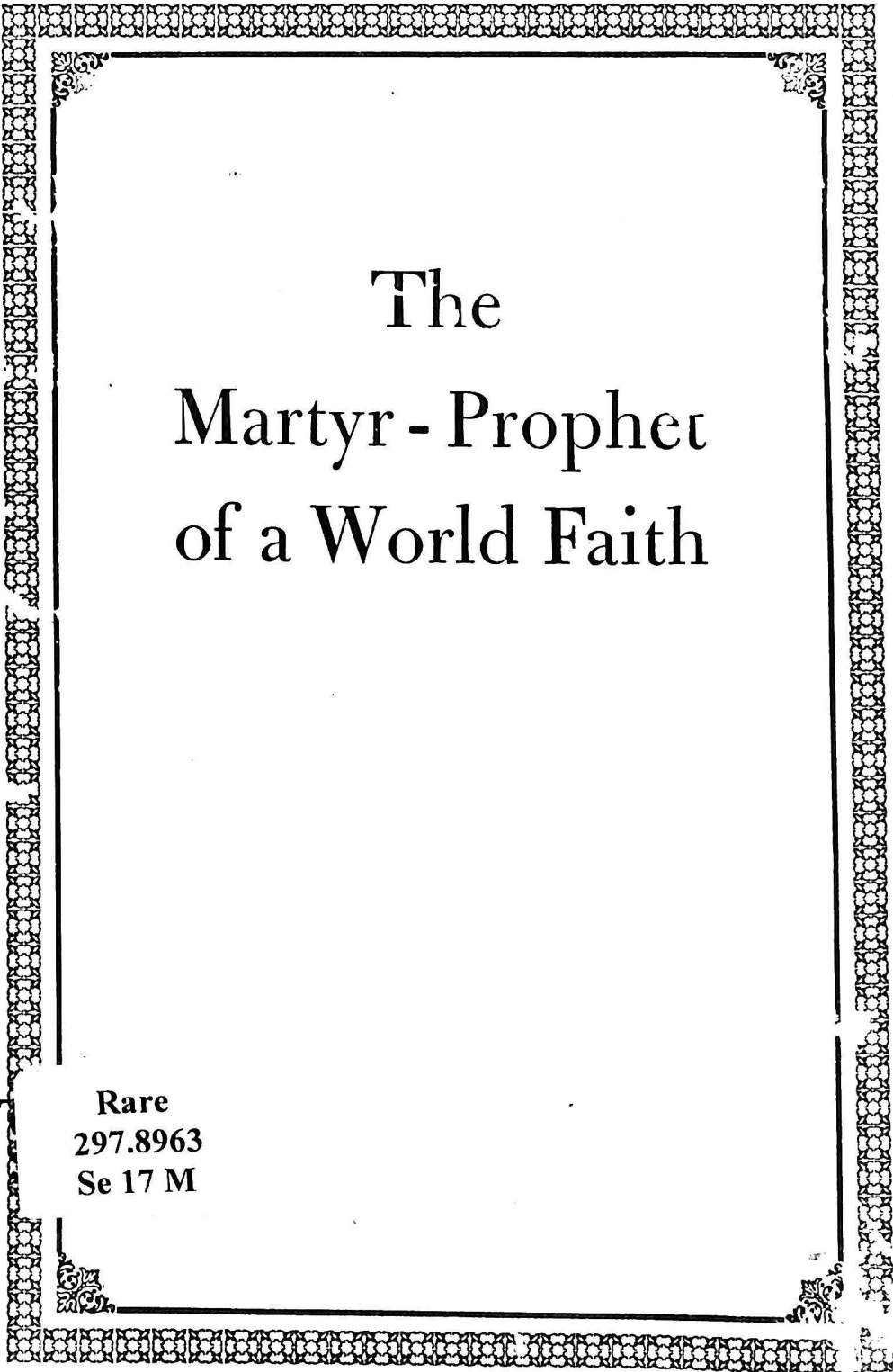
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The
Martyr - Prophet
of a World Faith


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Commemorating
The Centenary of the Martyrdom of the Báb
July 9, 1850 • Tabríz, Íran

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The Martyr-Prophet of a World Faith

By

WILLIAM B. SEARS

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THE MARTYR-PROPHET OF A WORLD FAITH

The blistering July sun glared from the barrels of seven hundred and fifty rifles, awaiting the command to fire and to take His life.

He seemed so young to die, barely thirty, and He was handsome, gentle, confident. Could He possibly be guilty of the shocking crime of which He was accused?

Thousands of eager spectators lined the Public Square. They crowded along the roof-tops overlooking the scene of death. They wanted one last sight of Him for He was either good or evil, and they were not sure which.

It was high noon, July 9, 1850, in a parched corner of Persia, the barracks square of the sun-drenched city of Tabriz.

THE chain of events leading to this scene began in 1844.

It was in an age of religious fervor. Everywhere men were preaching the return of Christ. They urged the world to prepare for it. Wolff in Asia, Sir Edward Irving in England, Leonard H. Kelber in Germany, Mason in Scotland, Davis in South Carolina, and William Miller in Pennsylvania all agreed that their studies of the Scriptures clearly showed that the hour for Christ's return was at hand.

James Russell Lowell's poem "The Crisis" was written in that very hour of Advent enthusiasm:

"Once to every man and nation
comes the moment to decide.
Some great cause, God's new Messiah . . ."

The years between 1843 and 1847 were generally accepted as the time for the return of Christ. Careful study of the prophecies

had simultaneously led Bible scholars and students in different parts of the world to these fateful years.

Did the years between 1843-1847 pass with no sign of the return of Christ? Or were these years comparable to those which followed the birth and enunciation of Christ's original message? Years which passed with no visible sign to the people of Palestine that the Promised One had come. The crucifixion of a trouble-maker from Nazareth they had dismissed from their minds. Was the story to wait, as it had waited in the time of Jesus, for over one hundred years before it began to reach the consciousness of the people? Was the story of Calvary to be retold at an execution post in the public square of Tabríz?

AND during 1844, in Persia, this story had its beginning.

It was the eve of May 23rd in Shíráz, the "city of nightingales and blue tile fountains." Shíráz, in what was once the ancient province of Elam given by Daniel, the Prophet, as the place of vision in the latter days and mentioned in the book of *Jeremiah*: "And I will set my throne in Elam."

A young man declared that He was the one foretold in all the holy books of the past. He said He had come to usher in a new era, a new springtime in the hearts of men. He was called "The Báb" which means the door or the gate. His teaching was to be the gateway to a new age of unity: *The world is one country and mankind its citizens; there is only one religion and all the prophets have taught it.*

As Jesus had spoken to Peter, the fisherman, the Báb spoke to a Persian student, Mullá Ḥusayn. Mullá Ḥusayn's own words can best describe the depth of this experience:

"I sat spellbound by His utterance, oblivious of time. This Revelation so suddenly and impetuously thrust upon me, came as a thunderbolt which, for a time, seemed to have benumbed my faculties. Excitement, joy, awe, and wonder stirred the depths of my soul. Predominant among these emotions was a sense of gladness and strength which seemed to have transfigured me."

"I sat enraptured by the magic of His voice and the sweeping force of His Revelation. At last I reluctantly arose from my seat and begged to depart.

"The Báb smilingly bade me be seated and said, 'If you leave in such a state, whoever sees you will assuredly say: This poor youth has lost his mind.'"

At that moment the clock registered two hours and eleven minutes after sunset on the eve of May 23, 1844. The Báb declared to Mullá Ḥusayn as he prepared to leave, "This night, this very hour will, in the days to come, be celebrated as one of the greatest and most significant festivals."

One hundred years later, May 23, 1944, in over eight hundred Bahá'í communities of the world this hour was commemorated as the dawn of a new age, the beginning of the era of "one fold and one shepherd."

In one century from the evening of its birth, this World Faith heralded by the Báb had spread to all the major countries of the earth, embracing people from every walk of life, every religious conviction. every shade of skin-color.

THE fame of the Báb soon spread beyond the circle of His disciples. It reached the authorities of both church and state. They were alarmed by the enthusiasm with which the people accepted the Báb's message. The same wave of opposition and hatred that had surrounded Jesus, began to engulf the Báb. The clergy at once initiated a combined attack upon Him. They gathered their wisest and most capable scholars and speakers to argue with and try to confuse the Báb. They arranged great public debates in Shíráz and invited the Governor, the Clergy, the Military Chiefs, as well as the people, hoping to discredit the young Prophet of Shíráz.

He spoke such searching truths that day by day the crowds increased. His purity of conduct at an age when passions are intense impressed the people who met Him. He was possessed of extraordinary eloquence and daring. Instead of benefitting the clergy, the debates they arranged elevated the Báb at their expense. He exposed, unsparingly, their vices and corruption. He proved their infidelity to their own doctrine. He shamed them in their lives. He defeated them with their own Holy Book in His hand.

Soon all of Persia was talking about the Báb. The Sháh himself, moved to investigate the truth of the reports concerning the Báb, delegated Siyyid Yahyay-i-Dárábí, surnamed Vaḥíd, to go at once to Shíráz and investigate the matter in person. Vaḥíd was chosen because he was called the "most learned and most influential" of all the Sháh's subjects.

Vaḥíd had three interviews with the Báb. After the first, he said to a friend, "I expatiated unduly upon my own learning in His presence. He was able in a few words to answer my questions."

Of these interviews, Vaḥíd said later, "As soon as I was ushered into His presence, a sense of fear, for which I could not account, suddenly seized me. The Báb, beholding my plight, arose from His seat, advanced toward me, and, taking hold of my hand, seated me beside Him.

"'Seek from me,' He said, 'whatever is your heart's desire. I will readily reveal it to you.'

"Like a babe that can neither understand nor speak, I felt powerless to respond. The Báb smiled as He gazed at me. He said, 'Were I to reveal for you the answers to the questions you seek, would you acknowledge that My words are born of the spirit of God? Would you recognize that My utterance can in no way be associated with sorcery or magic?'

"How am I to describe this scene of inexpressible majesty? Verses streamed from His pen with a rapidity that was truly astounding. The incredible swiftness of His writing, the soft gentle murmur of His voice, and the stupendous force of His style, amazed and bewildered me."

Vaḥíd summed up his report on his investigation of the Báb by saying, "Such was the state of certitude to which I had attained that nothing could shake my confidence in the greatness of His Cause."

When word of this reached the Sháh, he told his Prime Minister, "We have been informed that he has become a follower of the Báb. If this be true, it behooves us to cease belittling the Cause of this youth."

Still disturbed by Vaḥíd's response to the Báb's teaching, the Sháh issued an order summoning the Báb to the capital city of Ṭihrán. The Sháh had received a letter from the Báb requesting such an audience. The Báb said that He was confident of the justness of the King and so He wished to come to the capital and hold conferences with the priests of the empire in the presence of the Sháh, the civil authorities, and the people. The Báb offered to explain His Cause and His purpose. He said He would accept beforehand the judgment of the Sháh and, in case of failure, was ready to sacrifice His head.

The Báb never reached Ṭihrán. The Prime Minister, Hájí Mírzá Áqásí, feared the consequences of such an interview. He feared the influence the Báb might exert on both the Sovereign and the capital city. He succeeded in persuading the Sháh to transfer

so dreaded a subject to Máh-Kú, a prison castle in the Ádhirbáyján mountains to the north.

Enroute to Máh-Kú, the Báb approached the gate of Tabríz. The news of His arrival stirred the hearts of the people and they set out to meet Him, eager to extend their welcome to so beloved a Leader. The officials of the Government refused to allow them to draw near and receive His blessing.

As the Báb walked along the streets of Tabríz, the cries of the multitude resounded on every side. So loud was the clamour of welcome that a crier was ordered to warn the people of the danger to which they were exposing themselves. The cry went forth: "Whoever shall make any attempt to approach the Báb or seek to meet him, all that person's possessions shall be seized and he shall be immediately imprisoned!"

An undercurrent of excitement ran through the city during the Báb's stay. With saddened hearts and mixed feelings of helplessness and confusion, the people watched the beloved Prophet leave Tabríz for the castle of Máh-Kú. They whispered among themselves, as had the followers of Jesus when they watched Him being delivered in turn to Caiaphus and Pilate. "If this is the Promised One, why is He subjected to the whims of the men of earth?"

The Báb was given into the custody of 'Alí Khán, warden of the solid, four-towered stone castle which sat on the summit of a mountain on the frontier of Russia, Turkey, and Persia.

The Prime Minister was confident that few, if any, would venture to penetrate that wild region. The people of the area were already hostile to the Báb, and it was the Prime Minister's hope that this enforced seclusion among enemies would stifle the Faith at its birth and lead to its extinction.

He soon realized how gravely he had underrated the force of the Báb's influence. The hostility of the natives was subdued by the gentle manners of the Báb. Their hearts were softened by His love for them. Their pride was humbled by His modesty. Their opposition to His teaching was mellowed by the wisdom of His words. Even the warden, 'Alí Khán, began to relax the severity of the Báb's imprisonment, in spite of the Prime Minister's repeated warning against falling under His spell.

Soon great numbers began to come from all quarters to visit the Báb at Máh-Kú. During this period, the Báb composed His Persian *Bayán*, the most comprehensive of all His writings. In it the Báb defined His mission as two-fold: To call men to God, and to

announce the coming of the Promise of all ages and all religions—a great world educator whose station was so exalted that in the words of the Báb, “A thousand perusals of the *Bayán* cannot equal the perusal of a single verse to be revealed by Him whom God shall make manifest.”

The Prime Minister was informed of the affection which the once unfriendly people of Máh-Kú were showing toward the Báb. He was told of the flood of pilgrims to the castle. Those who had been ordered to watch developments, reported to the Prime Minister that the warden, ‘Alí Khán, had been enchanted by the Báb and treated Him as his host rather than as his prisoner. Both fear and rage impelled the Prime Minister to issue an instant order for the transfer of the Báb to the castle of Chiríq, called the “grievous mountain.”

The Báb said farewell to the people of Máh-Kú who, in the course of His nine month’s captivity among them, had recognized to a remarkable degree the power of His personality and the greatness of His character.

THE Báb was subjected to a closer and more rigorous confinement at Chiríq. The Prime Minister left strict and explicit instructions to the keeper, Yaḥyá Khán, that no one was to enter the presence of his prisoner. He was warned to profit by the failure of ‘Alí Khán at Máh-Kú. Yet, in spite of the open threat to his own safety, Yaḥyá Khán found himself powerless to obey. He soon felt the fascination of his prisoner and forgot the duty he was expected to perform, for the love of the Báb had claimed his entire being.

Even the Kurds who lived in Chiríq, and whose fanaticism and hatred exceeded that of the inhabitants of Máh-Kú, fell under the transforming influence of the Báb. The love which the Báb radiated was a living thing. As Saul of Tarsus had fallen victim to the enrapturing warmth of Jesus, in like manner whoever came in contact with the Báb was transported into a new world of joy and gladness. As the crowds had flocked to Jesus on the Mount of Olives, so came the hungry, thirsty people of Persia to the Mountain of Chiríq.

No sooner did this news reach the capital than the infuriated Prime Minister demanded that the Báb be transferred at once to Tabríz. He called an immediate conference of all the ecclesiastical dignitaries of Tabríz to seek the most effective means for bringing to an abrupt end the Báb’s power over the people.

The news of the impending arrival of the Báb caused such popular enthusiasm that the authorities decided to confine the Báb in a place outside the gate of the city.

The crowds besieged the entrance to the meeting place the next day, impatiently awaiting the time when they could catch a glimpse of His face. They pressed forward in such large numbers that a passage had to be forced for the Báb.

When the Báb entered the hall, a great stillness descended upon the people. At last the stillness was broken by the president of the gathering. "Who do you claim to be," he asked the Báb, "and what is the message which you have brought?"

Pontius Pilate had asked Jesus, "Art thou a king, then?" And Jesus replied, "Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice."

So did the Báb reply to the Assembly. "I am—I am—I am the Promised One. I am the one whose name you have for a thousand years invoked, at whose mention you have risen, whose advent you have longed to witness, and the hour of whose revelation you have prayed God to hasten. Verily, I say, it is incumbent upon the peoples of both the East and the West to obey My word and pledge allegiance to My person."

Immediately after He had pronounced these words, a quiet fell over the hall; a feeling of awe seized those who were present; the pallor of their faces betrayed the agitation of their hearts.

The examination of the Báb continued to its pre-arranged end. Yet, once again the purpose of the authorities had been frustrated. The meeting had served only to uplift Him in the eyes of the people.

THE Báb was at length delivered to the head of the religious court of Tabríz to be whipped with the bastinado. As Jesus had fallen under the scourge for His claim to be a Redeemer of men, the Báb also was subjected to the same indignity. Eleven times the head of the religious court applied the rod to the Báb's feet. He was struck across the face with one of the strokes intended for His feet.

Dr. McCormick, an English physician, treated Him and recalled their meeting in the following manner, "He was a very mild and delicate looking man, rather small in stature, and very fair for a Persian, with a melodious soft voice, which struck me much. In fact his whole look and deportment went far to dispose one in his favor."

His persecutors had fondly hoped that by summoning the Báb to Tabríz they would be able through threats and intimidations to induce Him to abandon His mission. They had failed. As Jesus had said, "My teaching is not mine, but His that sent me," the Báb too made it clear that this message was something greater than Himself.

The gathering in Tabríz had enabled Him at last to set forth emphatically, in the presence of the authorities, the distinguishing features of His claim. It had also enabled Him to destroy, in brief and convincing language, the arguments of His enemies.

The news of this meeting spread rapidly throughout Persia. It awakened new zeal in the hearts of His followers. They redoubled their efforts to spread His teachings. It enkindled a corresponding reaction among His adversaries. Persecutions, unprecedented in their violence, swept over the nation.

The Sháh succumbed to illness, and his Prime Minister Hájí Mírzá Áqásí was toppled from power. The successor to the throne was seventeen year old Náşiri'd-Dín Mírzá, and the active direction of the affairs of the nation fell to a new Prime Minister, Mírzá Taqí Khán. His rule was iron-hearted and his hatred for the Báb more implacable than that of Hájí Mírzá Áqásí. He unchained a combined assault of civil and ecclesiastical powers against the Báb and His Faith.

WHEN word of the suffering of His followers reached the Báb, who had been returned to the castle of Chiríq, He was plunged in sorrow. There was yet an added blow to come to Him. His beloved uncle, by whom He had been reared in childhood, was arrested in Ṭihrán to await execution.

It was this same uncle who had served the Báb with such devotion throughout His life, who became one of His first and most ardent disciples. It had been less than a year before his arrest in Ṭihrán that the Báb's uncle had visited Him in His prison cell in Chiríq. He had gone from there to Ṭihrán to teach the Faith of the Báb and had remained there until his arrest as one of fourteen prisoners.

The fourteen captives in Ṭihrán were imprisoned in the home of one of the city officials. Every kind of ill treatment was inflicted upon them to induce them to reveal the names and addresses of other believers. The Prime Minister issued a decree threatening with execution whoever among the fourteen was unwilling to recant his faith.

Seven were compelled to yield to the pressure and were released at once. The remaining seven became known as the "Seven Martyrs of Ṭihrán." The Báb's uncle, one of the leading merchants of Shíráz, was one of these seven.

His friends urged him to deny his faith and save his life. A number of the more affluent merchants offered to pay a ransom for him. The Báb's uncle rejected their offer. Finally he was brought before the Prime Minister.

"A number have interceded in your behalf," the Prime Minister told him. "Eminent merchants of Shíráz and Ṭihrán are willing, nay, eager to pay your ransom. A word of recantation from you will set you free and ensure your return with honors to your native city."

The Báb's uncle boldly replied to these words. "Your Excellency," he said, "my repudiation of the truths enshrined in this Revelation would be tantamount to a rejection of all the revelations that have preceded it. To refuse to acknowledge the mission of the Báb would be to deny the divine character of the message which Muhammad, Jesus, Moses, and all the prophets of the past have revealed."

The Prime Minister could not hide his impatience as the Báb's uncle signed his own death-warrant with his lips.

The Báb's uncle continued: "God knows that whatever I have heard and read concerning the sayings and doings of these messengers, I have been privileged to witness the same from this youth, this beloved kinsman of mine, from his earliest boyhood to this, the thirtieth year of His life. I only request that you allow me to be the first to lay down my life in His path."

The Prime Minister was stupefied by such an answer. Without uttering a word, he motioned that the Báb's uncle be taken out and beheaded.

The second to fall beneath the headsman's axe was Mírzá Qurbán 'Alí. He was a close friend of many nobles. The mother of the Sháh, because of her friendship for Qurbán 'Alí, said to the King, "He is no follower of the Báb, but has been falsely accused."

So they sent for him. "You are a scholar, a man of learning," they said. "You do not belong to this misguided sect. A false charge has been preferred against you."

Qurbán 'Alí replied, "I reckon myself one of the followers and servants of the Báb, though whether He hath accepted me as such, I know not."

They tried to persuade, holding out hopes of a salary and pension.

“This life and these drops of blood of mine,” he said, “are of but small account. Were the entire world mine, and had I a thousand lives, I would freely cast them all at the feet of His friends.”

Qurbán ‘Alí was taken to the Prime Minister.

“Since last night I have been besieged by all classes of state officials,” the Prime Minister told him. “They are vigorously speaking in your behalf. From what I learn of the position you occupy and the influence your words exercise, you are not much inferior to the Báb himself. If you had claimed for yourself the leadership, it would have been better than to declare your allegiance to one who is certainly inferior to you in knowledge.”

“All the knowledge which I have acquired,” Qurbán ‘Alí answered, “has only led me to bow down in allegiance before Him.” Qurbán ‘Alí boldly continued. “Ever since I attained the age of manhood, I have regarded justice and fairness as the ruling motive of my life. I have judged the Báb fairly with my mind and with my heart. I have reached the conclusion that should this youth, to whose transcendent power friend and foe alike testify, be false, then every Prophet of God from time immemorial down to the present day should be denounced as the very embodiment of falsehood.”

Neither the sweetness of bribes, nor the threat of death had any effect.

“I am assured of the unquestioned loyalty of over a thousand admirers,” Qurbán ‘Alí told the Prime Minister, “and yet I am powerless to change the heart of the least among them. The Báb, however, has proved Himself capable of transmuting the souls of the most degraded among His fellowmen. Upon a thousand like me He has, unaided and alone, exerted such influence that, without even attaining His presence, they have flung aside their own desires and have clung passionately to His will. Fully conscious of the inadequacy of the sacrifice they have made, they yearn to lay down their lives for His sake.”

The Prime Minister hesitated. “Whether your words be of God or not, I am reluctant to pronounce the sentence of death against one of your exalted rank and station.”

“Why hesitate?” burst forth Qurbán ‘Alí. “For this was I born. This is the day on which I shall seal with my life-blood my faith in His cause.” Seeing the Prime Minister’s uncertainty, he added

quickly, "Be not reluctant. Rest assured that I shall never blame you for your act. The sooner you strike off my head, the greater will be my gratitude to you."

The Prime Minister paled. "Take him away from this place!" he cried. "Take him away! Another moment and he will have cast his spell over me!"

Qurbán 'Alí smiled gently. "No," he said, "you are proof against that magic. It is a magic that can captivate only the pure in heart."

Enfuriated, the Prime Minister arose from his seat. His face was mottled and his whole frame shaking with anger as he shouted: "Nothing but the edge of the sword can silence the voice of this deluded people!" He turned to the executioners. "It is enough. No need to bring any more members of this hateful sect before me. Words are powerless to overcome their unswerving obstinacy. Whomever you are able to induce to recant his faith, release him. As for the rest, strike off their heads. I will face no more of them!"

THE news of the tragic fate which had befallen the seven martyrs of Ṭīhrán brought immeasurable sorrow to the heart of the Báb. To His companions, the Báb explained that this event foreshadowed His own death soon to follow.

The Prime Minister decided to strike at the very head of the Faith. Remove the Báb, he felt, and once more the old order could be restored. He called his counsellors together and unfolded his plans.

"Nothing," he told them, "short of the Báb's public execution can enable this distracted country to recover its tranquillity and peace."

He dispatched an order commanding that the Báb be brought to Tabríz a second time.

Forty days before the arrival of this summons, the Báb collected all the documents and writings in His possession. He placed them in a box, along with His pen-case and ring, and made arrangements for their disposal. 'Abdu'l-Karím, to whom they were eventually entrusted, informed his fellow-disciples that all he could reveal of the letter which had been given him concerning the contents of the box was that it was to be delivered into the hands of Bahá'u'lláh, one of the Báb's ablest defenders in Ṭīhrán.

At last the Báb was escorted to the city of Tabríz which was to be the scene of His martyrdom. Never had this city experienced a turmoil so fierce. As the Báb was being led through the courtyard to His cell in the city barracks, a youth leaped forward into His path. This eighteen year old boy had forced his way through the crowd ignoring the peril to his own life which such an attempt involved. His face was haggard, his feet were bare, his hair dishevelled. He flung himself at the feet of the Báb and implored Him: "Send me not from Thee, O Master. Wherever Thou goest, suffer me to follow Thee."

Reminiscent of the words of Jesus to the thief on the cross, the Báb answered him, saying, "Muḥammad 'Alí, arise and rest assured that you will be with Me. Tomorrow you will witness what God hath decreed."

That night the face of the Báb was aglow with joy, a joy such as had never shone from His countenance. Indifferent to the storm that raged about Him, He conversed with His companions with gaiety and cheerfulness. The sorrows that had weighed so heavily upon Him seemed to have completely vanished.

THE Báb saw the sun rise over the sands of His native Persia for the last time. He was engaged in a confidential conversation with one of His followers who served as His secretary when He was interrupted by a government official. The Chief Attendant for the Prime Minister's brother had come to lead the Báb to the presence of the leading Doctors of Law in Tabríz to obtain from them the authorization for His execution.

The Báb rebuked the Attendant for his interruption and held fast to His secretary's hand.

"Not until I have said to him all those things that I wish to say," the Báb warned the Attendant, "can any earthly power silence Me. Though all the world be armed against Me, yet shall they be powerless to deter Me from fulfilling, to the last word, my intention."

The Attendant was amazed at such boldness and effrontery in a mere prisoner. He insisted that the Báb accompany him. The barracks doors were opened and the Báb was brought into the courtyard, His conversation left unfinished.

To the people of Tabríz, the Báb was no longer triumphant. The campaign of united opposition by church and state was having

its effect. The Báb was now a humbled prisoner. The crowd filled the streets and people climbed on each other's shoulders the better to see this man who was still so much talked about.

Just as Jesus had entered Jerusalem hailed on all sides and with palms strewn in His path only to be mocked and reviled in that same Jerusalem within the week, in like manner the glory that had attended the Báb's first visit to Tabríz was forgotten now. This time the crowd, restless and excitable, flung insulting words at the Báb. They pursued Him as He was led through the streets. They broke through the guards and struck Him in the face. When some missile hurled from the crowd would reach its mark the guards and the crowd would burst into laughter.

As soon as the Chief Attendant secured the death-warrant, he delivered the Báb into the hands of Sám Khán who was in charge of the Armenian regiment which had been ordered to execute Him.

Sám Khán had found himself increasingly affected by the behavior of his captive. He was seized with great fear lest his action should bring upon him the wrath of God. He approached the Báb and spoke to Him.

"I profess the Christian faith," he explained, "and entertain no ill will against you. If your cause be the cause of truth, enable me to free myself from the obligation to shed your blood."

"Follow your instructions," the Báb replied, "and if your intention be sincere, the Almighty is surely able to relieve you from your perplexity."

Sám Khán ordered his men to drive a nail into the pillar that lay between the doors of the barracks. To the nail they made fast the ropes from which the Báb and His companion, Muḥammad 'Alí, were to be separately suspended.

The Báb remained silent, His pale handsome face framed by a black beard and small moustache. His appearance and His refined manners, His white and delicate hands, His simple but neat garments, all seemed out of place in the midst of this scene of violence.

Muḥammad 'Alí begged Sám Khán to place him in such a manner that his body would shield that of the Báb. He was eventually suspended so that his head rested upon the breast of his Master.

About ten thousand people had crowded onto the roofs of the adjoining houses, all eager to witness the spectacle, yet all willing to change at the least sign from the Báb. As the crowd that had passed by on Golgotha, reviling Him, wagging their heads and say-

ing, "Save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross," so, too, did the people of Tabriz mock the Báb and jeer at His impotence.

As soon as the Báb and His companion were fastened to the post, the regiment of soldiers ranged itself in three files. Sâm Khán could delay the command no longer. He ordered his men to fire. In turn, each of the files opened fire upon them until the whole detachment had discharged its volley of bullets.

The smoke from the firing of the seven hundred and fifty old-style rifles was such as to turn the light of the noonday sun into darkness. As soon as the cloud of smoke had cleared away, the crowd looked upon a scene which reason could scarcely accept. Standing before them, alive and unhurt, was the companion of the Báb, Muḥammad 'Alí. The Báb Himself had vanished from their sight. The cords with which they had been suspended were torn into pieces by the bullets, yet their bodies had escaped the volleys.

The soldiers tried to quiet the crowd. The Chief Attendant began a frantic search for the Báb. He found Him seated in the same room which He had occupied the night before. The Báb was completing the conversation which had been interrupted that morning by the Chief Attendant.

"I have finished my conversation with my secretary," the Báb told the Attendant. "Now you may proceed to fulfill your intention."

The Attendant was too much shaken to resume. He remembered the words the Báb had spoken that morning: "Though all the world be armed against Me, yet shall they be powerless to deter Me from fulfilling, to the last word, My intention." The Attendant refused to continue. He left the scene and resigned his post.

Meanwhile, in the courtyard the soldiers, in order to quell the excitement of the crowd, showed the cords which had been severed by the bullets. The seven hundred and fifty musket balls had shattered the ropes into fragments and freed the two, nothing more.

A. L. M. Nicolas, a European scholar, wrote of this episode, "It was a thing unique in the annals of the history of humanity. The volley severed their bonds and delivered them without a scratch." M. C. Huart, a French writer, stated, "It was a real miracle . . . they were freed without a scratch."

Sâm Khán was likewise stunned. He recalled the words the Báb had addressed to him: "If your intention be sincere, the Almighty is surely able to relieve you from your perplexity." He

ordered his regiment to leave the barracks square immediately. He told the authorities that he would refuse ever again to associate himself and his regiment with any act that would involve the least injury to the Báb, even though his refusal should entail the loss of his own life.

After the departure of Sâm Khán, the Colonel of the body-guard volunteered to carry out the order for the execution. A second time the Báb and His companion were lashed to the fatal post while the firing squad formed in line before them. As they prepared to fire the final volley, the Báb spoke His last words to the gazing multitude.

“Had you believed in Me, O Wayward generation,” He said, “everyone of you would have followed the example of this youth, who stood in rank above most of you, and willingly would have sacrificed himself in My path. The day will come when you will have recognized Me; that day I shall no longer be with you.”

The regiment discharged the volley. The Báb and His companion gave up their lives as the bullets shattered their bodies. As Jesus had expired on the cross so that men might be called back to God, the Báb breathed his last against the barracks wall in the city of Tabríz.

The martyrdom of the Báb took place at noon on Sunday, July 9, 1850, thirty years from the time of his birth in Shíráz.

THERE is but one parallel in all recorded history to the brief, turbulent ministry of the Báb. It is the passion of Jesus Christ. There is a remarkable similarity in the distinguishing features of their careers: the youthfulness and meekness; the dramatic swiftness with which their ministry moved toward its climax; the boldness with which they challenged the time-honored conventions, laws, and rites of the religions into which they had been born; the role which the religious hierarchy played as chief instigator of the outrages they were made to suffer; the indignities heaped upon them; the suddenness of their arrest; the interrogations to which they were subjected; the scourgings inflicted upon them; the public affronts they sustained; and finally their ignominious suspension before the gaze of a hostile multitude.

Sir Francis Younghusband in his book, *The Gleam*, said, “His life must be one of those events in the last hundred years which is really worth our study.”

Edward Granville Browne, the famous Cambridge scholar, wrote, "Who can fail to be attracted by the gentle spirit of the Báb? His sorrowful and persecuted life; his purity of conduct and youth; his courage and uncomplaining patience under misfortune . . . but most of all his tragic death, all serve to enlist our sympathies on behalf of the young Prophet of Shíráz."

AT LAST the clergy and the state prided themselves on having crushed the life from the Cause they had battled so long. The Báb was no more. His chief disciples had been destroyed, the mass of His followers throughout the land were being gradually cowed and exhausted.

Within three years, the Cause for which the Báb had given His life seemed on the verge of extinction. The life of the ill-fated Youth of Shíráz appeared to be one of the saddest and most fruitless.

Yet this abyss of darkness and despair was the very hour for which the Báb had long been preparing His followers. Repeatedly He had told them that He was but the humble forerunner of a Messenger of incomparable greatness yet to follow. In His book the *Bayán*, the Báb had written, "Of all the tributes I have paid to Him who is to come after Me, the greatest is this, My written confession that no words of Mine can adequately describe Him, nor can any reference to Him in My book the *Bayán* do justice to His Cause."

AMID the shadows that were gathering about the Faith of the Báb, the figure of Bahá'u'lláh alone remained as the hope of an unshepherded community; that same Bahá'u'lláh, to whom the Báb had sent the box containing His personal possessions and His writings.

The marks of clear vision, of courage and sagacity which Bahá'u'lláh had shown on more than one occasion ever since he rose to champion the Cause of the Báb, appeared to qualify him to revive the fortunes of an expiring Faith.

Yet even this hope seemed taken from the believers. Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned in the "black pit" in Tíhrán. He was stripped of his possessions and was exiled to Baghdád in 'Iráq.

The Sháh and the Prime Minister rejoiced. If they were to believe their counsellors, they would never again hear of the Báb or His Faith. It was swiftly receding into oblivion.

Once again they had underestimated the character of this Faith and the source of its power. The Báb had promised His followers in His book, the *Bayán*, that the one "Whom God will make manifest" would appear nineteen years from the date of His own declaration. In 1863 outside the city of Baghdád, nineteen years from that evening in Shíráz when the Báb had spoken to Mullá Husayn, Bahá'u'lláh declared to the world that He was the One foretold by the Báb.

The Cause for which the Báb had given His life no longer seemed to border on the verge of obliteration. The dawn had now given way to daylight. The era promised to the earth since the beginning of time, the day of the "one fold and one shepherd" had been ushered in by His sacrifice.

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