



An homage to *Memorials of the Faithful* and eleven of its heroes:
Shaykh Salmán, Nabíl-i-Zarandí, Darvísh-i-Şidq-‘Alí,
Shaykh Şádiq-i-Yazdí, Zaynu’l-‘Ábidín Yazdí,
Shaykh ‘Alí Akbar-i-Mazgání, Hájí Ja‘far and his brothers,
‘Abdu’lláh Baghdádí and Jináb-i-Muníb

Abstracts. *Memorials of the Faithful* is described as an inspiring “book of prototypes” that not only portrays “all of the archetypes that the various personality theorists have given us in this century” and “all the human dichotomies” that we may find in our lives but also addresses “us in our time . . . [and] on our own travels . . . [in our] tacit dimension, the silent root of human life.” These features of the book have led the author to compose nine poems on eleven of the personages of the book. They were not chosen because they were considered superior to or better than all the others. They were chosen because some of their personal qualities and events raised louder echoes in the author’s heart and mind. The nine poems are presented with short explanations of the details that have moved the author to write them.

Memorials of the Faithful, first published in Persian in 1924 in Haifa by the publisher Maṭba‘ah al-‘Abbāsiyah, under the title of *Tadhkiratu’l-Vafá*, is “the first Bahá’í book to be printed in Haifa under the Guardianship” (Gail xi). The word *Tadhkirat* is a Persian-Arabic word. It derives from the Arabic root *dhakara*, translated into English as “he preserved it in his memory, he remembered it . . . he sought, or endeavoured, to remember” (Lane 3:134). The word *Tadhkirat*, usually translated as “memory, remembrance . . . biographical memory, biography” (Steingass 290), is used in Arabic, Persian and Turkish literature to denote literary works “concerned with the lives of poets . . . calligraphers . . . or other categories of memorable persons” (Heinrichs et al.). One of the most famous of these works is a book written by the well-known Persian poet Faríd ad-Dín ‘Aṭṭár (c.1142–c.1220), *Tadhkirat al-Awliyá*, a collection of hagiographies published in English under the title *Memorial of the Saints* (see *Muslim Saints and Mystics*). Alessandro Bausani (1921–1988) writes that this book “is similar . . . to our middle age *Little Flowers*” (502). Western literature is rich in similar books, such as the

Golden Legend (Latin: *Legenda Aurea*) by Jacobus de Voragine (Italian: Jacopo da Varagine), a collection of lives of the saints in Latin, probably compiled around 1260; *Acts of the Saints* (Latin: *Acta Sanctorum*), an encyclopedic text in 68 volumes examining the lives of Christian saints, organised according to each saint's feast day, published between 1643 and 1940; and Alban Butler's (1710–1773) *The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs and Other Principal Saints*, first published in 1756–1759, a popular compendium of the *Acts of the Saints* in English.

‘Aṭṭār’s work, like the hagiographic literature of the Western world, relates stories of miracles and portents ascribed to the personages whose lives and utterances the author wishes to share with his readers. Therefore, he calls them *Awliyá*, which means “Friends (of God),” but is commonly used to denote the “saints” (Steingass 122). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s work is completely different. He celebrates His personages for their *vafá*, that is “good faith, fidelity, loyalty, sincerity” (Steingass 1475), a word which Shoghi Effendi has often translated “faithfulness,” as in the following sentence from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament:

In these days, the most important of all things is the guidance of the nations and peoples of the world. Teaching the Cause is of utmost importance for it is the head corner-stone of the foundation itself. This wronged servant has spent his days and nights in promoting the Cause and urging the peoples to service. He rested not a moment, till the fame of the Cause of God was noised abroad in the world and the celestial strains from the Abhá Kingdom roused the East and the West. The beloved of God must also follow the same example. This is the secret of faithfulness (*vafá*), this is the requirement of servitude to the Threshold of Baha! (WT10)

Marzieh Gail (1908–1993), an eminent Bahá’í author and translator, who translated the book into English in 1969 under the title *Memorials of the Faithful*, because she had received this task from the Guardian himself, when she was “on a pilgrimage to the Bahá’í world centre in Haifa” (xi), writes that this work “is more than the brief annals of early Bahá’í disciples . . . it is a kind of testament of values endorsed and willed to us by the Bahá’í Exemplar” (ibid.). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s descriptions do not point out His personages’ charismatic or thaumaturgical powers. There are only three exceptions: three episodes of persons healed through the intervention of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Shaykh Ṣádiq-i-Yazdí recovers from an intestinal disorder after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has done what Bahá’u’lláh has enjoined Him to do: “Go . . . Place your hand on the distended area and speak the words: ‘O Thou the Healer! [*Yá Sháfi*],’¹” (MF43). Muḥammad-Hádíy-i-Ṣaḥḥáf heals from a long-standing chronic fever after having eaten a special food specifically prescribed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and two years later, he dies after having eaten the same food in different circumstances (see MF68). Mírzá Ja‘far-i-Yazdí returns to life right after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has chanted at his bedside by the command of Bahá’u’lláh “the prayer of *Yá Sháfi*—O Thou, the Healer” (MF157), while his “family were gathered about him, mourning him, shedding bitter tears” (ibid.). These three episodes are narrated as common episodes of everyday life without emphasising what appears to us as exceptional events. A few years earlier ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had clearly explained the meaning of miracles to the eminent American Bahá’í Laura Clifford Barney (1979–1974). First: “The Manifestations of God are sources of miraculous deeds and marvelous signs. Any difficult or impossible matter is to Them possible and permitted” (SAQ113, chap. XXII, para. 2). Second: “in the sight of the Manifestations of God these marvels and miracles are of no importance . . . they would constitute a clear evidence only for those who were present when they took place, not for those who were absent” (ibid. para.3). Third: “These outward miracles are of no importance to the followers of truth . . . if a dead body be revived, what is gained thereby, since it must die again? What is important is to bestow true insight and everlasting life—that is, a spiritual and divine life” (ibid. 115, para.6). Faithful to this position, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá prefers to speak of the spiritual portents performed by His personages: their faithfulness in applying the divine Law to the actions of their daily lives, as difficult as their circumstances may have been. Their high moral standard makes each of the personages of His book an example of life to be recorded for posterity.

In *Memorials of the Faithful*, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá presents 69 biographies, but in reality, He speaks of 79 personages because in two cases, He speaks of two believers together, and in four cases, he speaks about groups of brothers. The believers that He describes in the same biography are Áqá Mírzá Mahmúd and Áqá Ridá,

¹ The prayer *Yá Sháfi* is known among the Bahá’ís as *Lawh-i-Anta’l-Káfi* or “Long Healing Prayer” (see *Bahá’í Prayers* 91-8).

“close and trusted companions of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá” (MF41), who, together, “devoted their days to all that is best in human life: they had seeing eyes; they were mindful and aware; they had hearing ears, and were fair of speech. Their sole desire was to please Bahá’u’lláh. To them, nothing was a bounty at all, except service at His Holy Threshold” (MF40-1); and Mashhadí Ḥusayn e Mashhadí Muḥammad-i-Adhīrbáyjání who, “both from the province of Adhīrbáyján” (MF62), worked as farmers in Bágh-i-Firdaws and died together because of the hot climate of the region, to which “they were not accustomed” (MF63). The groups of brothers are: Ustád Báqir and Ustád Ahmad, two carpenters, who “from the time when both became believers each held the other in His embrace” (MF72); Áqá Ibráhīm-i-Isfáhání and his three brothers, which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes together although they lived apart from one another, perhaps not only for their common love for Bahá’u’lláh, but also as a homage to the early days of their earthly lives when “they all lived in the same house, and remained together day and night. Bird-like, they shared the one nest; and they were always fresh and full of grace, like flowers in a bed” (MF77); Hájí Ja’far-i-Tabrízí and his two brothers, “souls at rest . . . well-pleased with their Lord and well-pleasing unto Him” (MF125); and finally Áqá Muḥammad-Báqir and Áqá Muḥammad-Ismá‘íl, who “died on the same night, wrapped in each other’s arms” (MF169) and their brother Pahlaván Riḍá, who passed away far from them in Káshán. Among these 79 personages, there are also three women: the consort of the King of Martyrs (MF13-5), a Bahá’í beheaded in Isfáhán in 1879, Shamsu’ḍ-Ḍuhá (MF175-90), and Ṭáhirih (MF190-203).

Gail describes *Memorials of the Faithful* as “a book of prototypes” (xi). She advises her readers that they will meet “mystic, feminist, cleric, artisan, merchant and prince . . . even modern Western youth . . . for example, in the chapter on Dervishes” (ibid.). Ronald Frederick Price, a Bahá’í Canadian writer and poet, guides us throughout the book so that we may meet “all of the archetypes that the various personality theorists have given us in this century” and “all the human dichotomies” (3): “Jung’s introvert and extrovert . . . the artist, the suffering artist-soul within us all, Mishkin-Qalam . . . [who] survives in all his seriousness, as we might, with humour” (ibid.); “the personality constitutionally weighted on the side of cheer,” as for example Ismu’lláhu’l-Aṣḍaq, who “always taught cheerfully and with gaiety, and would respond gently and with good humour” (MF6); or Muḥammad-‘Alí of Isfáhán, “a boon companion . . . affable . . . happy and

content” (MF24), loved by everyone, who “spent his days in utter bliss” (MF25) despite his straitened circumstances; and the opposite personality “the sombre, more reflective even melancholic type” (Price 3), often as a “result of the many difficulties these lovers of Bahá’u’lláh were subjected to and wore them ‘to the bone’ [see MF96]” (ibid.), like Mírzá Mihdí of Káshán, who “was ill almost all the time . . . an outcast, and destitute,” but always patient and content (MF96); or Hájí Taqí who after the death of his two brothers, “weary of this life” (MF115-6), threw himself down from the roof of his room, because he wanted to die; or Qulám-‘Alíy-i-Najjár, a man “abstemious and chaste . . . a mild man, patient quiet, mostly keeping to himself” (MF142-3). “Restlessness is a dominant theme” (Price 3) in these biographies: Sháh Muḥammad-Amín, “a flame of God’s love” (MF45), “never rested for a moment. Not one night did he spend on a bed of ease, never did he lay down his head on comfort’s pillow. He was continuously in flight, soaring as the birds do, running like a deer” (MF46); Nabíl of Qá’in, “in ecstasy, burning up with love” (MF50), “restless as the waves of the sea” (MF51), “had no caution, no patience, no reserve; he cared nothing for reticence, nothing for dissimulation” (MF51); Mírzá Muḥammad, after Bahá’u’lláh’s ascension, “could not stay quiet, day or night . . . [and] wasted away, like a candle burning down” (MF107). There also are quiet personages who, like Mishkín-Qalam, had no match “for patience and inner calm” (MF101); or who, like Mírzá Ja‘far-i-Yazdí, “a quiet man, sparing of speech,” were “in all things relying entirely upon God” (MF157). Finally, we meet sociable believers, like Hájí ‘Abdu’lláh Najaf-Abádí, who “spent his days in friendly association with the other believers” (MF66-7); and Nabíl of Qá’in, whose society was “attractive” (MF53). But we also meet people who prefer solitude, like the two brothers Ustád Báqir and Ustád Aḥmad, who lived “keeping to themselves, away from friend and stranger alike” (MF72-3); or Qulám-‘Alíy-i-Najjár, who “inclined to solitude, apt to stay apart from friend and stranger alike . . . much of the time lived by himself” (MF144).

Both Gail and Price suggest that “the reader will probably find himself in these pages” (Gail xi) because ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

. . . is describing not only the lives of these men and women in the nineteenth century, He is describing us in our time. He is addressing us on our own travels. He addresses the restlessness in us all. He speaks to us in our

victory and our loss. He speaks about what Michael Polanyi [1891–1976] calls the tacit dimension, the silent root of human life, which is difficult to tap in biographies, the inner person. This private, this inner person, is the person he writes about for the most part. (Price 3)

These features of this “series of spiritual portraits” (Kazemzadeh) have enabled me to write nine poems on eleven personages described in it. I did not choose them because I considered them in any way superior or better than all the others. I chose them because some of their personal qualities or events in their lives raised louder echoes in my heart and mind.

Shaykh Salmán

Shaykh Salmán (see MF13-6; see his photo in Taherzadeh, *Revelation* 1:206, Bal-yuzi, *Eminent Bahá’ís* 231) is well known by the Bahá’ís because for almost 40 years, “from the year 69² until the Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh” in 1892 (MF15), and even later until 1898-1899 when he died in Shíráz, he went back and forth, travelling thousands of miles, mostly on foot, to bring Tablets and letters from the residences of Bahá’u’lláh and later of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to Their lovers in Iran and ‘Iráq and vice versa. For this reason, the Blessed Beauty honoured him with the title of “Messenger of the Merciful (*Payk-i-Raḥmán*)” (Taherzadeh, *Revelation* 1:109, *Nafahát* 124). He was admired for “his simple and unsophisticated nature, his clear insight, his wisdom and tact when confronted with dangerous or difficult situations, above all his faith in Bahá’u’lláh,” as well as his “great physical stamina” (Taherzadeh, *Revelation* 1:110, 111). Adib Taherzadeh (1921–2000), the author of a four-volume study of the life and Writings of the Founder of the Bahá’í Faith, writes about him: “Salmán was pure-hearted and very simple. The believers always enjoyed his company, but some friends in high positions were embarrassed and sometimes afraid to meet him because of his simplicity and frankness” (*Revelation* 2:283). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes his services (MF15):

He traveled on foot, as a rule eating nothing but onions and bread; and in all that time, he moved about in such a way that he was never once held up and never once lost a letter or a Tablet. Every letter was safely delivered; every

² 1269 AH, or 1853 CE, the year in which Bahá’u’lláh “received the first intimation of His sublime Mission” (Shoghi Effendi, *Messages* 99).

Tablet reached its intended recipient. Over and over again, in Isfahan, he was subjected to severe trials, but he remained patient and thankful under all conditions, and earned from non-Bahá'ís the title of “the Bábís’ Angel Gabriel.”

These words by the Master resonate in the following poem (see Savi, *Remoteness* 270):

SHAYKH SALMÁN

Bologna, 1 February 1999

Shaykh Salmán,
Gabriel of the Bahá'ís,
how many lands
did you cross,
how many cold
nights, or sunned
days on dusty
roads did you spend.
A precious knapsack
on your cane,
a load of love
within your breast.
Smell of onions
on your lips,
musky perfume
in your heart.
Departures
and arrivals
but one joy:
from the human Temple
of the Beloved One,
to the human hearts
of His beloved ones.

Nabíl-i-A‘zam

Muḥammad-i-Zarandí (1831–1892), known as Nabíl-i-A‘zam (see MF32-6; see his photo in Taherzadeh *Revelation* 1:238), has been defined by Shoghi Effendi

Bahá'u'lláh's "Poet-Laureate, His chronicler and His indefatigable disciple" (GPB130). His life is so well-known among the Bahá'ís that it is not worth dwelling on it. The episode that inspired my poem (see Savi, *Remoteness* 260-1) is described by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as follows: "And at the end when the Daystar of the world had set, he could endure no more, and flung himself into the sea. The waters of sacrifice closed over him; he was drowned, and he came, at last, to the Most High" (MF35). His own words about his early days also resonated in my heart and mind (DB433):

I was a shepherd by profession, and was given in my early days a most rudimentary education. I longed to devote more time to my studies, but was unable to do so, owing to the exigencies of my situation. I read the Qur'án with eagerness, committed several of its passages to memory, and chanted them whilst I followed my flock over the fields. I loved solitude, and watched the stars at night with delight and wonder. In the quiet of the wilderness, I recited certain prayers attributed to the Imám 'Alí, the Commander of the Faithful, and, as I turned my face towards the Qiblih, supplicated the Almighty to guide my steps and enable me to find the Truth.

DROWNED

Bologna, 25 December 1998

Toward the meadows
of His nearness, heaven
of ecstasy, toward the sea
of nothingness, the ocean
of His love, the poet
laureate of Bahá'u'lláh
advanced that morning
when he was drowned.

From the meadows
of Zarand to the ocean
of the abiding reunion
with the Friend, he went his way.

His feet on the ground,
sometimes pierced,

his heart, by bitter
stings of remoteness,
always alive, his spirit,
to the signs of beauty
lavished near and far
by his Best-Beloved.

He is drowned now
at last in that surging
unbounded Ocean.
From there he offers
now his hand and says,
“Drown yourself,
you too, in the Ocean
of His Love.”

Darvīsh Ṣidq-‘Alī

Darvīsh Ṣidq-‘Alī (see MF36-8) is one of the nine individuals described in *Memorials of the Faithful* as “belonging to the mystic element (‘*urafā*)” (TV63, MF36). *Urafā* is the plural of ‘*arīf*, ‘the highest grade to which a mystic can attain’ (Steingass 829). They are: Nabīl-i Akbar, Mullā ‘Alī-Akbar, Muḥammad-‘Alī from Iṣfāhān, Darvīsh Ṣidq-‘Alī, Hājī Muḥammad Khān, Mishkīn-Qalam, Hājī Āqāy-i Tabrīzī, Mīrzā Muṣṭafā and Shams-i Duḥā.

Nabīl-i Akbar excelled in “the teachings of the mystics (‘*urafā*) and of the Shaykhī School” (TV5, MF1); Mullā ‘Alī-Akbar “frequented the gatherings of . . . mystics (‘*urafā*) . . . thoughtfully traversing those areas of knowledge (‘*ilm*),³ intuitive wisdom (‘*irfān*),⁴ and illumination (*ishrāq*)”⁵ (TV19, MF9); Muḥammad-‘Alī from Iṣfāhān “was one of the mystics (‘*urafā*); his house was a gathering place for them, and the philosophers” (TV43, MF23-4); Darvīsh Ṣidq-‘Alī “belonged to the mystic element (‘*urafā*)” (TV63, MF36); Hājī Muḥammad Khān “became a mystic

³ An Arabic word sometimes translated as science.

⁴ Among the Sufis this word denotes esoteric knowledge.

⁵ In the Muslim world this word denotes the oriental theosophy or philosophy of Suhrawardi (1155–1191).

(‘*urafá*’) when he was very young (TV142, MF91); Mishkín-Qalam “was among the most noted of mystics (‘*urafá*) . . . [and] a spiritual wayfarer (*sálik*)⁶” (TV152, MF98); Hájí Áqáy-i Tabrízí was “a spiritual man (*mard-i-rabbání*)” and “had sensed the mystic knowledge (‘*irfán*)” (TV218, MF142); Mírzá Muṣṭafá “was concerned with the anemones of mystic meanings” (TV227, MF148); and Shams-i Duḥá, the only woman among the nine, was “strongly attracted to the mystical teachings (‘*irfán*) of . . . Siyyid Kázim-i Rashtí . . . [and] became thoroughly informed on subjects relating to Divinity, on the Scriptures and on their inner meanings” (TV268; MF176). ‘Abdu’l-Baha does not praise these believers for possible charismas (see Savi, “The Baha’i Faith and the Perennial Mystical Quest”) but for having escaped the snares of an obsolete form of mysticism, with its emphasis on visionary and illogical elements, and for having become lovers of the Truth as manifested by Baha’u’llah and the champions of his Covenant. While speaking of Darvish Šidq-‘Alí, He explains that Baha’u’llah wrote that the word *darvish*, often used in Persian to mean “mystic,” “designates those who are completely severed from all but God, who cleave to His laws, are firm in His Faith, loyal to His Covenant, and constant in worship” (MF38).

Darvish Šidq-‘Alí recognised very early the Blessed Beauty, perhaps during His residence in Kurdistan. He was the attendant of the Shrine of Pír-Dávar on Mount Balábanú, “the mountain of Sulaymáníyyih, to which Bahá’u’lláh went” (Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá’ís* 316) during His residence in Kurdistan in 1854–1856. There, Darvish Šidq-‘Alí met Bahá’u’lláh and “on meeting Him came to see in Him all the signs by which the Promised One was to be recognised” (Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá’ís* 316). Šidq-‘Alí was one of the believers allowed to join the party travelling to Constantinople. He served as the groom on the journey. Taherzadeh writes that he “used to walk all day beside the convoy, singing poems which brought joy to the friends, and at night he attended to the horses. From Constantinople he accompanied Bahá’u’lláh on His exile to Adrianople, and then to ‘Akká” (*Revelation* 1:289). He died in 1880-81 and is buried in ‘Akká (see Balyuzi, *Bahá’u’lláh* 482).

‘Abdu’l-Bahá informs us that: “While in the barracks, Bahá’u’lláh set apart a special night and He dedicated it to Darvish Šidq-‘Alí. He wrote that every year

⁶ An Arabic word denoting among the Sufis the initiated on the mystical path.

on that night the dervishes should bedeck a meeting place, which should be in a flower garden, and gather there to make mention of God” (MF38). It has been speculated that Lawḥ-i Laylatu’l-Quds I (Tablet of the Sacred Night I), which may have been revealed in Adrianople and is addressed to Darvīsh Şidq-‘Alí, may be related to this “special night.” And the Iranian Bahá’í scholar ‘Abdu’l-Ḥamíd Ishráq Khávarí (1902–1972) suggested that the Sacred Night of this Tablet is the night of the Báb’s Declaration, 23 or 24 May (see *Raḥíq-i Makhtúm* 2:296). In 1996, an inquirer asked the Universal House of Justice about the above-mentioned words by the Master. On that occasion, the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice explained:

there is no further information in *Memorials* about this event, and there is no clear evidence in historical documents so far reviewed as to how and by whom this celebration might have been observed. It also remains a question when it was discontinued. However, in his book *Ganj-i-Shaygan* [*Ganj-i-Sháyigán*], pages 209-210, the well known scholar, Ishraq Khavari states that the ceremonial practices of Bahá’ís from dervish backgrounds were subsequently discouraged by Bahá’u’lláh . . . with the revelation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas in 1873, the laws and ordinances concerning days to be commemorated were given. Thereafter, other celebrations which had developed to that point were discontinued. (20 August 1996)

That being said, I know this special celebration has been discontinued. However, the fact that the Blessed Beauty had “set apart a special night” and that “He dedicated it to Darvīsh Şidq-‘Alí” (MF38) is captivating. And I was thus moved to make it the central theme of the following poem (see Savi, *Remoteness* 262), together with the concept that He has encouraged a new kind of mysticism:

THE NIGHT OF ŞIDQ-‘ALÍ
Bologna, 25 December 1998

O cool night of scents and roses,
which Thou, the truest Friend
of human hearts, hast dedicated
to Thy lover Şidq-‘Alí and to all
them who tread with him
the ways of mystery and beauty,

and never stray from the straight
path of Thy laws! How will
the nightingales of their hearts
fail to sing, when face to face
with the beauty Thou Thyself
hast willed to bestow
upon their night! In its scented
dark the gates of mysteries
are opened. Each sign of Thine
is relieved of all weight of sense
and intellect and glows
with boundless beauty. Thou thus
allayest the anguish of their hearts,
harassed by Thy veiling signs,
by any other beauty that yet
defaces Thee. Let others scorn
their unappeased pain of love.
Thou alone well knowest
whence it cometh and where
it leadeth. They can only
ask Thee: “Make Thou this pain
of ours to lead us but to Thee.”

Shaykh Şádiq-i-Yazdí

Shaykh Şádiq-i-Yazdí (see MF43-4) was subjected to a special test, a kind of torment of Tantalus. When Bahá'u'lláh left Baghdad to go to Constantinople in May 1863, he was among the lucky believers who were allowed to follow Him. But when the caravan was about to leave Judaydah (‘Iráq), on the river Tigris, where they had arrived on the seventh day of their march and had stopped for three days, Bahá'u'lláh instructed him and three other friends to return to Baghdad. Balyuzi writes that Shaykh Şádiq, “an old man greatly devoted to the person of Bahá'u'lláh . . . felt so acutely the pangs of separation from Him that he could not rest, and not long after, started, a solitary figure, to walk to Istanbul. But he never finished the journey and died on the way, at Ma’dan-i-Nuqrih [(Silver

Mine)]” (*Bahá’u’llah* 178). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains more specifically: “after the arrival of Bahá’u’lláh at Mosul, he could endure the separation no more. Shoeless, hatless, he ran out alongside the courier going to Mosul; ran and ran until, on that barren plain, with mercy all about him, he fell to his rest” (MF44). This specific episode is at the heart of the following unpublished poem:

SHAYKH ŞÁDIQ-I-YAZDÍ

Bologna, 1 February 1999

Shaykh Şádiq

your Beloved

did not want

you to die on

an easy bed.

He wanted you

to follow Him

to Mosul. And

then, shoeless,

hatless, alone, on

that barren plain,

He came toward

you, His cup filled

with crystal water,

tempered at the

Camphor fountain.

And you quaffed

it with joy.

Zaynu’l-‘Ábidín Yazdí

Zaynu’l-‘Ábidín Yazdí (see MF83-4) is one of those passionate lovers who did their utmost to reach Bahá’u’lláh while He was confined in ‘Akká, with the prohibition of meeting anyone. Shoghi Effendi describes them as follows:

The few pilgrims who, despite the ban that had been so rigidly imposed, managed to reach the gates of the Prison—some of whom had journeyed the entire distance from Persia on foot—had to content themselves with a

fleeting glimpse of the face of the Prisoner, as they stood, beyond the second moat, facing the window of His Prison. The very few who succeeded in penetrating into the city had, to their great distress, to retrace their steps without even beholding His countenance. (GPB187, chap.11, para.11)

When he began his journey to go and meet his Beloved, he was so sick that he passed away before attaining his destination, an episode which is the leitmotiv of the following poem (see Savi, *Remoteness* 271):

ZAYNU'L-‘ÁBIDÍN

Bologna, 1 February 1999

You did not reach
your journey's goal
on earth. You did not reach
that sea which roars
beneath the walls
of the *crimson City*.
Your body did not endure
that journey's toils.
But when you closed
your eyes for ever
to this life, your Best-
Beloved came toward you
from behind His veils
and the light of reunion
dawned upon
your loving heart.
You never came away
from that shining
Presence. There,
you live now in joy,
devoted and true,
stainless and faithful.

Shaykh ‘Alí Akbar-i-Mazgání

Shaykh ‘Alí Akbar-i-Mazgání (see MF104-5) “by disposition and because of the intense love in his heart, . . . yearned to write poetry, to fashion odes and ghazals, but he lacked both meter and rhyme” (MF105). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá numbers in his book other seven believers who wrote poetry. Unlike Shaykh ‘Alí Akbar, they were talented poets. These poets are Nabíl-i-Zarandí, Darvish Šidq-‘Alí, Áqá Muḥammad-Ibráhím, Mírzá Mihdíy-i-Káshání, Ustád ‘Alí-Akbar-i-Najjár, Jináb-i-Muníb and Ṭáhirih. Nabíl-i-Zarandí

. . . was a gifted poet, and his tongue most eloquent; a man of mettle, and on fire with passionate love . . . Day and night he sang the praises of the one Beloved of both worlds and of those about His threshold, writing verses in the pentameter and hexameter forms, lyrics and long odes . . . His native genius was pure inspiration, his poetic gift like a crystal stream. In particular his ode ‘Bahá, Bahá!’ was written in sheer ecstasy. (MF33, 34-5, 35)⁷

Darvish Šidq-‘Alí, also mentioned above as a mystic,

had a fine poetic gift and wrote odes to sing the praises of Him Whom the world has wronged and rejected. Among them is a poem written while he was a prisoner in the barracks at ‘Akká, the chief couplet of which reads:

*A hundred hearts Thy curling locks ensnare,
And it rains hearts when Thou dost toss Thy hair.* (MF36)

Áqá Muḥammad-Ibráhím “had a fine poetic gift, and he would create verses like stringed pearls” (MF81). Mírzá Mihdíy-i-Káshání “In early youth, under his father’s tutelage, . . . had studied sciences and arts, and had become skilled in composing both prose and verse” (TF95). Ustád ‘Alí-Akbar-i-Najjár too was “a gifted poet, writing odes in eulogy of Bahá’u’lláh” (MF102). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also cites Jináb-i-Muníb, who “was a calligrapher second to none, a poet, and . . . had as well a remarkable singing voice” (MF145). This man will be mentioned again later on. As to Ṭáhirih, a well-known Iranian poetess,⁸ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá only hints

⁷ The first five verses of this ode have been translated into English by the British scholar Edward G. Browne (1862–1926). See *Materials* 353.

⁸ See *Ṭáhirih: A Portrait in Poetry*.

at her “remarkable ability in literary pursuits” (MF191). The auspice that although Shaykh ‘Alí Akbar had no poetic talent in this world, perhaps in the Great Beyond his Beloved may have granted him to become the inspirer of aspiring poets in this nether world is the leitmotiv of the following unpublished poem:

SHAYKH ‘ALÍ AKBAR-I-MAZGÁNÍ

Bologna, 6 January 1999

Do not grieve that you lacked
both meter and rhyme.
Your eyes beheld the face
of the Best-Beloved.

Other hearts were granted
a poetical vein and denied
attaining the presence
of the Best-Beloved.

In centuries to come others
like you will look after meter
and rhyme in their praise
of the Best-Beloved.

From your world of love
and light will you help them
to give wings to their verses
for the Best-Beloved?

Ḥájí Ja‘far and his brothers

‘Abdu’l-Bahá relates the incidents of the lives of Ḥájí Ja‘far and his two brothers in a single biography (MF122-5) because they were related not only by their blood relationship but also, and especially, by their deep love for Bahá’u’lláh. Ḥájí Ḥasan is so transported by this love that, because of his imprudence in teaching the new Faith in Azerbaijan, he is treacherously killed in a garden, and his torn body is hidden under the earth. Ḥájí Ja‘far is so bound to Bahá’u’lláh that he sacrifices everything so that he may remain beside Him. When, in 1868, in Adrianople, he discovers that the authorities did not permit him to follow Bahá’u’lláh in the Holy

Land, he is so grieved that he cuts his throat. Bahá'u'lláh later on wrote about him, as well as about another believer who killed himself out of his love for Him:

Such souls have been influenced by the Word of God, have tasted the sweetness of His remembrance, and are so transported by the breezes of reunion that they have detached themselves from all that dwell on earth and turned unto the Divine Countenance with faces beaming with light. And though they have committed an act which God hath forbidden, He hath nevertheless forgiven them as a token of His mercy. He, verily, is the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Compassionate. So enraptured were these souls by Him Who is the All-Compelling that the reins of volition slipped from their grasp, until at last they ascended to the dwelling of the Unseen and entered the presence of God, the Almighty, the All-Knowing. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Summons* 145, sec. 2, para.13)

Having survived this desperate act, Ḥájí Ja'far finally manages to attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh in the Holy Land together with his brother Ḥájí Taqí. There he dies, falling from the roof of the caravanserai where he resides, while he paces absorbed in his prayers. After this event, Ḥájí Taqí remains alone. He, too, dies in the same way: he falls from the roof of the caravanserai. This human sequel of events binding these three brothers, three “eagles soaring . . . three stars of the Faith, pulsing with the light of the love of God” (MF122), is the leitmotiv of the following unpublished poem:

ḤÁJÍ JA'FAR AND HIS BROTHERS

Bologna, 3 February 1999

You were three brothers of Tabriz
young soaring eagles of the Faith
pulsing lights of the love of God.

Ḥájí Ḥasan, by which insanity
of love were you distracted?

Why did you dance and sing
shahnáz melodies in Azerbaijan?

Brought to that lonely garden,
you were tortured, killed and

your body hidden underground.
But your soul soared to Heaven
well-pleased with her Lord
and well-pleasing unto Him.

Hájí Ja'far, by which insanity
of love were you distracted?
Attempting suicide
that you might follow an Exile
in His exile. Love healed your
wound, your yearning for exile
was finally fulfilled. Where was
your heart that night on
the roof of the caravanserai?
In the morning your lifeless
body was discovered lying
on the ground. Your exile was past.

Hájí Taqí, silence
personified, now that your
brothers, companions
of former days, left you
alone, always sitting
lonely in your room. Now,
you fled away, you too, as
your brother, from that roof
toward his embrace and the
embrace of your Beloved.

‘Abdu’lláh Baghdádí

About ‘Abdu’lláh Baghdádí (see MF129-31), I could not find any historical reference in the Bahá’í literature. The purport of what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes about him, and as a matter of fact about all the other believers described in *Memorials of the Faithful*, is clarified by the following remarks by Price:

He [‘Abdu’l-Bahá] describes many pilgrimages and you and I are left to construct our own. We all must shape and define our own life. Is it aesthetically pleasing? Intellectually provocative? Spiritually challenging? ‘Abdu’l-Bahá shapes and defines these lives given the raw-data of their everydayness added up, added up over their lives as He saw them. How would He shape my life? Yours? How would we look in a contemporary anthology of existences with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the choreographer and the history of our days as the *mise en scene*? (3)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes at the beginning of His biography of ‘Abdu’lláh Baghdádí:

When he was very young, people thought of ‘Abdu’lláh Baghdádí as a libertine, solely devoted to pleasure. He was regarded by all as the sport of inordinate desires, mired down in his physical passions. But the moment he became a believer, he was carried away by the sweet savors of God, and was changed into a new creation. He found himself in a strange rapture, completely transformed. He had been of the world, now he was of Heaven; he had lived by the flesh, now he lived by the spirit; he had walked in darkness; now he walked in light. He had been a slave to his senses, now he was a thrall of God. He had been clay and earthenware before, now he was a dear-bought pearl; a dull and lusterless stone before, now a ruby glowing. (MF129-30)

This incipit is the leitmotiv of the following poem (see Savi, *Remoteness* 272):

‘ABDU’LLÁH BAGHDÁDÍ

Bologna, 12 February 1999

O friend of joy
your thirst for bliss
is today appeased
the wine you drink
today does not make
you lose your mind
to make you wise
it closes your eyes
to this world

and opens them
to the Veilless Beauty.
Today your feasts
are celestial agapes.
The gazelle-eyed
maids you invite
today are the virtues
of your Lord. Broken
your rusty fetters,
your heart is bound
today by the golden
chains of faithfulness.

Jináb-i-Muníb

The story of Jináb-i-Muníb (see MF145-7) is one of the most fascinating and moving biographies of *Memorials of the Faithful*. Friendship occupies a prominent position in human life. And thus, this story, revolving around the personal friendship between ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Mírzá Áqá, the given name of Jináb-i-Muníb, is full of inspiring details, comprising the charming personality of this man; his intimate relationship with the Master during their migration from Baghdad to Constantinople; their riding (both of them teen-agers) beside Bahá’u’lláh’s howdah and singing

*To our King though we bow the knee,
We are kings of the morning star.
No changeable colors have we—
Red lions, black dragons we are!* (MF145, see Ḥáfiz, *Divan* 395-6)

and especially his sickness and final death, alone, in that foreign hospital in Smyrna, and the Master’s words about that moment

Whenever I think of that moment, the tears come; my heart is heavy and I summon up the remembrance of what he was. A great man; infinitely wise, he was, steadfast, modest and grave; and there was no one like him for faith and certitude. In him the inner and outer perfections, the spiritual and

physical, were joined together. That is why he could receive endless bounty and grace. (MF146)

Bahíyyih Khánum, the Greatest Holy Leaf (1846–1932), told her version of the story of his passing to Sarah Lady Blomfield (1859–1939), the first distinguished Bahá’í of the British Isles and the first Bahá’í of Ireland, adding a small and moving detail:

A dear friend of the family, Jináb-i-Muníb, was taken seriously ill. When the boat stopped at Smyrna, Sarkár-i-Áqá (‘Abdu’l-Bahá) and Mírzá Músá carried him ashore, and took him to a hospital. The Master bought a melon and some grapes; returning with the refreshing fruit for him—He found that he had died. Arrangements were made with the director of the hospital for a simple funeral. The Master chanted some prayers, then, heartsore, came back to the boat. (Lady Blomfield 65)

Taherzadeh writes that Bahá’u’lláh, in a Tablet describing Jináb-i-Muníb’s passing in Smyrna, “says that when Jináb-i-Muníb’s spirit ascended to his abode in the eternal worlds of God, all the angelic souls and the Concourse on high rushed forward to receive him with eagerness and love” (*Revelation* 1: 286). This pregnant story has inspired the following poem (see Savi, *Remoteness* 263-4)

JINÁB-I-MUNÍB

Bologna, 25 December 1998

Winsome, charming, refined,
delicate, sensitive, a poet
and singer, once a lover
of worldly pleasures, a companion
of the young Áqá, beside Him
an escort of the Beloved’s *howdah*,
a wise messenger of His love,
an attendant at His Threshold.

On that hospital bed in Smyrna,
your mind never lost the memory
of the last touch of His hands
as He laid your head on that pillow.

On that hospital bed in Smyrna,

your body never lost the warmth
of the last loving embrace
of your youthful Companion.

On that hospital bed in Smyrna,
your heart never lost the fragrance
of His last kisses of love,
as he was forced away from you.

On that hospital bed in Smyrna,
when, in loneliness, your soul winged
its flight, the last glance of love
of the Beloved lifted you into Heaven.

Jináb-i-Muníb, a whole life
is not worth the love of the Beloved
and the youthful friendship
of that Companion of nocturnal rides.

Every tear of love shed
by His celestial eyes,
as He would recall
His last separation from you,
adds beauty to the radiant form
the Beloved gave you in Heaven,
even more beauteous than that
which He gave you on earth.

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