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A BABI PAMPHLET.

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“From hence they proceed to a higher point, which is persuading of men credulous and overcapable of such pleasing errors, that it is the special illumination of the Holy Ghost, whereby they discern those things in the word, which others reading yet discern them not.

“Most sure it is, that when men’s affections do frame their opinion, they are in defence of error more earnest a great deal, than (for the most part) sound believers in the maintenance of truth apprehended according to the nature of that evidence which Scripture yieldeth. ... It is not therefore the fervent earnestness of their persuasion, but the soundness of those reasons whereupon the same is built, which must declare their opinions in these things to have been wrought by the Holy Ghost, and not by the fraud of that evil spirit, which is even in his illusions strong.”
— Hooker, *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Preface, chap. iii.

I.

THE Babi Pamphlet, of which an account is given below, is a little manuscript book of 118 small pages, written in the beautiful Persian character, but, like most native books, with very few stops or spaces to show where paragraphs and sentences begin and end. It came into my possession in the following way. A Persian friend, a Babi, used often to come and see me, and we occasionally discussed points of Babi doctrine. The pamphlet was shown to me by him, because it contained a passage bearing upon a question we had been considering. He suggested that a copy should be made for me in town, the price of which was five kraus (about 2s.); and the manuscript when finished was corrected by the author himself, who is a leading exponent of Babi teaching here.

The little book was written in the first instance for a European friend of the author’s, as a duty of friendship, in order to acquaint him, and through him other Christians, with the weighty matters therein

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mentioned, relating to the latest divine manifestation, viz. Behaullah, who is declared to be Jesus returned again, and in one remarkable passage “the everlasting father” himself. It was originally composed before Behaullah’s death in 1892.

We here see a deliberate attempt made to convert Christians to Babiism by means of arguments derived from their own Bible, many passages of which are quoted, chiefly from the Prophets and Gospels; and we are able to study the manner in which a Babi champion sets about his task. We who have to acknowledge and experience the difficulty of successfully approaching the subtle, mystic Oriental mind, cannot help noting with satisfaction his ineffective handling of weapons borrowed from the Christian armoury.

Few probably go so far as a well-known Indian missionary, who reads all the unorthodox books he can lay his hand upon, in order to keep himself sound in the faith. The reading of such a pamphlet as this, though in places it

may provoke a smile, challenges the reader to bring forth and test his reasons for the hope that is in him, and re-examine the grounds of his acceptance of those articles of his belief which are here called in question (1 Cor. xi. 19).

It is always interesting, and sometimes amusing or even humiliating, to see ourselves as others see us. This is a point well worth a missionary's consideration, not so much for his own sake, as for the honour of the message with which he is entrusted, in order that he may be prepared to satisfy legitimate curiosity, remove prejudice and misconception, and give a true and right idea of his motives and spirit. This is only a part of the study of the native mind and character, and the best way of dealing with them, so incumbent on every worker among them — their religious attitude and environment, their habits of thought and reasoning; telling arguments and aspects of truth, points of vantage and agreement; and, in addition to the needs of the human heart in general, the particular state and standpoint of the individuals who come to us, often shown by their questions and gropings after truth. Thus may we be able to apply the heavenly medicine of God's Word with greater clearness, definiteness, and precision.

The little pamphlet before us is specially worthy of notice in this connexion, in that it shows us the working of a native mind in an unusual field. Its aim is not to overthrow the foundations of Christianity, but to approach the Christian with a missionary purpose, to enlighten his understanding, to rouse him from the sleep of careless indifference in which he lies, to wean him from his errors and misconceptions of Jesus' life and work and teaching, and to persuade him to forsake his obsolete creed and embrace the only true and binding religion in existence in the world to-day.

The votaries of this new sect of Mohammedanism are to be found everywhere throughout Persia, and in all walks of life. They have more in common with the Christian than the ordinary Mohammedan has. They acknowledge his Scriptures as genuine. They are taught to treat all men with brotherly kindness and courtesy; and they readily mix with Europeans where this can be done without fear of attracting undue attention. For they still outwardly conform to Mohammedanism, arguing that the duty of self-preservation and providing for those

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dependent on them is a paramount one, and that there is no obligation to make an open profession of their faith in such a land of bigotry and intolerance. In certain places the Babis are said to number the bulk of the population. Wherever he may be, the missionary is not likely to be long before coming into contact with them and becoming acquainted with some of their special characteristics in the field of religious discussion — their pertinacity, their assumption of superior enlightenment, their unproven assertions of vast numbers of adherents in Europe and America (the only alleged fact to support such statements being the numbers of letters said to have been received from these followers by the leaders of the movement,) their special pleading, and their method of handling the Christian Scriptures. This last is very sad. Quotations are made solely to support preconceived ideas, without reference to history or context, and without regard to time or place, and with a real and painful want of appreciation of the scope of the Bible and of the divine plan of salvation therein unfolded. The Bible is not regarded as containing the sum total of revealed truth. It is a convenient field from which to glean arguments to prove this latter-day theophany, which has superseded all previous manifestations, and which it is the duty of all to acknowledge.

The Babi use of the Scriptures is very disappointing. After hearing that, in their acceptance of them as genuine, this sect is favourably distinguished from other Mohammedans, it is not unnatural to hope that they will be prepared to assign them a position and authority and interpret them in a similar way to the general practice of the Christian Church. In place of this, the Babi ignores, denies, or explains away everything which it does not suit him to believe, and forces into the words of the sacred book, or rather into his own interpretation of them, everything he desires to find there; e.g. the fact of the Resurrection is impugned, and the word is explained in a different sense; the Ascension is denied; the miracles are not actual occurrences, but are to be figuratively explained in a spiritual sense; the writers of the New Testament are to be regarded as men liable to error in their apprehension and transmission of the teaching of Jesus; while the prophets are quoted in the most independent manner, and forced to give testimony to the so-called present manifestation, which is only one of a series each suited to the moral and spiritual condition of the particular age to which it was vouchsafed. Thus it may truly be said that Christ is Moses come again, and Behaullah is Christ. The difficulty of argument with men, often earnest and eloquent, holding such views, and making such use of the Bible to uphold them, may be easily imagined.

II.

It is now time to give some account of the pamphlet itself. At the head of it are placed the numbers 152 and 9, both of which, according to the *abjad* notation, are the numerical equivalent of the word Beha, and the brief invocation, "In the name of the incomparable Lord."

The introduction is devoted to the praise of the one Divine Being, Who has purposed that all men and all nations should live together in love and harmony, in the enjoyment of the same law and religion, and has sent the Holy Spirit to rouse the careless and indifferent — of which

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glorious day of unity and harmony the prophets have spoken beforehand. (Joel ii 28, 29.)

While in Yezd, the author of the pamphlet met a European, with whom he was greatly charmed, and who continued to refer to him in his letters even after his return to London.¹ After a time the writer of the pamphlet went to Shiraz, and enjoyed the society of his friends there, gathering an ear from every harvest-stole of love, and some treasure from every retreat. Among these was the delightful news that his European acquaintance of Yezd was in correspondence with a dear and honoured friend in Shiraz, the very pearl of integrity and sincerity, and had laid firm hold of the rope of inquiry and was clinging fast to the skirt of truth-seeking. To help him in this admirable endeavour, to acquaint him with the proofs, from reason and Scripture, of this most holy, latest, and supreme affair, which has created so great a stir in all quarters of the world, is a very congenial task to the writer, as well as incumbent on him as a friend. His desire and aim is, that the followers of the religion of Jesus may arrive at the knowledge of this merciful manifestation, viz. His Excellency, Behaullah (exalted be his name!), and by means of the new Holy Spirit obtain life, and enter the new kingdom of the Lord of hosts, and drink of the heavenly water which giveth life eternal.

Those who would obtain these blessings must first of all purify their ears and hearts from all that they have previously heard from their fellows, and all that has come down to them by tradition from their predecessors, and use their God-given powers of mind and intelligence to discern truth from falsehood.

Christ's rejection by the Jews is full of solemn instruction and warning for to-day. How came it to pass that the Jews persecuted and finally crucified their expected Messiah? What was it that intervened between the Seeker and the Sought, and drew a veil between the Lover and his Beloved, on the very morn of His arrival, and of the rising of the Sun of Beauty from the horizon of glory? — It has ever been thus. The manifestations of the Deity have always been repugnant to the understanding and ideas of mankind. The Jews only imperfectly understood their Scriptures, and clung tenaciously to preconceived notions, and to this day curse and revile His Excellency Jesus. God intended the manifestation of Christ (which is the same as that of Moses in a different guise) to be a test of the religious professors of that day: and those who discerned Him were only a few poor and despised fishermen and tax-gatherers.

The Christians of the present age have been similarly proved, and most of them have failed to stand the test. They are adhering to the *letter* of Scripture, and looking for a literal descent of Jesus from the skies above them, with the sound of the angels' trump. And all the while *He has come again*, and His followers have failed to recognize Him as His Excellency Behaullah (exalted be his name and his praise!) who is the manifestation of the eternal Beauty, the

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sublime Luminary, who descended a few years ago from the "heaven" of power with glory and the sound of the trumpet; whose message (typified by the angels' trump) has reached the ears of all mankind, and multitudes from different nations and religions have joyfully accepted it and placed his yoke upon their necks, while professing Christians have not yet raised their heads from the sleep of indifference.

No one, asserts the writer, will ever descend from the visible heaven. The Christians, who cherish this expectation, are committing a precisely similar error to that of the Jews, who interpreted the lying down of the wolf with the lamb, &c. (Isa. xi.) as a sign of the Messiah's coming, in a literal sense. The signs of Christ's Second Coming are figurative. And when Behaullah claims to be Christ returned again, on the evidence of these signs thus understood, the Christians are only asked to explain them in the same way as they interpret the words of Christ in which He says He is the living Bread which came down from heaven (John vi.).

This leads on naturally to the important question of the recognition of God's messengers to man. If, according to the Gospel narrative, incredible though it seem, Jesus after His resurrection with the same material body was not

¹ The friend here alluded to is Dr. Browne, author of *A Year Among the Persians*, who in that work speaks in high terms of the Babi leader's eloquence, and describes him as "one of the most distinguished poets who have consecrated their talents to the glory of the New Theophany."

recognized by one of the Apostles, how are the people of the present age, who have never seen Him, to recognize Him when He returns?

“I would possess clear penetrating eyes,
To recognize the King in every guise.” (1)

The manifestations of Truth, though differing outwardly, are in reality one, and are absolutely identical in spirit and purport: all are waves of one sea, and lights from one horizon.

“The souls of wolves and dogs do not in harmony accord:
United are the glorious souls of Lions of the Lord.” (2)

These pure essences appear in some appointed city in every age, issuing forth from the invisible world into the world of sense, with a law and precepts suitable for the guidance of God’s servants in that age, and with an invitation to all men to enter the everlasting kingdom. The manifestation can only be apprehended with unprejudiced eyes, on the strength of the proofs shown forth by itself. Men may not demand their own proofs, nor will miracles be granted on request. (Cp. Jesus’ refusal, Matt. xii. 38, 39.)

The miracles of Jesus are declared not to have been, as Christians believe, actual occurrences, but parables of spiritual truth. This theory is maintained both (a) on general grounds, and (b) from the words of Christ Himself.

(a) Had the miracles of Jesus, it is said, been visible facts, the Jews could not have been so incredulous as to ask for a yet further sign (Matt. xii. 38); no one could have refused to believe Him, but, on the contrary, large numbers would have accepted His teaching, especially from among those who had been benefited by His miracles, and the fame thereof would have drawn vast numbers from all parts to participate in them.

(b) Again, had the miracles actually happened, as reported, Jesus would not have said, “There shall no sign be given” (Matt. xii. 39). As

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for “the sign of the prophet Jonas,” the Jews did not see it, and the story rests on the authority of Mary Magdalene.

The figurative and parabolic character of the miracles of Jesus is still further illustrated by His words in such passages as Matt. viii. 21, 22, and 13-15, where the “dull ears” and “closed eyes” and “the dead” are clearly to be understood in a spiritual sense; John vi., in spite of which all the Apostles died, showing that the life spoken of is that of the soul, not of the body; and Matt. xvii. 20 (quoted as such, but in reality an inaccurate quotation and combination of parts of that verse and John xiv. 12), “Whosoever hath faith as a mustard-seed, these works that I do, he can do also,” in virtue of which the Christians are challenged to show a single miracle of bodily healing, and told that their failure will show one of two things, either that Christ’s miracles were spiritual, or that there is not one true follower of Christ among them able to do his Master’s works.

Who, then, are the true followers of Christ to-day? Those who, as in Christ’s own time, are true to their convictions in spite of opposition and danger. This description obviously cannot apply to the Christians of this age, who are wealthy, powerful, and honoured everywhere. Their missionaries, drawing their salaries and secure from insult, and claiming to be the host of salvation wherever they go, invite inquirers to prove their sincerity by abusing the head of their own religion, and then bestow large stipends upon them: whereas the sincerity of converts ought rather to be proved by giving money than by receiving it. The lady missionaries, attractive in face and dress, try to draw people to the churches by playing and singing. This is not Apostolic practice. This is not taking up the cross, or preaching the strait gate and the narrow way. Let this one text judge and decide between Christians and Babis! These Christian missionaries are the very false prophets foretold by Christ as one of the signs of His second coming (Matt. xxiv. 24). They were scarcely heard of 300, 200, or even 100 years ago; but now that this new and glorious manifestation (Behaullah) has come, which his followers regard as Christ’s return, the rising of the sun of truth is necessarily accompanied by the appearance of the false teachers foretold by Christ. We may further see the fulfilment of 2 Pet. ii. 1-3 in the large sums expended by the State and the Christian body on the comfortable living of the preachers and the subsidizing of the converts. We hear Christ’s terrible denunciation pronounced against them (Matt. vii. 22). He has descended under the name of “the Lord” from the heaven of power, and is dwelling at Sion (!), as foretold by Zechariah (ii. 10), and the Christian preachers and professors are alike in error and blind to his presence.

“ ’Twere good to bring, to test the thing, the precious touchstone rare,
And put to shame all in His name who false deceivers are.” (3)

All people cherish the belief that their religion will remain unchanged until the *Resurrection*, and resent any proposed alteration. But the Resurrection (qiyamat) is not what they think, but “the arising (qiyam) of the promised manifestation from the invisible world into the sphere of visible existence.” (See John xi., especially verse 25.) Christ's *second coming* (Matt, xxiii. 29; xxv. 13; Mark xiii., especially verses 31-fin.; Luke xii. 35) is Behaullah's descent from the “heaven

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of grace, clemency and munificence,” and His warnings in the Gospel directed against carelessness and negligence are explained away by the Christians conformably with their prejudices as referring to sudden death or the day of Resurrection and Judgment (e.g. Luke xvii. 30) — the very words of Scripture being thus used to hide the truth, as was done by the Jews also.

“Tis sleep unseasonable keeps thee from thy way,
Else would not seem ill-timed the morning call to pray.” (4)

God's own test of the truth or falsity of a new manifestation ought to be applied, instead of asking for signs and miracles, and making the non-appearance of certain expected signs a reason for unbelief:

“The sight of prophet's face appears a miracle in sooth
To him whose heart a relish hath for blessed light of truth.”(5)

This Divine test is found in Deut. xviii. 18, Isa. xlv. 24-26, and Acts v. (Gamaliel's counsel), viz. that false pretenders will be brought to nought, and the word of God's true messengers established. No false prophet, declares the writer, has ever succeeded in establishing a new religion, with a new law and holy book; otherwise the religion of Jesus Himself might fall under suspicion.

This test is next elaborately applied in the pamphlet to the Babi religion, and the conclusion drawn, that a faith like this, which started with no external aids or advantages, which is contrary to men's cherished opinions, invites to risk of impoverishment and hazard of life, and has been so bitterly opposed and persecuted, and in spite of all has achieved such remarkable success, must be from God. The founder of a new religion must be prepared to suffer distress and persecution, as was the case with Christ, the First Point (the Bab), and Behaullah, whose sufferings are mentioned.

First of all, there were his constant persecutions and imprisonments in Persia; then twelve years spent in Baghdad, while his enemies and the 'ulama were constantly day and night seeking to kill that “tree of the Paradise of God”; next his sojourn in Constantinople and six years' imprisonment in Adrianople, and finally his deportation to Akka by the Porte in conjunction with the Powers, in the hope that the unhealthiness of the place and the absence of the society of friends would put an end to his life. But, notwithstanding all, his religion grew and flourished all the time, for neither can the sun be hidden with mud plaster, nor the religion of God exterminated by hatred. Honour, instead of despite, became the portion of Behaullah's friends at Akka. The place itself was transformed under the benign influence of the august stranger. The climate improved, the ruined places were repaired, and fine gardens and buildings sprang into existence, while from all parts crowds thronged to see the manifestation of God residing there.

We now come to the longest section of the pamphlet — the Scriptural proofs brought forward to attest the Divine mission of Behaullah, many of which are highly ingenious and curious.

(a) *Behaullah's Sojourn at Akka.* — Akka is the “Valley of Achor,” the “door of hope” of Hos. ii. 15, “the strong city” of Ps. lx. 9; cviii. 10. Behaullah's residence there fulfils Isa. xxv. 6-9, which foretells the spiritual and temporal bounties he bestowed on those who thronged to see him. The expression “wines on the lees well refined” points to

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the *tea* with which his guests were regaled, which is the only beverage answering this description.² Of Christ, on the other hand, nothing of the kind is recorded, and He fulfilled none of the particulars mentioned in the prophecy. (One of the most singular features in the application of Scripture in this pamphlet is the way in which prophecies referring to Zion or Jerusalem by name are quietly transferred to Behaullah and his residence at Akka.)

² See Smith's *Bible Dictionary*, art. “Wine,” “if it [the wine] were designed to be kept for some time, a certain amount of lees was added to give it body (Isa. xxv. 6). The wine consequently required to be ‘refined’ or strained previously to being brought to table (Isa. xxv. 6).”

(b) *The Jews and Behaullah*. — A few passages (Jer. ii. 26; ix. 16; xxiv. 9, 10), which speak of Judah's punishment, are adduced, and their fulfilment seen in the abasement of the Jews after Christ's death. Many other passages are also brought forward which speak of the salvation and glory of the Jews "in the last days" — the fulfilment of which has been reserved, as is here alleged, for the present dispensation of Behaullah, in which the Jews in all countries enjoy a peace and freedom from oppression and ill-treatment, and legal protection, unknown before. Every particular given in these prophecies with reference to this glorious time has been fulfilled, down to the giving of the "new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name" (Isa. lxii. 2), viz. the name of the "desired land" given by Behaullah to Akka. (It is not shown in what way his mission has wrought such happy results for the Jews everywhere.) The "new heart" and the "new spirit" of Ezek. xxxvi. 24-27 are referred to the conversion of Jews to Babiism.

(c) *Other prophecies* are mentioned, the fulfilment of which is claimed for Behaullah instead of Christ. Thus, Joel iii. 16 ("The Lord shall roar out of Zion," &c.), cannot, it is said, have been fulfilled in Christ, Who was always wandering in retirement in deserts and on mountains, and not able to remain as much as four days in a single place because of the enmity of the Jews. Isa. xl. 3, 9, 10 ("Prepare ye the way of the Lord," &c.) similarly does not allude to Christ, for Whom no such thing was done, but to the railway made before Behaullah's going to Akka. In connexion with Ps. cii. 16 ("When the Lord shall build up Zion," &c.), mention is made of the large colony of monks and merchants near Akka,³ who rightly expected the Lord's return at that very spot, but, through their gross carelessness, failed to discern Him in Behaullah, who fulfilled the prophecy (!) by staying there for a while and having intercourse with them on his way to Akka. With reference to Isa. ii. 2-4, the jealous ambitions of the Christian Powers and their ceaseless invention of deadly explosives effectually prevent us from seeing the fulfilment of the prophet's words under the Christian dispensation. But Ps. xlvi. 9

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("He maketh wars to cease," &c.), has been fulfilled (though it must be confessed it requires a large amount of oblivion to perceive it!) by Behaullah, who (in his "Epistles to the Kings") forbade war and the greed of conquest and the use of murderous weapons, and enjoined peace, good-will, and brotherliness, which, however, it is judiciously added, must not be expected to come to pass all at once.

Four interesting applications of Scripture are still to be noticed: —

(i.) "The everlasting *Father*" of Isa. ix. 6 cannot, we are told, be Christ, but does refer to Behaullah, who is in truth "the mighty God, the everlasting father." foretold in the Parable of the Vineyard (Matt. xxi.), in which, after the murder of the *son*, comes "the lord of the vineyard" himself! (This, it need hardly be said, is quite in harmony with the theory of Divine manifestations so often referred to; but at first sight it sounds very strange to hear Behaullah at one time spoken of as Christ, and at another as God the Father.)

(ii.) Dan. viii. 13, 14. The "two thousand and three hundred days" point, so it is asserted, to this manifestation. No explanation is given in the pamphlet, nor could the author himself give any satisfactory one when asked on two occasions to do so.

(iii.) Mal. iv. is quoted in full, and the Hebrew "Elijah" declared to be the same as the Arabic "Ali," which accordingly denotes Mir-ya Ali Muhammad, the Bab and forerunner of Behaullah.

(iv.) 2 Thess. ii. 1-8. Subh-i-Ezel, "the Morning of Eternity" (a portrait of whom is given as the frontispiece to Browne's *New History of the Bab*), who was the original successor of the Bab, and for a time after his death commanded the allegiance of his followers, is so unfortunate as to show forth in himself, according to our writer, the signs which mark the man of sin, who is destroyed by the breath of the Lord's mouth — i.e. the signs of Behaullah. He is treated in consequence to a very emphatic condemnation, and a crowning instance is here seen of Christian blindness to the truth in their failure to understand the supposed allusion of the prophecy. The writer expresses a wish that four fair-minded men of understanding would visit both Akka and Cyprus and judge between the rival claims of Behaullah and Subh-i-Ezel. But, he sadly laments, there is no desire to search for truth, otherwise it could be easily ascertained.

"Ever ready is the FRIEND for distraught lover's heart to feel:

³ The Rev. Wm. Jones, who has travelled much, and visited Persia last year [1900] on his way to India, gave me the following information about the colony at Haifa, near Akka, alluded to above: — "I am afraid I know very little of the German colonies except that they are looking for the visible appearance of Christ in Palestine to rule over the whole world, I suppose. There are two colonies, one at Haifa and one at Jerusalem. They live in families, have a church building where they meet every Sunday, and a school-house where the children are educated. Their houses are neat and clean. They have gardens and fruit trees, and a number of them have become well off in this world. I presume they look for Christ to reign a thousand years, but I saw little of themselves — my information is mostly second hand."

Were you sick, sir, there's PHYSICIAN close at hand your grief to feel." (6)

The writer concludes with an appeal for earnest, serious inquiry, without delay or hindrance from worldly concerns and business, points a warning from the results of prejudiced unbelief in the case of the Jews, not one of whom, he says, has ever yet repented of his errors; requests his friend to read the pamphlet often, and finally expresses the hope that its arguments and Scriptural proofs will lead him, and through him those who are still careless and indifferent, to the present light of truth.

Christian and Jew are both conciliated by Babiism through the acceptance of their Scriptures, and invited to lay aside their prejudices and slavish adherence to the letter of Scripture, and embrace the present fulfilment of what the prophets long ago foretold.

The Mohammedan, often dissatisfied with Islam as he finds it, is

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appealed to by a religion which teaches justice and brotherhood, which does not bid him break with the past, but pass above and beyond it into fuller light, under the guidance of the divine guide sent for the present age. It is a religion adorned with a glorious roll of martyrs and heroes, while at the same time it comfortably allows its adherents to conform outwardly to the prevailing faith, and save themselves the inconvenience of presenting to the wrath or cupidity of powers secular or spiritual so inviting a bait as that of a renegade from the faith.

Babiism is just as truly as Mohammedanism a "religion without faith." It has added more prophets to the already long list of 124,000 accepted by Mohammedans, but it has not recognized the uniqueness of the personality and redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And in this case, as always, the Truth vindicates itself in no more striking way than in the capacity for error of those who are unacquainted with, or refuse to accept, the truth as it is in Jesus.

Our duty is a plain one. It is no new one, but simply the privilege of letting in the light (with God's help) through every opportunity accorded to us. Very much remains to be done. But we know that the power of Truth is not broken, but that it will prevail — yea, and DOES prevail!

W. A.
RICE.

Shiraz, Persia.

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Sources of Verses quoted in Pamphlet.

A Persian friend tells me that (1), (2), and (5) are from the Masnavi, (3) and (6) from Hafiz, and (4) from Sadi. In the latter, the original reference was to the Jews.