**Zillah Sultán and his Sons**

a story of forgiveness

Juliet Thompson. *'Abdu'l-Bahá - Center of the Covenant*, pp19-20

reprinted in *Vignettes from the Life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, by Honnold, pp 41-42

In 1911 the Master spent a few quiet days in the French Alps, presumably to rest, before continuing to London. Here took place a remarkable encounter which illustrates the universality of His love, even towards those whose hearts ran hostile to Him and to His Father's Cause. Juliet Thompson tells us the following about this occasion which she herself witnessed: 'Monstrously sinned against, too great was He to claim the right to forgive. In His almost off-hand brushing aside of a cruelty, in the ineffable sweetness with which He ignored it, it was a though He said: Forgiveness belongs only to God.

An example os this was His memorable meeting with the royal price, Zillah Sultán, brother of the Sháh of Persia, Muhammad 'Alí Sháh. Not alone, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, but a great number of His followers, band after band of Bahá'í martyrs, had suffered worse than death at the hands of these two princes. When the downfall of the Sháh, with that of the Sultán of Turkey, set 'Abdu'l-Bahá at liberty, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, beginning His journey through Europe, went first to Thonon-les-Bains, on the Lake of Geneva. The exiled Sháh was then somewhere in Europe; Zillah-Sultán, also in exile with his two sons, had fled to Geneva. Thus 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the exonerated and free, and Zillah-Sultán, the fugitive, were almost within a stone's throw of each other.

In the suite of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was a distinguished European who had visited Persia and there met Zillah Sultán. One day when the European was standing on the balustraded terrace of the hotel in Thonon and 'Abdu'l-Bahá was pacing to and fro at a little distance, Zillah Sultán approached the terrace. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was wearing, as always, the turban, the long white belted robe and long 'abá of Persia. His hair, according to the ancient custom of the Persian nobility, flowed to His shoulders. Zillah Sultán, after greeting the European, immediately asked:

"Who is that Persian nobleman?"

" 'Abdu'l-Bahá."

"Take me to him."

In describing the scene later, the European said: "If you could have heard the wretch mumbling his miserable excuses." But 'Abdu'l-Bahá took the prince in His arms. "All that is of the past," He answered. "Never think of it again. Send your two sons to me. I want to meet your sons."

They came, one at a time. Each spent a day with the Master. The first, although an immature boy, nevertheless showed Him great deference. The second, older and more sensitive, left the room of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, weeping uncontrollably. "If only I could be born again," he said, "into any other family than mine."

For not only had many Bahá'ís been martyred during his uncle's reign (upwards of one hundred by his father's instigation), and the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá threatened again and again, but his grandfather, Násiri'd-Din Sháh, had ordered the execution of the Báb, as well as the torture and death of thousands of Bahá'ís.

The young prince was "born again" - a Bahá'í.

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**Version of the same story found in *The Diary of Juliet Thompson*,** pp 172-173

At noon that day [August 25] we had royalty to lunch! Bahrám Mírzá of Persia. Prince Bahrám's father is Zillu's-Sultán, who, as the eldest son of Násirid-Din Sháh, would have succeeded to the throne but that his mother was not of royal blood. It was through the orders of Násirid-Din Sháh that the Báb was executed and thousands of Bábis massacred, while through Zillu's-Sultán's orders those two great Bahá'ís "The King of the Martyrs" and "The Beloved of the Martyrs" and at least a hundred others, met horrifying deaths Now the whole royal family is in exile, Zillu's-Sultán and his sons in Geneva, while 'Abdu'l-Bahá walks free in Thonon - so near!

The day before I arrived, Zillu's-Sultán came over to Thonon for a few hours, and straight to the Hotel Du Parc.

Hippolyte Dreyfus, when he was in Paris, had met this Prince, had visited him in his tent while he - the prince - was on a hunting trip. And now he met with him again on the terrace of the hotel. The Master too was on the terrace, pacing up and down at a little distance. Hippolyte was standing in the doorway when he saw Zillu's-Sultán coming up the steps. The prince apprahced and greeted him, then turned with a startled look toward the Master.

"Who is that Persian nobleman?" he asked

"That," answered Hippolyte, "is 'Abdul-Bahá."

And now Zillu's-Sultán spoke very humbly.

"Take me to Him," he begged.

Hippolyte told me all about it. "If you could have seen the brute, Juliet, mumbling out his miserable excuses. But the Master took him in His arms and said, 'All those things are in the past. Never think of them again.' Then He invited Zillu's-Sultán's two sons to spend a day with him."

And so it was that Prince Bahrám came to lunch.

A beautiful boy - Prince Bahrám - like a Persian miniature. His skin is as smooth as ivory, his straight features finely chiseled, his eyebrows meet in a thin, black line across his nose. But being so young he is wholly unawakened spiritually, and he hasn't any manners at all! After lunch, assuming the privileges of a royal prince and Muhammadan, he stalked out of the room ahead of Laura and me - when the Master, in spite of our protests, had insisted on our preceding Him. However, the Master said later: "Bahrám Mírzá bad nist." [Prince Bahrám is not bad], so *I* can afford to be tolerant.

After lunch, returning to the white and rose-colored room, the Master placed me on His left and the prince on His right and we all had coffee. The coffee was served first to the prince. To my great surprise he rose and offered his cup to me. Too completely disarmed, I immediately "bent over backward," figuratively speaking.

"Won't you keep it?" I asked.

"No," he replied solemnly, "it has two lumps of sugar in it. I don't like two lumps of sugar."

Neither did I!

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Some days later, [the morning of September 4], Zillu's-Sultán's elder son, Sultán Husayn Mírzá, had come to visit the Master. After a long private talk with Him, the prince rushed into Mulk's room [Tamaddunu'l-Mulk was one of the Persian Bahá'ís traveling with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and served as translator], threw himself down on the couch and wept bitterly.

"If only I could be born again," he sobbed, "into any other family than mine! When I think that my own father has massacred to many Bahá'ís; that it was through my grandfather's orders that thousands of Bábis were slaughtered and the Báb Himself executed, I cannot endure the blood that flows in my vein. If only I could be born again!"

Years later, Juliet heard that he HAD been born again - a Bahá'í - and was serving the Cause with great zeal in Persia. His poor young brother, Prince Bahrám, died in the First World War, on a torpedoed ship.