almighty has confirmed our every step. Before the authorities of the Russian Government, our truthfulness, wisdom, honesty, integrity and charity towards all nations and the uprightness of conduct under all conditions had been demonstrated.

The incident of the intercession was solely through the Divine will for it was the Almighty's doing that the decree pardoning the prisoners from execution was read in public where a large multitude of the Russians, the Christians and the Muslims, including the Shi'ih cleric, were present. This was a mighty bounty and a great blessing, which on one hand provided the friends with an added measure of stature and on the other, robbed the ignorant [Muslims] of the opportunity to claim, "The liberty of these two murderers was a miracle of the Imam!" or devise equally nonsensical reasons. However, if one wished to truly appreciate the depth of ignorance of these Shi'ih's, one should note that even now they fabricate such ridiculous and absurd claims and have further ruined their own reputation, nay, the reputation of all Iranians, before the world community and proven their folly and stupidity.

During these days, joy and delight has surrounded the friends on all directions and the shower of divine bounty has continued to fall on the believers with ever-greater profusion. On the other hand, we are immensely elated as the court proceedings have been concluded and the truth of our claim has been well-established before the officials of the Russian Government. We have unbounded joy and eternal gratitude because of the arrival of the Sacred Tablets and Divine Verses confirming the Almighty's pleasure with our deeds and actions. In many Tablets, Bahá'u'lláh has bestowed endless blessings upon the illustrious martyr, and designated for him stations beyond the imaginings of the inhabitants of the world and exalted above the conceptions of those occupying the highest heavenly pavilions. Moreover, He has revealed His good-pleasure for the actions of the believers in the course of these events. In particular, in one of the Sanctified Tablets, in response to a sum that one of the friends had contributed, permission was granted for that fund to be used towards improvements of the resting place of that sacred and hallowed remain, which is located on a choice spot outside the town of 'Ishqabad. However, these days, because of the bitter cold and snow, these improvements cannot be carried out and must be delayed, and God willing, when the weather is more agreeable and the Spring has arrived, and days and nights are equal, they will be undertaken and completed.

A few days after the execution sentence of the two ruffians was pardoned, by the authorities' command, a picture of six of them in the special uniform of the Siberian prisoners was taken as they were being sent to Siberia by way of Badkubih. The day that they were being removed for Badkubih was yet another occasion for the enemies' commotion and remorse. From that day until now, which has been over a month, the merchants and the Shi'ih leaders in Badkubih, Mashhad, Tihran and Tabriz are engaged in intrigue, hoping to rescue the prisoners from their fate. We will see how the divine decree unfolds and what is hidden behind the veil of destiny.

This was a summary of the events pertaining to the killing of the illustrious martyr, which were outlined most succinctly.

This servant supplicates that the friends would not forget him in their prayers.

On behalf of this ephemeral servant, convey my heartfelt greetings to your esteemed father, distinguished brother, the honored Aqa Mirza Mihdi - may God prolong his days of delight - and other friends in Isfahan.

May your brow always shine with the resplendent rays of glory, grandeur and virtuosity.

Written by Abu'l-Fadl Gulpaygani on 29 Jamadu'l-Avval 1307[25].

Notes

[1] 15 July 1889.

[2] End of August 1889.

[3] 28 August 1889.

[4] Siyyid Ahmad was a son of Haji Mirza

Siyyid Hasan, known as the Afnan Kabir. He was a devoted believer and for a while lived in Yazd and 'Ishqabad, engaged in commerce. In mid 1890, he visited 'Akka and it was there that he learned of being accused of theft in Istanbul.

He hurried to that city, suffered bitterly at the hands of foes, including an enemy of the Cause by the name of Muhammad-'Ali Isfahani, but was able to prove his innocence and establish their slander. Detailing this incident,

Bahá'u'lláh

in one of His Tablets reveals, "There were several myrmidons in Istanbul who perpetrated great harms against the honored Afnan, Aqa Siyyid Ahmad. Since the honored Afnan was meek and gentle, these men manifested greatest enmity, uttered the worst slanders and incited the opposition of the lowest elements of society against him;" [Muhammad-'Ali Faizi, *Khanidan Afnan* 64.] He attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh in 'Akka where he remained until His ascension.

Subsequently, he undertook travels to promote the Cause and once more returned to 'Akka where he received the endless bounties of the Master. He then went to 'Ishqabad and from there in 1899 to Yazd where he established the first Spiritual Assembly of that city; [Khatirat Malamiri 61]. He eventually went to Shiraz where he was killed during a night burglary. On hearing the news,

'Abdu'l-Bahá was deeply grieved and conferred upon him the rank of a martyr; [Khatirat Nuh-Salih 403 and Khanidan Afnan 66]. The Master revealed two condolences Tablets and a Tablet of Visitation to mark Siyyid Ahmad's passing.

[5] 28 August - 26 September 1889.

[6] Theaters for passion-plays commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Husayn.

[7] Mourning groups and processions.

[8] In order to act out the injuries befallen the Imam and His companions, a number in the Shi'ih mourning procession would cut themselves, often quiet severely, and with blood gushing out from their foreheads or as they beat their bare backs with sharp knives, would continue the march - a horrendous scene which greatly incites public sympathy.

[9] Soothsaying sessions, typically devoted to telling and acting out the events of Karbila, which led to the martyrdom of Imam Husayn and His family.

[10] The first ten days of Muharram is a period of special feverish observance for the Shi'ih, reaching its emotional height on the tenth day of the month which marks the martyrdom of the Imam and His companions.

[11] 8 September 1889.

[12] Colonel in the Russian military.

[13] Circa 9 November 1889.

[14] Military court-marshals conducted in the field under the auspices of the Voennyi Sud court.

[15] 16 November 1899.

[16] The correct spelling may likely be Kilub.

[17] Plural for court summons, literally meaning to show up.

[18] Horse driven flatbed or luxury carriage.

[19] A famous building in Isfahan used previously for official purposes.

[20] The author consistently refers to the "hadrat-i Sud," a reference to the chief Judge. This has been rendered as "Justice of the court" to distinguish him from the other 8 Judges.

[21] 19 November 1899.

[22] Vajni rabut means "important jobs."

[23] 28 November 1899.

[24] It is an Islamic tradition that prior to death one should utter a specific formula, testifying to the oneness of God and the Prophethood of Muhammad.

[25] 21 January 1890.

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