

Muḥammad-Hádí-i-Şahḥáf

Yet one more among those who emigrated and came to settle near Bahá'u'lláh was the bookbinder, Muḥammad-Hádí. This noted man was from Işfáhán, and as a binder and illuminator of books he had no peer. When he gave himself up to the love of God he was alert on the path and fearless. He abandoned his home and began a dreadful journey, passing with extreme hardship from one country to another until he reached the Holy Land and became a prisoner. He stationed himself by the Holy Threshold, carefully sweeping it and keeping watch. Through his constant efforts, the square in front of Bahá'u'lláh's house was at all times swept, sprinkled and immaculate.

Bahá'u'lláh would often glance at that plot of ground, and then He would smile and say: "Muḥammad-Hádí has turned the square in front of this prison into the bridalbower of a palace. He has brought pleasure to all the neighbors and earned their thanks."

When his sweeping, sprinkling and tidying was done, he would set to work illuminating and binding the various books and Tablets. So his days went by, his heart happy in the presence of the Beloved of mankind. He was an excellent soul, righteous, true, worthy of the bounty of being united with his Lord, and free of the world's contagion.

One day he came to me and complained of a chronic ailment. "I have suffered from chills and fever for two years," he said, "The doctors have prescribed a purgative, and quinine. The fever stops a few days; then it returns. They give me more quinine, but still the fever returns. I am weary of this life, and can no longer do my work. Save me!"

“What food would you most enjoy?” I asked him. “What would you eat with great appetite?”

“I don’t know,” he said. Jokingly, I named off the different dishes. When I came to barley soup with whey (ásh-i-kashk), he said, “Very good! But on condition there is braised garlic in it.”

I directed them to prepare this for him, and I left. The next day he presented himself and told me: “I ate a whole bowlful of the soup. Then I laid my head on my pillow and slept peacefully till morning.”

In short, from then on he was perfectly well for about two years.

One day a believer came to me and said: “Muḥammad-Hádí is burning up with fever.” I hurried to his bedside and found him with a fever of 42 Centigrade. He was barely conscious. “What has he done?” I asked. “When he became feverish,” was the reply, “he said that he knew from experience what he should do. Then he ate his fill of barley soup with whey and braised garlic; and this was the result.”

I was astounded at the workings of fate. I told them: “Because, two years ago, he had been thoroughly purged and his system was clear; because he had a hearty appetite for it, and his ailment was fever and chills, I prescribed the barley soup. But this time, with the different foods he has had, with no appetite, and especially with a high fever, there was no reason to diagnose the previous chronic condition. How could he have eaten the soup!” They answered, “It was fate.” Things had gone too far; Muḥammad-Hádí was past saving.

He was a man short of stature, lofty of station and mind. His heart was pure, his soul luminous. During all those days when he served the Holy Threshold, he was loved by the friends and favored by God. From time

to time, a smile on His lips, the Blessed Beauty would speak to him, expressing kindness and grace.

Muḥammad-Hádí was loyal always, and he accounted all things other than God's good pleasure as fiction and fable, nothing more. Blessed is he for this gift bestowed upon him, glad tidings to him for the place to which he shall be led; may it do him good, this wine-cup tempered at the camphor fountain, and may all his strivings meet with thanks and be acceptable to God.ⁱ

ⁱCf. Qur'án 11:101; 11:100; 76:5; 76:22; 17:20.