GOD'S HEROES

A DRAMA IN FIVE ACTS

BY LAURA CLIFFORD BARNEY



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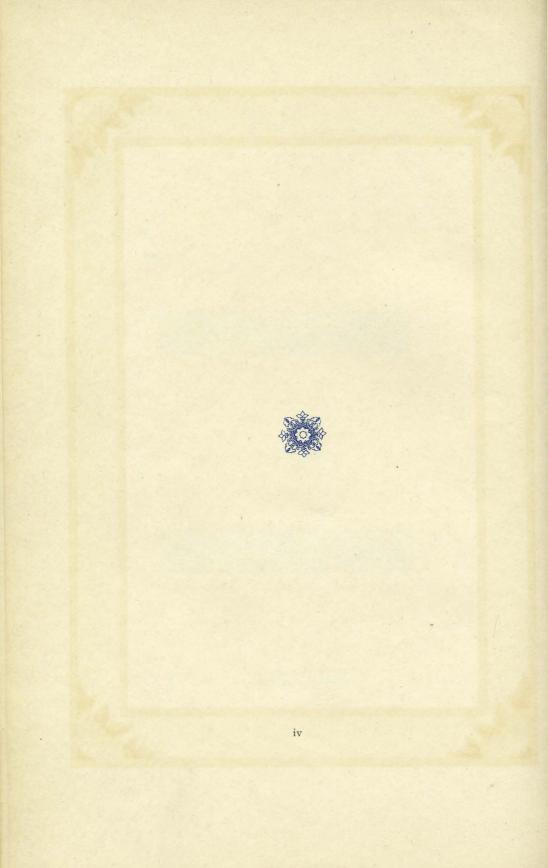
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PREFACE.

Introductions should often be divided into two unequal parts—one for the reader of little patience; the other for the heroic investigator. So, first, I shall briefly say that this work portrays but a fragment of one of the most dramatic periods in history, and is but a limited presentation of the most vast philosophy yet known to man. For the rest, beware! hasty reader, and turn over these pages, unless you feel the wish to know what my subject really is, and why I have chosen to express such a subject in drama.

From earliest times it has been the office of the theatre to present the forces and events which form the lives of men. It originated in antiquity at the foot of the altar of the Gods, whose will was there shown forth to mortals in sacred performances; also, in the middle ages fervent Christians acted the mystery plays in the very shadow of the Church. But another theatre arose almost simultaneously with these sacred performances—a theatre dedicated to the portrayal of human passions; and from this is descended the theatre of today.

Some regard it merely as a temple of art; others believe that its highest expression is attained only when it contributes, also, to the moral development of society; and, consequently, they deplore certain abuses of the present theatre which appeal too often to the base emotions of men and array vice in the multi-coloured veils of dissimulation. This modern tendency to present the heedless conduct of the

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minority in a form so alluring that it calls forth toleration, sympathy and encouragement, can be only harmful.

The writers of plays should always be true psychologists: then if they treat of the faults of men and women they will do so boldly and show them as they really are, and the result will be good; for when the mirror of truth is held before the gaze, he is blind indeed who can turn away uninfluenced by the sight of a disorderly reflection. Masters of the dramatic art always have been genuine moralists. Who, on seeing Shakespeare's plays, does not realize the evils of ambition, jealousy, and licentiousness; or, beholding the personages of Molière, perceive the folly of frivolity, hypocrisy and pedantry?

The theatre, like all other forces, may upbuild or shatter. It can be a mighty instrument for spreading ideas broadcast; and, for this reason, I believe that the wave of regeneration, which is sweeping over the world, should take form also on the stage; and am trying, therefore, in this play, to bring before the public some of the most inspiring events of our epoch.

My scene is laid in the distant Orient, in a country full of archaic and barbaric customs—the Persia of over half a century ago; but the aspirations of my heroes are of all ages and of all lands.

I only regret that I might not thoroughly describe the life of Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad, the Bab, from 1844, when he first felt impelled to guide men to nobler ways of thought and of life : how hate and jealousy sprang up in his

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path, but how his unswerving will surmounted all obstacles; how he was persecuted, imprisoned, and finally killed in 1850; how he imbued thousands of his Persian brothers with courage and righteousness, and prepared them to await a greater disclosure of truth from One who should come to complete the work of reformation; how, in their turn, his followers bore the greatest hardships brought upon them by the infuriated clergy and populace, and even were killed in tens of thousands on account of their unorthodox belief; and how, in those days of persecution, Baha'u'llah stood forth in the fury of the storm, gathering around him the disciples of the Bab, and declaring the deeper meaning of his message. Then, I should have liked to tell of the transformation of Babism into Bahaism through the teaching of Baha'u'llah, who explained that, beside the reform of perversions in Islam, there should be a general reform of all abuses in human society; and that the barriers of hate between castes, between nations, and between religions should be levelled, so that all men might unite in one great brotherhood under an universal code of love and of honour, free from superstition, division and dogma. It is a pity not to recount Baha'u'llah's life minutely, not to follow him step by step through his exile from country to country, to his final imprisonment in Acca. Brought up amid the luxuries of a noble family he yet accepted with joy all privations which came to him during his tedious banishment and long confinement, until in 1892 he died, leaving to his remarkable son 'Abdu'l-Baha the mission of spreading his word through-

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out the world. That cry of regeneration raised behind prison walls now echoes abroad in the hearts of men.

All this I would have written in full detail, but a play is a play, and not a series of books. I have, therefore, presented to the public only a few episodes in the early Babi history, and only a few of the noted characters of that period : yet, even this imperfect sketch should suffice to give an idea of the vastness of the movement.

I have thought it preferable not to have the Bab or Baha'u'llah appear on the scene, for certain beings cannot be adequately impersonated; their influence, nevertheless, will be felt throughout the play, and especially in the life of the splendid Qurratu'l-'Ain, who stands forth in history as an example of what the disciple of truth can accomplish despite hampering custom, and violent persecution.

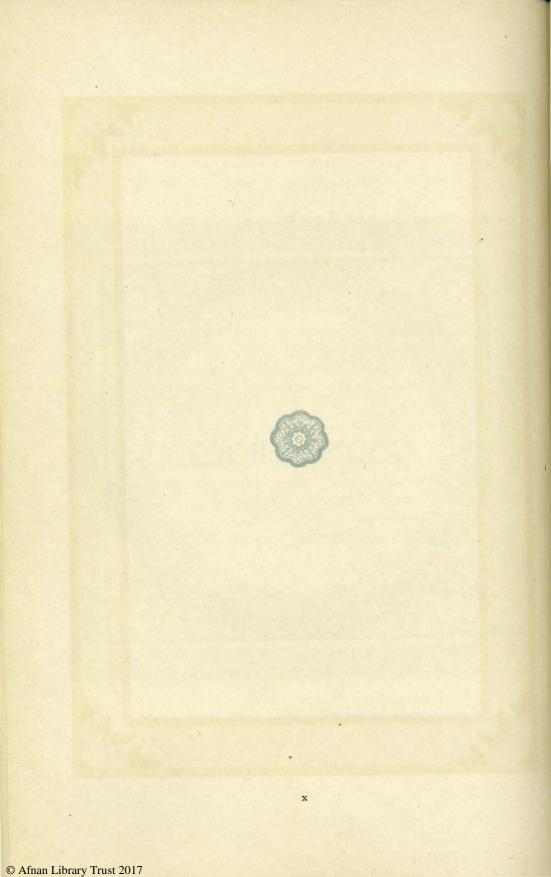
Indulgent reader, I am aware that the only merit of my play is its subject; yet I hope, notwithstanding, to give you a glimpse of Eastern glory, and to awaken your interest in this great movement, the universal religion— Bahaism, which is today bringing peace and hope to expectant humanity.

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L. C. B.

PARIS, April, 1909.

GOD'S HEROES



PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

ç	QURRATU'L-'AIN, afterwards named TAHIRA. Divinely human.
I	FATIMAQURRATU'1,-'AIN'S younger sister. Gen- tle and womanly.
I	AILAAKBAR'S wife. Delicate and broken- hearted.
I	DAIAOld nurse. Mistakes vice for virtue through habit and desire.
ľ	'HE KALANTAR'S FIRST WIFE.
I	'HE KALANTAR'S SECOND WIFE, and mother of the betrothed.
R	RUHANGIS
A	VISITOR.
Т	'wo Little BoysQurratu'l-'Ain's children.
s	ALIHQURRATU'-I, 'AIN'S father. Benevolent.
•,	ALIQURRATU'L-'AIN'S uncle. Broad-minded, well-balanced.
Т	AQIQURRATU'L-'AIN'S uncle and father-in- law. Arrogant, heedless.
•_	Авди'ц-WaнabQurratu'ц-'Ain's brother. Upright, stern Muhammadan.
	See next page for continuation of Cast.

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K	
	MUHAMMADQURRATU'L-'AIN'S husband and cousin. Worldly, good looking.
	QUDDUSBeautiful, æsthetic and virile.
	HUSAIN
	AKBARPassionate, ambitious, resentful.
	AMINOld family friend. Sincere, but narrow.
	BASHIROld negro servant. Devoted and pathetic.
	SHIRAZI
	HADI WALI }Usual type of Babi. Brave, clear headed.
	A BABIIn name only, not in thought.
	AHMAD An inquiring and kindly mind.
	NASIR
	Mullas, Babis, Soldiers, Servants, Musicians, Women, Handmaidens, and Dancer.
	SCENE: PERSIA. TIME: 1848 TO 1852.
	NOTEFor the convenience of the Western public, the
	titles of address, which always accompany oriental names, have been omitted throughout the play.
4	have been omitted throughout the play.
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March 1

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ACT I

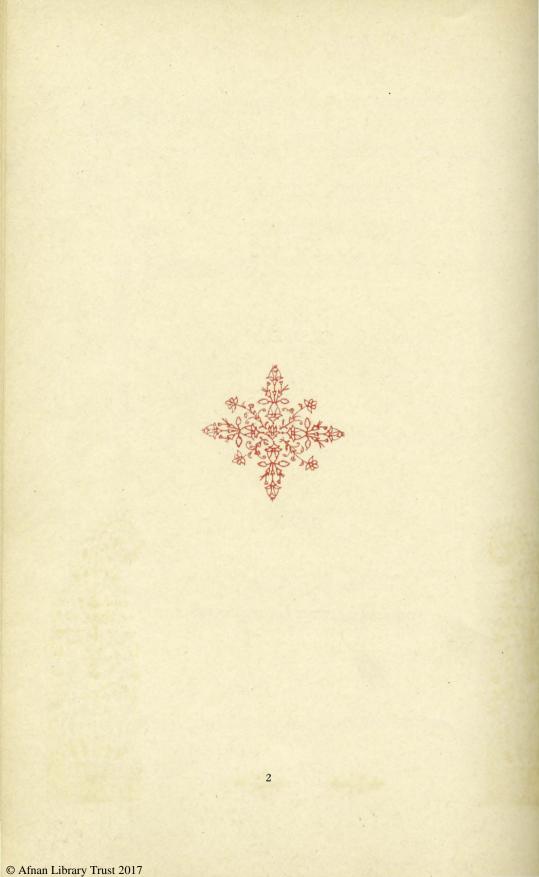
QASWIN

A PERSIAN ROSE-GARDEN

DAWN

THE AZAN CALLS THE FAITHFUL TO AWAKE





ACT I

SCENE—The night is breaking into day, and the Azan, the call for prayer chanted from the minaret of the mosque, is summoning the Faithful to awake. A Persian rose garden breathes its sweetness upon the air. Around a fountain are high wooden couches covered over with sombre carpets, where men are sleeping. The awakening day draws them slowly from their slumbers. The men arise. Their faces and hands are sprinkled with rose water, turbans are wound on the fez, and sashes wrapped around the waist, the long flowing abas are slipped over the shoulders.

SCENE I

'ALI, TAQI, AMIN, AKBAR. Later BASHIR, SHIRAZI, NASIR and SALIH.

'ALI

Awake, my honoured comrades, come from the world of sleep to the world of reality.

AKBAR

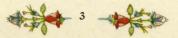
Ah! I am numb. I have slept in a false position.

TAQI

I go to the mosque, for after prayer I must detain the worshippers to urge them to exterminate the followers of Anti-Christ.

'ALI

But they are of the noblest men in the land. Reflect on their merit, then justice will prompt you to cease your futile and unwarranted denunciations.



TAQI

Still must they die, for it is commanded to kill the infidel.

(TAQI goes out shadowed by SHIRAZI who, at the beginning of the Act, had entered the garden unnoticed, but who, on hearing these words turns back and glides after TAQI, muttering.)

SHIRAZI

Your own condemnation will condemn you, for the vengence of Allah is swift and sure !

(The prayer to Allah is performed; then the glittering samovar is borne in and set down on a huge brass tray; everything is deftly prepared, and the men seat themselves to drink the honey-coloured tea.)

SALIH (entering)

Greetings to you my beloved guests ! I hope the night has spread the balm of rest upon your wearied bodies ; but, 'Ali, has our noble brother already left us ?

'ALI (ironically)

Yes, gone to the mosque for prayer, to commune with God!

AKBAR

Taqi has great work to perform, for to-day he will publicly denounce the Anti-Christ, the false "Bab."



A Persian Rose-Garden

SALIH

The existence of this sect is a fiery torment to him.

AKBAR

And should be to all good Muslims, for has not this young imposter usurped that great title, "Bab," the Gate of Knowledge ?

'ALI

Still, Akbar, his followers say he proves his claim for those who care to listen.

SALIH

(turning to where AMIN is heavily sleeping)

Ah! Amin slumbers still!

Act I

'ALI

Yes, our dear old friend heard not the Muazzin summoning us to arise, nor my cruel voice jarring on the stillness, but perhaps the soft hum of the samovar will rouse him.

> AMIN (waking reluctantly)

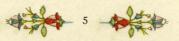
Peace be upon you !

ALL

Upon you be peace !

SALIH

Did you rest, Amin, according to the desire of a loving host ?



AMIN

(beckoning for tea)

Your rose-garden is a corner of Paradise, and your company is sweeter to my soul than dark-eyed houris; but last night's discussion, in the form of scorpions, haunted my dreams and envenomed all my rest.

(beckons for more sugar.)

AKBAR

Respected comrade, it was your conscience rebelling against the words you spoke in favour of the "Bab," as his deluded followers call him.

'ALI

Jeer not at this "Bab" for it may be through this Gate that we enter the Way.

AKBAR

Way of Destruction !

AMIN

(shifting uncomfortably) Destruction ! Why destruction ?

AKBAR

Do you not know that he declares that the official religion, that the established religion of our forefathers, must give way to his teachings ?

SALIH

But on what grounds?

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A Persian Rose-Garden

'ALI

He insists that the message of truth is never final, but must ever be renewed in accordance with the needs and development of man.

AKBAR

Why! If these impious words were true, the forms of belief would change and the infallibility of the priesthood be destroyed! No! Religion is final, and Muhammad is the Seal of the Prophets; as we are the anointed ones, the guides of the people, I therefore say that whoever harkens to the words of this young heretic enters the way of destruction and damnation. May God assist us to eradicate this evil!

(rises nervously and walks up and down.)

'ALI

You also know the answer to your words, for you have heard it from my lips.

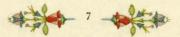
AKBAR

I acknowledge that you are skilled in the art of sophistry, but I do not wish to discuss the subject further. It makes my blood boil with righteous indignation!

'ALI

Toleration is a virtue, my revered Mulla; so permit me to continue to speak of this with our friends here present.

(AKBAR shrugs his shoulders and soon after disappears from view.)



Act I

SALIH

Why be impatient, revered doctor ? Words, if true, will find echo in the hearts of men; or, if false, will fade upon the air.

(He turns towards 'ALI.)

Well, loved brother, tell us why our religion is not final.

'ALI

How good it is to find a listening ear, for many are deafened by fear or pride.

AMIN

(interrupts with satisfied complacency)

I have been always an eager watcher, a listener intent; but speak.

'ALI

Religions are diversified expressions of one Truth; they must be renewed by a succession of universal Prophets, who show forth this one Truth in the forms best suited to the ages in which they live.

SALIH

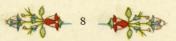
So you think religions must change to accord with the evolution of humanity?

'ALI

Surely ! Truth cannot be final with regard to us, for we, as we develop, more fully understand; and does not our growth in knowledge increase our capacity to receive ?

AMIN

Most logical, most logical !





A Persian Rose-Garden

'ALI

The Prophets work all together for they have one aim, and they follow one law. They differ only in the application of that law.

SALIH

Still, Christ, did he not break the sabbath and change the Mosaic law of divorce? Was not that enough to perplex the Jews?

'ALI

Not if they had been seekers after the reality instead of obstinate slaves of habit. Verily the changed times had new requirements, which necessitated putting aside the exoteric law; the esoteric law remained the same.

(During the latter part of this conversation knocking at the gate is heard.)

SCENE II

Enter MUHAMMAD, HUSAIN and 'ABDU'L-WAHAB.

MUHAMMAD

Peace be upon you !

ALL

Upon you be peace !

SALIH

Welcome to my humble garden, which, until your coming, was unadorned, but now is enriched by your presence!

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Act I

HUSAIN

Your hospitality is as vast as your generous heart, and my stay in Qaswin has been made so alluring that, if duty did not bid me depart, I should fain not journey further.

AMIN

Eh! Husain, were I the son of the Mayor of Tihran I should feel free not to bend to duty !

MUHAMMAD

We stopped for you on our way to the mosque, that we might all walk thither together.

AMIN

Sweet thought—to make the road to sanctity less long and lonely; but it is yet early, tarry a while, and drink some fragrant tea.

(all seat themselves.)

HUSAIN

Where is your honoured guest, Akbar, my future fellow-traveller?

'ALI

He walked toward the harem, sending Nasir before him to carry the news of his coming.

AMIN

Indeed a model husband !

SALIH

Liala is broken-hearted at Akbar's change of plan, for now she cannot accompany him on his pilgrimage to Mecca.

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MUHAMMAD

Why, has he decided to leave here long before the month of pilgrimage ?

SALIH

Yes.

Act I

'ALI

Such a disappointment will increase her ill-health, the more, as she suspects that Akbar desires to take another bride.

SALIH

Fortune favouring him, he would wed Husain's youthful sister, rich in gold, position, and beauty.

'ABDU'L-WAHAB

He is wise to consider his own good pleasure, and journey with Husain.

MUHAMMAD

Women are always safer at home; the less they see, the better; blessed is the custom that keeps them veiled and apart from men!

'ALI

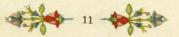
But then how can they develop and become companions for man?

'ABDU'L-WAHAB

They see their near relatives : that suffices ; further freedom would lead to immorality.

'ALI

Knowledge guards virtue better than constraint.



MUHAMMAD

Women lack sound judgment; they must be guided and not permitted to decide for themselves. There is my wife, Qurratu'l-'Ain, who journeyed to Karbala and dwelt many months in that sacred city. Did she become more firm in faith, more enlightened? God forbid! She mistook night for day and vice for virtue; she has turned from the faith of her fore-fathers to follow an impious imposter !

'ALI

But Muhammad, consider ; before condemning her you had better inquire more fully into the matter. Have not you, yourself, always loudly praised Qurratu'l-'Ain, as a model of virtue, and declared her understanding of the sacred books equal to that of the most learned Mujtahid in the land? Why now condemn her judgment?

SALIH

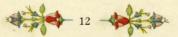
If only my daughter claimed herself to be the "Bab," the Gate of Knowledge, her claim I would believe.

'ABDU'L-WAHAB

Yes, revered father; I, too, know my sister to be wise, but now she is misguided. We must save her from herself; we must bring her back to her husband, and to the true religion!

MUHAMMAD

I bemoan the cruel folly which keeps her far from my home since her return from Karbala. I will not accept a Babi wife, but I would welcome a repentant woman.





A Persian Rose-Garden

'ABDU'L-WAHAB

Cousin, you are in the right; we must exterminate this great evil !

'ALI

Again I ask you to investigate before condemning.

MUHAMMAD

Is it not enough to know that this young heretic desires to extend the barriers of our religion and country to include the domains of the infidel ?

'ABDU'L-WAHAB

(rising)

Let us go to the mosque to hear your father warn the people.

AKBAR

(entering in anger)

Verily, we must admonish the followers of Islam to take up arms against the enemy of Allah and of the Prophet, for he is a menace to faith, nation, and home!

AMIN

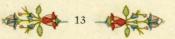
You seem terribly in earnest.

AKBAR

Yes, unto death I swear enmity against this pretended "Bab" and against his followers! Even though they be of my own kindred, I swear that I will hound them to death or to repentance !

'ALI

A rash vow can bring no good to the speaker, and if this cause be of God it is above the threats of men.





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Act I

AKBAR

Are you one of this despised sect that you ever speak in their favour ?

AMIN

(jokingly)

Your attitude invites confidence.

(All walk toward the garden gate. 'ALI and AMIN bring up the rear, talking together.)

Akbar's anger grows ever more intense; something he heard in the harem, perhaps.

'ALI

So it appears. Probably Qurratu'l-'Ain reproached him for neglecting his wife and for trying to win Husain's sister.

SCENE III

(Women enter, clad in garments of varied hues, and bear off the samovar to a corner of the garden. They sit in a circle on the ground. Their voices sound like the twittering of many birds.)

Enter DAIA, LAILA. Later FATIMA, QURRATU'L-'AIN and BASHIR.

DAIA

Mulla Akbar took you to wife because it is seemly for a man of God to protect an orphan, and you should therefore show deep gratitude.

LAILA

If he was so kind, then, why is he so unkind, now? He promised to take me with him to Mecca: must not a man of God keep his promise?

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A Persian Rose-Garden

DAIA

Folly, child! a man cannot be held responsible for a promise given when he is under the influence of woman. (*musingly*) The applause he got for marrying an orphan has died out now. He has to find other means to attract the attention of men.

LAILA

But why ?

DAIA

To become Mujtahid; and you should not be a hindrance to him in his great ambition. You should be a loving, silent wife, desirous of bearing everything for the good pleasure of your lord.

(FATIMA joins them.)

FATIMA

What has your master decided, fair Laila? Will he remain to make the pilgrimage with you in due season?

LAILA

No, Fatima, my husband leaves me here. But my grief will be less bitter because, though I am only a distant relative, your loving hospitality has made me feel that this is my home.

(weeps and walks away.)

FATIMA

Did you not tell Akbar that such a shock may shatter her frail life ?

DAIA

I did, but I suppose he knows better than you or I what are his own wishes.

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Act I

FATIMA

Did not Qurratu'l-'Ain speak to him ?

DAIA

Indeed, she did; and in a most unwomanly manner.

FATIMA

She could not have been unveiled before him.

DAIA,

No, not bold to that extent, but when addressing man she seems not to remember the inferiority of woman. She dared bid him follow duty instead of ambition, and even said that it is vanity to go to holy places unless the heart is holy. Young women are changing. In my day they were silent and submissive.

(they walk on.)

(QURRATU'L-'AIN enters slowly; her head is slightly bent and her fingers count her beads; she stops, slips the tasbih over her wrist, and takes a heavy-headed rose into her hand; bending, she breathes into it deeply. FATIMA rises from the circle of women and comes toward her and lays her head on her shoulder; QURRATU'L-'AIN looks up from the flower into the beautiful up-turned face; smiling, she presses her lips on FATIMA'S forehead and gently strokes her long, dark hair. The women are alike QURRATU'L-'AIN is sterner and paler; her sister, sweeter and fresher.)

FATIMA

What vision appears to you in the splendour of this spring morning, Qurratu'l-'Ain ?

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QURRATU'L-'AIN

From all sides I see new life rising; the struggle between the hardened soil and the maturing seed is over. Soon, upon all things, summer will spread victorious beauty!

FATIMA

But it will fade with autumn leaves and fall under the chill breath of winter, and winter holds all beings fast in crystallized forms.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Still, even the end has a beginning, for spring will again conquer, sister mine. So, when, as now, ancient faiths have become rigid in cold dead forms, a new faith germinates in the souls of men.

FATIMA

You believe that Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad, the Bab, has transformed the season of dead faith into a spiritual springtime ?

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Yes, he is the founder of a new era; men will receive fresh disclosures of truth through his teachings.

FATIMA

Why is truth not given once for all?

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Because relativeness and evolution are laws of the universe; you must think of the world as a great school, where, from time to time, new teachers and new instructions are needed. All great teachers strive to accomplish the same end—to perfect man.

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Act I

BASHIR (entering)

Honoured mistress, Mulla Muhammad is hastening here and would speak with you in private.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Bid him enter, the ladies are going. (exeunt women.)

SCENE IV

MUHAMMAD enters hastily.

MUHAMMAD

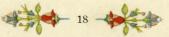
Qurratu'l-'Ain, while my father was denouncing the Babis and exhorting the worshippers to take up arms against them, I left the mosque, and hastened hither to warn you against the danger of adhering to your scandalous faith; and to make a final appeal to you, to return to my home—our home. Think of the time we have lived apart. Why this cruel separation ? for have we not all things to bring us together ?—youth, kindred

QURRATU'L-'AIN

You are intolerant. Look no further for the reason of our disunited lives; I am ever ready to live with you, but you will not let me.

MUHAMMAD

Why, my beloved, I yearn for you! Never for a moment have I been resigned to this cruel separation.



A Persian Rose-Garden

Act I

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Then why prolong it ?

MUHAMMAD

I cannot permit my wife to be a Babi; I cannot have her bring shame and ridicule into my respected home. Even now I am jeered at on all sides for not having yet divorced you. Reflect ! must not the power of my love be great, to have prevented me from putting you aside under all this accusation?

QURRATU'L-'AIN

If you would free yourself from fear of public opinion you would find peace and happiness. Ah ! if you would only listen to me and follow the decree of your own freed judgment !

MUHAMMAD

The world's judgment is my judgment; think not, my misguided wife, that your words will unbalance my mind. I am right, for public opinion is with me.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

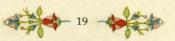
Public opinion rarely apprehends either the end or the beginning.

MUHAMMAD

Say not foolish words, woman; if you had but seen, a few moments ago, the eyes of the worshippers flash with anger at the bare mention of the false Bab, you would appreciate the force of public opinion.

QURRATU'L-'AIN

But when it rests on a basis of ignorance it must surely crumble.



MUHAMMAD (pursuing his thought)

While my father was representing the vileness of this imposter, cursing him as a son of perdition . . .

QURRATU'L-'AIN (interrupting)

Ah! he did that! he calumniated that saint! (She seems to enter a visionary state.) I see his mouth fill with blood, for an evil curse brings punishment upon the lips of the speaker. I foresee men full of hate hounding the innocent followers of the Bab, trying to crush the hearts of the Faithful. I foresee the Faithful dying with the prayer of forgiveness on their lips. I foresee persecution and the fury of oppression over all our country. I foresee little children, old people, women, and men, tortured for their conviction. I foresee multitudes, multitudes of killed, testifying that they have conquered, though they are dead! But ah! I see those who will really suffer—the murderers, those who have the hiss of hate in their hearts!

MUHAMMAD

Qurratu'l-'Ain, are you going mad? What do you mean about my father?

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Listen ! law governs all; those who go against the law are crushed into obedience. Taqi opposes the truth: he will attract to himself the consequence of this action. It is inevitable.

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A Persian Rose Garden

MUHAMMAD

Cease these idle words and answer me. Will you abandon this degrading belief and come back to my home ?

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Hear my pleading, Muhammad, allow me to speak to you of this great Cause, and be a ready listener; then shall our lives be transformed, and together we will uplift the souls of men to vast realities ?

MUHAMMAD

Not one word more will I hear upon this subject !

QURRATU'L-'AIN

Then let me live silently by your side, showing you by my life the beauty of the Bab's commandments.

MUHAMMAD

We cannot be together unless you openly deny this belief; my wife must be spotless before all men !

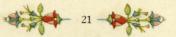
(During these words an uproar arises in the city; it grows, nearer and nearer, louder and louder; the gate is burst open and in rushes AMIN.)

SCENE V

The same. Afterwards AKBAR, NASIR, SHIRAZI, HUSAIN and Soldiers.

AMIN

Horror ! Horror ! Your revered father has been killed.



Act I

