



The SPELL *of*
THE HOLY LAND

BY
Archie Bell

CALIFORNIA



With eight plates in full colour and many
duogravures from photographs by

E. M. NEWMAN

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GIFT OF

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colony he said he was so delighted that he would grant them an annual subsidy of four thousand marks. Verily, here was an emperor worthy of the name, and all Palestine rang with his praises. We found but one place where his impressive dignity seemed to have received a check. At the tomb of Saladin he signified a desire to honour the hero by placing a wreath of flowers at his head. And, afterwards, he sent back a wreath that would not wither, to take the place of his flowers. The Moham-medan authorities would not permit flowers from a Christian to defile this tomb perpetually, so a little alcove was built on one side of the tomb, and the Emperor's tribute was placed behind glass where it could be seen by visitors to the tomb and yet not be within the tomb itself. But a more important result of the Emperor's visit was that since he came and went, the Turkish officials have given the German colonists less trouble, they have been less extortionate in the collection of "taxes" and have taken fewer exceptions to the improvements of "infidels" who are considered their most natural prey.

But Haifa has nothing to hold pilgrims and travellers long, although a German hotel-keeper assured me that the time would come when European people would hold its advantages over

those of Mediterranean cities like Algiers and make of it a fashionable winter resort. Perhaps if some of the travellers, those seeking climate and novelty instead of holy places, knew what they were going into, when they plunge into the interior of Palestine, they would stay longer beneath the protecting shadow of the German eagle in the hospitable German hotels. But it lacks historical interest, so people who land here from the boats that cruise along the Syrian shore from Port Saïd, Alexandria and European ports, hurry off to Mount Carmel or inland, after perhaps making the excursion to the very interesting city of Acre, which lies about six miles across the bay.

I went to Acre chiefly because I thought I would find there a prisoner of Turkey whom I wished very much to see, Abbas Effendi, the Persian head of the Bahia Movement, or the Babists and Babites, as they are called in America. Chance favoured me, and I found him elsewhere, but in Acre I was informed that he had been released, after a confinement of something like forty years, and, being a free man, he had immediately left Acre, which seems to be a city at the end of the world, an unhealthful city, owing to its position by a big marsh from which malarial odours constantly rise, and a city

to which the former Sultan of Turkey, Abdul Hamid, condemned all his political suspects, religious leaders and the men of action whom he wanted to be watched day and night.

St. Paul once spent a day at Acre (Acts xxi : 7) but the biblical account may mean that he merely called within the city gates. It would be difficult to imagine a Christian spending an entire day there unless he was obliged to do so. Along with Nablus, it is one of the most fanatical cities in Syria. Most of the inhabitants seem either to be political prisoners, the descendants of prisoners, or soldiers guarding prisoners. And they are practically all rampant Mohammedans. They spit at Christians and hurl vile epithets at them. After enduring a morning of it, I asked the dragoman how it was that such apparently ignorant people could tell that we were Christians.

“Neither of you have a moustache or chin whiskers,” he replied. “You observe they all have hair on their faces, as they are commanded to have. People who do not have, are dogs.”

It is possible to sail across the bay in less than two hours, but we preferred the unique journey by land, because the road between Haifa and Acre is merely the broad beach of the bay, and

CHAPTER XVIII

MEETING A PROPHET

ONE morning as I was walking along the beach of the Sea of Galilee, just beyond Tiberias, thinking of the important events in history that had transpired on those sands, and of the fishermen who had been called from their nets to carry a new gospel to the world about two thousand years ago, I met a man whose appearance was more striking than any man I have ever seen in my life. He was a comparatively short old gentleman with long white beard. He wore a long white robe that reached to his ankles and a white turban covered the top of his head. Doubtless I stared at him in amazement; he was so different from any human being I had ever seen. He was walking slowly, his head slightly bowed, and evidently in deep thought. But he looked up, saw me looking at him, and then raised his hand to his forehead in Oriental salutation as he passed. I was alone, and, believing him to be some personage of Tiberias, I admit walking slowly be-



ABBAS EFFENDI (ABDUL BAHÁ).

hind him until we reached the city, and, as I conveniently met a dragoman, I inquired as to the identity of the old gentleman who attracted me.

“That’s Abbas Effendi,” he replied, “Abdul Baha.”

Here then, on the sands of Galilee, I had come face to face with the Persian prophet, one who during his lifetime has millions of zealous followers, and one whom his followers believe has fully as much scriptural prophecy to fortify his claims to leadership among men as did the Man of Nazareth. Like Jesus Christ, he has been persecuted and has suffered on account of his preaching. Like Jesus Christ, he had come to the Sea of Galilee to walk up and down its holy shores, preaching and teaching his disciples, who follow him as he walks and talks. Already much myth and legend is springing up around him, for he is the holiest man of the East, despised by many, cursed by the fanatical followers of other religions, and loved by believers in him with a love that becomes devotion itself.

Abbas Effendi, as he is known in the East, or Abdul Baha, as he is better known in America, is the recognized head of the Bahai Movement, as he said he preferred to have his religion called, although it may be more familiar in some quarters when spoken of as the cult of

the Babists. He is a person of tremendous magnetism. One "feels" him when in his presence. Irrespective of his religious teachings, the wise men of the earth, who have met him, have considered him one of the wisest who lives. And he has met the distinguished men of all nations. They have visited him in his prison home at Acre, as they visited Tolstoi at his farm in Russia. Men like William J. Bryan have made it a part of their pilgrimage of Palestine to call upon him and pay their respects. Wise doctors from Europe have called upon him to discuss philosophy, as it is taught in the East, and they have found that he has absorbed all the philosophies of the European continent, knows practically all about all the religions of the world, and is able to discuss each with its leaders, while to every one who meets him he speaks, not of the error of other men's ways, but graphically and poignantly explains to every man how his religion is but a part of that great universal religion which he himself preaches and believes is soon to cover the world.

But the dragoman who disclosed the interesting identity admitted that he was powerless when I told him that I desired to be presented, owing to the fact that Abbas Effendi speaks only the Persian language. Then, unwilling to let

what I considered an opportunity to pass, I addressed one of his followers in English, and as chance would have it, I spoke to his interpreter, a Persian gentleman who had been for ten years attached to the Persian legation at Washington. Certainly he would present me. There was no hesitation as he quickly took me to the side of his master, bowed profoundly and introduced me. The old man held out his hand and touched mine. "I am pleased," he said, "very pleased to meet one from far away America. I am very glad that you have come to these foreign countries to learn and observe, that you may go back to your own country knowing more of the world than you could know if you remained in one country. I am glad that I have met you in this hallowed and beautiful place, the Sea of Galilee's shores. I trust that your visit here will be pleasant, and that you will continue your journey and return to your home in safety."

There seemed to be finality to his words. It seemed that my "interview," which I craved, was over, for the old man started along, after raising his hand to his forehead as a sign of farewell. So I pressed the interpreter to request another interview for me, at a more convenient time, perhaps, when I could talk to the wise man and learn something of his teachings.

“Abbas Effendi will be pleased if you will call upon him at his home up there at three o’clock this afternoon,” said the interpreter, as he pointed to a little white house near the lake, with an overhanging balcony that had a view over the whole extent of the sea. Thus ended my first meeting. Fortunately for me there were three others. Together we walked slowly along the sands and together we sat on his little balcony near sunset and I heard of that great new religion which is to reconcile the whole world. He told me of his millions of followers in Persia (the English officials fifteen years ago estimated the number as between three and four millions in Persia alone) and he told me of the thousands who are flocking to his banner in India, but he seemed to me even more interested in his message to Europe and America. “Particularly America,” he said, “for there is the new country, one that is not weighed down by superstitions and prejudices which are so difficult to overcome. America is a receptive country, capable of seeing and hearing and believing.”

And while Abbas Effendi, himself, did not care to give any figures, because he said that there was no way of knowing the exact truth, his interpreter told me that they were of the opinion

that there were about fifty thousand converts to the Bahai Movement in America, their strongholds being in Chicago, Boston and Washington. At Chicago he had heard the Bahais had purchased a large tract of land just outside of the city and would soon erect a church. In Europe many churches had been built, and Abbas Effendi was recently pleased to learn that in the Caucasus a million-dollar structure had been completed by his people, and had naturally become the finest structure devoted to the cult in the world, because in Persia, where numbers are greater, the people are poor and up until this time are obliged to meet in central halls and rooms.

It was not known at the time of his birth that Abbas Effendi would be the leader of the Bahais, nor was it known at the time of his birth that his father, Baha O'llah, would be later hailed as the Light of the World, but, strangely enough, Abbas Effendi was born in the year that the Bab, or Herald of the new religion, appeared in Persia and proclaimed his message to the world. As usual in such cases considerable misinformation has circulated around the world in regard to Bahatism, its founder, Baha O'llah, and his son, Abbas Effendi, and their relative positions in the religion, so I questioned Abdul Baha

carefully in the matter during our walks and talks and learned from the best source of all just exactly what is believed in regard to the Bab, from whom the cult takes its name. And strangely enough, as it seemed to me, I was told that the Bab did not claim to have founded the religion, although he suffered martyrdom for his declarations, and is held in holy esteem by all believers, but merely announced that he was the "gate," which is the translation of "Bab," a sort of John the Baptist, who proclaimed to the world that the "One whom God would manifest," etc., was at that time upon the earth, but unknown. The Bab said that the coming Great One would in time announce himself to the world, and he believed that the Christ would declare His mission in not more than nineteen years.

The Bab was hanged and shot. The father of Abbas Effendi—the "Great One," as he is known—never saw him, and perhaps knew little concerning him. But in nineteen years he called his family together, when they were upon a journey, and announced who he was. Soon afterward he was sent into exile and there remained the rest of his life. But, before he died, *this* man who is known as Baha O'llah (Light of God), called his son to him, stretched forth his

hands and declared that Abbas Effendi should be considered the Servant of God, indeed one with himself. To his followers he quoted: "I will make him, my first born, greater than the kings of the earth," using the Hebrew Bible, strangely enough, because he thought no more of it than of the words of Buddha, the creed of the Zoroastrians, of the words of Mahomet and Jesus Christ. Thus Abbas Effendi, unsuspecting that such was to be the case, became the head of the movement, and he has been considered so until this day. He has been freed by the Young Turks after having been held as a political prisoner for forty years. He was particularly despised by Abdul Hamid; but, now that the Sultan has found his reward, Abbas Effendi may go where he pleases. Thus I found him on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, where he believes that he is completing his mission, and where, owing to his years, he must soon end his earthly life.

Before I saw Abbas Effendi the second time I had quite a lengthy interview with his secretary and close friend, Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, the brilliant young Persian who is devoted to the head of the Bahaists and spends his entire life in his company. He admitted to me that a close record is being kept of everything of im-

portance that is uttered by the "Renovator of the Worlds," as he is known to his followers. Abbas Effendi has written much, but it is not from his writings so much as from what he says that his disciples gain that faith which is prompting them to undergo persecutions and sufferings for the sake of the new movement.

Abbas Effendi is a dynamo of energy. He was born in 1844, and is therefore an old man. His life as a prisoner might have left him a physical wreck, but instead of that he seems to have undergone an almost superhuman recuperation. He rises early in the morning, receives visitors of all nationalities and creeds during the day, often attends the services of the Jews in the synagogues, goes to prayer with the Moslems in their mosques, and attends Christian churches. He carries on a correspondence with his followers in all parts of the world, and directs any number of momentous affairs; but his secretary tells me that after the affairs of his busy day are over he will often call him, assure him that he is not weary, and will either read, dictate or talk until far into the hours of the night. He knows not fatigue, but attendance upon him often wearies the younger men, who carefully record his sayings and habits, day and night.

The first time I called upon him in his temporary home, overlooking the Sea of Galilee, he arose to greet me, and then motioned me to be seated as he called to a servant to bring me a glass of tea. "Perhaps you do not like tea," he said, "but this is Persian tea and there is a difference. I assure you that this is worth drinking." When I inquired as to his health, he assured me that he had not felt so strong for many years. Instead of undermining his constitution, his long imprisonment at Acre seems to have had the opposite effect. All of the latent energy of his young manhood seems to have been stored up for the present. He said he had no complaints to make. His life had been nothing but one succession of troubles. He had been an exile, as his father had been before him. But he spoke of these things in a soft and gentle voice.

"Why," he asked, "why is it that you come to see me? You say you write for American readers. People of the world care to hear more about the successful and beloved men of the world, so why do you not speak to them? I am an outcast among men, for I have been until now a political prisoner—and I am the son of a prisoner."

But he did not exactly mean what he said,

because he willingly talked of himself and of his religion, and replied to questions, many of which he must have answered many times. Over and again he said that his was not a new religion. "Bahatism is simply a message," he would repeat, "its prophecies are readily explained by all religions. We strongly forbid all leadership, hence the Bahais remain unorganized and make no proselytes, but teach that each person shall live among his neighbours, until his life tells silently that he is a Bahai."

Briefly summed up, however, and robbed of the beautiful rhetoric in which Abbas Effendi is able to clothe his sentences—I wished afterward that I had received his permission to jot down what he said in shorthand—he is preaching a universal religion which includes about every known creed of the well-known religions. His aim seems to reconcile everything. He preaches equal suffrage for men and women. He would have a universal language, and told me that he believed Esperanto would do, after a few changes had been made in the present system. He has lectured one evening before a meeting of Socialists and agreed with them in many essentials. The next night it happened that he lectured before a large audience in a room next to their cathedral. He agrees with the Moslems,

and discusses at length with them the teachings of their prophets in whom he believes. He accepts Jesus Christ as the Son of God and an inspired Prophet. He believes in almost everything that is taught by orthodox Jews. He believes that Buddha was an inspired prophet. The same honour is given to Confucius, while he has a strong leaning toward Zoroaster.

Oh, this man can discourse learnedly upon the philosophy of Herbert Spencer, Kant and Schopenhauer. Also he can speak learnedly of those Eastern philosophers of whom we of the West have never even heard the names.

I asked him if he included Christian Science in his apparently all-reaching and all-embracing religion.

“I find gems of truth in what Mrs. Eddy said,” he replied, “and these things I include and accept. But there are many exaggerations in what she taught. I say to you, if you have a mental ailment, it can be cured by thought. If you have a physical ailment or a broken bone, I would say to you, ‘quickly send for a doctor.’ Earthly trouble can be cured only by earthly means and has not to do with God.”

“Is the day of miracles over, or will other miracles occur in the future?”

“You mean, I take it, things which we believe

at present to be contrary to natural law?" I replied in the affirmative.

"To that question, I shall only reply, I believe that everything is possible with God at any time."

Then, as if wishing to turn the conversation to other subjects, he said in polite Oriental fashion: "It is beautiful to be young and free, so you may travel around the world and see the beautiful things of the earth."

And I recalled on that last day, when I saw him, that he said the same thing. As I came down to the beach to take a little boat that carried me across the Sea of Galilee where I took a train, he came to bid me farewell and repeated the same words, as he raised his hands in benediction and added: "You will have a safe voyage across the great sea that takes you to your home. It is beautiful to be young and free, to go where you will." And, lifting up his white robe, he turned and walked along the sand, which seems to have a fascination for him, followed by three or four of his disciples.

"There may be a light in a room, but it merely sheds light in that room," he said. "There may be many lights, with coloured bulbs of various hues and shades. But the source of all those lights is the same—and there must be sources; it

is the dynamo that is hidden from sight. So it is with all the religions. They sparkle here and there in various colours—but there is but one source for them all, just one Light, and that is God. Self-seeking preachers and teachers have wandered far from that Real Light. And it is the Light that we now seek in the real truth. Men have wandered far from the teachings of Christ, Buddha, the Jewish prophets and all of the others. Ours is not a new religion, it is the very old one; we desire to unite all forms in their original purity.”

Then I spoke of his persecutions.

“What is it for one man to suffer?” he asked. “It is as nothing. If one man may enjoy little comfort on earth and at the same time be leading many men to see the Light—ah, that is the thing!”

He said that his religion should have no paid ministers. He teaches, and he expects those whom he teaches to do likewise, without money. They should perform this service in addition to whatever else they do in life.

Mizra Ali Mohmed, who was born in 1819 in a little city in Persia, at the age of twenty-four declared himself to be the “Bab” or door. His first declaration was made before a concourse of one hundred thousand pilgrims in Mecca, and

when he returned to his native home his cause spread so rapidly that he gave great alarm to the officials. But he persistently declared that it was merely through him that the announcement was made to the world that a "Messiah" was already on earth and would manifest himself in nineteen years. The Bab was condemned to death by hanging and shooting. He was hung up with one of his secretaries and soldiers were ordered to fire. The secretary was killed, but a bullet hit the rope by which the Bab was hanging and let the body fall to the earth, whereupon the soldiers, who were Armenians, believed that a miracle had happened and ran away. When the Bab was again arrested he was dictating letters to another secretary, and such was the superstition that it was difficult to obtain soldiers who would again attempt to perform the deed. But he was executed, and his body was removed by stealth from Persia, brought all the way on camel-back and interred on Mount Carmel, where Abbas Effendi has erected a suitable monument and placed the body of his father. He attempted to erect a church over the two graves, but the Turkish government would not permit him to do so.

Mirza Hussian Ali, now known as Bah O'llah, was born in 1817 of a family that belonged to the

ruling class at Teheran. At the age of twenty-seven he heard of the teachings of the Bab and began to preach his gospel. His property was confiscated and he was thrown into a dungeon, where he remained for four months. But the "cause" continued to spread, and the authorities banished him from Teheran to Bagdad, where great numbers of pilgrims came to hear him. It was while on the trip between the two cities that he called his family to him and announced that he was the promised Messiah and for that he was being persecuted. Abbas Effendi told me feelingly how his father made this announcement to his mother and himself as they were seated in an orchard at their midday meal.

The report spread, and the authorities of Arabia became aroused and had him banished to Constantinople, thinking that his cause would die. Instead, it grew, and spread so rapidly that the Sultan banished him to Acre, the penal colony in Syria. There he died in 1892, after having announced to the world that Abbas Effendi was the Coming One of whom the Bab had prophesied, the one to come in the latter days and establish God's Kingdom on earth. Then the son was thrust into prison and remained in the military barracks for three years with insufficient food. Finally, he was permitted to

live outside the walls, but always under the military guard. Thus he lived for forty years, until he was released by the Young Turks. He went to prison a young man, and he was released an old man. He was thrust into a Turkish jail before he had the rudiments of education, but he came out so learned that the sages of civilized nations were astonished at his grasp of affairs and knowledge of the world and its life, religion, science, history and practical reforms which were needed at once.

He says that many of his followers are yet confined within prison walls and are being persecuted, having only secret communication with the outside world. When a party of Americans visited him in 1900, the Bahai movement began to spread throughout the Western world and it has made rapid strides in that time, although numerically his following is greatest in Persia, where religious beliefs mean more than they do in the West. Several of the government officials have advocated encouraging the movement among the Persians and Indians, as its tendency is to make all classes less fanatical and to bring all religious sects and creeds into a closer fellowship and completely break down caste, which is such an important factor in Oriental life.

And that, in a nutshell, was what I gained

from my interviews with Abbas Effendi himself. He believes that Christ taught "love thy neighbour as thyself." He believes that Mohammedans, Jews, Buddhists and Zoroastrians were taught the same thing, and that not one of them is doing as they were taught. Thus he would become the great "renovator" or conciliator. He would bring all men together in a spirit of brotherly love—and he would raise the status of women—particularly in the East, so that they might have an equal standing with males. And as Queen Victoria wrote to his father in 1869: "If this is of God, it will stand; and if not, there is no harm done."

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