

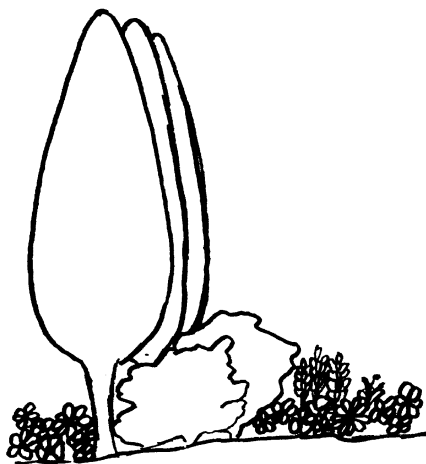
Bahíyyih Khánum, The Greatest Holy Leaf.

(Based on an account of her own childhood by Bahíyyih Khánum in 'The Chosen Highway'.)

Bahíyyih Khánum was the daughter of Bahá'u'lláh. Even when very young she was courageous and strong, but also gentle and very kind. We are told that she is the greatest woman in the `Bahá'í dispensation. Bahá'u'lláh called her 'The Greatest Holy Leaf of the Tree of Life'.



1 The Imprisonment



When she was very young, Bahíyyih Khánum's life was peaceful and happy. She used to play with her brother, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who was two years older than herself. Bahá'u'lláh owned a house in the country where the family sometimes stayed. The children used to play in the gardens where there were beautiful flowers and trees and bushes laden with fruit.

Their mother, Asíyyih Khánum, was kind and understanding to such a degree that other women from the neighbourhood would come to her to tell their troubles and hear her advice. They called her 'Mother of Consolation'. Bahá'u'lláh was also well known for being kind and generous. He was famous for the help He gave to all in

need and was called ‘Father of the Poor’. The Holy Family at this time was very happy and their home was always open to those who needed help.



When Bahíyyih Khánum was six years old everything suddenly changed. At this time ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was eight and they had a little brother, Mírzá Mihdí, who was two.

One day, the children and their mother were together and Bahá’u’lláh, their father, was away looking after the villagers at His country house. Suddenly a servant came running to their mother, and shouted to her in great distress that Bahá’u’lláh had been arrested.

“They have beaten Him!” shouted the frightened servant. “They say he has been tortured! His feet are bleeding and He has no shoes! His clothes are torn and His turban is gone! There are chains upon His neck!”

The children were frightened and cried bitterly. Their mother’s face turned white with shock and fear.

In those days in Persia, if anyone was in trouble in this way, every member of the household was also in danger. Immediately, almost everyone in the house and all those connected with them, fled from the danger of also being arrested and tortured. All the relatives, friends and servants left in terror. Only one faithful servant, named Isfandíyár, and one woman remained. Now that only these few people remained in the big house it was unprotected from thieves. Within a very short time everything of value had been stolen. Nearly all the family treasures, jewels and precious things, as well as their money, were taken.

Luckily, the family was helped by one of Bahíyyih Khánum’s uncles, a brother of Bahá’u’lláh’s, named Mírzá Músá, who helped the family to escape.

They found a small house, where they would be relatively safe, not too far from the prison where Bahá’u’lláh was being kept. Asíyyih Khánum, the children’s mother, had managed to rescue a few precious treasures which she was able to

exchange for money and in this way she managed to get some food to Bahá'u'lláh in prison.

The prison where Bahá'u'lláh was kept chained up was a terrible underground dungeon. Other followers of the Báb had been imprisoned with Him and they were all chained together in this Black Pit, ankle deep in filth, with no light or fresh air. Every day one of the Bábí's was taken from the prison and given to the mob of angry people in the streets to be tortured and put to death. Every day the children, hiding in the house not far from the prison, could hear the dreadful shouts of the crowds and sometimes the cries of the victim. Each day they did not know if this time it was their Father who was suffering so dreadfully.

When night came, their mother would creep out, under cover of darkness, to find out if Bahá'u'lláh was still alive. Sometimes she would take 'Abdu'l-Bahá with her. When this happened, Bahíyyih Khánum, only six years old, was left in charge of her little brother, and would hold him in her arms, shivering with terror, not knowing what terrible thing had happened to her Father, and terrified that something dreadful may have happened also to her mother. But she waited, bravely caring for little Mírzá Mihdí in the dark, and waited, and waited, for her mother and 'Abdu'l-Bahá to come home.

This terrible way of life continued for four long months. Eventually news came that Bahá'u'lláh was to be released from the dungeon. The Family was overjoyed.

