

Translation

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'Abdu'l-Baha's Proclamation on the Persecution of Baha'is in 1903

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Abstract

This is a provisional translation of an account by 'Abdu'l-Baha of the persecutions of the Baha'is of Iran that erupted in 1903. There were outbursts in Rasht and Isfahan followed by a pogrom in Yazd and surrounding regions, which resulted in nearly two hundred deaths. This treatise by 'Abdu'l-Baha was intended to bring this episode to the attention of the western Baha'is and to marshal public support in curbing the persecutions of Baha'is of Iran. It was originally translated and published in the United States as though the author were Haji Mirza Haydar 'Ali Isfahani. The present provisional retranslation is based on the original text.

Keywords

Baha'i history
 'Abdu'l-Baha
 Baha'i persecutions
 Iran
 Rasht
 Isfahan
 Yazd
 1903

By 1903, the Baha'i community of Iran had experienced nearly a half-century of relative peace. The last widespread persecution of its members had occurred in 1852–3, in the bloodbath that followed the unsuccessful attempt on Nasiru'd-Din Shah's life by a few disgruntled Babis. During this period the community had changed its character from a militant messianic Babi community to a peace-loving, ethically bound, progressive-minded Baha'i community that had grown considerably in numerical strength and geographic spread. Throughout this interval, though the Baha'is periodically continued to be harassed, and on occasions a few of them were killed by their opponents often as an excuse for political ambitions, no large-scale persecution was witnessed. This changed drastically in the summer of 1903 when a pogrom was unleashed against the community, resulting in the murder of nearly two hundred defenceless Baha'is. This occurrence outraged 'Abdu'l-Baha who wrote at length about the details and it is a rendering of this treatise that is the subject of this paper.

As the Qajar dynasty was drawing the last breath of its despotic rule, the situation for Baha'is also drastically worsened. In 1886, Mirza 'Ali-Asghar Khan (c.1859–1907), titled Amīn us-Sultan, became Nasiru'd-Din Shah's trusted prime minister and for the next 12 years (with a short break in 1897–8) ruled the central administration with tyrannical hands. During his tenure, Iran's foreign debts grew considerably, a national revolt was raised against his disastrous tobacco concession and considerable unrest was formed against his rejection of any suggestion for social and political reform.

1. For a detailed discussion see, Mirza Yahya 'Amidu'l-Attiba Hamadani, *Memoirs of a Baha'i in Rasht: 1889–1903*; trans. and annotated by Ahang Rabbani, *Witnesses to Babi and Baha'i History*, vol. 9, e-Book, 2007, pp. 25–33, <http://ahang.rabbani.googlepages.com/rasht>
2. For instance, in the nearby town of Manshad, 25 Baha'is were killed most brutally over a period of ten days. See Ahang Rabbani and Naghmeh Astain, 'The Martyrs of Manshad', *World Order*, 28/1 (Fall 1996) 21–36; and Muhammad-Tahir Malmiri, 'The Events and Tragedies of Manshad', trans. by Ahang Rabbani, <http://ahang.rabbani.googlepages.com/manshad-malmiri>

By 1903, political opposition against the prime minister's reactionary rule had gathered significant strength.

At first, the northern provinces, particularly the city of Rasht, rose against non-indigenous institutions such as schools. The Baha'is, as always, were used as a diversion. On 3 May 1903 a minor incident over a photograph between two Baha'i goldsmiths in Rasht, Mashhadi Taqi and Mashhadi Riḍā, escalated into widespread disturbance and only the prudent intervention of the governor prevented bloodshed and calmed the troubled waters.¹

In late May, as a result of the instigation of the notorious Shaykh Muhammad Taqi, known as Aqa Najafi, over 200 Baha'is of Isfahan were forced to take refuge in the Russian Consulate while the mob pillaged their homes. Two Azali brothers were killed on trumped-up charges. Through the intervention of the British and Russian Consulates, the situation subsided.

In Yazd the situation was considerably different. Aqa Najafi had written letters to all major cities encouraging them to follow his lead in harassing the Baha'is. The newly appointed prayer leader of Yazd, Sayyid Muhammad Ibrahim, arrived on 12 June and was anxious to prove his orthodoxy and to consolidate his authority. Therefore, before even arriving at the city, he circulated rumours about a general massacre of the Baha'is. The day after his arrival witnessed the first attacks against several Baha'i shopkeepers. The first murder of a Baha'i took place on 15 June when Haji Mirza Halabi-Saz was brutally killed. After that, for a week, the city was calm but soon the Baha'i-killing spread to the nearby villages and cities.² During the next month, wave upon wave of mob attacks left hundreds of Baha'is homeless, nearly 200 of them dead, and many more injured.

When this attempted genocide reached its peak in the midsummer of that year, 'Abdu'l-Baha wrote a proclamatory treatise outlining events leading to this pogrom, the motives and actions of the principal persecutors, and the intense sufferings of the Baha'i community. Like all his communications on such subjects, 'Abdu'l-Baha was full of praise for the patience, forbearance and the conduct of the Baha'is, young and old.

In retrospect, it appears that 'Abdu'l-Baha intended this treatise to be published in the West, galvanizing the support of prominent Baha'is, Baha'i communities of the United States and Europe in general, and the public at large. Towards this end, he instructed one of his secretaries, Dr Younis Khan Afroukhtih, to translate this treatise, which presumably was done in collaboration with some of the English-speaking Baha'is visiting 'Akka at the time. This work was further assisted by an English-speaking pilgrim of Jewish descent from Hamadan, Dr Arastoo Hakim, and was completed on 19 September 1903.

The translated treatise was then sent to the United States to be published under the title *Bahai Martyrdoms in Persia in the Year 1903 AD*. It was received in Chicago on 29 October 1903 and its publication took place through the work of the Baha'i Publishing Society in 1904. However, for reasons not clear to the present translator, it was published as a document prepared by Haji Mirza Haydar 'Ali, a prominent Baha'i residing in Haifa at that time. The following notation was included:

In compliance to the holy command of Abdul-Baha, the following account of the recent martyrdoms in Persia, up to the present time, is herein written and submitted for the perusal of the beloved of God.

(Signed) Hadji Mirza Heider Ali

In preparation for its publication, the Baha'i Publishing Society minimally edited the English for a smoother reading and revised a quotation from the New Testament to bring it in line with copies of the Bible available to the general public.

In the spring of 2004, the present translator coordinated a typing effort to enable the 1904 publication to be posted on the Internet for the use of researchers in Babi-Baha'i history. In April 2005, Dr Khazeh Fananapazir brought to my attention that this document was indeed a treatise by 'Abdu'l-Baha published in *Makātīb-i 'Abdu'l-Bahā*, vol. 3, pages 122–47.

This important discovery facilitated a retranslation of the treatise, which appears below. In the course of the present effort, it was further discovered that the original translation differed considerably from 'Abdu'l-Baha's treatise: sections were moved around, large segments from the original text were missing in the published translation, various additions were made in the translation that were not in the original text, and a number of other deficiencies were noted. Therefore, I thought it necessary to undertake a fresh translation from the original text in *Makātīb* as part of my project to collect and assemble a number of documents relating to the 1903 Baha'i persecution. And while undoubtedly my translation also suffers from important shortcomings, it is more aligned with the original text and hopefully offers a basis for more befitting renderings in the future.³

'Abdu'l-Baha's treatise (a provisional translation)

A synopsis of the sorrowful events of the [Baha'i] martyrs in Yazd and Isfahan
He is God!

In this enlightened age, which is the century of the Almighty God, by the effulgence of the Sun of Reality, the lights of civilization are diffused over all horizons, and human attainments and divine virtues, just as dawn swells in the morning, are so spread in the East and the West that ferocity and bloodshed among mankind are abandoned; nay, rather, in civilized countries they are entirely forgotten. Religious contentions are completely eradicated and the prejudices of the dark ages are abolished. Among diverse groups and tribes no conflicts, discords or hostilities have remained save national conflicts and political ambitions. All peoples and nations, reposing in the cradle of security and safety, are well protected against the cruelty of tyrants.

In Iran, when the Divine Call was raised, the radiant morn appeared and the Sun of Truth arose, many people were delivered from the lowest depths of ignorance, attained the highest human perfections, became the centre of heavenly virtues, spirit incarnate and righteousness embodied – appearing in the world of humanity with spiritual qualities and holy attributes.

However, the adherents of the old religions still held fast to their former teachings and traditions, and day by day became more ignorant until they degenerated into ferocious wolves and rabid dogs, even outdoing the

3. In process of this retranslation, I benefited from several valuable suggestions of Dr Fananapazir and Phillip Tussing. All imperfections in this translation however, are to be ascribed to me alone.

4. Reference to the conflicts faced by the Babi community of Iran during the upheavals of 1848–53.
5. A reference to Aqa Muhammad Taqi Najafi.
6. A reference to Shaykh Muhammad Bāqir, for whom the Lawh-i-Burhan was revealed, a portion of which is cited at the conclusion of this Tablet.
7. The martyrdom of these two brothers, the King of Martyrs and the Beloved of Martyrs, took place on 17 March 1879. For details see: 'Abdu'l-Hamīd Ishrāq Khāvarī, *Nūrayn Nayyirayn* (Tehran: Mu'assisih Millī Matbu'āt Amrī, 123BE/1966); 'Izzatu'llāh Nur, *Khaṭīrāt Muḥā jirī az Isfahān dar Zamān shahādāt Sultān ash-Shuhadā va Mahbūb ash-Shuhadā* (Tehran: Mu'assisih Millī Matbu'āt Amrī, 128 BE/1972); Fādil Māzandarānī, *Tarīkh Zuhur al-Haqq*, vol. 5, H-Bahai: Lansing, Michigan, 1999, <http://www-h-net.msu.edu/~bahai/arabic/vol3/tzh5/stzh.htm>, 242–8; and in English, Hasan M. Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahā'īs at the Time of Bahā'u'llāh: With Some Historical Background* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1972) 33–51.

ravenous man-eating beasts. Thus, they began to oppose those holy souls, each day instigating persecution, every hour causing new oppressions, each moment kindling the fires of destruction, burning the sanctified ones in the flames of hatred and malice, setting their heads upon spears, torturing their children, plundering houses and property, looting wealth and possessions, and banishing women and children from their native land. The honourable were debased, the revered were despised, and the virtuous were taken captive.

Among such outrages are numbered the recent events of Yazd and Isfahan, which caused the hearts to burn and quake, and the people of equity to shed tears of blood and beat their breasts. Although the Baha'is are brave and courageous, and in the field of combat each able to battle a large number of opponents, and when war ensues they manifest such valour as would quickly break the ranks of their foes,⁴ and it has been proven that in bravery they have no equal or like, yet, by the divine and firm decree of God, they are commanded to maintain universal peace and entrusted with absolute meekness. When tyrants extend to them the hand of cruelty, attacking them like blood-thirsty wolves, the divine friends must submit like lambs before them, without offering the least resistance, accepting the wounds of daggers and swords as babes accept the honey and milk [from their mother's breasts], kissing the hand of the killer while receiving a stab to the heart; and, while yielding their lives in the path of God, begging His forgiveness for the oppressors and asking for remission of their sins.

This approach and behaviour, however, has caused those ferocious animals and malicious snakes and scorpions to increase their repression day by day, staining their hands with the blood of their victims, taking the path of tyranny and never showing any mercy. In such wise these recent events of cruelty and violence have added to the manifold events of the past, and indeed eclipsed those afflictions and sufferings of former times.

In summary, this is what occurred. In these days, the '*ulama* of the Shi'ite sect, that is, the old religion of Iran, saw that the Divine Call was raised and that the peoples of the East and of the West were moved. The effulgence of the Sun of Reality beamed forth so radiantly that all eyes were brightened, the standard of God's Cause was hoisted, and the people flocked in multitudes under the tent of God's Words. Shi'ites were converted to the Baha'i Faith, and even the Jews were overtaken with such enthusiasm and fervour that, ere long, none may be found in Iran who has not accepted this divine guidance. So with the Zoroastrians – Iran's ancient religion – who had rejected all the prophets from Abraham to Moses as well as Christ and the Messenger of God [Muhammad], but now a majority of whom have come to accept, believe and confess to all holy scriptures and books of the prophets of God, and they are also recognized as Baha'is in all sincerity and faithfulness.

The witnessing of all these things caused the wicked '*ulama* to be so filled with hatred and jealousy that patience became exhausted, and at every moment they kindled a new fire of animosity, instigating and compelling by all possible means the ignorant rabble and vicious idlers to shed the blood of these wronged ones. One of the wicked '*ulama* (Najafi⁵), living at present in Isfahan, whose father⁶ stained his hands with the blood of Sultan ush-Shuhada and Mahbub ush-Shuhada⁷ and was denounced by Baha'u'llah as the 'Wolf', was himself denounced as the 'Son of the Wolf'. Everyone wondered

concerning the significance of this title [the 'Son of the Wolf'] and what harm would come from him, until recently the wisdom of these names was revealed, as the following will testify.

The beginning of this turmoil, caused by the wicked '*ulama* and their ignorant followers in Iran, took place in the city of Rasht in the month of March (1903), corresponding to the month of Muharram (1321 [AH]).⁸ At first the ignorant '*ulama* enticed the common people, vagabonds and idlers to loot and rob the friends [Baha'is], and incited them to persecution and oppression, and these, filled with greed, assaulted like wolves and attacked the lambs of God.

One of their deeds was the disinterment of the body of a believer who had recently died, after which they cut it to pieces before setting it alight. During his life this man had shown great sincerity and kindness to all the people, who, including the enemies and even the ignorant '*ulama*, testified to his moral character, rectitude, trustworthiness and great love. They said, 'This is a just, honourable and faithful man, but he is a Baha'i.' His only sin was that 'he was a Baha'!' That is, from earthly he became heavenly, from material he became spiritual, from worldly he became holy.

Praise unto God! How astonishing! They peruse the Qur'an, perceiving the counsels and exhortations of God, still they are fierce and bloodthirsty, and consider oppression to be one of the requirements of the sacred Shar'at [Islamic law], thus defaming and denigrating Islam in the sight of all nations. The just King of Iran endeavoured to restrain these thugs and vagabonds from their oppression, but found himself unable to do so. They plundered and pillaged the property of the Baha'is, and bitterly tortured the friends [of God]. This caused the '*ulama* to incite the rabble to commit the same acts in other cities of Iran.

One of them is the 'Son of the Wolf' [Aqa Najafi] in Isfahan. Even though through various means he has amassed a vast fortune, stealing it all from the people, is immersed in all forms of carnal desires, and everyone testifies to his ill intentions, nevertheless the ignorant population follows his lead. For the purpose of plundering the friends' possessions, they obey his command, extending their hands to pillage and using brute force. When this man witnessed the ascendancy of God's Cause and the rise of the Divine Words, his breast was filled with the fire of hatred and jealousy. He raised the standard of mischief and caused enmity. He began by confusing the minds of the people by forging a telegram in the name of the prime minister of Iran and ordering his trusted confederates, under the cover of night, to post four hundred copies upon the walls of the city. The essence of this telegram was: 'Shaykh Taqi [Aqa Najafi], the Hujjat ul-Islam, must protect the religion (of Islam).' This telegram was a pure fabrication and lie. Nevertheless when morning came, the rabble and the vagabonds seeing and hearing of it became excited and proceeded to the house of Shaykh Taqi, who immediately issued a *fatwa*⁹ for the killing of innocent Baha'is.

It is evident that in the midst of such tumult and under such circumstances when the guide of an ignorant populace issues such a *fatwa* what commotion and mischief results. The ravenous mob invaded the shops and houses of the believers and began to destroy and pillage. But the divine friends, knowing it to be unlawful to defend themselves without the permission and consent of the government, were obliged to appeal to the

8. 1 Muharram 1321 AH corresponded to 30 March 1903.
9. A religious ruling issued by a *mujtahid* (doctor of religious law) the execution of which is considered binding upon Muslims.

10. Qur'an 26:50.

governor of the city. Finding him, for some reason and purpose, negligent in the matter, they thought it best to gather the dispersed [Baha'is] in one place in order that some course of action might be determined upon. They assembled in the Russian Consulate, this being the only door open to them. There they passed the whole night in prayer, raising the cry, 'Yā Bahā'u'l-Abhā!' [O Thou Glory of the Most Glorious!] and at times they referred their difficulties to the governor, hoping thereby the mob might be quieted and the meek defended.

The governor inquired of Shaykh Taqi the cause of the riot and asked concerning the telegram, what it was and whence it came. In answer he declared complete ignorance of the telegraph matter. He then went to the Russian Consulate and erecting a pulpit, began to outwardly exhort and adjure the mob, which had assembled to injure and murder the believers, to disperse. The governor then addressed a letter to the friends of God saying, 'Be tranquil and at ease. The tumult has ceased and people have dispersed. Now return to your homes and attend to your work, and pray meanwhile for His Imperial Majesty, the King of Iran, for hereafter no one will molest you.' The governor's letter was registered in the consulate, after which the Baha'is came out of their retreat to go to their own homes.

However, in private, Shaykh Taqi had advised his trusted men that, when the believers emerged from the consulate proceeding to their own homes, they should incite the mob to attack and slay them. Therefore, when the friends of God came out of the consulate to go home, on the streets, the malicious multitude attacked them like bloodthirsty wolves, seizing and beating whomever they could. With utmost viciousness they tortured and wounded 70 people in all, killing some outright.

The honoured Sayyid Abu'l-Qasim Marnuni was one of the martyrs. This righteous Sayyid was about 80 years of age, and during his life was renowned in that realm for his piety, faith, knowledge and virtue. He was evident light and spirit incarnated. Even enemies bore witness to his chastity and sanctity, testifying to his generosity, charity and benevolence. He was in truth a help to the poor, and a refuge and support for the afflicted; his word was influential, honoured and accepted by all the people. In his last days, once he became known as a Baha'i, then the people of enmity, jealousy and denial attacked him. They themselves testify, 'When we assaulted him, he cried out: "We are from God and unto Him we return. Yā Bahā'u'l-Abhā!"' And in the very moment of his expiration he spoke this verse with great joy and exultation: 'You have done us no harm, we shall but return to our Lord!'¹⁰

While his tormentors, like wild beasts, attacked him with rocks, clubs, axes and cleavers, he, single and alone, under the weapons of his evil-doing persecutors who were wounding and cursing him, suffered it all in fortitude with grandeur and majesty. He faced the Kingdom of Lights as though he felt not a blow nor received a wound, but rather perceived the open gates of the Supreme Concourse, and yielded his life to his Beloved with utmost joy, happiness and exhilaration. O that I had been with him to partake of his joy and to attain his great happiness!

Finally the exalted prince governor, seeing the intensity of the hostility of those ferocious wolves, had no alternative but to arrest and seize the divine friends and as such many were protected by being confined in prison.

Behold how great was the outbreak and tumult that the prison-house became a place of refuge and the dungeon a court of safety. This much is sufficient and [the graveness of the matter] needs no further exposition.

When the intensity of the violence and tumult had reached its zenith in Isfahan, a certain Sayyid Ibrāhīm, son of Yazd's Imām Jum'ih, was returning from the sacred cities of Karbala and Najaf. In the exalted '*Atabāt*'¹¹ he had received from Sayyid Kazim Yazdi, the chief of the [Shi'ite] religion, a *fatwa* and authority to shed the blood of the innocent. When he arrived at Isfahan, and perceived the flames of the fire of tyranny and persecution, read the forged and false telegram and saw the excitement of the people, he determined to hasten forthwith to Yazd. He received complete instructions from Shaykh Taqi to carry out, upon his arrival, whatever would cause destruction to the foundation of the friends of God. With these wicked intentions he reached the city of Yazd.

This decadent man, however, perceived that the governor would not tolerate such a violation, deeming it to be a cause of riot and revolt which would result in the destruction of Iran and the defaming of Iran's name. Therefore he carefully devised a stratagem and a ruse. Having arrived by chance upon the anniversary of the birth of the Messenger of God [Muhammad] – peace be upon Him – the people of the city came to visit him. In that gathering he related incidents concerning the rampages in Isfahan, describing in detail the courage and bravery of the people who had stood for the annihilation of the Baha'is, looting their wealth and property, and pillaging their possessions and belongings. At the same time, through pure lies and calumny, he insinuated that – I take refuge with God! – the just government would connive in such action and consent to these violations and transgressions. In reality, however, His Imperial Majesty and the illustrious prime minister had not a thought save that of justice and protection for their subjects. In short, this heartless man commended the people of Isfahan so greatly that the audience was inspired by religious zeal and fanatical enthusiasm to eradicate the Baha'is. In such ways he encouraged and provoked many, intimidated others who refused to listen, and instigated the rabble and hoodlums to rob and plunder [the Baha'is].

As a result, on the third day after the arrival of that worthless [man], either through persuasion or force, a mob of ruffians and vagabonds was assembled. A great multitude, armed with swords and daggers, invaded the house of the honoured [Haji] Mirza Muhammad Sini-saz [tinsmith], with sticks and clubs beat and injured his wife and suckling babes, broke their household utensils and fixtures, plundered the furniture and demolished their home. With great force, they pulled the gentle Haji from his house, and dragged him in the streets until they arrived at a butcher's shop, where a bully attacked him, like a wild beast, and with a meat cleaver, assaulted his blessed head, cutting it deeply, and causing several more injuries to his chest and side.

It was then that a *farrāsh* [footman] of the governor arrived and rescued the poor victim from the hands of his tormentors. Because his wounds were severe and the blows of Shimr and Yazid¹² had been inflicted on him, that wronged man was unable to walk, and thus the *farrash* was obliged to drag him to the court of the governor, where he lay motionless.

During this time, his 11-year-old son was at school. His schoolmates, being urged by their teacher, attacked this innocent lad. The wretched, tormented

11. lit. 'thresholds'; a designation for Karbala and Najaf.

12. Yazid, son of the Caliph Mu'awiyah, was the man who ordered the killing of the Imam Husayn in Karbala. Shimr ibn Dhu'l-Jawshan was the man who carried out the order.

child ran to his teacher for protection and he, having a stone in place of a heart, commanded him to curse, insult and deny his religion. However, this wonderful child, with confidence and faith, refused to do so, saying: 'I am only a schoolboy, unfamiliar with the reality of affairs. How can I stain my lips with a curse?'

Then that pitiless instructor joined the other schoolboys, inflaming the fire of malice and enmity, and committing such a deed of cruelty which has caused hearts to burn and tears to pour forth from the eyes of friends and strangers. That inhuman teacher with his pupils, tortured that dear boy, beating him with sticks, stabbing him with penknives, picking him with needles and awls in such manner that pen cannot portray, nor tongue utter, nor ear hear, nor heart imagine.

In short, that light of the martyrs' eye and the first-fruit of the Abha Paradise, at the dawn of youth, manifested such constancy and steadfastness at the time of martyrdom and hastening to the divine altar of sacrifice, that brave men were stupefied. The teacher himself and the pupils would relate, 'When we were stabbing him he only cried out, "Yā Bahā'u'l-Abhā!" and "Yā Maḥbūbu'l-A'lā!" [O Beloved of the Most Exalted!]. Never wavering an instant, but with greatest joy and delight he yielded up life to the Life-Giver!' In this manner he attained the presence of the Supreme Friend in advance of his noble father.

If there be but a particle of justice, it will testify that this constancy and firmness, this joy and exhilaration, manifested on the plain of martyrdom, this cry of 'Yā Bahā'u'l-Abhā!' at the zenith of anguish and pain, is beyond human endurance, especially when exhibited in a boy of such tender years. Sanctified is He Who confirmed his heart in God's love when he hastened to the field of martyrdom! Sanctified is He Who caused him to utter 'Yā Bahā'u'l-Abhā!' under the attack of the enemies. Sanctified is He Who caused his soul to rejoice when ascending to the Supreme Friend! Verily this is but one of the signs of the Mighty Lord!

The blood of that superb child was still flowing when the malicious crowd killed his illustrious maternal uncle with utmost cruelty and torture, chopping his body until it was a mass of pieces. And this prince of faithfulness, under the keen sword of the foes, was heard saying, 'I am content with the fate decreed by God, sacrificing myself for the sake of His Mighty Cause.' The evildoers then tied with ropes the sacred remains of the benevolent father, the pure-hearted son and the sanctified uncle, and disgracefully hauled them through the streets, clubbing and stoning their mutilated corpses, meanwhile clapping and cheering, until they reached the town square, where they threw down the bodies.

The mother of that fine child, seeing her martyred son, her husband slain by the severest cuts, and her brother covered with blood and dust, began to weep and bitterly cry over the wrongs they had suffered, and especially that of the child. One can imagine what must have been the condition of that wretched of the worlds, while being held captive by the people of enmity, upon finding those sanctified bodies thus hacked to pieces before her.

Such viciousness, ferocity, bloodthirstiness, tyranny and injustice have not been heard of in ancient or medieval times – even among the most brutal criminals or the wilds of Africa. Possibly barbarous tribes, in moments of revenge for massacres and severe losses in battle, might have produced

deeds of similar brutality. That would be the mere seeking of vengeance and attempting retribution. But such tyranny and gross injustice has never been witnessed from the hand of foes or the attack of enemies, as was poured out upon these angelic, pure-minded, trustworthy, righteous and pure-hearted souls – people that were kind to all, well-wishers of the world of humanity, renowned for their goodly characters, and even praised by their oppressors and well known as innocent and guiltless. If we refer to all the histories of the world, we will see that such oppression and tyranny on the part of the enemies of God toward the lovers of the Merciful One is unparalleled and unequalled, especially when we consider that not one of these martyrs ever stretched his hand in defence, nor uttered an uncivil word at the time of martyrdom. Nay, rather, with utmost concentration on the Supreme Concourse, with humility, submissiveness, tenderness and exaltation of spirit, they were praying until they surrendered their souls into the Hand of the Life-Giver.

Sanctified be God! The government of His Imperial Majesty, the Shah of Iran – may God protect his dominion – has strictly forbidden hunters from killing birds during the season of breeding, or to discharge a gun even into the air, it being considered cruel and unlawful that, during the hatching period, the young ones should be killed or even startled or troubled by the sound of a gun. But the Baha'is, notwithstanding their innocence and purity, with righteousness and deeds approved at the Divine Threshold, were the victims of their own countrymen, and made to suffer such calamity, and were the object of such enmity. Consider the equity and tenderness of His Crowned Majesty [the Shah], and how stony-hearted are the people of the old religion.

In short, on that day, in the course of this mighty cataclysm and the outbreak of this inferno of malice, gates and houses were burned, dwellings invaded, and they destroyed, beat, killed and plundered all. The governor tried as far as possible to protect [the Baha'is], but he was unable to do so and his efforts remained futile. However, the aforementioned Sayyid Ibrahim, who was the Imam Jum'ih and the chief of the adversaries [of the Baha'is], together with a number of the mischief-makers, went to the governor's house. There they outwardly denied being the instigators of the revolt and troubles, whereas in fact they secretly provoked the rabble, vagabonds and ruffians, and incited them with the prospect of booty, spoils and plunder.

The next day, provoked by the iniquitous clerics, the merciless mob carried out a greater assault, robbing and spoiling more than ever. With the severest tortures, they martyred six holy personages, cutting their bodies to pieces and throwing them into the town square, after which they rode horses over the mutilated corpses of the martyrs and crushed them under the hooves of their steeds, mixing their blood and flesh with the dust.

Praise be unto God! For one thousand years, the Iranians, especially the Shi'ites, have been lamenting and loudly weeping over the tragedy of the Prince of the Martyrs [Imam Husayn] slain upon the plain of Karbala – a lamentation that reaches the highest pavilion of heaven – saying, 'The army of the malicious Yazid mercilessly ran their horses over the body of that Martyred One, crushing Him under the hooves of their steeds!'

It is because of this that Jesus said, 'Your fathers killed the Prophets of God, but you are building their tombs, visiting them, prostrating before them, and kissing them.'¹³ And now this passage exactly reflects the present condition of the Iranians. With utmost cruelty and wickedness, certain people

13. Matthew 23:29–33 states, 'Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say: If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up, then, the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?' [King James Version]

14. This Tablet was printed based on the original text. From this point until the verse 'the rejectors shall be in great loss' is based on a text in 'Abdu'l-Baha's handwriting. [The editor of *Makātib*]

martyred Imam Husayn, and now the children of those murderers are mourning and lamenting, and building and adorning the tombs of the martyrs. How heedless and negligent are the people!

In summary, the idlers and vagabonds of Yazd, daily advancing in tyranny and mayhem, are becoming bolder and more impertinent. A brief report has reached us that by Friday the number of martyrs had exceeded one hundred. This special reporter, in a brief letter, written in great sorrow and sadness, states:

Alas! Alas! And again alas! Our hearts are burning! Our breasts are filled with sorrow and grief! The cry of lamentation is raised high and the shriek of mourning heard in all directions. The hand trembles in writing and the heart brims with utmost pain. The eye is tearful and the ears unable to hear the account of that persistent tyranny. Every day there is a greater calamity, and every moment brings a manifest outcry.

In the city of Yazd there are nearly five thousand Baha'i households – none have a moment of rest or peace. They have no supper at night and no meal during the day. By the depth of their sorrow and grief, their food has become pieces of their liver, and for water they drink their tears, expecting at each moment the attack of the pillaging and murdering enemies, to persecute and take captive the women and children. The majority are hungry, thirsty and naked. The women especially are suffering so keenly on account of the slaughter of their fathers and husbands and the martyrdom of their brothers, and in such despair that they know not how to care for their suckling babes.¹⁴

In brief, the steadfastness of these souls under the swords of persecution, their resignation and acquiescence while facing thousands of enemies, the joy and exhilaration of these luminous realities at the Divine altar, the constancy of the confirmed women, the strength and faith of the holy maid-servants, their patience in coping with massacre, beating, plunder and the martyrdom of children, and the steadfastness of the young children themselves, are all the greatest proofs of the sincerity and faithfulness of the friends. Especially when in the time of this oppression and tyranny, they raised not a hand in defence of themselves, but rather considered self-sacrifice a great blessing and self-redemption as the greatest bounty of the world of humanity. They quaffed the overflowing cup of martyrdom as exhilarating wine. They sought not to withhold their lives from the sword, nor their throats from the dagger. They beheld destruction of their homes and dwellings, and yielded wealth and possessions to the plunderers and pillagers. Women and children were made helpless and homeless, and with utmost joy and gladness offered up their lives at the feet of the Divine Beloved, without uttering a single word at which their murderers could take offence. Rather, they entreated intercession for them, asking God's forgiveness and blessing upon their persecutors.

Had they raised their hands in defence, a single soul could have withstood a large multitude, as was written by one of the friends from Yazd, his own words being as follows:

God has tied the hands of all, giving no permission for defence; otherwise no one would be able to be impertinent [towards us]. But, knowing that we never

transgress the revealed ordinances by raising the hands of resistance, the enemies are able to massacre, rob and shed pure blood with great audacity. Had they thought we would defend ourselves, the leaders and their followers would not have dared to breathe or utter a word against us. We yearn, however, for martyrdom in the Path of God, and ask it with all our hearts and souls. Only do we implore a refuge for our families, wives and children. Should we not do so, we fear we would be accused of neglect; otherwise, life itself has no merit and is not worthy to be offered as ransom in the Path of God. If it be accepted, it is our greatest honour and glory.

15. Qur'an 26:50.

16. Qur'an 2:94.

17. Qur'an 42:15.

If such martyrdom, submission to pillage and plunder, loss of home and property, captivity of women and children, giving up of life with utmost joy, or such a cry in the throes of martyrdom as 'Yā Bahā'u'l-Abhā!' or the shout of 'Yā Rabbiya'l-A'lā!' [O My Lord, the most Exalted!] or the roar of 'You have done us no harm, we shall but return to our Lord!'¹⁵ or the melody of 'Is anyone truly capable of beholding, to come and behold me?'; if all these things do not prove steadfastness and constancy, and demonstrate the greatest evidence of faithfulness, spirituality and love in these holy souls, then from what shall we produce the evidence of steadfastness and firmness? Thus, 'Seek ye death, if ye are sincere!'¹⁶ Should they write the description of what befell them with the ink of their blood, of a certainty the pages of the leaves of the world would not be sufficient. If these souls be condemned, then from what shall we prove the steadfastness of the Prophets, the firmness of the chosen ones, and the constancy of the believers during past centuries? For the greatest virtue, for which the Prophet [Muhammad] was commended, was only his ability to 'stand steadfast as thou art commanded'.¹⁷

In short, the last information from Yazd, conveyed by the illustrious Sayyid Mahdi Afnan, the offshoot of the Divine Lote Tree, is as follows:

The number of the martyrs has reached one hundred and seventy pure souls, which we know of. Of those martyred that we have not counted, God knows. Several thousand houses, shops and stores have been robbed and plundered, and many homes have been burned. Women and children have been left helpless and neglected; left naked, hungry and homeless, without a kind protector, or a friend or an assistant or a companion. They go from door to door seeking shelter, all the while thanking God, day and night, for their mighty calamities, saying: 'Praise be unto God that we have received such affliction and hardship in the Path of God! We have been the targets for a thousand shafts of oppression in the Path of His Love! This was the utmost desire of our hearts and souls; this was our comfort and the repose of our being.'

It was known that these events would take place, and it was heard from the lips of 'Abdu'l-Baha several times that in a large assembly of the believers last year He stated unequivocally, 'Yazd is in great peril. Pray for it, pray for it.' By the will of God the fulfilment of the following passages, written by the pen of 'Abdu'l-Baha, will also appear:

Ere long, by the Command of God, the veils will be raised from the Face of His Cause, and its refulgence will be reflected upon the horizons of the world.

18. Qur'an 5:59.
 19. Qur'an 36:30.
 20. Translation from
*Epistle to the Son of
 the Wolf* 73.

The teachings of the religion will be promoted, the standards of your Glorious Lord will wave from the highest edifices; the base of superstitions will be shaken; the veils of darkness will be rent; the morn of [clear] evidences will appear; the Kingdoms of heaven and earth will shine with the lights of revelation. Then ye shall see the banners of the opposing nations hauled down, the faces of the enemies darkened, the decrees of the wicked leaders abrogated, and the believers shall be in great joy while the rejecters shall be in great loss.

At any rate, on the morning of that Friday, the mob suddenly assembled from all quarters, crying while attacking, 'Alas for our holy law! Alas for our faith! Alas for our religion!' Previous to this they had killed five or six persons every day, but on that day the guarding soldiers, instigated by the *'ulama*, allied themselves with the ignorant rabble, and began to pillage. The vagabonds martyred a number of the believers, beat the women with clubs, hands and whips, and looted a large number of shops, stores and homes [of the Baha'is]. Many children became fatherless. Many mothers and fathers became childless. Many sisters became brotherless. How many homes were completely destroyed! How many families were scattered and made helpless and homeless! How great the number of the affluent that became penniless! How vast the number of those reared in beds of comfort were now compelled to sleep upon the cold, black earth! How numerous were the wounded and the ill, with none to care for them or dress their injuries!

At the time of their execution one would cry out, 'Is anyone truly capable of beholding, to come and behold me?' Another, 'Do you find fault with us for aught except that we believe in God and in His holy verses?'¹⁸ And another, 'O the misery of men! No Apostle comes unto them but they laugh him to scorn!'¹⁹ And yet another would exclaim, 'I witness that there is no God but God!' and 'Yā Bahā'u'l-Abhā!' And still another would shout, 'We have kept both Bahā and the khūn-bahā [blood-money]!'²⁰ One was loudly chanting the poem of Varqā, called *Servitude*, while another, with joy and delight, was bidding farewell to his murderer, saying, 'May God preserve you!' upon the utterance of which he was struck so violently in the mouth that from the blow he yielded up his life. And yet another martyr, at the time of his assault by the enemies, stated, 'No king has ever been accorded such majestic pomp and glory!' A handsome youth, at the moment of death, cried out joyously, 'Tonight is the night of my nuptials, and I am to obtain the Beloved of my heart and the Desire of my soul!'

Praise be unto God! What ignorance is this that the murderers take the exact last utterances of martyrs, weave them into verses to be chanted by children in the streets and bazaar, describing the place where this one was martyred, what his condition was, and what he said, and how such a young man chanted such a verse, and how he was torn into pieces.

There were two gentlewomen who, while mourning in their home for their martyred kin, were attacked by a cruel mob. First they beat and tortured the two wronged women as much as they could, and then dragged them outside the home, after which they were stabbed and chopped into many pieces with swords and daggers. When the ferocity of the people reached this level, the governor, finding himself powerless to stand against the rioters, fled from the city and retired to the citadel for self-preservation.

Praise be unto God! They seized a baker and with meat axes hacked him into pieces. Throughout the time of his torture he sang in a melodious and resonant tone and with great joy announced, 'For ten years I have been longing for this! I beseech God to forgive and to pour out upon you His bounties, that you may attain your hearts' desire, for through you I have attained the desire of my heart and soul!'

The number of those martyred, up to that day, is reported to have been more than 150 persons within the city of Yazd. In the surrounding villages, numerous personages were martyred in each hamlet. The details have not reached us, except a short report of a telegram received in Tehran to the effect that the governor, being pressed by the rioters and compelled by the vagabonds of the city, was forced to blow one of the friends from the mouth of a cannon, and to behead another in the town square. Briefly, the boorish mob put a woman in a sack, over which they poured kerosene, and burned her alive. They tightly tied and nailed another believer to a tree, poured kerosene over him and burned the tree and the man together.

In Ardakān, a village near Yazd, lived the honoured Sadr, the esteemed Mu'tamid ush-Sharī'ah, the adored Niẓām ush-Sharī'ah, and the beloved Diyā' ush-Sharī'ah, with all their families, kinsmen and relatives. They were of the venerable 'ulama and were sayyids, and all had received titles from His Imperial Crown. Yet the 'ulama issued a *fatwa* demanding the blood of these honourable souls to be spilled. The ignorant mob, incited by the 'ulama, attacked those gentle beings with guns, arms and weapons of war. Though these believers had sufficient numbers to stand against the crowd, could have resisted easily and were provided with ample means of defence, yet, in accordance with the command, 'It is better to be killed than kill,'²¹ they yielded their lives to the blood-thirsty wolves who, stretching out their claws of tyranny, martyred 17 persons with the utmost cruelty. Among the victims there was a young child who fell into a well, and he has survived and remains alive. None other was left standing. The orchard and mansion where they resided were utterly destroyed. The trees were uprooted. All that could be pillaged was taken away, including a considerable amount of wealth.

The number of martyrs in Ardakan has reached 19 by now and in the village of Taft the number was 28. In other villages, each suffered one or two martyrs. In Manshād there were ten. In Dih-Bālā they threw a believer, alive, into a baker's oven and roasted him to death. To date, six women have been martyred. While these many have been martyred, a great many more have been injured and wounded.

Jesus – may the spirits of both worlds be a sacrifice unto Him! – has plainly pointed out the pathway to the Kingdom, showing clearly the shortest and surest road. That straight path is the field of self-sacrifice. Therefore these sanctified souls have but followed that Effulgent Source [Christ], and through this path have they proceeded to the Kingdom of Mysteries. For the sake of such as these He said: 'Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.' 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' 'Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you, falsely, for my sake.'²² Similarly, in the Most Holy Tablet it is revealed:²³

21. *God Passes By*, p. 198, a statement attributed to Baha'u'llah. For a similar proclamation see *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts* (Haifa: Bahā'ī World Centre, 2002) 110.
22. Matthew 5:10, 5:8, 5:11 respectively.
23. The portion of the Lawh-i-Aqdas [the Most Holy Tablet] quoted by 'Abdu'l-Baha is at considerable variance with the published version in *Tablets of Bahā'u'llāh revealed after the Kitāb-i-Aqdas*, pp. 16–17. In the above rendering, while following 'Abdu'l-Baha's wording, the present translator has stayed close to the translation in *Tablets of Baha'u'llah* to the extent possible.

24. The passage cited by 'Abdu'l-Baha is from Baha'u'llah's *Lawh-i-Burhan* [the Tablet of the Proof]. However, a comparison of 'Abdu'l-Baha's wording (as reflected in *Makātib 'Abdu'l-Bahā*, vol. 3, pp. 145–6), against the *Lawh-i-Burhan* in the original text of the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 57 (English) or pp. 84–6 (Persian) (or in *Tablets of Bahā'u'llāh revealed after the Kitāb-i-Aqdas*, pp. 209–10), suggests some discrepancies. The present translator has modified Shoghi Effendi's rendering to represent words used by 'Abdu'l-Baha in *Makātib*.

25. Qur'ān 2:88.

Blessed the slumberer who is awakened by My Breeze. Blessed the lifeless one who is quickened through My breaths. Blessed the eye gazing at My beauty. Blessed the one who heareth My melody. Blessed the distressed one who seeketh refuge beneath My canopy. Blessed the sore athirst who hasteneth to the kawthar of My generosity. Blessed the soul who casteth away his selfish desires for love of Me and taketh his place at the sanctified banquet table which I have sent down from the heaven of divine bounty for My chosen ones. Blessed the ignorant one who seeketh the fountain of My knowledge; and the abased one who layeth fast hold on the cord of My glory. Blessed the heedless one who cleaveth to My remembrance. Blessed the soul that hath been raised through My breath and hath gained admittance into My Kingdom. Blessed the one whom the savours of reunion with Me have caused to draw nigh unto the heaven of My Cause. Blessed the eye that hath seen and the ear that hath heard and the heart that hath recognized the Lord Himself, in His great glory and majesty, invested with grandeur and dominion. Blessed are they that have attained His presence. Blessed the being who hath sought enlightenment from the Day-Star of My Word. Blessed he who hath attired his head with the diadem of My love. Blessed the man who hath heard of My grief and hath arisen to aid Me among My people. Blessed he who is assured of My Word. Blessed is he who hath offered his life in My path. Blessed the one who hath borne hardships for My Name; and whom the things of the world have not kept back from attaining My Court. Blessed is the man who hath gained admittance into My Kingdom, gazed upon My realms of glory and power, quaffed from the sea of My utterance, hath acquainted himself with My Cause, apprehended that which I concealed within the treasury of My Words, and hath shone forth from the horizon of divine knowledge engaged in My praise and glorification. Verily, he is of Me. Upon him rest My mercy, My bounty, My generosity and My loving-kindness.

This is the ransom for the blood of the martyrs! This is the utmost desire of the near ones! This is the eternal life of the spiritual ones! This is the pathway of Jesus! This is the way of the Divine Manifestations, in both the ancient and modern ages!

In a Tablet addressed to the Wolf, the father of Shaykh Taqī, [Baha'u'llah] wrote:²⁴

Do thou think We fear thy cruelty? Know thou and be well assured that from the first day whereon the voice of the Most Sublime Pen was raised We offered up Our souls, and Our bodies, and Our sons in the path of God, the Exalted, the Great, and We glory therein amongst all created things and the Concurrence on high. Unto this testify the things which have befallen Us in this straight Path. By God! Our hearts were consumed, and Our bodies were crucified, and Our blood was spilt, while Our eyes were fixed on the horizon of the loving-kindness of their Lord, the Witness, the All-Seeing. The more grievous their woes, the greater waxed the love of the people of Bahā. Unto their sincerity hath borne witness what the All-Merciful hath sent down in the Qur'ān. He saith: 'Wish ye, then, for death, if ye are sincere.'²⁵ Who is to be preferred, he that hath sheltered himself behind curtains, or he that hath offered himself in the path of God? Judge thou fairly, and be not of them that rove distraught in the wilderness of falsehood. So carried away have they been by the living

waters of the love of the Most Merciful, that neither the arms of the world nor the swords of the nations have deterred them from setting their faces towards the ocean of the bounty of their Lord, the Compassionate, the Generous.

By God, the Truth! Troubles have failed to unnerve Me, and the repudiation of the divines hath been powerless to weaken Me. I have spoken, and still speak forth before the face of men: 'The door of grace hath been unlocked and He Who is the Dayspring of Justice is come with perspicuous signs and evident testimonies, from God, the Lord of strength and of might!'²⁶

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26. The passage cited by 'Abdu'l-Baha is from Baha'u'llah's *Lawh-i-Burhan*. However, a comparison of the version in *Makatib* 3:145–6 with *Lawh-i-Burhan* in the original text of the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (*Lawh Mubarak khitab bih Shaykh Muhammad Taqi Mujtahid Isfahani ma'ruf bih Najafi* (Langenhain: Bahā'ī-Verlag, 138 BE/1981) 57, suggests some discrepancies. For the purpose of this translation, reliance has been placed on Shoghi Effendi's translation of the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1988) 84–6.