

Memorials of the Faithful, Mírzá Muḥammad-i-Vakíl

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Translated. Original Persian



Mírzá Muḥammad-i-Vakíl – Memorials of the Faithful, 'Abdu'l-Bahá

One of the captives who were sent on from Baghdád to Mosul was Mírzá Muḥammad-i-Vakíl. This righteous soul was among those who became believers in Baghdád. It was there he drank from the cup of resignation to the will of God and sought his rest in the shade of the celestial Tree. He was a man high-minded and worthy of trust. He was also an extremely capable and energetic administrator of important affairs, famous in 'Iráq for his wise counsel. After he became a believer, he was distinguished by the title of Vakíl—deputy. It happened in this way:

There was a notable in Baghdád by the name of Ḥájí Mírzá Hádí, the jeweler. He had a distinguished son, Áqá Mírzá Músá, who had received from Bahá'u'lláh the title "Letter of Eternity." This son had become a staunch believer. As for his father, the Ḥájí, he was a princely individual known for his lavish open-handedness not only in Persia and 'Iráq but as far away as India. To begin with he had been a Persian vazír; but when he saw how the late Fath-'Alí Sháh eyed worldly riches, particularly the worldly riches of Persian vazírs, and how he snatched whatever they had accumulated, and how, not content with confiscating their costly vanities and lumber, he punished and tortured them right and left, calling it a legal penalty—the Ḥájí dreaded that he too might be catapulted into the abyss. He abandoned his position as vazír, and his mansion, and fled to Baghdád. Fath-'Alí Sháh demanded that the Governor of Baghdád, Dávúd Páshá, send him back, but the Páshá was a man of courage and the Ḥájí was widely known for his able mind. Accordingly, the Páshá respected and helped him and the Ḥájí set up in business as a jeweler. He lived with pomp and splendor, like a great prince. He was one of the most remarkable men of his time, for within his palace he carried on a life of gratification and opulence, but he left his pomp, style and retinue behind, occupied himself with his business affairs and realized great profits.

The door of his house was always open. Turks and Persians, neighbors, strangers from far places, all were his honored guests. Most of Persia's great, when they came on pilgrimage to the Holy Shrines, would stop at his house, where they would find a banquet laid out, and every luxury ready to hand. The Ḥájí was, indeed, more distinguished than Persia's Grand Vazír; he outshone all the vazírs for magnificence, and as the days passed by he dispensed ever more largesse to all who came and went. He was the pride of the Persians throughout 'Iráq, the glory of his fellow nationals. Even on the Turkish vazírs and ministers and the grandees of Baghdád he bestowed gifts and favors; and for intelligence and perceptivity he had no equal.

Because of the Ḥájí's advancing years, toward the end of his days his business affairs declined. Still, he made no change in his way of life. Exactly as before, he continued to live with elegance. The prominent would borrow heavily from him, and never pay him back. One of them, the



TRANSLATION

mother of Áqá Khán Maḥallátí, borrowed 100,000 túmáns from him and did not repay one penny, for she died soon after. The Íl-Khán, 'Alí-Qulí Khán, was another debtor; another was Sayfu'd-Dawlih, a son of Fath-'Alí Sháh; another, Valíyyih, a daughter of Fath-'Alí Sháh; these are only a few examples out of many, from among the Turkish amírs and the great of Persia and 'Iráq. All these debts remained unpaid and irrecoverable. Nevertheless, that eminent and princely man continued to live exactly as before.

Toward the close of his life he conceived a remarkable love for Bahá'u'lláh, and most humbly, would enter His presence. I remember him saying one day, to the Blessed Beauty, that in the year 1250 and something over, Mírzá Mawkab the famed astrologer visited the Shrines. "One day he said to me," the Hájí continued, "Mírzá, I see a strange, a unique conjunction in the stars. It has never occurred before. It proves that a momentous event is about to take place, and I am certain that this event can be nothing less than the Advent of the promised Qá'im."

Such was the situation of that illustrious prince when he passed away, leaving as heirs a son and two daughters. Thinking him to be as wealthy as ever, the people believed that his heirs would inherit millions, for everyone knew his way of life. The Persian diplomatic representative, the latter-day mujtahids, and the faithless judge all sharpened their teeth. They started a quarrel among the heirs, so that in the resulting turmoil they themselves would make substantial gains. With this in view they did whatever they could to ruin the heirs, the idea being to strip the inheritors bare, while the Persian diplomat, the mujtahids, and the judge would accumulate the spoils.

Mírzá Músá was a staunch believer; his sisters, however, were from a different mother, and they knew nothing of the Cause. One day the two sisters, accompanied by the son-in-law of the late Mírzá Siyyid Riḍá, came to the house of Bahá'u'lláh. The two sisters entered the family apartments while the son-in-law settled down in the public reception rooms. The two girls then said to Bahá'u'lláh: "The Persian envoy, the judge, and the faithless mujtahids have destroyed us. Toward the close of his life, the late Hájí trusted no one but Yourself. We ourselves have been remiss and we should have sought Your protection before; in any case we come now to implore Your pardon and help. Our hope is that You will not send us away despairing, and that through Your favor and support we shall be saved. Deign, then, to look into this affair, and to overlook our past mistakes."

Replying, the Blessed Beauty declared with finality that intervention in affairs of this kind was abhorrent to Him. They kept on pleading with Him, however. They remained a whole week in the family apartments, clamoring every morning and evening for favor and grace. "We will not lift our heads from off this Threshold," they said. "We will seek sanctuary here in this house; we will remain here, by the door of Him Who guards the angels, until He shall deign to look into our concerns and to save us from our oppressors."

Each day, Bahá'u'lláh would counsel them, saying, "Matters of this kind are in the hands of the mujtahids and the government authorities. We do not interfere in such affairs." But they kept on with their importunities, insisting, imploring, begging for help. It happened that the house of Bahá'u'lláh was bare of worldly goods, and these ladies, accustomed to the best of everything, could hardly be satisfied with bread and water. Food had to be procured for them on credit. Briefly, from every direction, there were problems.

Finally one day Bahá'u'lláh summoned me to His presence. "These esteemed ladies," He said, "with all their exactions, have put Us to considerable inconvenience. There is no help for it—you will have to see to this case. But you must solve this entire, complicated matter in a single day."

The next morning, accompanied by Áqáy-i-Kalím, I went to the house of the late Hájí. We called in appraisers and they collected all the jewels in an upper apartment; the ledgers and account books having to do with the properties were placed in a second room; the costly furnishings and art objects of the house in a third. A number of jewelers then went to work and set a value on the gems. Other experts appraised the house, the shops, the gardens, the baths. As soon as they began their work I came out and posted someone in each room so that the appraisers could duly complete their tasks. By this time it was nearly noon. We then had luncheon, after which the appraisers were directed to divide everything into two equal parts, so that lots could be cast; one part would be that of the daughters, and one that of the son, Mírzá Músá. I then went to bed, for I was ill. In the afternoon I rose, had tea, and repaired to the family apartments of the mansion. Here I observed that the goods had been divided into three parts. I said to them: "My instructions were that everything should be divided into two parts. How is it that there are three?" The heirs and other relatives answered as one: "A third must certainly be set aside. That is why we have divided everything into three. One share is for Mírzá Músá, one for the two daughters, and the third we place at Your disposal; this third is the portion of the deceased and You are to expend it in any way You see fit."

Greatly disturbed, we told them, "Such a thing is out of the question. This you must not require, for it cannot be complied with. We gave our word to Bahá'u'lláh that not so much as a copper coin would be accepted." But they, too, swore upon oath that it must be as they wished, that they would agree to nothing else. This servant answered: "Let us leave this matter for the present. Is there any further disagreement among you?" "Yes," said Mírzá Músá, "what has become of the money that was left?" Asked the amount, he answered: "Three hundred thousand túmáns." The daughters said: "There are two possibilities: either this money is here in the house, in some coffer, or buried hereabouts—or else it is in other hands. We will give over the house and all its contents to Mírzá Músá. We two will leave the house, with nothing but our veils. If anything turns up we, as of now, freely accord it to him. If the money is elsewhere, it has no doubt been deposited in someone's care; and that person, well aware of the breach of trust, will hardly come forward, deal honorably by us, and return it—rather, he will make off with it all. Mírzá Músá must establish a satisfactory proof of what he says; his claim alone is not evidence." Mírzá Músá replied: "All the property was in their hands; I knew nothing of what was going on—I had no hint of it. They did whatever they pleased."

In short, Mírzá Músá had no clear proof of his claim. He could only ask, "Is such a thing possible, that the late Hájí had no ready funds?" Since the claim was unsupported, I felt that pursuing it further would lead to a scandal and produce nothing of value. Accordingly I bade them: "Cast the lots." As for the third share, I had them put it in a separate apartment, close it off, and affix a seal to the door. The key I brought to Bahá'u'lláh. "The task is done," I said. "It was accomplished only through Your confirmations. Otherwise it could not have been completed in a year. However, a difficulty has arisen." I described in detail the claim of Mírzá Músá and the absence of any proof. Then I said, "Mírzá Músá is heavily in debt. Even should he expend all he has, still he could not pay off his creditors. It is best, therefore, if You Yourself will accept the heirs' request,

since they persist in their offer, and bestow that share on Mírzá Músá. Then he could at least free himself from his debts and still have something left over.”

On the following day the heirs appeared and implored the Blessed Beauty to have me accept the third share. “This is out of the question,” He told them. Then they begged and entreated Him to accept that share Himself and expend it for charitable purposes of His own choice. He answered: “There is only one purpose for which I might expend that sum.” They said, “That is no concern of ours, even if You have it thrown into the sea. We will not loose our hold from the hem of Your garment and we will not cease our importunities until You accede to our request.” Then He told them, “I have now accepted this third share; and I have given it to Mírzá Músá, your brother, but on the condition that, from this day forward, he will speak no more of any claim against yourselves.” The heirs were profuse in their thanks. And so this weighty and difficult case was settled in a single day. It left no residue of complaints, no uproar, no further quarrels.

Mírzá Músá did his best to urge some of the jewels on me, but I refused. Finally he requested that I accept a single ring. It was a precious ring, set with a costly pomegranate ruby, a flawless sphere, and unique. All around the central stone, it was gemmed with diamonds. This too I refused, although I had no ‘abá to my back and nothing to wear but a cotton tunic that bespoke the antiquity of the world, nor did I own a copper coin. As Ḥáfiz would say: “An empty purse, but in our sleeve a hoard.”

Grateful for the bounty he had received, Mírzá Músá offered Bahá’u’lláh everything he possessed: orchards, lands, estates—but it was refused. Then he appointed the ‘ulamás of ‘Iráq to intercede for him. They hastened to Bahá’u’lláh in a body and begged Him to accept the proffered gifts. He categorically refused. They respectfully told Him: “Unless You accept, in a very short time Mírzá Músá will scatter it all to the winds. For his own good, he should not have access to this wealth.”

Then in his own hand, Mírzá Músá penned deeds of gift, made out according to each of the five creeds, in Arabic and Persian; two copies he made, and chose the ‘ulamás as his witnesses. Through certain ‘ulamás of Baghdád, among them the famed scholar ‘Abdu’s-Salám Effendi, and the erudite and widely known Siyyid Dávúd Effendi, he presented the deed of gift to Bahá’u’lláh. The Blessed Beauty told them: “We are appointing Mírzá Músá himself as Our deputy.”

After Bahá’u’lláh’s departure for Rumelia, Mírzá Músá, with a promissory note, purchased from the Government the tithes of Hindíyyih, a district near Karbilá, and suffered a terrible loss, close to 100,000 túmáns. The Government confiscated his properties and sold them for next to nothing. When told of the matter, Bahá’u’lláh said, “Do not speak of this, ever again. Do not so much as utter a word about those estates.” Meanwhile the exile from Adrianople to ‘Akká took place. Mírzá Muḥammad went to the Government authorities and said to them: “I am the deputy (vakíl) of Bahá’u’lláh. These properties do not belong to Mírzá Músá. How is it that you have taken them over?” But he had no documents to support him, for the title deeds were in ‘Akká, and on this account the Government rejected his claim. However, in the process, he became known to all as Mírzá Muḥammad the Deputy. This is how he received the title.

When we were in Adrianople, Mírzá Músá sent on the ruby ring, through Siyyid 'Alí-Akbar, and the Blessed Beauty directed us to accept it. After we reached 'Akká the believers fell ill, and lay suffering in their beds. I sent the ring to India, to one of the friends, asking him to sell it with all possible speed and forward the proceeds to us in 'Akká to be expended on the sick. That blessed individual never sent us a penny. Two years later he wrote to say that he had sold the ring for twenty-five pounds and had spent that sum on the pilgrims. This, when the ring was of such great value. I made no complaint. Rather, I praised God, thanking Him that out of all that wealth not a fleck of dust had settled on my robe.

Mírzá Muḥammad was taken prisoner and sent away from Baghdád to Mosul, where he fell a prey to fearful ills. He had been rich; in God's path he was now poor. He had enjoyed his ease and comfort; now, for the love of God, he suffered pain and toil. He lived on for a time in Mosul, suppliant, resigned, and lowly. And then, severed from all save God, irresistibly drawn by the gentle gales of the Lord, he rose out of this dark world to the land of light. Unto him be salutations and praise. May God shed down upon him the waters of forgiveness, and open before his grave the gates of Heaven.