



I Have Seen a Curious Article Which Astonished Me

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MIRZÁ ABU'L-FAZL WAS ILL, bedridden, and sixty-seven years old when the attack on 'Abdu'l-Bahá — published under the title “Baháism: A Warning” — was given to him in Beirut. The article, written by Reverend Peter Z. Easton, had appeared in the September and October, 1911, issue of the British magazine *Evangelical Christendom*. By December it had found its way to Syria.

Defending the Bahá'í religion was nothing new for Abu'l-Fazl. Yet he appeared genuinely taken aback by Reverend Easton's attack. “'Abdu'l-Bahá calls the people of Europe to the lofty attributes of humanity,” Abu'l-Fazl wrote, “but Peter Z. Easton teaches them libels, execration, falsehood and calumnies!”

Mirzá Abu'l-Fazl Gulpáygání was a renowned scholar who had once risen to the highest ranks of the Shí'í Muslim clergy in Persia. His expertise encompassed Islamic and European sciences, rational philosophy, speculative theology, and even Buddhism. But then, in 1876, he became a Bahá'í. He was stripped of his position, imprisoned for four years, and narrowly escaped the campaigns of murder against Bahá'ís in the Middle East.

Abu'l-Fazl began his treatise by questioning Reverend Easton's motives: “Jealousy has caused many to fall from the high station and lofty summit of courtesy,” he wrote. The implication was that Easton was jealous of Archdeacon Wilberforce, who had invited 'Abdu'l-Bahá to his church and prompted Easton's attack.

“Are there not enough revilers, calumniators and prevaricators in the other parts of the world,” Abu'l-Fazl asked, “that such should also appear from Europe?”

“Have not the people of Europe read history?” he added. Easton had based his attack on Bahá'u'lláh on a few questionable sources. The ancient Roman historians, Abu'l-Fazl said, had done exactly the same thing to Christ. Tacitus had accused Christianity of being “the enemy of humanity” without knowing the first thing about it.

Easton had also claimed that Bahá'u'lláh's followers would become "slaves of the most awful despotism which ever showed itself on earth." But, Abu'l-Fazl pointed out, Bahá'u'lláh had designed "the organization of a House of Justice in every city of the world, the members of which . . . shall be elected by the people. Such members must hold their consultations in the utmost purity of conscience and good will."

Finally, the Persian scholar answered Easton's central challenge: "What has Bahá'u'lláh brought which is not found in the Christian religion?"

Abu'l-Fazl had a lot of things to list: the rejection of oral tradition in favor of authenticated, written texts; the obligation to engage in a profession; elevating work to the status of worship; universal compulsory education for both sexes; the abolition of slavery; and democratic, constitutional government.

He then tossed in a few additional ones, among them "the prohibition of haughtiness and egoism," perhaps a final nod to Reverend Easton. The rebuttal now complete, Abu'l-Fazl signed it, and mailed it to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "so that he can, in his wisdom, decide what to do with it."

'Abdu'l-Bahá received the manuscript at 309 West 78th Street in New York on June 19, 1912. He had it translated and printed, and called it *The Brilliant Proof*. "Each one of you should have a copy," he told the Americans. "Read, memorize and reflect upon it. Then, when accusations and criticisms are advanced . . . you will be well armed."

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