

Our Own Times

A CONTINUOUS HISTORY OF THE
TWENTIETH CENTURY

Edited by HAZLITT ALVA CUPPY *and*
A BOARD OF SPECIAL EDITORS

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was assailed from the outside as a delusion. But whatever the value of its contentions, at the beginning of the new century it was enforcing attention by virtue of its growth.

Zionism

The development of a national self-consciousness among the Jews during the closing years of the Nineteenth Century was strikingly manifested in the progress of the movement called Zionism. Among the wealthier Jews there were apostates, though there were more, rich and poor, who became atheistic or indifferent. But the mass of the Jewish people felt a new sense of racial unity and clung to the old faith. Under the leadership of Doctor Theodor Herzl they began to organize with a view to establishing a Jewish commonwealth in Palestine. The plan was first to secure the necessary rights and guarantees, and then to send to Palestine the poor or homeless Jews while their more prosperous fellows remained in the homes of their adoption. Gradually in this way the commonwealth was to be built up.

The Zionist conference, which began its sessions at Basle, Switzerland, December 26, 1901, had not been fully reported at the close of the year. But among the earlier addresses that of Max Nordau may be summarized. The Jews, argued Doctor Nordau, should stop emigrating to America, and the funds thus saved should be used to create a workmen's coöperative organization, which would educate poor Jews for the industries they had been accustomed to learn in the sweatshops of London and New York. Even the poorest Jews want to work, he continued; they are not paupers in the scientific sense of the word, though the world restricts them in the exercise of their abilities. Economically the Jew is in the position of a barbarian, but he has needs, created by civilization and by his religion. The Zionist movement is the protest of a bondsman—the claim of a slave that he has rights of equality. Self-reliance and the re-peopling of Palestine would ameliorate the condition of the race. Doctor Nordau also criticized the rich Jews, saying that, with some exceptions, the richer a Jew became, the smaller was his interest in the advancement of his race.

Babism

The introduction into the United States of that offshoot of Mohammedanism known as Babism has drawn considerable interest to a hith-

erto little-understood sect. In the early nineties a Doctor Kheiralla brought Babism to America. He gave a series of talks about the religion and succeeded in winning a number of adherents, though the American Babists soon split up into various schisms, closely following those which already existed in Asiatic Turkey. In 1901 the adherents of Babism were estimated at about one million, of whom about three thousand were in the United States.

The origin of Babism has been traced to the Shiites, the Mohammedan sect which holds that Ali, first cousin of Mohammed and husband of his daughter Fatima, was the first legitimate successor of the Prophet. The other great division of the faith—the Sunnites, or “orthodox Mohammedans”—accept the Sunna, or body of traditional laws and teachings, not contained in the Koran, but recorded by the Prophet's first disciples or drawn by inference from the Koran.

The Shiites, or at least part of them, maintain that after Mohammed there were twelve Imams (leaders), of whom eleven lived and died on earth. The twelfth—Imam Mahdi—disappeared, but was expected to reappear at the suitable time and inaugurate the Mohammedan millennium. Imam Mahdi, who was lost to mortal eyes in the year 940 A.D., continued to communicate with the Mohammedans through chosen men who were called Bab, or Gate. There were four of these Babs. After the death of the fourth no more was heard from Imam Mahdi for many hundred years.

Early in the last century a young man named Mirza Ali Mohammed announced himself as a new Bab. During a ministry of six years he denounced the immorality and worldliness of the Mohammedan authorities and taught the importance of upright living. Put to death by the Persian Government in 1848, he left many followers, who shortly afterward were driven out of Persia by persecution and established a little colony at Bagdad. From 1850 to 1864 the nominal head of the Babists was Subh-i-Ezel. He was supplanted by his half-brother, Beha, who thus divided the Bagdad colony into two sects which warred upon each other so bitterly that in 1868 the Turkish Government separated them, sending Subh-i-Ezel to Cyprus and Beha to Acre.

Beha died in 1892, leaving four sons, of whom the two oldest founded rival sects. Abbas Effendi, the oldest, is held by many believers to be a divine incarnation, as was his father before him.