

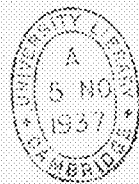
Tomb of Darius the Great

To the left is a Sassanian rock sculpture representing the Roman Emperor Valerian making obeisance to Shapur

THE PAGEANT OF PERSIA

A Record of Travel by Motor in Persia
With an Account of Its Ancient
and Modern Ways

By HENRY FILMER



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CHAPTER I

FROM TEHERAN TO MOHAMMERAH THROUGH LURISTAN AND ELAM

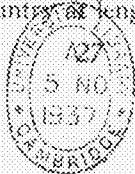
1. *The Charm of Persia*

PERSIA? You have heard of it perhaps and some day you may go there as I did with the same vague notions of its geography, its history, its politics and its culture.

If you have not associated it with Zoroaster, with Daniel and Esther and Cyrus and Darius and Xerxes and Haroun-al-Raschid and Hafiz and Omar Khayyam and Bahaism, you have heard at least of its charm.

So you go to Persia, ascending the great mountain plateau from Baghdad in the west or from Pahlevi in the north. You travel for days over a stony barren mountainous country, interspersed only occasionally by towns and villages forming oases on a plateau of from three to ten thousand feet. You encounter wretched villages of sun-dried or mud bricks; you find few hotels which would be classed even as second rate in Europe or America; you suffer from intense cold in winter and from scorching heat in summer; and you are moved to wonder in what the charm of Persia consists. Then, gradually and imperceptibly, in spite of the absence of the ordinary comforts of life, the charm of the country envelops you as subtly and as silently as a London fog.

The sight of the vast barren mountain ranges which rear their heads over every part of the great Persian plateau brings in the end an indefinable peace to the soul. Their lonely presence becomes one of the most readily recognizable elements in the fascination which the country at length exercises over you.



Whence proceeds the peculiar spell of its monotonous succession of naked mountains? May it not be something more than a fanciful view that here like speaks to like and we recognize in the general aspect of the Persian plateau a region comparable in many respects to that once inhabited by our Aryan ancestors? If this be so we find in Persia, accordingly, satisfaction for an age-old nostalgia.

With the charm of its natural scenery there is united a past of exceptional interest and a present of the highest importance in the politics and the future of the Middle East. Persia has contributed to the world more diverse and numerous religions than perhaps any other country. Here Zoroastrianism was developed, containing within itself some of the most important elements of Christianity. Here Mithraism, Manichæism, Mazdakism, Shi'ism, and Bahaism, all had their beginnings.

Persia was probably also the original home of some of our most common fruits and flowers, and it is indubitable that to Persia the English language owes such words as rose, jasmine, lilac, narcissus, peach, asparagus, spinach, orange, cypress, musk and myrtle. Other common English words derived from Persian are magic, paradise, peacock, rice, tapestry, tiger, azure, candy, checker, chess, julep, lemon, sugar, caravan and caravanserai.

It was in Persia that the greatest empire of the ancient world had its origin, that of Cyrus the Great (559-528 B. C.). It was here that Daniel and Esther of the Bible lived. It was from Persia that Xerxes started on his long journey having for its object the conquest of Greece.

From the earliest period of historic times the country has been a bridge between the Far East and the Mediterranean world, and today its art represents an amalgam of Eastern and Western influence. Its carpets have been renowned from remote times, as also its rich textiles. Even as long ago as the time of classical Greece the luxury of the Persian Court was proverbial.

Its architecture is represented by the Achaemenian palaces at Persepolis of the sixth and fifth centuries B. C., by the Seljuk and Mongol buildings which lie scattered over its northern extent, and

by the seventeenth-century Sefavid palaces and mosques of Isfahan. In fact, for every period of its notable history there is preserved some striking memorial of interest to the curious traveler.

Strategically, the country has played a notable part in the history of the world for more than two thousand years. Its western borders represented the limits of conquest of even the mighty Roman Empire. Its Mongol sultans were courted in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries by the proudest monarchs of Europe as possible allies against the Saracens, then in possession of the Holy City of Jerusalem. Its Persian rulers, the Sefavids, became the object of the solicitations of the West against the Ottoman Turks in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century the country became one of the most important pawns in the struggle between the Russian and British Empires for possession of the Middle East. Although this struggle, with the preoccupation of Soviet Russia in its internal upbuilding, has for the time being ceased to possess the acute character which it once assumed, it is one which may well reappear some day in one form or another.

World literature has received a greater heritage from the Persian poets, Sa'di, Hafiz and Firdausi, than it has from any other Oriental source, while the quatrains of Omar Khayyam have become an imperishable part of English literature. Many of the *Arabian Nights* are the work of Persian story-tellers and one of the most notable of the characters portrayed in those *Nights*, Haroun-al-Raschid, was born and died in Persia. Indeed, Persian cultural influence at the Court of the Caliphate at Baghdad was for many years paramount and all-prevailing.

Today, Persia represents the halfway house between Turkey, which is being rapidly westernized, and Afghanistan, in primitive isolation. In few countries of the world have customs with traditions of thousands of years been perpetuated so unchanged as in Persia; yet few countries today are undergoing so rapid a transformation of their ancient ways. This revolution is under the inspiration of a shah who is one of the most absolute rulers of

Islamic, the Jewish, the Christian or the Zoroastrian faith. The German traveler, Wagner, relates that in Tabriz in the last century the practice of the temporary marriage was so far accepted even by Christians that it was not uncommon for European residents temporarily domiciled there to contract such marriages with Nestorian Christian women in the presence of the Nestorian clergy. It is highly probable that the institution of the temporary marriage in Persia, which has no counterpart in the Sunni religion, is a relic of an institution coterminous with early Zoroastrianism or perhaps of an even earlier period.

In addition to these differences which have divided the Shi'as and the Sunnis, perhaps the most important distinction between the two sects, other than that of the controversy over Mohammed's lawful successor, has been that having to do with the enunciation of new religious tenets. For the Sunnis, the Koran and the so-called traditions or Sayings of the Prophet, as interpreted by the four orthodox Sunni schools—the Hanafi, the Maliki, the Shafi'i and the Hanbali—are the final authorities accepted by the *ulema*, or religious teachers. The Shi'a faith has admitted, however, a much greater degree of flexibility and adaptation in the recognition of the right of the *mujtahids*, or highest dignitaries of Shi'ism, to pronounce new enunciations of religious truths. Thus, the Sunnis hold that the Bab-ul-Ijtihad, or Gate of Endeavor, has been closed with the fixing of the Traditions of the Prophet by its four orthodox schools. The Shi'as, on the other hand, maintain that the Bab, or Gate, is still open and that new revelations of divine truth may be made. This theory, incidentally, gave rise to the development of Babism in the last century under the inspiration of the Bab who claimed that he was a new gate which had been opened by God for the guidance of man under Islam.

The *mujtahids*, who may be compared to a College of Cardinals, have no counterpart in the sect of the Sunnis. These highest Shi'a dignitaries in Persia were formerly named by the *mujtahids* of the holy Shi'a cities of Ne'ef in Iraq but more recently, under the spirit of nationalism, authority for their appointment in Persia has been transferred to the *mujtahids* attached to the College

of Sepahsalar in Teheran, control over which was vested in the Ministry of Education in 1931.

Their authority, however, under the régime of Reza Shah Pahlevi has been radically shorn. So all-powerful was formerly their influence that they did not hesitate to oppose their authority to the Shah. In 1890 the Tobacco Concession accorded by Nasr-ed-Din Shah to the British had to be terminated inconspicuously owing to the opposition aroused by the *mujtahids* who pronounced it contrary to Islam. In 1907 it was even provided by the supplementary fundamental law of the Empire implementing the Constitution that five *mujtahids* should have the right of vetoing all legislation of the newly established Majlis which might be interpreted as opposed to the spirit of Islam. However, this extraordinary power was never formally exercised owing to the failure to select the five *mujtahids* who should be given this right of veto. In 1925 the *mujtahids* last effectively made their power felt when, on the ground that the introduction of a republic in Persia was contrary to Islam, they successfully thwarted the plans entertained to that end by the Prime Minister who subsequently made himself shah. Since that time Reza Shah Pahlevi has succeeded in challenging their power and, by slow degrees, in effectively curbing their paramount influence where all other monarchs in modern times had signally failed in a like endeavor. In these efforts the Shah has been powerfully seconded by modern historical developments, not least of which has been the disappearance, since the war, of the threat of Turkish aggression and the consequent disappearance of the original *raison d'être* for the adoption of the Shi'a faith as the national religion of Persia by the Sefavids. This development, moreover, has coincided with the larger tendency on a world scale to strip the superstitious appanages of religion from life and to substitute therefor the rule of reason.

2. The Religions of Babism and Bahaism

Of the "two and seventy jarring sects" of Islam, the most notable which has taken rise in modern times from the Shi'a sect

has been that of Baháism and its progenitor, Babism. According to the most eminent student of the latter, Professor Browne, Babism, in its original and primitive form, represented a Shi'ism of the most exaggerated type. Here there is space to sketch only in the briefest manner the development of these movements, distinctive among creeds given birth to in Persia by their spread even to Europe and the United States.

Mirza Ali Mohammed, the Bab or Gate, was born in 1820 at Shiraz. After receiving a scant education he proceeded to Nejed where he remained a year at the shrine of Ali and there became deeply imbued with the spirit of his messianic mission. Returning to Shiraz he proclaimed himself in 1844 as the Bab, or Gate, to the knowledge of the hidden or twelfth Imam.

With the most astonishing rapidity there spread over Persia recognition of the Bab's claim among even the most learned men of Islam. With the extension of his influence there was a corresponding expansion of the pretensions put forward on behalf of the Bab who, in the eyes of his followers, quickly became acknowledged as the twelfth Imam who had re-emerged from his long concealment as the Mahdi or deliverer of the world.

Since recognition of the living existence of the twelfth Imam, in whose person there were embodied, conformable with the Shi'a faith, both spiritual and temporal powers, constituted a direct challenge to the authority of the Shah, repressive measures were soon instituted against the adherents of the Bab. So great was the zeal of these followers that important insurrections broke out in Khorasan, in Mazanderan and in Zinjan against the governmental authority, which were only put down with the greatest difficulty. As Professor Browne has remarked, one of the most profound effects of the dramatic representations of the passion of Hussein "has been to create among the Persians a widely diffused enthusiasm for martyrdom" which was never more extensively nor more enthusiastically manifested than in the bold defiance of the government by the Babis in the assertion of their principles of faith. Thousands marched to their death under circumstances of the greatest heroism, as recorded by Count Gobineau in his

Religions et Philosophies dans l'Asie Centrale. Finally, in 1850 only six years after the announcement in Shiraz of the Bab's mission, the Bab himself met death under highly dramatic circumstances at Tabriz. His followers were everywhere proscribed, hunted down, imprisoned or executed and the Bab's religion itself banned.

Briefly, the Bab claimed that his revelation represented as great an advance over the Koran as the Koran had over the Gospels and as the Gospels had over the Old Testament. With himself as the "Point" of the divine manifestation, there were associated about him eighteen others who made up the emanations of God, the number nineteen consequently acquiring a mystical character. Thus the Bab calendar was to consist of nineteen months of nineteen days each, all personal effects were to be changed every nineteen years and all Bab families were to entertain nineteen guests every nineteen days.

The nineteen divine beings representing the divine manifestation were to be recognized and honored above all other Babis. These would control and direct the State and receive twenty per cent of the income of other Babis.

Upon the death of the Bab, the successor named by him, Mirza Yahya, was recognized as the supreme head of the Babis until his authority was challenged some years after by his half-brother and senior, Mirza Hussein Ali Baha'ullah. Both of them had removed in 1863 to Baghdad. In that year, at the request of the Persian Government, the Turkish Government deported both to Adrianople where there occurred the schism, seemingly inevitable in all religions, between the followers of Mirza Yahya and of Baha'ullah which resulted in the establishment of Baháism. In 1868, to prevent disorder incident to the division between the Babis the Turkish Government deported Mirza Yahya and his Babi followers to Cyprus, while Baha'ullah and the Baháis were removed to Acre in Syria.

The Babis soon disappeared as an effective religious movement, but the Baháis, the better to support the claims of their leader, Baha'ullah, to the title of the true and rightful leader of the

new religion, went so far as to endeavor to suppress the literature of the early history of Babism and so far to distort the true history of the rise of the Bab as to relegate him to an inferior position in relation to Baha'ullah, making him a kind of John the Baptist or forerunner of the true spiritual head, Baha. As a clue to the growth and development of religions in the distant past nothing is more enlightening of the extreme lengths to which fanaticism is capable of driving men than the history and development of Bahaism. Although well told by the Reverend W. M. Miller in his book, *Bahaism*, the deep significance of Doctor Miller's exposure of the chicanery attending the founding of Bahaism, for the study of the origin of religions, would appear to have escaped this scholarly missionary of the Presbyterian Church in Persia.

Curiously enough, the original movement, Babism, has now almost completely disappeared and Bahaism which, like Babism, threatened at one time in the last century to become of great strength and influence in Persia, has lost likewise its influence in the home of its origin. Today it survives among a few Europeans and Americans. It is thus at once both the latest and perhaps at the same time the last serious religious movement to emanate from Persia and Asia where all the world's religions have been spawned and where, now that mysticism and idealism are being supplanted by materialistic conceptions of life, reason is banishing from men's minds jinn and demons, and angels as well as gods.

3. *Religions of the Manichees and the Mazdakites*

Of the religions of the world which have had their sources in Persia—Mithraism, Zoroastrianism, Mazdakism, Manichæism, Shi'ism, Babism and Bahaism—there remains only to mention briefly the religions of Mani and Mazdak. These two are both alike in having risen under the Sassanian Empire, being inspired, the one by Mani in the third century A. D., and the other by Mazdak at the beginning of the sixth century A. D.

The announcement of Mani's prophetic mission was made by

him in 242 A. D. at Ctesiphon, the Sassanian winter capital, his gospel being based on Mithraism with certain elements borrowed from Christianity. To quote Professor Burkitt, the authority on the religion of the Manichees:

The message that Mani announced was, in brief, that there are two eternal sources or principles, Light and Dark; that by the regrettable mixture of Dark and Light this visible and tangible Universe has come into being; and that the aim and object of those who are children of Light is not the improvement of this world, for that is impossible, but its gradual extinction, by the separation of the Light particles from the Dark.

Besides the Two Roots, or Principles, as they were called, of the Dark and Light representing the powers of evil and good, there were the Three Moments consisting of the Past, the Present and the Future. In the Past the Dark succeeded in mingling with the Light, as also in the Present, but in the Future they will be separated, and man may assist in this great work of distillation by the consecration of his life to the spirit of Light or the good forces of the world. Mani further conceived of himself as the final and last Prophet in historical succession to Buddha, Zoroaster and Christ, thus anticipating in this claim the Prophet Mohammed.

Although Mani himself suffered the fate of most prophets by being put to death about 276 A. D., his religion spread both westward and eastward of Persia. In the west his most famous convert was St. Augustine, whose conversion from Manichæism to Christianity inspired his famous *Confessions*. In the east the religion of Mani long survived in the region comprised within modern Turkestan where the discovery of fragments of Manichæan works in recent years has furnished most of the information available to students of the religion.

Of Mazdak, a Persian, and of his extraordinary success in inducing the acceptance of his faith by the Sassanian king Kobad who ascended the throne in 487 A. D., little needs be said. The

religion hardly survived the death of its founder but it is important as having contributed to the genesis of the Ismailis, or Assassins, and probably to some extent also of the Babis.

Mazdak, a high priest of the Zoroastrian faith, announced himself as a reformer of that creed. He proclaimed that all men were born equal and that, accordingly, all men should share equally in the world's goods, while it is also asserted that he advocated a community of women. To these tenets were added, according to Rawlinson, certain beliefs borrowed from the Brahmins and from other Oriental sources, such as the sacredness of animal life, the observance of the simple life and the need of abstemiousness and devotion.

By means of a clever imposture, involving the hiding of a confederate in a cavern beneath a sacred fire altar, and of appearing to converse with the flame itself, he so far imposed upon Kobad as to induce that monarch's acceptance of the faith espoused by Mazdak. The result of the adoption of such tenets by the King inspired, naturally, widespread dissatisfaction among the rich and those generally in authority. The King was deposed, but in 501 A. D. he was permitted to re-ascend the throne. He thereupon gave it out that, while as an individual he continued to adhere to the doctrines of Mazdak, as a king he did not propose to support the sectaries in any extreme or violent measures. Some time later, with the decline of the power of the Mazdakites following the withdrawal of the King's active support, the sect languished and, in the end, Mazdak himself was done to death. The circumstances of his assassination were cruel in the extreme. The Mazdakites, having been invited to a great banquet at the palace, were seized as they entered and buried head downward in the earth with only their feet protruding. Mazdak himself, who had been kept in audience in the palace, was then invited by King Kobad's son to take a walk through the garden. Pointing to the rows of feet of Mazdak's followers, "Behold," said the Prince, "the crop which your evil doctrines have brought forth!" Whereupon Mazdak was himself seized and buried in a like manner.

Professor Browne, with his usual critical insight, expresses

great doubt of the advocacy by the Mazdakites of promiscuous sex relations. As he notes, it was a charge likewise frequently brought against the Babis by their opponents and in our own days we have learned how little credence is to be given to unscrupulous propagandists in like instances, from the charge brought at one time against the Bolsheviks of the nationalization of women. Presumably this is an old canard which has been used from the beginning of history to blacken the faces of revolutionists, whether in religion or politics, the ace in the hole of die-hard conservatives.

In surveying these many religions which have their roots in Persia it cannot be occasion for surprise that Persians have come to regard all religions with a spirit of skepticism, even those who are the most earnest professed adherents of the Shi'a faith of Islam. As Gobineau, that most profound observer of Persia, has remarked: "Minds habituated to continual change, inclined to doubt, and observing spread out before them the accumulation of all the faiths which have ever been held in the entire world since the most remote antiquity, are apt to be exhausted by this panorama, and should be, and once habituated to doubt, they cannot escape this disposition to skepticism."