

A HISTORY
OF
PROTESTANT MISSIONS
IN THE NEAR EAST

BY

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ETC., ETC.



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Contents

	INTRODUCTION	11
I.	THE MUHAMMADAN WORLD AND THE EASTERN CHURCHES	17
	1. The Muhammadan World	17
	2. Two Aspects of Islam	21
	3. The Oriental Churches	36
	4. The Roman Propaganda	46
	5. The Russian Church	56
	6. The Position of Christians Under Turkish Rule	58
	7. What is the Justification of Protestant Missions Among the Oriental Christian Churches? .	66
	8. Has the Time Come for Muhammadan Missions in the Near East?	76
	9. The Message of Christianity to Islam .	80
II.	THE BEGINNINGS OF PROTESTANT MISSIONARY EN- DEAVOUR	89
	1. Peter Heyling	91
	2. Henry Martyn	93
	3. The "Mediterranean Mission" of the Church Missionary Society	94
	4. The Basle Mission in Transcaucasia, 1822-1835	97
III.	PROTESTANT MISSIONS IN TURKEY AND ARMENIA .	104
	1. The Mission of the American Board Until the Rupture with the Ancient Church, 1830-1846	106
	2. From the Organization of the Protestant Church in 1850 Until the Armenian Massacres in 1895	113
	3. The Armenian Massacres, 1894-1896	135
	4. Russian Armenia	153
	5. The Work of the American Board from 1896 to 1907	155

	6. Protestant Missions Among the Greeks, the Bulgarians and the Turks	164
	7. The New Era in Turkey	176
IV.	SYRIA AND PALESTINE	181
	(A) <i>Syria</i>	181
	1. The Mission of the American Board, 1823-1870	185
	2. The Entrance of the Other Missionary Societies	201
	3. The Mission of the American Presby- terians, 1870-1908	212
	(B) <i>Palestine</i>	229
	1. The Beginnings of Protestant Missionary Work: Anglo-Prussian Episcopate of Jerusalem	235
	2. The Mission of the Church Missionary Society	242
	3. German Missionary Work in the Holy Land	258
	4. Protestant Outposts in Arabia	271
V.	PERSIA	279
	1. Protestant Missions in Persia. The Work of the American Board, 1834-1870	294
	2. The American Presbyterian Mission Among the Nestorians, 1870-1908	303
	3. Missionary Competition	308
	4. American Presbyterian Missions in Persia, Exclusive of the Mission Among the Nestorians	317
	5. The Work of the Church Missionary So- ciety in Persia	329
VI.	EGYPT AND ABYSSINIA	337
	(A) <i>Egypt</i>	337
	1. The American Mission	344
	2. Spittler's "Apostelstrasse" (Apostles' Road) and Other Smaller Missions	354

Contents

9

3.	The Church Missionary Society Mission in Egypt	358
4.	The Egyptian Sudan	363
(B)	<i>Abyssinia</i>	371
1.	The Church Missionary Society Mission from 1830 to 1843	378
2.	The Second Period—The Falasha Mission .	382
3.	The Swedish National Mission	386
VII.	MISSIONS AMONG THE JEWS. THE WORK OF THE BIBLE SOCIETIES	391
	(A) <i>Missions Among the Jews</i>	391
	(B) <i>The Work of the Bible Societies</i>	400
VIII.	SUMMARIES AND STATISTICAL TABLES	412
	INDEX	423



Society took over several schools for Druse children, which, however, had to be abandoned on account of Turkish intolerance. In Gaza, formerly one of the cities of the Philistines, and at present the second largest town in Palestine, lying on the caravan route to Egypt, Pritchett, an Englishman, had established schools as a part of his "Philistine Mission," which he was glad to hand over to the Church Missionary Society in 1878. In Kerak, the ancient Kir in the land of Moab, a Wesleyan, named Lethaby, began an independent mission in 1883, which, however, he had not sufficient means to carry on, especially as the Turkish authorities were continually throwing new obstacles in his way. Although the place was only about one hundred miles from Jerusalem, it was difficult to reach; yet the Church Missionary Society took it over in 1894. It was hard work. The Turkish Governor was determined that missions should not succeed; for months he placed a soldier on sentry duty at the gates of the settlement, to prevent the entrance of any Moslem. The schools were also closed through the intrigues of the leaders of the Greek Church. But patient perseverance overcame all these obstacles. As the great caravan road of the Mecca pilgrims, the *darb i haj*, and the new Hejaz Railway pass close to Kerak, the latter is a very suitable centre from which to itinerate. Yet lack of funds has compelled the Society to abandon the station. At Acca, on the coast, the Church Missionary Society established a station in 1890, with the purpose of reaching the leaders of the Babist movement, who had been banished to that town.

In Bethlehem, Nazareth and Shefa Amr the Female Education Society had for decades flourishing girls' boarding-schools. These, too, were subsequently transferred to the Church Missionary Society (1902).

In this way the work of the Church Missionary Society grew into a spreading tree, its branches reaching from Gaza in the south to Nazareth in the north, from Jaffa in the west to Es-Salt and Kerak in the land east of the Jordan, thus

V

PERSIA

PERSIA has an area of about 640,000 square miles, and is, therefore, about two and a half times the size of the German Empire. Its population, however, is only 7,500,000. Large stretches of country, particularly in the interior, are desert, void of human beings. More than half of the country has only one inhabitant to the square mile. Only the provinces along the boundary are at all thickly populated. Of non-Muhammadans there are only about 100,000. Islam, which overran the country after the battle of Kadesia in 634 A. D., swept away nearly all the Zoroastrians who had enjoyed state protection under the Sassanids (531-628), as well as nearly all the Christians, who at that time were thickly scattered over the country. Only in the province of Azerbaijan, in the northwest, is a remnant of the ancient Persian Church still met with, the so-called Nestorians, or Syrians, whose number is 23,000 to 25,000.

The great mass of Muhammadans is a curious conglomerate. In the southwestern province of Khuristan there are 250,000 Arab nomad immigrants, who so predominate that the province goes also by the name of Arabistan. In the wild mountainous western provinces 900,000 Kurdish bandits and Lurs have their homes, the former to the north and the latter to the south of the latitude of Hamadan. In the northern provinces, from Azerbaijan to Khorasan, there dwell nearly 1,750,000 people, belonging to nomadic tribes of Turks and Turkomans, known as *Ilak*, the "tribes." But the main portion of the Muhammadan population is the 5,500,000 Persians, who are the only great and historic nation of the Indo-Germanic stock that has been almost entirely Islamized. True to the genius of the family of peoples to which it belongs, the

Persian nation has contributed greatly, and in most original fashion, to the further development of Islam. We will point out but three of these contributions.

(a) *The Shiah.* Even before Muhammad's appearance, there had been jealousy between the Omayya and the Hashim branches of his family, the Koreish. It was to the latter branch that the Prophet and the majority of his first followers belonged, while his bitterest opponent, Abu Sufian, belonged to the former. The quarrel became acute during the first decades after the death of Muhammad, in consequence of the intrigues of Aysha, the most influential of the Prophet's wives, and the boundless ambition of Muawiyya, the son of Abu Sufian. The result was a fight to the death between the Prophet's family and the Omayyads. The sword, to which the Prophet had appealed for the authorization of his prophetic office, brought ruin upon his own family. Ali was murdered, Hasan and Husein, his two sons, were slain in battle. The khalifate passed to the Omayya family, while the Prophet's family was thrust aside. If there had been no truly religious impulses in Muhammad's movement, this violent and ruthless pushing aside of his family might have taken place without causing such a tremendous commotion and division among his followers. As it was, a portion of the Islamic peoples separated from the khalifate of the Omayyads, and, faithful to the memory of Muhammad, gathered round his son-in-law, Ali, and Ali's two sons, Hasan and Husein. The tragic end of those three, combined with the fact that they were descendants of the Prophet, surrounded them with a halo. The *Shiah* (Sect), as the followers of Ali were named, was thus originated. Though taking its rise in political troubles, it could maintain itself only by making a religious claim. Both religious and secular power had been united in Muhammad. The Omayyads had assumed the secular power, the rule of the world. So the Shiahs claimed the religious succession. Ali, Hasan, Husein, and their immediate successors were thus, in the eyes of the Shiahs, the legitimate imams, the religious leaders and teachers of the Moslem community. Thus the peculiar doctrine of

the imams, the shibboleth of the Shiites (Shiahs), took its rise; of this doctrine we have spoken at some length in chapter four. Intelligible as this dogmatic development is, arising out of loyalty to the Prophet, it was, nevertheless, impossible to carry it through without rejecting the *Sunna*, or "tradition," which was cunningly used by the opposite party in support of its pretensions to supreme power, and, further, it was necessary to adopt a free allegorical exegesis of the Koran itself, since the Koran is silent about the imams. But in thus freeing themselves to some extent from a literal interpretation of the inspired book, they had undermined the theological foundation. In this way it came about that, while in Sunnitic Islam the doctrinal development soon came to a standstill, and, after the first centuries, no new sects arose, the Shiah, on the other hand, experienced numerous outbursts of dissent of the oddest character. In the pages of this book we meet with the Druses, Ismailites, Nusairiyeh, Metawileh, and Babists, and there are innumerable other sects. The orthodox Shiah itself, also, has made full use of the wide scope offered to it for theological development. It is not too much to say that, in some form or other, allegorical exegesis, an inclination to theosophical and mystical speculations, a predilection for mystical dervish orders, and the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, are the common property of Shiites of all kinds.

Sunna and Shiah fought long and fiercely. For a long time Egypt, North Africa, Syria and nearly the whole of the East were Shiite. Yet the Sunna finally won the supremacy, because of the fact that the Arabs held to the Sunna, and that the Turks adopted it. Yet when, in 1502, Ismail Safi Shah mounted the Persian throne as the first native king, after a Mongol government of nearly 250 years, he decreed that the Shiah should be the national religion in his kingdom. And, ever since, Persia has been a stronghold of Shiism. Outside of Persia, it appears only sporadically, as a sect.

(b) *Sufism*. By far the most important doctrinal development of the Shiah is sufism, one of the most profound systems of theology ever produced by any race. By ignoring the

Sunna and adopting an allegorical exegesis, a wider opportunity was gained, as we have seen, for a free development of theology. The innate speculative faculty of the Indo-Germanic race asserted itself, receiving, in addition, from Zoroastrianism a tendency to take a profound view of life. It seems probable that the specifically Persian doctrinal development owes its origin to three influences: (1) to Indian pantheism, (2) to the Neoplatonism of the Grecian schools of philosophy in its later form, and (3) to the gnostic speculations of ancient Christian sects. But it is at the present day scarcely possible to unravel this tangle of influences, which enriched the world of Persian thought, and to trace them back to their various individual sources. The determining factor was religious and intellectual dissatisfaction with the dead forms of Islamic worship, and with the incomplete and dry scholasticism of the orthodox doctrine. This Persian theosophy was rendered peculiarly attractive by the grace and finish of the poetic form into which it was cast. Persian poetry is penetrated with its spirit. The greatest Persian poets, Sadi, Hafiz, and Jalal-ud-Din Rumi are profound philosophers. This wonderful combination of the most beautiful poetry with the profoundest philosophy is unique in the history of literature, and exercises even on Oriental students in the Occident an influence that is often nothing short of intoxicating.

In giving a sketch of the system of sufism, we shall make a distinction between its fundamental principles and its practice. Only the Godhead is real, essential being, it alone existing from everlasting to everlasting in unapproachable majesty. Though the universe rests on the divine will, it has no being of its own, in fact it *is* not, but, rather, only appears to be, being intended by God to be a mirror, in which the eternal Godhead is reflected. Conditional being is granted to man alone, who possesses existence in so far as his spirit is a part or an effluence of divine substance, but who does not exist in so far as his body and his world of sense share in the unreality of the universe. Man's being rests on a complicated process of creative emanation. At the begin-

ning of all things God caused to emanate from His own hidden being the original substance, light, in order by its means to establish relations between Himself and the world, which, in so far as it possessed existence at all, existed apart from Himself. Of this light-substance He formed the throne of His glory, the tablets of the world's destiny and, finally, the soul of man. From among men He has at various times ordained individuals, who have possessed a particularly bright and full measure of the light-substance. These are the prophets, and, above all, Muhammad, who was, in fact, identified with the light-substance, which is often termed "the spirit of Muhammad." The task of man is to return from his own being, conditioned as it is by its union with the non-existent, to true, pure being, to the Godhead, the original Light. One easily recognizes here the influence of Vedanta philosophy, and of the Christian logos theory, as it appeared in the gnostic systems of emanation. But this speculative, theosophical view of the universe is not the original contribution of sufism, having been, in its main outlines, adopted from outside, and given a beautiful form in the lyrical poetry of Persia. The characteristic doctrine of sufism is, rather, the "ascent of man to God." In order to solve its religious-ethical problem, and to lead the soul out of the fetters of non-existence back to the pure, true entity whence it emanated, sufism makes use neither of the enquiring intellect, nor of the practical will; neither of orthodox dogma nor of the fixed forms of worship in the mosque; it sets in activity, rather, a specific faculty of the soul, intuition, the inner eye, *taur* (the imagination). By complete self-abstraction from the surrounding world of sense, with its impressions, sensual attractions and duties, the soul is to sink itself into the divine by contemplation, thus returning to absorption in the Godhead by a toilsome ascent of eight steps. Only the dervish, who has broken away from all connection with the outside world, is able successfully to enter upon this path; when he has taken his first step in it he becomes a *salik*, a "wanderer." But, since the way is long and the

goal lofty, and since neither the teaching nor the practice of Islam affords any helpful guidance, it is necessary for him to have a *murshid*, a spiritual guide, to whom he must commit himself in utter confidence and unquestioning subjection. Only so may he hope to avoid losing his way on the difficult path. The eight steps of the ascent are (1) *service*, the performance of the Islamic precepts for life and worship; (2) *love to God*, which the poets extol with particular zest, often painting it in bold colours, which suggest the passions of erotic love; (3) *seclusion*; (4) *knowledge*; (5) *ecstasy*; (6) *truth*; (7) *union with God*; (8) *extinction*. In order that intuition may become fully effective it is necessary that the ordinary functions of the intellect and emotions be suspended as much as possible, the hidden powers of the "imagination," or subconsciousness, being allowed full play in their stead. The means to this end are spasmodic movements of the body, dancing, hemp-smoking and the use of other stupifying drugs, but, above all, psychopathic influences of the hidden life of the soul, such as hypnotism and clairvoyance, in which the sufists had attained a high pitch of perfection long before occidental science began to observe those remarkable phenomena in the twilight of the soul-life. (Compare what is said of the dervish orders, and of the mysticism of Islam, in Chapter I, 2.)

It is easy to understand how a race naturally inclined to mysticism and repulsed by the prose of real life, might prefer to spend life in the mysterious depths of an artificially produced semi-consciousness. It is equally clear what a dark shadow this artificial and unreal life of the mind must cast on the exalted philosophy upon which it rests. Occidental scholars are inclined to confine themselves to the pantheistic theories of sufism, while they pass by, as unpleasing, the dark shadows of mystical practice. So the actual facts are misrepresented, and this false representation is one of the grounds of the exaggerated extolling of this Islamic philosophy. Yet this mystical practice is the specific characteristic of sufism.

We must enquire into some of the effects of such mystical

speculation. (1) Since it is the chief object of this mysticism to lead by the eight steps of intuition to the certain goal of real union with God, an experience which the soul is to attain independently of the Koran and the mosque, all the external forms of doctrine and practice are despised in comparison with that "royal road." The mystic became indifferent to both mosque and church, to the Koran and the Bible, to the cross and the crescent. One often finds, in sufist poets, passages which dispose of every kind of historical religion with equal contempt. One result of this is that freedom from the fetters of the blind fanaticism, elsewhere so sadly prevalent in Islam, renders possible the formation of a sometimes surprisingly just estimate of other religions, even of lower forms of worship, such as idolatry. But it more frequently happens that a destructive scepticism grows out of this contempt of outward forms, such a scepticism as we see, for instance, in the famous Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam. Sufism is altogether unfavourable to a calm appreciation of Christianity as a divine, just provision for the salvation of mankind.

(2) If the taur (imagination) is the spiritual function brought into play by the sufist mystic, and if a murshid be indispensable to any one beginning to tread the mystic road, then the way is evidently opened for the formation of the most various sects and orders, since the number of those who desire to qualify themselves to become murshids is naturally great; and, as soon as any one is recognized as a murshid by a larger or smaller circle, he at once acquires limitless influence over his disciples, since they are bound to obey him blindly. And, further, in the semi-darkness of mystic clairvoyance there are methods of exciting and increasing the powers of imagination and even of inciting to superhuman acts; methods, many of which are harmless, though many are also of a doubtful, and even of an obviously dangerous, character. Every murshid considers his own method to be the most effectual, and it becomes the shibboleth of his order. This is the soil in which the dervish orders have grown, developing their mystic methods, which appear so abstruse to us.

(3) If the "imagination" and other similar psychical powers be alone needful for the mystical ascent, the display of practical piety in public and private life loses importance. The mystic who is undergoing absorption in Allah is raised above good and evil; his conduct in this non-existent world does not affect his progress in the road of intuition. Thus, in presenting itself as the "royal road," in opposition to the common Islamism of mosque and university, sufism undermined the foundations of morality, and deadened the sense of duty. In fact it was guilty of the fateful error of separating the specifically religious life from the ethical life of the individual as a whole, concentrating religion in an utterly subordinate function of the soul. This is the more dangerous since orientals, quite apart from such teaching, are only too strongly inclined to make a thoroughgoing separation between their religious philosophy and their every-day life. In spite of these dark shadows, sufism is one of the most brilliant proofs of the soul's hunger for communion with God, a hunger which will be satisfied. Even Christians may find edification in listening to the strains of its hymns, which echo the longing after true life in God. And this fragrant lotus flower is the more surprising since it springs from the desert soil of the Islamic belief in Allah, and blooms in contrast with the dry formalism of the correct Muhammadan practice of piety.

(c) *Babism*.¹ The doctrine of the imams as a series of progressive agents of revelation, belonging to the family of Muhammad and of Ali, gave rise in the nineteenth century to the most effective and ideal religious movement within the world of Islam. About the beginning of that century, two teachers, Sheikh Akhmed Akhsai (1752-1826) and his disciple, Hadji Seyyid Kasim, appeared in Kerbela, the sacred place of pilgrimage and the seat of learning of the Shiites, and further developed the doctrine of the imams, teaching that in every

¹E. G. Browne, "The Episode of the Bab"; "New History of the Bab." Dr. F. C. Andreas, "Die Babis in Persien," Leipzig, 1896. *Church at Home and Abroad*, Vol. XIV. *Allgemeine Missions-Zeitschrift*, 1894, pp. 327 ff. *Ev. Miss. Mag.*, 1894, pp. 12 ff. Sell, "Essays on Islam," pp. 46 ff.

generation the imam, though himself hidden, has some one who communicates his revelations, and through whom he guarantees the spread and the purity of the true faith.

Among their disciples was a merchant's apprentice from Shiraz, who, to his father's grief, gave up his work, devoting himself to theological speculations. This was Ali Muhammad. He discovered that he possessed the qualifications to be such a medium of revelation, and began, in a small circle in Shiraz at first, to call himself the *Bab* (gate), that is, the organ of revelation of the hidden imam. Although a youth of barely twenty-four years, he found a following. Among his first disciples were such important men as the talented and energetic Mollah Husein.

The life of Ali Muhammad was short and remarkably uneventful. At first he claimed to be nothing more than the Bab, the representative of the hidden imam of his generation. This claim he proved in his Surat al Jussuf, a treatise on Sura XII of the Koran, which deals with the history of Joseph. But he soon made the further claim that he himself *was* the imam, who had been hidden for centuries, but had now appeared as the expected *Imam Mahdi*, that is the "Rightly Led One," whose calling it was to introduce the time of the final victory of Islam. From that time on he called himself the *Nukta* (point), *Nukta i Ula* (first point), or *Nukta i Beyan* (point of explanation), and set forth his claims in detail in his most important work, the "Beyan," that is, the "explanation." The original substance, light, the original will of Allah, the first creation of Allah, assumes from time to time human form. These "incarnations of the first Will" are the prophets. Of these there have been an untold number in the past, and in the future there will be quite as many. The last great prophet was Muhammad. The prophet of this generation was the Bab. The various incarnations must all be communications of the same divine revelation, which, however, is further developed as the human race progresses. The revelation at the time of Abraham differed from that in Adam's time. Even so, revelation has undergone development between the time of

Muhammad and the time of the Bab. In every age the revelation of the respective imam is the highest and most perfect in existence, and must be accepted as such in faith. Thus the teaching of the Bab now supplants that of Muhammad, the Beyan is the legitimate successor of the Koran, and the Bab is to men of the present day what Muhammad was to men of past centuries. The Bab is logical and admits that after him will come he "whom God will make visible," that is, a new imam, or his bab, for a succeeding generation. This teaching of the Bab clears the way for freer doctrinal development.

It would not be worth while to devote much space to the particular doctrines which the Bab taught, on the strength of his being the highest authority in the matter of revelation. Curiously enough, he thought that nineteen was the sacred number. He found it everywhere in the world-scheme, and was resolved to bring it to the light. His sacred book, the Beyan, has nineteen sections in each of its nineteen chapters; the Babist year has nineteen months, each with nineteen days; the day has nineteen hours, each consisting of nineteen minutes; coins, taxes and even fines are to be regulated on the basis of nineteen. The Bab gave an original turn to the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, common to all Shiites. He maintained that every soul is, as it were, a letter of the alphabet, written by God. Just as a child rubs out a letter he has written, until he has done it perfectly, so every soul reënters a body until it has gained its perfect form.

More important are the practical precepts of the Bab. These accord greater rights to women, permitting them to attend meetings of the men, abolishing the veil and rendering divorce more difficult. Smoking is forbidden. The dead are to be more carefully buried. The Bab even tried to introduce a new form of handwriting, which, however, has fortunately not been generally adopted. It is difficult to determine whether there are in the teaching of the Bab any germs of social and religious progress in Persia. At any rate, his followers are more tolerant of other religions, especially of Christianity. The Bible as well as the Koran is supplanted

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by the Beyan of the Bab, yet it is regarded as an interesting lesson in the progress of mankind to read the records of both those revelations, comparing them with the more perfect revelation of the Beyan. The reading of the Bible is, therefore, recommended. The question has been debated, whether Babism is an Islamic sect, or whether, banished from Islam, it has grown to be a new religion. Its principles, at least, provided the possibility of a religious development in advance of Islam, and Beha, the successor of the Bab, has invented a kind of universal religion. While the Bab, still a youth, was working out his ideas, a tragic fate overtook him. He was banished first to Maku, a remote little town on the furthest northwestern boundary of Persia, whence he was dragged in 1850 to Tabriz to be barbarously executed. He had not yet reached his thirtieth year. Though the leader had languished in prison and had met with a shameful death, Babism now spread rapidly. People of all grades of society, even the highest and best educated, became his followers, being called Babists. Even in the first generation there were such prominent men as Mollah Husein, the hadji, Mollah Muhammad Ali, and Mollah Muhammad Ali of Zangin, noted for his learning and piety. Above all, there was Zerrin Taj (Golden Crown), a woman of surpassing intellect. Filled with enthusiasm, the Babists called her Qurrat ul Ain (Lustre of the Eye). She had a most attractive personality, doubly striking by contrast with her countrywomen of the Persian harems.

The Persian government foolishly assumed from the very beginning a hostile attitude towards Babism, endeavouring to exterminate it with fire and sword. Seeing their influence threatened, and angered by the sharp criticisms of the Bab and his followers, the mollahs and the mujtahids, the superior clergy of the Shiites, urged on the temporal power. Thus a terrible war of extermination began to be waged against Babism. Barely four years after Ali Muhammad first appeared as Bab in Shiraz, a band of his followers in a remote part of the country, led by Mollah Husein, defended the

to gain political & economic influence

mountain fastness of Sheikh Tebersi, in the province of Mazandaran, against a superior force of government troops, the siege ending after four months in the extermination of the faithful defenders. A year later an extremely bloody and bitter civil war broke out in the town of Zangin, under the leadership of the Babist Mollah Muhammad Ali. This contest also ended in the extermination of the Babist community there. The severest blow was struck by the Persian government in 1852. Three fanatical Babists, probably without any authority, and even without the knowledge of the leader of the movement, committed a murderous assault on the shah, Nasir-ud-Din. All the Babists had to pay the penalty; they were to be exterminated root and branch. As many of them as fell into the hands of the government were condemned to death, and were executed with the cruelties that only oriental bloodthirstiness can devise. Blood flowed in streams. But if the government thought that Babism could be thus crushed, it made a great mistake. The movement grew, and the Babists went to their death with the joyousness of martyrs. Only one of them is known to have denied his faith when threatened with death; as soon as the danger was past he repented bitterly of his apostasy, and two years later proved the sincerity of his repentance by suffering a still more cruel martyrdom. Even Christians must wonder, when they behold the heroic faith and the triumphant death of these Babists. Singing "From God we came, to God we return," they faced the most shameful and agonizing death, without the trembling of an eyelid.

Meanwhile the movement was undergoing a rapid inner development. Ali Muhammad had, before his death, solemnly appointed as his successor a disciple of his, Mirza Yahya, with the title of Hazret-i-Ezel (His Highness the Eternal) or Subh-i-Ezel (Dawn of Eternity). Yahya withdrew to Bagdad in order to escape the pursuit of the Persian government. But the latter, remembering the attempt of 1852, was suspicious of such a man so near to the boundary, and induced the Sultan to confine both him and his followers. They were, accord-

ingly, placed under police supervision as political prisoners, first in Constantinople, later in Adrianople, and finally in Acca in Syria. Mirza Yahya was of a retiring disposition, not a man of action. His elder half-brother, Mirza Husein Ali, better known under the name of Beha Ullah (Beauty of God), became the real leader of the movement. It was not long before this talented and versatile man discovered that he was the imam predicted by the Bab, "whom Allah would render visible," the imam of the succeeding generation, who was called to supplant the revelation imparted by the Bab with a newer and still more advanced revelation. In his great work, "Ikan" (certainty), which he had written while still in Bagdad, he endeavoured to prove in a really masterly way, from the Bible and the Koran, the truth of the teaching of Babism in general. In later works he openly advanced his claims to the prophetic office. And, however much Mirza Yahya resisted these claims, the more energetic and logical Beha gained the upper hand. By far the greater number of the Babists attached themselves to him, and he managed, even in imprisonment in Acca, by means of an extensive correspondence, to retain the leadership until his death on the 16th of May, 1892. Since then his son, Abbas Effendi, has been the leader of the movement.

In 1896 the attention of Europe was widely attracted to the Babists once more when, on May 1st of that year, Shah Nasir-ud-Din was shot by a fanatical Babist as he was entering the mosque in Teheran. Connected with this deed were many dangerous political intrigues, especially that of a revengeful adventurer, Jamal-ud-Din. The murder of the shah, an act of vengeance for the cruel and bloody persecution of the Babists, was punished by similar persecutions. But religious movements cannot be exterminated by means of the sword and the gallows. It is estimated that fully one million of the 7,500,000 inhabitants of Persia are at the present day Babists. Bloody persecutions have again burst over them of late years, for instance, in 1903 in Yezd; but the Babists meet death as defiantly as ever.

(d) Aside from the Shiite Persians, the Syrians or Nestorians in the northwestern province of Azerbaijan chiefly claim our attention. They dwell partly in the plains to the west of Lake Urumiah, partly in the neighbouring mountainous region of Kurdistan. Lake Urumiah is about eighty miles long and thirty miles wide; its water is so saline and bituminous that fish cannot live in it, but on its shores there are numberless aquatic birds, especially flocks of beautiful flamingoes. To the west of the lake there is a wonderfully beautiful and fertile plain, which rises gradually towards the mountains and is called "Persia's paradise." On it lie more than three hundred villages and hamlets, nestling among fields, gardens and vineyards. Numerous streams rush down from the mountains to the lake, their banks lined with willows, poplars and fig-trees. The plain has almost the appearance of a great forest, with its plantations of peaches, apricots, pears, plums and other fruit-trees. In the midst of the orchard-land lies the town of Urumiah, situated on a height some four hundred feet above the level of the lake. It is the reputed birthplace of Zoroaster. Towards the west rise the bare mountains, wild and menacing. The lake itself lies 4,100 feet above sea-level, and the hills quickly attain a height of 12,000 feet above the sea, an Alpine range looking down from its snow-covered summits upon the plain at its feet. We enter upon a wild and rugged wilderness of mountains, full of deep gorges and valleys, with wild torrents rushing over mighty blocks of stone. Higher and higher rise the chains up to 14,000 feet and more. There is no proper road over this wilderness of rocks. The isolated valleys, or valley systems, are separated from one another as by walls. Everywhere there are inaccessible cliffs, deep hollows, precipitous rocks, affording a last refuge to the pursued. For whole days the traveller passes through this paradise of bandits, until he sees, stretched out like a map before him, the wide-spreading plain of Mesopotamia. In this wild, pathless mountain region Nestorians have their homes in about three hundred villages hidden away in twenty-five upland valleys. Unfortunately they are split

Index

- ABADIYR**, 204
 Abassides, The, 35, 59, 182
 Abbas Effendi, 291, 338
 Abdi Effendi, 173, 175
 Abdul Hamid II, 35, 137-140, 153
 Abdul Kadr el Jilani, 29
 Abdul Mejid, 218
 Abeih, 191, 194, 198, 213, 222
 Abu Abdallah, 183
 Abu Bekr, Khalif, 29, 183
 Abu Ruchi, 379, 408
 Abu Sufian, 280
 Abuna of Abyssinia, The, 364, 375 f.
 Abyssinia, 19, 53, 57, 354 f., 371-390
 Abyssinian Church, The—see Oriental Churches
 Acca, 249, 252, 291
 Adabazar, 114, 121
 Adana, 115, 157 f., 214
 Aden, 22, 27, 273 f., 360
 Adger, 406
 Adi Ugri, 387
 Adigrat, 380
 Adis Abeba, 389
 Adowa, 380 f.
 Adrianople, 44, 104, 172, 398
 Aghtamar, 45
 Ahmed Tewfik, 176
 Ailet, 387
 Aimerich, 48
 Ain Arik, 257
 Ain Karim, 257
 Ain Zehalteh, 194
 Aintab, 115, 125, 131, 133, 155 ff., 159, 162, 194
 Akhissar, 140
 Akhmed Akhsai, 286
 Akhram, 183
 Alamut, 185
 Albania, 49, 53, 104, 169, 409
 Albanians, The, 24, 170 f.
 Albistan, 162
 Aleppo, 115, 172, 194, 409
 Alexander I, 98
 Alexandria, 45 f., 339, 345, 347, 356 f., 394, 398 f., 409
 Ali, Khalif, 35, 182, 280
 Ali Bey, 401
 Ali Ilahi, The, 326
 Ali Muhammad, 287, 290
 Alliance Israélite, The, 327, 394
 Alma, 188, 194
 Amara, 277
 Amasia, 117, 140
 American Bible Society, 174, 216, 402 ff., 409
 American Board, Missions of, 70, 71 ; among the Jews, 390, 395 ; in Persia, 294-303 ; in Syria and Palestine, 185-201, 235 f. ; in Turkey and Armenia, 56, 102, 106-135
 American Colony in Jerusalem (Spaffordites), 234
 American Sisters, The, 55
 Amhara, 372, 378 f.
 Amharic language, 91, 95
 Amirkhanyanz, Abraham, 403, 406
 Ammiel Mission, The, 258
 Amr, 26, 45, 363
 Anatolia College, 56, 131, 135, 157
 Anderson, Rufus, 106
 Andreas, F. C., 286
 Anglican Mission in Persia, 308 ff.
 Ankober, 381
 Antioch, 162, 210
 Antuf, 186
 Anyok, The, 370
 Apostles' Road, The, 262, 354 f., 379
 Appia, Miss, 207
 Arab Conquest, The, 13 f., 39, 45, 271 f.
 Arabi Pasha, 339, 360
 Arabia, 17, 19, 24, 28, 105, 271-278, 409
 Arabic language, The, 20, 39 f., 50, 57, 63, 95, 196, 232, 271 f., 359
 Arabistan, 334
 Arabkir, 116, 140, 159
 Arabs, The, 23, 230
 Arakel, 102 f.
 Argos, 110, 165
 Ariopolis, 165
 Armash, 105
 Armenia, 11, 21, 24, 62, 98, 105, 118, 135, 137, 149, 153 ff., 159 f.
 Armenian Aid Society, The, 150
 Armenian Church, The—see Oriental Churches
 Armenian Massacres, The, 41, 66, 118, 140-153, 155, 162, 260, 316

- Armenian Orphanage, The, 260
 Armenian Schools, 111, 159
 Armenians, The, 23, 25, 43 ff., 99, 110, 135 f., 152, 156, 181, 233, 298, 318-329, 333, 340
 Armeno-Turkish language, The, 45, 106, 108
 Arnold, Mühleisen, 210
 Arnott, Miss Walker, 257
 Arnoutkoyi, 157
 Arrhenius, 389
 Arsazides, The, 41
 Artuf, 255
 Asad es Shidiak, 188
 Asadurian, A., 402
 Asfuriyeh, 205
 Ashkenazim, The, 393
 Asia Minor, 23, 28, 37, 39, 91, 96, 105 f., 117, 126, 133
 Asia Minor Medical Missionary Association, The, 158
 Asir, 105
 Aslan Sahagian, 159
 Assassines, The, 184 f.
 Assemani, J. S., 47
 Assiut, 46, 56, 74, 348 ff., 352 f.
 Assuan, 345, 354 f., 357, 369
 Assumptionists, The, 55
 Astrakhan, 98
 Assyrian Mission, The, 309, 313
 Assyrian Mission of the American Board, 116 f.
 Atbara, 369
 Athanasius, 37
 Athens, 165 ff.
 Athlit, 232
 Atil, 206
 Auso Kunoma, 388
 Avakian, Ohannes, 141
 Awetaranian, Johannes, 161
 Awishalum Mission, The, 315
 Axum, 376, 378
 Ayesha, 280
 Azerbaijan, 279, 292, 316 f., 325
 Azo, 145

 BAAKLIN, 206
 Baalbek, 203 f.
 Babism, 286-291
 Babists, The, 249, 281
 Babylon, 13
 Badger, G. P., 309 f.
 Bagdad, 100, 105, 163 f., 290, 330, 399
 Bahrein, 276
 Baiburt, 140
 Baker, Sir Samuel, 365
 Baku, 99, 155
 Balearic Isles, The, 21
 Balkan Peninsula, The, 11, 17, 23, 37, 57, 68, 89, 167
 Baniyas, 214
 Baptist Missions, 165 f., 257, 315
 Baratieri, General, 375
 Barclay, Joseph, 245
 Bari, The, 371
 Barnum, Henry S., 110
 Barton, Dr., 405
 Barun, The, 370
 Basil the Great, 37, 117
 Basilides, Negus, 91
 Basle Mission, The, 96-103, 378
 Basra, 105, 164, 276 f.
 Baz, 317
 Beaconsfield, Lord, 176
 Bebek, 110 f., 126, 130, 157
 Bedouins, The, 24, 208, 210, 273
 Bedr Khan, 293, 309
 Bedros, 115
 Beha Ullah, 291
 Behais, The, 328
 Behnesseh, 93
 Beirut, 105, 178, 186, 189, 191, 203 f., 207, 217, 222 ff., 398, 409
 Beirut Mission Press, The, 190, 215, 347
 Beirut Seminary, The, 222
 Beit Jala, 40, 260
 Beit Meri, 204
 Beit Sahur, 40, 260
 Bellamy, 206
 Bellesa, 387
 Benedictines, The, 55
 Benha, 352 f.
 Beni Suef, 352
 Beranduz, 304
 Berbers, The, 337, 408
 Berlin Congress, The, 136, 154, 167
 Bethany, 55
 Betharram, 55
 Bethlehem, 40, 55, 240, 249, 252, 259 f., 270
 Beyan, The, 289
 Bible, The, publication of in ancient languages, 405; translation of into modern languages, 196 f., 296 f., 325, 371, 379 f., 385, 389, 399-408
 Bible Lands' Mission Aid Society, The, 119
 Bible Societies, Work of the, 400-411
 Bilbeis, 356
 Bird, Frank, 186
 Biredjik, 145
 Bisharin Bedouins, The, 357