

Muhammad-'Ali Sabbáq of Yazd

`Abdu'l-Ghaffar of Isfahán

`Alí Najaf-Ábádí

Mashhadí Husayn and Mashhadí Muhammad-i-Adhirbayjani

Hájí `Abdu'r-Rahim-i-Yazdi

Hájí `Abdu'llah Najaf-Ábádí

Muhammad-Hadiy-i-Sahhaf

Mirzá Muhammad-Quli

Ustád Báqir and Ustád Ahmad

Muhammad Haná-Sab

Hájí Faraju'lláh Tafríshí

Áqá Ibráhím-i-Isfahani and His Brothers

Áqá Muhammad-Ibrahim

Zaynu'l-Ábidín Yazdí

Hájí Mullá Mihdíy-i-Yazdí

His Eminence Kalím (Mirzá Músá)

Hájí Muhammad Khán

Áqá Muhammad-Ibrahim Amír

Mirzá Mihdíy-i-Káshání

Mishkín-Qalam

Ustád `Alí-Akbar-i-Najjar

Mirzá Muhammad, the Servant at the Travelers' Hospice

Mirzá Muhammad-i-Vakil

Hájí Muhammad-Riday-i-Shirazi

Husayn Effendi Tabrízí

Jamshíd-i-Gurji

Hájí Ja'far-i-Tabrizi and His Brothers

Hájí Mirzá Muhammad-Taqi, the Afnán

`Abdu'llah Baghdádí

Muhammad-Mustafa Baghdádí

Sulaymán Khán-i-Tunukabani

`Abdu'r-Rahman, the Coppersmith

Muhammad-Ibrahim-i-Tabrizi

Muhammad-'Aliy-i-Ardikani

Hájí Aqáy-i-Tabrízí

Qulám-`Alíy-i-Najjár

Jináb-i-Munib, upon him be the Glory of the All-Glorious

Mirzá Mustafá Naráqí

Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín

Azím-i-Tafrishi

Mirzá Ja'far-i-Yazdi

Husayn-Aqay-i-Tabrizi

Hájí `Alí-'Askar-i-Tabrizi

Áqá Alíy-i-Qazvíní

Áqá Muhammad-Baqir and Áqá Muhammad-Isma'il, the Tailor

Abu'l-Qásim of Sultán-Abad

Áqá Faraj

The Consort of the King of Martyrs

Shamsu'd-Duhá

Táhirih

Click on any of the numbers below to go to a page of Memorials of the Faithful (unformatted):

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
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189
190
191
192
193
194
195
196
197
198
199

200
201
202
203
204

Click on any of the numbers below to go to a chapter of Memorials of the Faithful (unformatted):

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
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15
16
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61
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63
64
65
66
67

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Proem

This is a book about people who were trying to get into prison rather than to escape from it, because they were prisoners of a great love. Their love was for Bahá'u'lláh, Whom the nineteenth century world bound with chains and tried to silence by shutting Him, ultimately, in the Crusaders' stronghold at 'Akká.

Like the eye of the storm, He is the center of these accounts, but hardly appears in them—remaining, as the Guardian has described Him, “transcendental in His majesty, serene, awe-inspiring, unapproachably glorious.”

The reader will probably find himself in these pages, whether he is the jeweler from Baghdad, one of the dishwashers, or the professor who could not endure the arrogance of his compeers. Mystic, feminist, cleric, artisan, merchant prince are here. Even

modern Western youth will be found here, for example in the chapter on dervishes. For this is more than the brief annals of early Bahá'í disciples; it is, somehow, a book of prototypes; and it is a kind of testament of values endorsed and willed to us by the Bahá'í Exemplar, values now derided, but—if the planet is to be made safe for humanity—indispensable. These are short and simple accounts, but they constitute a manual of how to live, and how to die.

The task of putting these biographies into English was given me by the Guardian many years ago, when I was on a pilgrimage to the Bahá'í world center in Haifa. Shortly afterward the Guardian sent me, to Tihrán, the text from which this translation was made. According to its Persian title page, this was the first Bahá'í book to be printed in Haifa under the Guardianship. A Persian introduction states that 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote the book in 1915, and granted permission to M. A. Kahrubá'í to have it published. The text, which is dated 1924, bears the seal of the Haifa Bahá'í Assembly. A second title page, in English, describes the work as “An account, from the pen of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, of the lives of some of the early Bahá'í believers who passed away during His lifetime,” although the work was actually recorded from His utterances.

Here, then, almost half a century after His passing, is a new book given to the world by 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

We wonder how many of us, at the close of unbelievably painful and arduous years, would devote the waning time not to our own memories but to the lives of some seventy companions, many of them long dead, to save them from oblivion.

'Abdu'l-Bahá was present at many of these scenes, yet time after time He effaces Himself to focus on some companion, often on one so humble that the passing years would surely have refused him a history. And if, to the cynical, these believers seem better than ordinary men, we should remember that the presence of the Manifestation made them so, and that they are being looked at through the eyes of the Master—Who said that the imperfect eye beholds imperfections, and that it is easier to please God than to please people.

Thus the book is still another token of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's partiality for the human race. The love He personified was not blind but observant, not impersonal but warm and tender; it was a continual attitude of unobtrusive care. Such love, from such a Being, does not end with one life span. He left the world half a century ago, and most of those who longed for Him so much that the hostile said they were not Bahá'ís, but 'Abdu'l-Bahá'ís, are now vanished from our sight. But still, His love is

here, for new millions to find.

The translator

Keene, New Hampshire, December 1969

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