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NEW RELIGIONS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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IV. BABISM.

IN endeavoring to present any clear and complete view of this mystical nineteenth-century faith it is necessary to trace some of the preceding movements in Persia and the East, some of which date far back in the past.

In the general schism of the Mohammedan faith, the members of the Persian sect that maintains the legitimate succession of the descendants of Ali are known as the Shiitas, as distinguished from the Sunnites or orthodox Moslems of the Turkish Empire. They have always shown a degree of mysticism doubtless borrowed from India and a general spirit of revolt against the strict and uncompromising requirements of the Koran. In 817 A.D. there arose a school known as the followers of Babek, who taught the doctrine of incarnation and, as one phase of this doctrine, the successive reappearances of the imam, or the spiritual successors of Ali, who with his sons Hassan and Hosein had been murdered after the battle of Ar-bela. In accordance with this doctrine, he or his successor is supposed to exist in spiritual form, tho not always visible among men. In A.D. 891 a sect arose known as the Karmathians, who, following out the teachings of Babek, reached the pantheistic conclusion that all distinctions between good and evil are imaginary and needless. Under the influence of these teachings, coupled with an enthusiastic devotion to the memory of Ali, this sect became very powerful in Arabia and Egypt, and in the year 909 A.D. it established what was known as the Fatimite dynasty at Cairo. In 920 they captured Mecca and carried off the sacred stone which is worshiped in connection with the Kaaba.

There was established at Cairo under this dynasty (which continued until the year 1171) a great university in which the mysticism and pantheism of the Shiite sect were taught without reserve. Under the influence of these teachings arose the Syrian sect of Druses, who reject all moral obligations toward any but their own clan. Another outcome of the same pernicious doctrine was the "Order of the Assassins," which under the leadership of Hassan Ben Saba established itself in a mountain fastness of Persia, and for a century and a half spread terror among the courts and chief cities of the East.

Mirza Ali Mohammed, who was born October 9, 1820, in the city of Shiras, began to manifest some time before the year 1844 a devout and meditative character. He had spent considerable time at Karbala in attending the lectures of Seyed Kazim, a leader of the Shaiki sect, who emphasized the doctrine that pure and holy men are often impersonations of the Deity. Following the suggestion of an expected imam, Mirza Ali Mohammed came to look upon himself as the forerunner of "one whom God should manifest." Accordingly on the 23d of May, 1844, he publicly announced his mission as a divine teacher and guide. He was wise as well as modest in not claiming at first to be himself the manifestation, but only the Bab ed Din, the "Gate of the Faith." He held himself aloof from the pleasures of the world and seemed to possess a peculiar magnetism and won disciples with great rapidity. In 1845, after returning from a pilgrimage to Mecca and after a season of prolonged meditation in the old mosque of Kufa, in which Ali had been slain, he

visited Bushire, bearing with him a journal of his pilgrimage and commentaries on certain parts of the Koran. He displayed great intellectual activity and very marked ability. His greatest work was the publication of the Beyan, the Babi Bible. He attracted so much attention that the reigning Shah sent one of his most learned doctors to interview him and report the result. This man was so charmed with the Bab that he became a disciple. A leading mollah also sent a messenger to ascertain the facts. He was so impressed by the tidings brought to him together with some other writings of the Bab that he also became a disciple. But by this time strong opposition was aroused on all hands. For his strictures on the mollahs he was confined to his house and forbidden to preach, tho he gave private instruction. Three special devotees became his zealous missionaries. One of these, a beautiful Persian woman, stung with the wrongs visited upon her sex, threw off the constraint in which women were held and became a powerful preacher and an enthusiastic advocate of the Bab. This earnest propaganda, tho exceedingly fanatical, was characterized by truth and good morals. Just at the time when an apostate Mormonism was degrading the Christian women of America, Babism was struggling to emancipate the Mohammedan women of Persia from the thralldom with which polygamy had cursed them for a thousand years. In 1848 the followers of Bab proclaimed their leader as the "Universal Sovereign." From that time he was called "The Point," the focus toward which all previous dispensations had converged. The movement was soon proscribed, and the Bab was imprisoned for eighteen months, and about the year 1850 he and one of his most devoted followers were hung by the arm pits over a lofty wall. His follower died

of his sufferings, but the Bab fell to the earth still alive, and was despatched in an adjacent guardhouse.

In this case, as in all others in like circumstances, the martyrdom of the Bab established the success of his cause. He was a real martyr, a sufferer for philanthropy's sake, and not a corrupter of public morals, lynched for his crimes, as was the founder of the Mormon Church in America. But some of his followers, rendered desperate by his cruel death, were prepared for violent measures. Accordingly in 1852 three of them attempted to assassinate the Shah. This led to a fierce persecution, during which multitudes of Babis were put to death with horrible tortures. Among those who suffered was the beautiful Kurat 'l Ayn, who had braved all dangers in her eloquent appeals for the emancipation of her sex. She is represented as the most remarkable and renowned of the Bab's disciples—a person of marvelous beauty, possessed of high intellectual gifts, eloquent, devoted, and fearless. Mr. Edward Sell, author of "The Faith of Islam," says: "Her romantic career, her marvelous power, and her tragic end will long continue to give strength to the Babi cause, and the spirit of endurance to its followers." The persecution in which her career so sadly ended has been characterized by Renan as one of unrivaled atrocity. He says: "The day of the great slaughter of the Babis in Teheran was perhaps a day unparalleled in the history of the world." He quotes from a French author to the following effect: "Women and children, with lighted candles stuck into their wounds, were driven along with whips, and as they went they sang: 'We came from God, and to God we return.'" Altho there has been no subsequent persecution equal to that which occurred in 1852, yet there have been outbreaks of violence against the Babis of greater or

less extent in 1878, 1888, 1889, and even as recently as 1903. The London *Times* published an account of extensive massacres which occurred on June 27-28, 1903, in the province of Yezd, in Southern Persia.

In 1849, a year before the death of the Bab, he designated a disciple named Tahya, also known as Subh Ajel, as his successor. This man, at the time of the massacre, fled to Bagdad, where his right of succession was recognized. But in 1853 an older brother, named Mirza Husein Beha, on escaping from prison, joined him in Bagdad and became his assistant. Gradually, by his superior force of character and by well-planned intrigue, Beha became his successful rival. As the ruling Shah objected to the residence of these two disturbers so near the Persian border, they were removed by the Turkish authorities, in 1864, to Adrianople. But the strife between their respective partisans becoming more and more deadly, the two aspirants were separated two years later, and Beha was exiled to Acre, and Ajel to the Island of Cyprus. The next year (1867) Beha boldly claimed to be the "one to whom the Bab had referred as him whom God should manifest." His cause was greatly strengthened by the death of his rival, which occurred in 1880. From that time to the date of Beha's own death in 1892, the opposition of the Ajelites party, whose headquarters were at Famagusta in Cyprus, steadily declined. And as Beha had ceased to be the forerunner or "Door," which the name Bab implied, and had become the very "one whom God should manifest," his followers now called their system Behaism. They maintained that Beha held to the Bab the same relation that Christ held to John the Baptist. They said of him: "Beha had come for the perfecting of the law of Christ; and his injunctions are in all respects similar,

they are the same throughout, and indeed could not be otherwise, for Beha is Christ returned again."

Upon the death of Beha in 1892, at the age of 72 years, his eldest son, Abbas Effendi, became his successor, tho not without fierce contention on the part of his two younger brothers. He now resided at Haifa, near Mount Carmel. Rev. Dr. H. H. Jessup published in *The Outlook* June 22, 1901, an interesting account of a visit which he had paid to Abbas Effendi at his home, where he found him surrounded by about seventy or eighty followers, who always bow in worship wherever they meet him. When asked by Dr. Jessup whether he regarded Christ as the Son of God, he promptly replied: "Yes, I do; I believe in the Trinity." To the question, "Do you accept Christ as your Savior?" he said, "Yes"; "and do you believe that He will come again to judge the world"? "Yes." Yet notwithstanding the readiness of these answers, he left the impression that he accepted the truths of the New Testament only in some mystical sense. In reply to the question whether he allowed his followers to worship him as divine, according to the current rumors, he answered evasively and seemed inclined to turn the subject. He certainly did not embrace the opportunity afforded him to deny such statements.

Dr. Jessup expresses his amazement and disgust at the fanaticism of American women who visit Abbas Effendi as pilgrims. He says: "One woman who passed through Beirut, en route for the Abbas Effendi shrine, stated that she was 'an agnostic, and found that a failure. Next she tried theosophy, and found that too thin. Then she tried Christian Science and obtained a diploma authorizing her to heal the sick and raise the dead, and had found that a

sham.' And now she was on her way to see what Abbas had to offer."

The fact that so many Americans—mostly women—are seeking the shrine of Babism, and that several organizations have already been formed in this country, will justify a quotation of the following account of the introduction of Babism to our shores:

"Some years since [says Dr. Jessup] Dr. Ibrahim Kheirulla, an educated Syrian of great mental acumen, conceived the idea of introducing Beha-Babism into the United States. He declared Beha to be the Messiah returned to earth and Abbas to be his reincarnation. He visited Abbas, and from time to time, as his accredited agent and promoter, has brought his disciples, chiefly American, to visit Abbas, and some of them at least have bowed down and worshiped him as the Messiah. A cousin of Dr. Kheirulla, who is clerk of the American press in Beirut, has given me the following statement:

"The doctor, after the death of his first wife in Egypt in 1882, married first a Coptic widow in El Fayum whom he abandoned, and then married a Greek girl, whom he also abandoned and who was still living in 1897 in Cairo. He was at the World's Parliament in Chicago, and tried to promote several mechanical inventions. At one time he was worth £3,000. He then obtained the degree of doctor, and taught mental philosophy. He then helped a Greek priest, Jebara, in publishing a book on the unity of Islam and Christianity, which fell flat and had no influence on the public mind. He then opened a medical clinic to cure nervous diseases by the laying on of hands. He afterward went to Chicago and tried trade, and then teaching and preaching, and pretty much everything else. He is a smart talker, full of plausible argument, and can make white appear black. Of late he has had little to do with religion. It can be said to his credit that, after receiving aid in Beirut College, he paid back the money advanced to him."

As one of the five or six new religions which have arisen during the nineteenth century, Babism (we prefer the broader name) stands relatively high in moral purity and in spiritual influence. It must be acknowledged as a reform movement rising far above the moral grade of either Islam or the mysticism of the Sufi, from both of which

it has borrowed. Compared with our American Mormonism, it is immensely superior in moral purity, sincerity, and spiritual aspiration. It claims hundreds of thousands—Mr. Curzon says a million—of adherents in the East, and boasts several organizations in this country. True to the general fact that all the new religions have borrowed something from Christianity, Babism has found in the New Testament proofs of its divine authority which no Persian ever dreamed of. For example, a pamphlet published by Messrs. W. Hooper Harris and Charles E. Sprague has made extensive use of the book of Revelations and also of certain Old-Testament prophecies which are supposed to have foreshadowed the development of this system. It has also appropriated the assumptions of the Adventist Samuel Miller, who predicted the overthrow of the present dispensation of the world during the year 1844, about the time that the Bab appeared. Totten, another American Adventist, predicted that the end would occur in 1867. This was the year, it is said, in which Bab announced himself as the "Universal King." Dr. Cummings fixed upon the year 1869, "and this was the year in which Beha began his career as a prisoner at Acre." Various Old-Testament predictions are so interpreted as to give an imaginary support to the claim that this is the last dispensation of the one true religion, of which Christianity was only a stage. Babism treats the other religions of the world with broad charity, and its proposed mission is to unite all in one, under the head of the Babist imam.

The doctrines of Babism are a singular mixture of Mohammedanism, Indian Pantheism, Persian Sufism, and Christianity. For example, while prayer is offered to Allah, the being of God is described in the pantheistic terms of the Vedanta. He is the one

unmanifested essence; all beings are emanations from the All. The doctrine of transmigration is also taught in the Behan, or Babi Bible; also that of ultimate absorption into the Infinite. The Beha is essentially the first in importance of all the prophets, among whom are Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed. In the Behan there is always an expectation of a coming imam, and in anticipation of this a vacant seat is always to be seen at the Behan feasts, and upon the mention of his name all present arise. The Babis look for a millennium and for the final prevalence of their system as a universal religion. They believe in a judgment and a future life, the inner or sanctified body surviving the death of the elementary body. Prayer is observed three times a day for individuals, but public prayers are proscribed. Fast days and festivals are

observed, among which is the anniversary of the manifestation of the Bab and also that of the manifestation of Beha.

The religion of the Babis prohibits concubinage, adultery, slander, the use of wine and opium, prayer in the street, ill treatment of beasts, the use of images or pictures in worship. Hospitality is enjoined, also kindness, courtesy, and charity, humane treatment of inferiors, and the forgiveness of enemies. It advocates cleanliness, marriage for all, tithing, friendliness toward all sects, loyalty to government, and conformity to the customs of the lands in which Babis dwell. It welcomes all good works of Christian priests and teachers. Confession of sin must be made to God only. The study of helpful sciences is encouraged. All must practise some trade or profession.

THE FRAUDULENT SIDE OF SPIRITUALISM—A DUTY

BY ISAAC K. FUNK, D.D., LL.D.

LIFE is growth. We can not elect to stand still. The time comes when the bird must break its shell and come out or die. That which was house and home and life for it yesterday, to-day, if continued, is its death. This is the law of true evolution. There may be eddies and recessions, but, as with the sea, the incoming tide is bound finally to assert itself.

A profound question always in order is: What is the next stage of human development and what are its signs? Christ pronounced the doom of the Jews when He said: Eyes have ye, but ye see not; ye can discern the signs of the skies—that is, the changes on the plane of your present life; but ye can not discern the signs of the times—that is, the changes that forerun the coming of the new kingdom which

comes through the fertilizing power of the above upon the lower. I come revealing to you this kingdom of which I am, but ye see me not; I call you to a new life, but ye hear me not; ye hear me not and see me not because the faculties within you which are to have their functions in this new kingdom are dead. Therefore is your condemnation just.

When the world moves forward, the man or age or civilization that will not accept the reform is plowed under and, at least for a time, forgotten.

As a rule, the higher truths come in at what seems to be the bottom of society; the barn, the manger, is the doorway. Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? To the eyes of the ruling class—the class which is the fruitage, the logical outcome of the forces and