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THE "BAHA'I REVELATION": ITS WESTERN ADVANCE.

BY JEAN MASSON.

[The recent consecration of the site for a Bahai temple on the outskirts of Chicago has attracted the attention and interest of students of religious progress to this new faith of Baha'o'llah with its world appeal, its audacious claims, and its marvelous spread. Miss Masson writes from the standpoint of a more than sympathetic spectator, and we have not thought it necessary to put any editorial check upon the enthusiasm of her phrases.—
THE EDITOR.]

THE political activity of Young Turkey has liberated Abbas Effendi, the Master of Acca,* for fifty-six years prisoner, exile, the great exponent of the "Bahai Revelation." The constitution promulgated by the Sultan proclaims liberty, justice, equality, fraternity, religious tolerance. Does this proclamation embrace the Bahai movement? It is a question of interest to Islam, to America, to the world. Islam has fought the movement, has resisted purgation, for more than a half century, since May 23, 1844, the day Mirza 'Ali Muhammad, a young Persian, declared himself the "Gate," or "Bab," the herald of "the Mighty One to Come." Recession from this hostile position is a tremendous step toward the realization of the world peace, the world religion. For this is the *motif* of the Bahai movement.

MANY MILLIONS OF ADHERENTS.

The movement is a prodigious, an irresistible fact. Already has it attained world-wide dimensions. It numbers its adherents by the millions, from every religion and creed and class.

Persia, where public propagandism is prohibited, is percolated with it. "I do not say," said a recent traveler, "that all Persian Bahais are progressive men and optimists, but I do say that all progressive men and optimists whom I met in Persia were Bahais." In India the barriers of caste disintegrate before the Bahai Revelation. Calcutta has a considerable Bahai Assembly. There are Bahais in Bombay, Zoroastrian and Muhammedan converts, once credal enemies, now brothers of the same faith. In Rangoon the Bahai movement has unified the followers of six religions,—Buddhists, Muhammedans, Hindus, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians. Mandalay has several hun-

dred Bahais, for the most, native Burmans. Entire Hebrew communities of the Orient have become Bahai communities. In Russia the Bahai movement has taken enduring hold. Bahai Assemblies are established in Teheran, Cairo, London, Paris, Berlin, Stuttgart.

The movement invaded America in 1893, rapidly spreading over the land. To-day Bahais are found in Canada, and in almost every State of the Union. There are Bahai Assemblies in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles, Oakland, Montreal. So far has the movement advanced that Bahai teachers have gone out from America to Europe, India, Persia.

A FAITH THAT LINKS ORIENT AND OCCIDENT.

It is time to take cognizance of this strange faith encamped in our midst, a faith that fraternally links Orient and Occident, insisting that the world's great religions touch terminals. A faith whose basic tenet, Unity, is actualized.

Is the Bahai Revelation the New Revelation the world awaits? Is the Bahai movement the ultimate religion that shall transplant the great historic faiths, that shall call halt to theologic and human strife?

The Bahai movement by its stupendous claims compels attention: It is the prophetic fulfillment of the world's great religions. Like them, at its center is a dynamic personality—Baha'o'llah. Him the Bahai movement proclaims the manifestation of God for this day. He comes with a great message, a great revelation,—the Word of God to man. He fulfills the expectations of the world: To the Jew he is the Messiah; to the Christian, the return of Christ; to the Muslim, the return of the Imam Mahdi; to the Buddhist, of Buddha; to the Hindu, of Krishna.

* Acca, variously spelled Akka, Acre, St. Jean d'Acre of the Crusaders, Achor of Hosea 2: 15.

A Bahai does not abjure his hereditary faith. Rather, the Bahai Revelation emphasizes the validity of that faith. It asserts that God has revealed His Word to the world through great teachers as the world is prepared to receive it. Time obscures the Word. Human interpretation pollutes it. A reaffirmation is made of the Word, the impregnable Truth in its essence, as after the winter the spring returns newly clothed. Inherent in the Word is the power to transform the world.

To-day man in his maturity is ripe for a completer revelation of Truth than has yet been granted him. The revelation of Baha'o'llah is the response to his need. Through it he enters upon a new cycle of progress and civilization. It ushers in a new dispensation, the seventh great creational day. It is the New Testament of the world. It answers the questions of the ages. It insists upon deeds, purity of action,—this is religion; upon the ancient virtues, justice, truth, love, sacrifice, severance from the world. It provides for no priest-craft, no leaders. It recognizes no class distinctions: "Ye are all leaves of one tree, drops of one sea." It extends its protection to woman, exalting her, emancipating her from the harem, abolishing the historic veil. It offers the final and permanent solution of great social and industrial problems, where human institutions so lamentably fail.

HISTORY OF THE MOVEMENT.

Historically, the Bahai movement sprang from the heart of Mohammedanism. The appearance of the Bab,—May 23, 1844,—disturbed the foundations of Islam. He invited the fate of all great reformers,—persecution, imprisonment, and, at last, on July 9, 1850, martyrdom. He left behind him a great book,—the Persian Beyan. In it he subverted Mohammedan laws and customs. He changed the lunar system of the Persians to the solar, dividing the year into nineteen months of nineteen days each. Days and months named after the names and attributes of God. But the essential fact of the Beyan is its insistence upon "Him whom God shall manifest":

"All the splendor of the Beyan is 'He whom God shall manifest.'" It was but preliminary to the perfected law, the great revelation: "The whole Beyan revolves around the saying of 'Him whom God shall manifest.'" "I swear by the Most Holy Essence of God (glorious and splendid is He!) that in the day of the manifestation of Him whom God shall manifest, if

one should hear a single verse from Him and recite it, it is better than that he should recite the Beyan a thousand times;" Blessed is he who will gaze upon the arrangement of Baha'o'llah, for, verily, He shall inevitably appear."

At the prophetic hour Mirza Huseyn 'Ali, son of the vizier, Mirza Bozork of Nur, assumed the station of "Him whom God should manifest," and the name, Baha'o'llah,—the Glory of God. "O King," he wrote to the Shah, "verily, I have been like any other man sleeping upon my couch; the breezes of the Most Glorious passed over me, and taught me the knowledge of all that has been. This is not from me, but from the Powerful, the Omniscient."

Again Islam was shaken. Persecution succeeded this declaration,—imprisonment in Teheran, exile to Bagdad, to Constantinople, to Adrianople, and, finally, on August 31, 1868, to the prison town of Acca on the coast of Syria. Subsequently he dwelt near the village of Behje. Here he passed away, May 28, 1892.

At Adrianople, in 1862, Baha'o'llah made public declaration of his mission. Thereupon the Babis became Bahais; the Babi cause, the Bahai movement.

ACCA, THE "CENTER OF PROPHECY."

From Acca Baha'o'llah proclaimed his station in epistles to the kings of Europe, to the Shah of Persia, Pope Pius IX., to the President of the United States. Four of these epistles were accorded recognition. Alexander II. of Russia sent a messenger to investigate the claims of Baha'o'llah. Napoleon III. responded, "If he is God, I am two Gods." Queen Victoria,— "If this is of God it will stand, and if not there is no harm done." The Ulama of Persia said: "This man is the opposer of religion and the enemy of the Shah." To which Nasiru'd-Din Shah protested, "This is a question for proofs and arguments and of truth or falsehood; how can it refer to politics? Alas! how much we respected these Ulama, who cannot even reply to this epistle."

For forty years, in books, in tablets, through personal intercourse, as men asked, Baha'o'llah gave abundantly to the world his revelation of truth,—the Word. "Were seekers to be found," he said, "all that hath appeared from the Absolute Penetrative Will should be declared sincerely to please God; but where is the seeker, where is the inquirer, where is the just one?"

He called men to submission: "If ye be

slain for His good pleasure, verily, it is better for you than that ye should slay." He commanded obedience to government: "In every country or government where any of this community reside, they must behave toward that government with faithfulness, trustfulness, and truthfulness." He exhorted the world to peace and unity:

"We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations; . . . that all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened, that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled,—what harm is there in this? Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the most great peace shall come. . . . Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind."

THE BAHÁÍ BOOKS AND COMMANDMENTS.

Among the books of Baha'o'llah are the *Kitab'l Akdas*, with its *Tablets of Explanation*, the *Ighan*, the *Kitab'l 'A'hd*.

The *Kitab'l Akdas* is the *Book of Laws for the world*. It abolishes war. It institutes an international house of justice to act as a tribunal of arbitration; a general house of justice to administer national affairs; and in every city a house of justice, invested with spiritual and temporal power. It commands the establishment in every city of at least one house of prayer,—a *Mashrak-El-Azkar*. It deprecates celibacy, seclusion, asceticism. It prohibits polygamy. It abolishes the confessional. To God only is the absolution of sin. It emphasizes the incumbency of education: "Whosoever educates one of the children of the people who love God, it is as though he has educated one of the branches of the blessed divine tree, and he is worthy of praise, blessing, and mercy of God." It enjoins the creation of a universal language. It ordains penal codes, hygienic laws, regulations to meet the world's conflicting sociologic conditions. It commands individual work, that all should engage in some occupation, some trade, art, profession: "We have made this,—your occupation,—identical with the worship of God, the True One."

The *Ighan*, the *Book of Assurance*, interprets the symbology, lifts the veil that has obscured the scriptures of all religions. It

affirms that each religion has its true prophet; that all prophecy culminates in this day, "the day of Him whom God shall send forth"; and in "his book, which is the return of all the books and their guardian."

The *Kitab'l 'A'hd* is the *Book of the Covenant*. It creates Abbas Effendi, the eldest son of Baha'o'llah, "the Center of the Covenant." He is known to Baháís as 'Abdu'l-Baha,—the *Servant of God*. To him they turn as their spiritual guide, the interpreter of the revelation of Baha'o'llah.

ABDUL BAHÁ, "THE MASTER."

'Abdu'l-Baha was born May 23, 1844, the day of the Bab's proclamation. He shared the exile and imprisonment of Baha'o'llah. Until the recent political agitation in Turkey he was a prisoner in Acca, stringently confined during the months immediately preceding the Sultan's firman of amnesty. The Baháí movement, essentially spiritual, has yet its enemies, is yet accused of political motives. The spiritual affiliations of 'Abdu'l-Baha encircle the world. About his table have gathered in love pilgrims from all lands and all religions. Here, in the presence of this great servant of the world, unity and peace are achieved, while men and nations dream of unity, theorize concerning peace, increase their navies, their devices for mutual destruction.

America promises eventually to become a mighty stronghold of the movement. A Baháí House of Spirituality has been organized within the Chicago Assembly,—a body of men, chosen by the society, whose function approximates spiritually to that of the future house of justice. Baháí literature is printed and widely distributed by the Baháí Publishing Board, operative in Chicago in conjunction with the Baháí Counsel Board of New York.

Russia,—Ashkabad,—adhering to the command of the *Kitab'l' Akdas*, erected in 1906 the first *Mashrak-El-Azkar* of the world. America is a close second. North of the city limits of Chicago, overlooking Lake Michigan, a picturesque site has been chosen for the erection of the second Baháí temple of the world, monument to universal peace, to the universal faith,—the revelation of Baha'o'llah.