

# 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Meetings with Two Prominent Iranians

INTRODUCED AND TRANSLATED BY AHANG RABBANI

"World Order"  
Fall 1998  
Vol 30, No. 1  
pp 35-46

Two important figures in the literary and political life of modern Iran, Muḥammad Qazvíní and Siyyid Ḥasan Taqízádiḥ, whose paths often crossed that of the Bahá'ís, have left poignant descriptions of their meetings with 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris in October 1911.

Muḥammad Qazvíní was one of the foremost scholars of Persian literature, history, and culture. He edited and published numerous manuscripts and historical documents, including *Lubábu'l-Albáb*, the oldest biography of Persian poets, compiled by Muḥammad 'Awfí around 1221 C.E.; *Marzubán-námih*, a book of fables by Sa'du'd-Dín Waráwíní; *Al-Mu'jam fi Ma'áyi'ri Ash'ári'l-'Ajam*, a treatise on Persian prosody and poetic art written by Shamsu'd-Dín Muḥammad ibn Qays ar-Rázi between 1220 and 1232 C.E.; *Chahár Maqála* (The Four Discourses), by Nizámí al-'Arudí of Samarqand; *Kitáb-i-Nuqtatu'l-Káf*, a purported early history of the Bábí; and *Tarikh-i-Jahán-gushá*, written by 'Alá'u'd-Dín 'Aṭá Malik-i-Juwaynín in 1260 C.E.<sup>1</sup> Qazvíní undertook many of these efforts in collaboration with the British Orientalist Edward G. Browne; most were published in the E.J.W. Gibb Memorial series.

In addition to editing and publishing literary and historical manuscripts, Qazvíní wrote extensively about the life, works, and accomplishments of the men of letters of Iran and the Middle East, including a series of historical notes entitled *Vafiyát-i-Mu'áshiryán* (The Passing of the Contemporaries), which appeared in 1949 in the celebrated *Yádgár* journal edited by Dr. 'Abbás Iqbál Ash-tiyání. The ninth section of these notes lists biographical information on contemporary figures whose names began with the letter 'ayn, the first being 'Abdu'l-Bahá under the entry "Abbás Effendi," which appeared in two consecutive issues, nos. 6-7 of Bahman and Esfand 1327 Sh. [Islamic solar year] (January and February 1949).<sup>2</sup> In this note Qazvíní gives a brief history of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's life and his recollection of meeting Him in Paris. He also asked his old and close friend, Siyyid Ḥasan Taqízádiḥ, a well-known figure in the political, diplomatic, and literary circles of Iran, to describe his own meetings

Copyright © 1999 by Ahang Rabbani. Photograph opposite: 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris, 1911.

1. C.E. (of the common era) is an alternative designation equivalent to A.D. (*anno Domini*, in the year of the Lord).

2. [I am grateful to *Pazhúbish-námih* for having made this document accessible in its Summer 1997 issue, pp. 152-62. Trans.]

with 'Abdu'l-Bahá at the same time. Taqízádih's recollections are appended to Qazvíní's note.<sup>3</sup>

The significance of the accounts of the meetings with 'Abdu'l-Bahá lies in the fact that two prominent Iranians who, because of their Bábí-Azalí connections had been active opponents of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, in later life wrote sincerely about their meetings with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who received them with His customary love, affection, and sin-covering eye—never mentioning their past deeds—and immersing them in the ocean of His compassion.<sup>4</sup> From their descriptions it is evident that their meetings with 'Abdu'l-Bahá left a deep impression that was still with them when they wrote these passages nearly four decades later, risking their reputations and standing in Iranian society by publishing them in an environment filled with hatred toward anything associated with the Bahá'í Faith.

Another point that makes Muḥammad Qazvíní's note on 'Abdu'l-Bahá important to students of history is that he openly admits to having written the Persian introduction to *Kitáb-i-Nuqṭatu'l-Káf*, having edited its text, and having been generally the force behind its publication—a fact suspected for some time and now clearly documented in Qazvíní's own words. It should be noted that the printing of *Kitáb-i-Nuqṭatu'l-Káf*, allegedly an early history of the Bábís, caused 'Abdu'l-Bahá much distress. He instructed Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, the foremost Bahá'í scholar of his generation, to write a detailed account refuting its content and also instructed several prominent Bahá'ís in Tehran to aid him in his research—a task eventually completed after Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl's death by Siyyid Mihdí of Gulpáygán.

A translation of Qazvíní's entry for 'Abdu'l-Bahá follows. Parenthetical comments are by the authors; comments in square brackets are by the translator, who has also contributed the footnotes, unless otherwise noted.

\* \* \*

'ABBÁS EFFENDI (A.H. 1260–1340 [1844–1921 C.E.]): Known as 'Abdu'l-Bahá, he is the eldest son of Mírzá Ḥusayn-'Alí Núrí, known as Bahá'u'lláh. The birth of 'Abdu'l-Bahá took place on the night of the fifth of Jamádiyū'l-Avval of the year A.H. 1260, corresponding to 1844 C.E., in the Arab

3. [For details about the activities of this political reformist during the constitutional movement, see Edward G. Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905–1909* (Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 1910). Trans.]

4. [For more details on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to Paris, see H. M. Balyuzi, *Abdu'l-Bahá: The Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh* (London: George Ronald, 1971) 159–68. Trans.]

neighborhood of Tehran in the personal residence of Bahá'u'lláh.<sup>5</sup> His mother was the first wife of Bahá'u'lláh, known as Navvábih and titled Ummu'l-Ká'inát; 'Abbás Effendi himself was styled the Most Great Branch.

From his first wife, namely, Navvábih, another son was also born to Bahá'u'lláh, named Mírzá Mihdí and designated the Purest Branch. He passed away in Acre during the lifetime of his Father, Bahá'u'lláh, in A.H. 1286 [1870 C.E.] at the age of nineteen.<sup>6</sup>

The second wife of Bahá'u'lláh, who was known or titled Mahd-'Ulyá, bore Bahá'u'lláh three sons: first, Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí, titled the Greater Branch; second, Mírzá Badí'u'lláh; and third, Mírzá Diyá'u'lláh.<sup>7</sup> After the passing of their father, a fierce disagreement took place among these three brothers and their fourth brother, 'Abbás Effendi, over the matter of successorship. The followers of 'Abbás Effendi were called *Thábitín* [the steadfast] and the partisans of the other three brothers *Náqidín* [the Covenant-breakers].

The third wife of Bahá'u'lláh, known as Gawhar Khánum, was commonly referred to as the Ḥaram-i-Káshí [the Káshí wife]. She bore Bahá'u'lláh a daughter named Furúghíyyih.

In mid-1908, when a revolt took place in the Ottoman Empire and Sultan 'Abdu'l-Ḥamíd was dismissed from the throne, all prisoners and exiles other than common-law criminals were freed, including 'Abbás Effendi, who during Ramaḍán A.H. 1328 (1910 C.E.) left the city of Acre and began traveling to various parts [of the world]. He first went to Egypt, from there to Switzerland, and thence to London and Paris, returning to Egypt. From there, at the beginning of the year 1912 C.E., he journeyed to North America, arriving in New York in the middle of the year. After traveling and speaking in many North American cities, he returned at the end of that same year to Europe, arriving on 14 December in Liverpool. From there, in 1913, he traveled to many other European countries, including Germany, Austria, and Hungary, and by the middle of the year returned to Egypt and from there went to Haifa. From that date forward he selected Haifa as opposed to Acre as his headquarters. In sum, the travels of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, which began at Ramaḍán A.H. 1329 [1911 C.E.] when he first went from Palestine to Egypt and then to Europe and America, until Muḥarram A.H. 1332 [December 1913 C.E.] when he returned to Palestine took a total of two years, three months, and some days.

5. [For details about the location of Bahá'u'lláh's residence in Tehran, see H. M. Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1980) 17. Trans.]

6. [Mírzá Mihdí died on 23 June 1870 at the age of twenty-two. Bahá'u'lláh and Navvábih also had a daughter, Fátimih, entitled Bahíyyih Khánum, the Greatest Holy Leaf. Four other children died in childhood. Trans.]

7. [Bahá'u'lláh and His second wife also had a daughter named Šamádíyyih; two other children died in childhood. Trans.]

The passing of 'Abbás Effendi took place in Haifa on 27 Rabi'ú'l-Avval A.H. 1340, corresponding to 28 November 1921 C.E., at the age of seventy-eight according to solar reckoning and eighty based on lunar years. He was interred next to the resting place of the Báb on Mount Carmel overlooking the city of Haifa.<sup>8</sup>

After the passing of 'Abbás Effendi—as both his sons had passed away in childhood, and he was not survived by a male descendant—his successor in leading the Bahá'ís in accordance with his own Will and Testament was a grandson, Shoghi Effendi, a son of Diyá'íyyih Khánum, daughter of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the wife of Aqá Mírzá Hádí, son of Aqá Siyyid Husayn, the son of Hájí Mírzá 'Abu'l-Qásim (who was a brother-in-law of the Báb). Shoghi Effendi was a graduate of Oxford University in England.<sup>9</sup> He was born in A.H. 1314 [1897 C.E.]. At the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing he was still at Oxford. His family urgently requested him to return at once to Haifa, but due to distance he arrived a month after 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing. Therefore, if we have correctly recorded the date of his birth, at present—that is, Esfand of 1327 Sh. [Islamic solar year; March 1949], he must be fifty-four years old [fifty-two solar years].

#### ACCOUNT OF MY MEETING WITH 'ABBÁS EFFENDI 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ IN PARIS

I, Muḥammad ibn 'Abdu'l-Vahháb-i-Qazvíní, arrived in Paris from Clarens, Switzerland, on 6 October 1911 and immediately contracted such a severe cold that for a week I stayed home. During this period I did not leave my dwelling and remained thoroughly unaware of news of the world. One day Aqá Siyyid Muḥammad Shaykhu'l-Islám of Gílán, who was the brother-in-law of the late Mírzá Karím Khán-i-Rashtí, and his brother, the late Sardar Muhiy [the Mu'issu's-Saltanih], was visiting me at my house. In the course of conversation he asked: "Do you know that 'Abbás Effendi, the leader of Bahá'ís, is now in Paris?" With astonishment I replied that I was unaware. "Yes, he has been in Paris for about twelve days," he continued; "his house is near Quai de Passy among the well-known neighborhoods of Paris."

I immediately wrote to Dr. Muḥammad Khán-i-Mahallátí, one of my old friends in Paris and notorious for being devoted to this path [the Bahá'í

8. [During His lifetime, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had expressed the desire to be buried halfway between the Shrines of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. However, as no such place was available or specifically designated at the time of His passing, His sister, Bahíyyih Khánum, instructed that 'Abdu'l-Bahá be temporarily buried in a Shrine dedicated to the Báb, in a room next to the one where the Báb was interred. Trans.]

9. [Shoghi Effendi attended Balliol College, Oxford University, for a little over a year in 1920 and 1921 before 'Abdu'l-Bahá passed away. Trans.]

Faith] and asked him to arrange, if possible, for me to visit 'Abbás Effendi. I inquired whether it was necessary to request permission for me to come, thinking that, much like Acre, here, too, one should appeal to an intermediary to contact the chief, and a meeting would be possible only after receiving the proper permission.

At noon time the following day, Saturday, 14 October 1911 C.E., Muḥammad Khán came to our house and told me that an intermediary, requests, and permissions were not needed:

All wishing to come forth, may,  
 and those who desire to leave, may;  
 Pride, coquetry, chamberlain, and doorkeeper,  
 have no place at this threshold.

We agreed that he would return the next morning at 9 A.M. so that together we could go to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's place of residence.

The next morning (Sunday, 15 October 1911 C.E., or 21 *Shavvál* A.H. 1329), Dr. Muḥammad Khán came to my house, and by the underground rail (metro), we went to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's house at 4, rue de Camoëns.<sup>10</sup> His residence was at an exquisite building, newly constructed, and furnished with all the latest means of comfort, such as an elevator, electricity, carpeting in the stairway, telephone, and so on. It was a large apartment with six or seven rooms, and perhaps even more, two formal sitting rooms, and superb furnishings. Once we entered the hallway of the apartment, I noted that separate groups of twos or threes were conversing with one another and were not concerned with the traffic of the visitors. I quickly thought that it was similar to the *Rawzih-khání* [soothsaying] gatherings in Iran where no one pays attention to others, and such formalities as invitation, calling ahead of time, presenting one's personal card, or requesting permission to enter, and so on were not required.

My friend became engaged in conversation with one of the groups standing in the hallway and was nearly out of my sight. For about six minutes I stood there not knowing what to do. Then I suddenly spotted one of my acquaintances from the previous year's visit to Paris, titled Tamaddunu'l-Mulk, who was a young man from Shiraz and a devout Bahá'í, and went toward him. He saw me and came forward, and we shook hands.<sup>11</sup> When I inquired about attaining 'Abdu'l-Bahá's presence, he said, "He is in the next formal room; if you please, let us go there." With this he picked up a chair and went to the drawing room and after about half a minute returned and invited me to go with him.

10. [The Bahá'ís purchased the building in 1996. Trans.]

11. [He traveled with 'Abdu'l-Bahá as His translator but because of his immense ego eventually left the Bahá'í Faith. Trans.]

When I entered the room, my eyes fell on 'Abdu'l-Bahá, whom I immediately recognized as I had seen his picture many times in various journals, newspapers, and certain books, and my eye was well acquainted with his countenance. He wore a small headdress, which simply was a white piece of cloth wrapped around a small white fez, and a large brownish *labbdíh* with wide sleeves. His beard and eye brows were white as cotton, and he possessed brilliant, piercing eyes with strong manly features that, from the profile, resembled those of Tolstoy. He was sitting on a velvet-covered chair (*fauteuil*) at the head of the room with his back to the window. All around the room—there were actually two connecting rooms, a larger one where he was at that time and a smaller one—were sitting absolutely silent and motionless some thirty-five people, mostly women, from Iran, Egypt, America, England, France, and so on. Not one noise could be heard or felt from anyone, particularly the Persians who were wearing their customary hats and who, with arms folded on the breast, remained still and upright like statues. Each sat with downcast eyes; truly one could mistake them for statues, as they were all extremely quiet, immobile, and reverently still.

Quietly, I entered the room, offered my greetings, and wanted to sit by the entrance. But 'Abbás Effendi rose from his seat and greeted me warmly, bidding me to move up by saying, "Higher please, higher please." I went a bit further in the room and was about to sit when again he said, "Higher please. Come sit here." He pointed to a chair on his own right-hand side. Since I did not wish him to remain standing, I quickly took my seat next to him on the chair that he had designated. For the next two or three minutes he continued to greet me and inquired about my well-being, though, unfortunately, I do not recall his exact words. He added, "I have asked of you and was told that you were not in Paris." I was a bit bewildered about how it was that he knew me and what had prompted him to inquire about me. The thought then came to my mind that perhaps this was a ploy to add me to the rank of his well-wishers. My reasoning was that I knew Mr. Dreyfus was fully aware of the circumstances of my publishing the *[Kitáb-i-Nuqṭatu'l-Káf]*, having edited its Persian text, and having prepared an introduction based on the English introduction of the late Edward Browne and some other of his writings.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, I thought

12. Hippolyte Dreyfus was a French Jew who converted to the Bahá'í Faith. Because he was a lawyer and an outstanding orator, he was the general representative of the Paris Bahá'ís. I suspect that he is no longer alive and must have passed away a few years ago. Qazvíní. [Mr. Dreyfus-Barney died in December 1928; for Shoghi Effendi's eulogy, see "Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney: An Appreciation by Shoghi Effendi," *The Bahá'í World (Formerly: Bahá'í Year Book): A Biennial International Record, Volume III, 1928-1930*, comp. National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1930) 3:210, 214. Trans.]

that, as soon as I had requested an audience, he must have told 'Abdu'l-Bahá: "This person who is now seeking an audience is the same publisher of the infamous *Nuqtatu'l-Káf*, and to attract his heart, when he comes, do not mention any of this business." It seems that Dreyfus did not wish to be present in the room when I entered and must have momentarily exited from another door but came in after my entrance and with his eyes greeted me, pretending to have just come into the room.

'Abdu'l-Bahá quickly turned to him [Dreyfus], and it was evident that he was engaged in presenting a talk—that is, 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Persian would give his speech consisting of exhortations and teachings, and the others were listening most attentively; Dreyfus would translate from Persian into French. However, Dreyfus said, "I am hesitant to translate further in the presence of our old and much learned friend, Mírzá Muḥammad." 'Abdu'l-Bahá turned to me and said, "We were discussing a subject with the friends; after our talk we shall visit with you extensively. If you wish, translate for them that 'The children of Israel had sunk into the depth of darkness. . . .'" I replied that, since I had just arrived and was uninformed of the details, it was best if Mr. Dreyfus continued translating.

'Abbás Effendi continued his talk and would speak each sentence in eloquent Persian. Dreyfus would translate its essence into French. In most instances, the translation was far from the original, and it required much imagination to relate the translation to the sentence originally spoken by 'Abbás Effendi.

At any rate, from the point that I entered the gathering, the gist of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talk was that the children of Israel had sunk into the abyss of darkness, were constantly at war and battling with one another, and worshiped a multitude of gods. Hence God sent Moses to guide them, and He was able to lead them from waywardness to the path of faith. After the passage of many centuries, because of the material attachment of the divines of Israel, the religion of Moses decayed and was corrupted and became the source of profits for the rabbis. Therefore, God sent forth Jesus, the Spirit of God, Who gave His life for this mission. . . . and similarly, the Prophet Muḥammad, and then, in his view, Siyyid 'Alí-Muḥammad-i-Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and now Him, and so on.<sup>13</sup>

In short, after concluding his talk, 'Abdu'l-Bahá took my hand and led me to the smaller room next to the larger one, where we conversed on a variety of topics not related to religion. I asked him several questions about the Ismá'ílís (as during that time I was in the process of publishing the third

13. ['Abdu'l-Bahá holds a unique position as one of the three Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith—Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. But He is not, as Qazvíní's text implies, a Manifestation of God, a station reserved for Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb. See Shoghi Effendi, "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh," in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters*, new ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991) 131–34. Trans.]

volume of *Jahán-gushá-yi-Juwayní*, which was concerned for the most part with Ismá'ílís), particularly about the present Ismá'ílís in *Shámát* [Levant].<sup>14</sup> He responded to them all sufficiently and accurately.

I then asked him a few questions about the Azalís. He immediately frowned, always referring to them as Yahyá'ís and never calling them Azalís.

"It is rumored in Iran," I further queried, "that in accordance with Your Excellency's instructions, the remains of the Báb have been moved from the vicinity of Tehran to the mountain of Carmel overlooking Haifa and are now buried there. Is this true?"

Clearly and explicitly He stated: "Yes, in such a year (and now I cannot recall the exact year that He mentioned), I accomplished this matter."<sup>15</sup>

After discussing various topics, he kept me for lunch, which among other things, included a delicious broth [*abgúshí*] that contained excellent garbanzo beans—a very rare item in Paris.

On several more occasions, either in his residence or in the house of Dreyfus and his wife, Mrs. Dreyfus-Barney, I had lunch or dinner with 'Abbás Effendi until I left Paris.

During the same time that I attained the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris, his honor Siyyid Ḥasan-i-Taqízádih, the former ambassador of Iran in London, was also in town. He, too, went to meet him and was received with the utmost respect and honor. Now in Tehran I have asked him to commit to paper whatever he may recall of those meetings to be included in these pages of the *Yádgár* journal. He, with his customary alacrity to assist such worthy and scholarly causes, has accepted my request and prepared the following section, which appears exactly as he wrote it.

#### DETAILS OF THE MEETINGS OF ÁQAY-I-TAQÍZÁDIH WITH 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ

IT was toward the end of 1911 when I arrived in Paris from Istanbul, where I had been staying since the beginning of February of that year. I made this

14. [Most of the followers of the sixth Shiah Imam, aṣ-Ṣádiq, expected his son, Ismá'íl, to succeed him as the next Imam. However, Ismá'íl died before his father, and another son, Músá, known as Kázim, assumed the office. At that time an influential splinter group was formed, which continued to maintain that the rightful claimant to the successorship remained in the house of Ismá'íl. During various periods of Shiah history Ismá'ílís have been particularly influential. In the latter part of the eighteenth century they enjoyed a revival through such leaders as Sháh *Khalíl'u'lláh* and Áqá *Khán* and were able to establish sizable communities in central and southern *Khurásán*. In addition, notable pockets of Ismá'ílís reside today in Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Syria, Iran, India, Pakistan, Oman, Zanzibar, and East Africa. Trans.]

15. ['Abdu'l-Bahá interred the remains of the Báb in a newly constructed Shrine on Mount Carmel on Naw-Rúz 1909. Trans.]



journey at the request of Hájí 'Alí-Qulí Khán-i-Sardár As'ad-i-Bakhtiyári and stayed only a short while (perhaps about two or three weeks). During this time I traveled to London for a few days, returning to Paris from where I subsequently returned to Istanbul. This period coincided with the famous ultimatum issued by the Russian government against the Iranian government for the dismissal of the American Mr. Shuster, which resulted in the horrible massacre of Tabriz and the hanging of the Thiqatu'l-Islám on 'Ashurá A.H. 1330 [10 Muḥarram] corresponding to 31 December 1911 C.E., that I heard about upon my arrival in Istanbul.<sup>16</sup>

During my stay in Paris, one day in accordance with a previous arrangement, I went to see 'Abbás Effendi 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the leader of the Bahá'í community. I do not recall the exact date, but it was at the same time that the Russians were issuing ultimatums to Iran. One morning I was received by him ['Abdu'l-Bahá] at his residence, an exquisite building (which, it was said, he rented for 4,000 francs a month—that is, 160 British gold pounds).<sup>17</sup>

From the hallway I was led into a large sitting room that apparently served as his formal receiving room and where he delivered his talks. From there I went further to a smaller room that served as his bedroom, where he graciously received me. We spoke until about noon.

Meanwhile, a crowd had gathered in the larger room in anticipation of an audience with him. As it was getting late, Mr. Dreyfus, a Jewish Frenchman and a close companion of his, came into the room and, standing with hands upon his breast, said, "People are waiting." 'Abdu'l-Bahá did not pay much attention to him and only replied "Fine" and continued to converse with me.

From what I recall of the conversation, one topic about which I asked Him was this: "From what I have heard, you desire the establishment of freedom in Iran. Hence, is it not proper that your followers, in accordance with your command and when necessary, aid and assist those (non-Bahá'í) elements promoting political freedom, such as in the elections, and so on?"

16. [W. Morgan Shuster, an American financial expert with experience in Cuba and the Philippines, where he had served after the Spanish-American war, was employed by the Iranian government with extraordinary powers to reform the country's shattered finances. His activity antagonized the reactionary elements of Iranian society and their patrons, the Russians, who demanded that he be fired. When the Iranian government ignored the Russian ultimatum, Russian troops invaded northern Iran. Bowing to military force, the Iranian government dismissed Shuster. On returning to the United States, Shuster wrote a book, *The Strangling of Persia*, that has become a classic. Editor] [Taqízádiḥ heard about the execution of a prominent Shiite cleric when he arrived in Istanbul. For more details about the Shuster episode, see Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906-1911* (New York: Columbia U Press, 1996). Trans.]

17. [Undoubtedly £160 sterling was meant. 'Abdu'l-Bahá remained in Paris for nine weeks. Trans.]

He replied that, "In principle, we prefer freedom as it is one of the divine blessings and pleases God. However, this is not because freedom helps with the diffusion and propagation of our Cause, as it is the opposite—namely, our Cause grows better in a repressive environment."

What I have noted is the essence of his utterance, as I do not recall the exact words.

A few days later Mírzá Asadu'lláh (dressed as a traditional [Muslim] cleric) in the company of Mírzá 'Azízu'lláh Khán-i-Varqá (who worked at the Russian Bank in Tehran), both of whom were among 'Abdu'l-Bahá's companions, came to see me bearing an affectionate message from 'Abdu'l-Bahá: "The Master wishes you to join him for dinner one night."<sup>18</sup> I agreed and went there at the appointed evening. When Mírzá Asadu'lláh and 'Azízu'lláh Khán had come to see me, they had spoken of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's deep love for Iran and its independence and said, "The Master is constantly inquiring about what is reported in the newspapers as he is worried, meaning about the Russian ultimatum." (I suspect that they said such things, as these people [the Bahá'ís] speak to each person depending on his interests to attract hearts. Since they had noted my love and commitment for Iran that has consumed my whole being, they emphasized this aspect of the Master's interest. Of course, it may well be very possible that 'Abdu'l-Bahá, indeed, was not uninterested in the independence of Iran.)

The night that I went to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's house for dinner was rainy. When I left my residence at about 8 P.M., it was difficult to locate transportation. Hence I was a little late in arriving (about 8:15 or 8:30) and found 'Abdu'l-Bahá and his companions waiting for me. In that gathering, in addition to Mírzá Asadu'lláh Khán, Tamaddunu'l-Mulk was present as well, but the thing that caused my astonishment was that there was no news of dinner! For a while we continued conversing. I had imagined that dinner would be served at eight o'clock (according to the European custom). I was hungry and perplexed. I waited longer, but still no news of dinner. I thought that I had come late and that they had already eaten dinner. For a while 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 'Azízu'lláh Khán, and I continued with our conversation. Occasionally, because of my hunger and not wishing to overstay my welcome, I wanted to leave, but, being reserved, I did not say anything. Eventually, perhaps closer to eleven o'clock, one by one the honored companions began to arrive, and it was nearly midnight when they informed us that dinner was served. An extensive table filled with delicious food was spread, including a rice dish that is mixed with *ghaymih* [ground meat] (apparently it is called *islambuli polo* or has some other name).

After dinner we returned to the original room to continue our conversation and enjoy coffee. Shortly after coffee was served, 'Abdu'l-Bahá began

18. [The designation Master (*Aqá*) was given by Bahá'u'lláh to His son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Trans.]

to appear fatigued, and one of his companions whispered to me that he observes the custom of sleeping shortly after dinner. From this it was evident that 'Abdu'l-Bahá lived according to the Persian customs.

When I rose to leave, he asked, "Do you have an automobile?"

"I will find transportation," I replied.

However, he did not permit me to leave, even though he was sleepy, and insisted that I should wait until one of his attendants located a taxi for me, which he did. With that I returned home.

The conversation that night was charming and delightful. The topic of religion was not discussed that much, and he spoke of the early years of his life and recalled his childhood. He related: "My mother tied a two-*qirán* silver piece in the corner of a handkerchief and asked me to go out and buy some food. As I was passing through the streets in the Karbilá'í 'Abbás-'Alí marketplace of Tehran, one of the youngsters cried out, "This child is a Bábí!" Whereupon the children in the street rushed toward me to beat me. I was frightened and escaped. They chased me, until eventually I was able to hide in the entrance to a house belonging to the father of Şadru'l-'Ulamá (apparently the father of Şadru'l-'Ulamá and Aqá Mírzá Muḥsin, the son-in-law of Siyyid 'Abdu'lláh Bihbahání, who was well-known at the beginning of the constitutional movement, or perhaps their grandfather). I stayed in that dark entrance until the streets were deserted and returned home to find my mother perturbed over my fate."<sup>19</sup>

Of the events of that night, after 'Abdu'l-Bahá's companions had left us to go for a walk, and he and I were left alone, at one point the French maid came in and informed him [in French] that he had a telephone call. He asked me, "What is she saying?"

I translated.

He said, "Find 'Azizu'lláh Khán, and tell him to take the call."

I translated that, too. The maid said that he was not there.

He then said, "Tamaddun should take the call."

The maid responded that he was not there either. Finally, 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself had to take the call, which apparently was from an American Bahá'í woman who spoke Persian, and went to the phone. When he returned, he said to me, "That was the first time in my life that I spoke on a telephone." He also said that the same French maid had a fiance who wrote her regularly, but for a few days she had not received a letter and cried constantly, which had caused much distress to everyone. 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself had consoled her and told her that soon she would receive a letter, but she had not regained her composure.

19. [The same incident, with some slight variation, is told by Mírzá Maḥmud-i-Zarqání, *Kitáb-i-Badáyí'u'l-Athár* (Bombay, 1921; rpt. Hofheim-Langenhaim, Germany: Bahá'í-Verlag, 1982) 2:205-06. Trans.]



'Abdu'l-Bahá with a group of Bahá'ís at the Eiffel Tower,  
near 4, rue de Camoëns, Paris

'Abdu'l-Bahá was extremely polite and wise and possessed excellent manners. He left a deep, positive impression on those whom he met. Because he exerted much care for cleanliness and observed European customs, he was very respected. Every time that he went outside and walked in streets or parks wearing his perfectly clean *'abá* [overcoat] and shirt, He attracted people's attention.<sup>20</sup> He also was very polite and respectful toward me. During our first meeting, when I left his bedroom and passed through the large sitting room [occupied with guests], on my exit in the hallway, one of his companions informed me: "The Master has said that we should tell people that you are an Egyptian visitor so that no one would be informed of your visit here."<sup>21</sup>

A while later, toward the end of 1912 or the early part of 1913, he was in London, and I was there, too. But I did not see him. I heard that he was informed of my association with the late Professor Edward Browne, and since he was deeply annoyed with the late Browne over the publication and dissemination of the *Kitáb-i-Nuqṭatu'l-Káfi* and certain of his other writings, he must have been annoyed with me too. God only knows.

Apparently the night I had gone to visit 'Abdu'l-Bahá, he had asked 'Azizu'lláh Khán, "What do the newspapers and media report of Iran?"

20. ['Abdu'l-Bahá liked to walk in the Trocadéro Gardens, which are near the rue de Camoëns. He attracted attention wherever He went. Trans.]

21. ['Abdu'l-Bahá was aware that Taqízádi's enemies would use to their own political advantage news that Taqízádi had met with 'Abdu'l-Bahá and would paint him as a Bahá'í sympathizer. Trans.]