

BAHAISM

THE RELIGION OF BROTHERHOOD

FRANCIS HENRY SKRINE

[Photo: 'ABDUL BAHA (ABBAS EFFENDI)]

BAHAISM

THE RELIGION OF BROTHERHOOD

AND ITS PLACE IN THE EVOLUTION OF CREEDS

BY

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“It is natural that true religion should be difficult, for it comes only by practice, like every other acquirement. All spiritual improvement is slow, and all religion — so I have found — is difficult; for if it is not a panacea against the ills of life it is not true religion.”

LADY EASTLAKE.

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INTRODUCTION

THIS little book is based on a series of letters which were published last summer in *The Near East*. They attracted the notice of 'Abdul Baha, who was good enough to express approval of my attempt to expound the gospel preached by his illustrious father, Baha 'Ullah. I therefore yielded to a suggestion that I should give my sketch of Bahaism a more permanent form. In doing so I have re-handled the entire subject, in order to assign Bahaism a place in the evolution of organised creeds. Their ultimate efflorescence is sometimes styled "Mysticism"; but this is surely a misnomer. The Mystic searches Nature for symbols of God, and cultivates his own soul that it may become worthy of union with Him. In the quest of personal holiness he utterly ignores the cravings of his fellow-men, doomed, like himself, to grope in darkness. Mysticism is static as well as self-regarding. It injures the devotee, whose life is spent in sterile contemplation,

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aptly styled *nombriisme* by French writers. After attaining imaginary perfection by mortifying the flesh, he is so elated by spiritual pride as to believe that all religion is needless. Moreover, the instincts which he seeks to eradicate have their roots thrust deeply into the human organism. Bodily vigour depends on their reasonable gratification, and without it the soul can never reach a full development. Neglect of the physical laws which regulate our being has shortened many a precious life, and it accounts for lapses from an impossible standard which scandalise the virtuous and give the unregenerate cause for rejoicing. Mysticism is injurious to the community, by withdrawing its noblest elements from participation in mundane affairs, and forbidding them to reproduce their kind. History teaches us that more racial mischief has been wrought by the attitude known as "Otherworldliness" than by the unbridled play of animal instincts. Hindu Yogis, Buddhists, Şufis, Quietists, and the Contemplative Orders of Christendom were mystics in a greater or less degree. Their influence for good has been restricted and subject to eclipse.

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A higher plane was reached by idealists such as St. Francis of Assisi, Tulsi Dása, and Baha 'Ullah. Like their forerunners they scanned material nature for symbols of God, and saw Him everywhere. They were equally bent on attaining personal holiness, but regarded it as a means for rendering social service. Love all-embracing is the keynote struck by idealism. It is dynamic as well as unselfish, recognising that man is man only by virtue of action; and it represents the final stage in the evolution of all vital creeds. Now civilisation has entered upon a social Renaissance, whose results none can foresee. The spirit of brotherhood is abroad, bringing home to us the great truth that "God hath made of one blood all the nations of the earth." Idealists are multiplying rapidly, and their doctrines harmonise with the psychical atmosphere which pervades the inhabited world. It has generated the "unrest" of which we hear and see so much. But, after all, unrest is a condition of progress. Maeterlinck has remarked, in his *Intelligence des Fleurs*, that "the vegetable kingdom sets mankind prodigious lessons of insubordination, courage, ingenuity and perseverance. If we

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had applied to the removal of the various necessities which are crushing us, of pain, old age, and death, one-half of the energy put forth by any little flower in our gardens, we may well believe that our lot would have been very different from what it is.”

Through the kind offices of Miss E. S. Stevens (Mrs. E. M. Drower) and M. Eustache de Lorey, I was able to submit my manuscript to 'Abdul Baha during his short stay in Paris. After hearing it translated viva voce into Persian, he authorised me to publish it, and sent his portrait to serve as a frontispiece, with the text of an unpublished address delivered by him, which will be found in an appendix. M. de Lorey writes: “ 'Abdul Baha is a great admirer of your work, and thanks you for having written it. He hopes that you will continue to interest yourself in Bahaism, and to propagate it by your pen.” I may add that the Teacher has undertaken to give my views a much more thorough revision should a second edition be called for.

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BAHAISM THE RELIGION OF BROTHERHOOD

[Religion Defined.]

RELIGION is a manifestation of the aesthetic instinct, which prompts the soul to seek for union with the hidden Source of Harmony. It may be defined as “Belief in the existence of Supernatural Power, and a sense of dependence thereon.” The fact that some savage communities are destitute of the aesthetic instinct has been adduced to prove that religion is the figment of a deceitful and domineering priesthood. But when physical environment is very unpropitious, all primary springs of action which are not directly helpful in the struggle for life remain in abeyance. No sooner are food, shelter, and protection secured by means of association, than the aesthetic instinct asserts itself. Men turn like sunflowers to the mysterious Influence which

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is striving to bring order into the welter of blind forces personified as “Nature.” Religion was the very life-blood of primitive society; to this day we unwittingly import it into our politics, art, and economic life: it pervades every form of human activity.

[Magic its Cradle.]

Magic was the cradle of all religions. It recognised the existence of supernatural power, and endeavoured to influence it by mechanical means, which were alone within the savage's ken. The magician asserted that his spell, incantation, and curse could neutralise the harmful agency of unseen forces, or enlist them on his side. His pseudo-science was the mind's earliest conquest of brute force; and many a magician founded a dynasty of Kings.

[Animism, Ancestor-worship, Totemism.]

As the average of cerebral capacity rose, owing to the interplay of social forces, it became self-evident that a vast range of phenomena could not be explained by mechanical agency. A notion took root of supernatural power immanent in nature. The tendency to personify is common to children and savages; men invested inanimate things with the life which thrilled in their own being, and believed

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them to be tenanted by a spirit potent for good or evil. Animism is the earliest type of religion as distinguished from magic, and it developed into ancestor-worship when primitive minds had grasped the idea of the continuity of life. Totemism, or the worship of symbols of tribal unity, arose from the stern necessities of warfare. Some animal or plant, chosen at random, served the purpose of our flags and uniforms, enabling warriors to distinguish friends from foes in battle. By hypertrophy of the social instinct the Totem was afterwards admitted to the comity of the tribe, and became an object of adoration.

[Polytheism]

The next step was a conception of supernatural power detached from nature, and controlling it. Heavenly bodies and terrestrial forces were personified, becoming gods and goddesses. They were invested with attributes held in respect by savages, namely, wrath and anger; housed in temples and placated by sacrifice. This cult is Polytheism or the worship of Nature-Powers. Its immediate object was an idol, because the primitive mind cannot grasp abstract ideas apart from some concrete symbol suggesting them. The increasing

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complexity of social organisation was reflected in the progress of religion. That principle which economists style the "Division of Labour" extended to the gods, who were ranged in Triads or Pantheons; and a belief took root that the Universe was governed with the same wisdom as a well-ordered tribe. But the social instinct had brought with it a conception of justice — that which is due from man to man. No community will long tolerate gods of lower moral calibre than its own. They became judges, and redressed inequalities of this life in a world beyond the grave. Religion thus assumed an ethical aspect. It is moulded by physical environment as well as social organisation. The world's creeds were born in Asia, where Nature works on a gigantic scale, convincing weak mortals of their impotence. All of them appeal to the instinct of self-preservation; their driving force is fear.

[A State Religion.]

When tribal organisation broadened out into national life, the floating mass of magical superstitions, animism, totemism, and polytheism crystallised into a State Religion. Thence-forward acceptance of its tenets became the test of civic conduct; and dissent incurred the

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penalties of high treason. Beliefs seem to be so much more convincing when they are universally held. Man is the only animal who knows that he will die. We banish the haunting fear of an unknown hereafter by reflecting that others in the same plight find strength in religion to endure misfortunes, and comfort from its ordinances at the hour of death.

[Theology.]

At this stage the Priest superseded the Magician. Unlike his predecessor he laid no presumptuous claim to counteract or control the hidden forces of Nature. He stood forward as the intermediary between Gods and Laymen (Gr. *laos*: "the people at large"); and asserted an exclusive right to offer sacrifice. Specialisation in the priesthood produced a pseudo-science of theology, which stunts the growth of religion by attempting to weigh the Infinite in balances of human reason. It always includes a body of mythology, legend, dogma, and ritual. Myths represent the impressions made by Nature's processes on the primitive mind. Its reaction to external stimuli is very much the same in all ages and countries; whence comes the kinship between the mythology of communities which can never have been in touch

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with each other. Legends celebrate the exploits of gods and their incarnations on earth. As the savage's credulity is boundless and his sense of wonder requires strong stimulus, the historical basis of legends is soon lost in a mass of fiction. Dogmas are metaphysical deductions from mythology and legendary lore, drawn by the subtle brains of priests. Ritual is the external clothing of the other factors in religion; it symbolises dogmas which transcend the lay capacity, and plays on the emotions by means of suggestion. Certain words and gestures, repeated in rhythmical order, are apt to engender a religious frame of mind.

[Revelation.]

When the art of writing came into use, current notions of theology were stereotyped in sacred books; and religion became immobile as well as intolerant. Implicit belief in their contents as a revelation of divine will, and unquestioning obedience to priestly interpretation are imposed on laymen. Science, with its scepticism and empirical methods, is anathema to a church whose canons embody the immutable decrees of Providence. Yet human society is an ever-growing organism; if religion

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is to be vital, it cannot linger in the vista of an immemorial past; its ethical system must be adapted to changes in environment. Religion is not blind acquiescence in the dicta of authority, but a life.

[Formation of a Priestly Caste.]

Polytheism increased sacerdotal influence. The innumerable gods were exacting, and visited minute infractions of ritual with calamity. Priests took full advantage of the general terror. They became possessed by the evil spirit of domination; commercialism spread from the market-place to the sanctuary, whose guardians used their tremendous power for purposes of private gain. It was increased by co-operation, for the Law of Mutual Help is a higher evolutionary phase than that of Struggle. Co-operation decuples efficiency, but where it is restricted to a limited number of men, the law of struggle leagues them against all who stand without the pale. Moreover, the morality of men in association is that of the average; and it lags far behind the standard attained by minds of nobler stamp. Castes are groupings formed within a community for the purpose of advancing interests possessed in common by their members; they are symptoms of arrested

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social progress. Superior intelligence led the priesthood to form one of the most exclusive kind; and it became a power in the State.

[Monotheism, Dualism, Pantheism.]

Belief in the unity of supernatural power is the highest flight yet taken by organised religion. Sometimes a warlike tribe imposed their tutelary god on conquered foes. He ousted all rivals, synthesised the creative, preserving, and destructive influences observed in Nature, becoming Lord of Heaven and Earth. This cult is termed Monotheism. Sometimes profound speculation as to the relations between mind and matter led philosophers of the priestly caste to deduce Dualism, or Pantheism from the childish worship of Nature-Powers. The first is an inference from the struggle for life waged throughout Nature. Good and evil influences are seen in antagonism; but if God be omnipotent He must ultimately control rebellious matter; it therefore behoves mortals to fight on His side. From the pantheistic standpoint this material world is a labyrinth of illusions and entanglements from which the human soul must free itself by rigorous contemplation of the Absolute, sole possessor of reality. All phenomena, the finite mind included, are

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evanescent manifestations of a Supreme Unity, from whom they proceed and in whom they will ultimately merge. When the conception of a personal and omnipotent God has once taken shape, "perfect love casteth out fear." Gratitude is felt to Him for calamity averted and success achieved; paeans of praise mingle with sacrificial chants. Religion begins by inspiring Terror, rises to a Body of Knowledge, and reaches its zenith in Devotion.

[Struggle between Priests and Warriors]

Its evolution, however, is sorely hampered by the law of struggle. The warriors, on whose skill and valour public safety depended, were led to imitate priests in forming an exclusive caste; and an appreciation of life's continuity produced the institution of heirship. Man stands alone among animals in looking beyond this transitory existence; he takes pride in a long line of ancestors, and wishes to live again in his descendants. Thus the magician or war-lord became King, "Father of the Tribe"; and the hereditary principle, which lies at the root of caste, restricted the choice of leadership to his dynasty. Now a fierce struggle for power set in between the sacerdotal and military castes. Priests had potent allies

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in women, whose entire subjection had stunted their intellectual and moral growth; they could invoke the terrors of hell-fire, and draw bills to be honoured in a future world.

[Its Results Discredit the Cause of Religion.]

If they emerged triumphant from the fray, a theocracy was established, which always meant government by the sacerdotal caste. Should their antagonist win, the King became head of the Church, and enlisted the sanctions of religion in support of dynastic rule. If the spiritual and temporal powers

arrived at a Concordat, the King was invested with “a right divine to govern wrong,” and had license to follow his own caprices provided always that he remained “orthodox,” and accepted priestly guidance. It is impossible to exaggerate the racial mischief wrought by absolutism and intolerance. The first has distorted the natural development of Germany by stamping it with the idiosyncrasies of a single mind, which is still swayed by the instincts of the tribal era. The second has well-nigh destroyed the souls of Spain and Persia, has robbed France of her most progressive sons, and lowered human efficiency by systematically eliminating the fit. If official religions are characterised by intolerance,

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immobility and tyranny, it becomes clear that St. Augustine’s Civitas Dei — a vision of pure theocracy — is impossible of realisation. A union of Church and State is fruitful only if the national creed expands *pari passu* with the social organism; and this has never yet occurred in history.

[Province of the State.]

What, then, are the appropriate functions of the State? The sway of selfish instincts, and memories of despotism in the past, incline men to limit them to an irreducible minimum. Englishmen have been confirmed individualists since the Revolution of 1688, and all but the most advanced look with suspicion on government. This attitude is surely an anachronism. The modern State is not a personality apart from its citizens, for such authority as it possesses is derived from them. It is, or should be, a pleiad of specialists who represent the best knowledge of their age, epitomise the national will, and are subject to dismissal for malfeasance. The State defends its citizens against foreign aggression, and advances their collective interests abroad. At home it secures fair play in industry and commerce, and equal opportunity for all; it curbs the animal instincts,

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disseminates useful information, and performs public services which are beyond the scope of private effort or tend to become monopolies. The State should honour genius and talent which, neglected, are at war with mankind. But belief is spontaneous, instinctive, emotional; it often masters, rarely serves the intellect. Faith is, therefore, a question for the individual soul, which must one day face unaided a future wrapped in mystery; it lies beyond the purview of law and public authority. The State’s proper attitude towards organised religions is one of benevolent neutrality; its interference should be limited to the suppression of ritual which is palpably injurious to the general well-being. That form of government is best suited to man’s spiritual needs which allows the freest scope to his idiosyncrasy.

[Mysticism.]

In course of time the aesthetic instinct outgrows the limitations imposed by authority, and rises in revolt against an official creed. All communities which emerge from barbarism into comparative civilisation contain a leaven of men and women who yearn for immediate union with the mysterious Force which we

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style “God” or, more vaguely, “Things Divine.” They see mythology discredited by scientific research, dogmas degenerating into subtle abstractions which transcend the layman’s understanding;

ritual losing its symbolical significance, and reverting to mere magical observance; routine and fanaticism becoming the Scylla and Charybdis of religion. They look for the advent of a Messiah who shall usher in the reign of righteousness. While the mass of mankind cannot realise an abstract idea in the absence of some concrete image which suggests it, there are some who habitually reverse the process. They search the material universe for symbols of the New Jerusalem, where wisdom, power, and beauty sit enthroned. The object of their quest is Heavenly Wisdom, termed *Sophia* by the later Greek philosophers; for devotion cannot thrive without some knowledge of the beloved one. Their conceptions of God vary with environment. Wherever monotheism prevails He is a Being vested with the noblest human characteristics, for such are alone within the range of human comprehension. This mental and emotional attitude is styled "Mysticism." In all ages

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illuminated, however faintly, by the lamp of history it reveals mysticism emerging from the bosom of an ironbound creed, and giving a tremendous stimulus to human effort.

[A Reformation.]

In the little band of mystics a Prophet arises, who is in closer touch than his fellow-men with the Spirit of Life. He stands forth as the mouthpiece of Divine Will, communicated to him by special revelation; and voices the aspiration of dumb myriads who groan beneath the double burden of despotism and intolerance. Disciples gather round the inspired Teacher, eager to learn and propagate his doctrines. A Reformation thus takes shape, which aims at freeing the immortal truths common to all religions from the dense mass of superstition which obscures their radiance. Now the royal and sacerdotal castes take alarm; for their cherished privileges are at stake. Reformers suffer ostracism, imprisonment, and death. But "the blood of martyrs is the Church's seed." Persecution, unless it be carried to a root-and-branch extermination of dissidents, serves but to fan the flame of enthusiasm. In course of time the reformed religion finds universal acceptance, and is an agency making

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for progress until in turn it succumbs to the malign influence of power.

[Mysticism in Indian Philosophy.]

A tendency to mysticism is especially strong in communities belonging to the great Aryan family. Its earliest traces were seen in Upper India, which was subdued by successive waves of Aryan invasion between the fifteenth and tenth centuries B.C. The new-comers had been driven by desiccation from their pasture-grounds in Northern Asia, and a long struggle with hostile Nature had raised their physical and psychical capacities to a pitch which has never been surpassed. After settling down to cultivate the fertile valleys of the Indus and Ganges, they developed a highly complex form of Nature-worship. The secular arm was represented by divers warrior-chiefs: but a priestly caste, calling themselves "Brahmans," held the key of knowledge, and the power which it proverbially confers. The Philosophy, or system of co-ordinated learning, elaborated by Brahman thinkers, has no equal in profundity and range. It formed the basis of Hellenic culture, and therefore of our own. These wise men of old divided the human race into three categories. The lowest is that of the "Forest-Dwellers,"

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who live for the gratification of their animal instincts. Such is the condition of the mass of mankind even in our day. Some there are who, by dint of superior brain-power, become “Masterful.” Science teaches them to govern Nature by divining and obeying its laws, but gives them no insight into the cause of life and growth; no hope of immortality. Their ideals are still on the lower plane, which is ruled by brute instinct, and their intellect is its slave. They crave for power or luxury, and worship money, which is the master-key to both. They extract personal profit from the ill-requited labour of other men; and have, therefore, no sense of human brotherhood. They ignore the supernatural, and so are destitute of religion. Their aims are sordid and unsatisfying: “Let us eat and drink,” they say, “for to-morrow we die!” An elect few rise to the highest degree, qualified as “Virtuous.” By eradicating selfish instincts they become indifferent to desire, and attain a condition styled *Vairágya* in Sanskrit, meaning “detachment” from things of this world. But there was no central authority in Brahmanism entitled by universal acceptance to expound the sacred

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books, termed *Shástras*. India, therefore, became a battle-ground for jarring sects, whose spiritual guides placed their own interpretation on the scriptures. While a few Brahmans could soar into the rarefied atmosphere of transcendentalism, the ignorant masses were swine stamped with the brand of Epicurus. The later *Shástras*, styled *Puránas*, or “ancient writing,” sought to win converts by playing on animal instinct. They cast doubt on the gods’ existence; superseded devotion by ritual, which led to gluttony, drunkenness, and debauchery. Yet the soul’s propensity to climb would take no denial. When current religion failed to satisfy its cravings, a seer stood forth who placed his finger on the causes of human misery.

[Buddhism.]

Gautama, known to his followers as the Buddha, or “Enlightened One,” was a warrior prince of Upper India, who flourished in the sixth century B.C., an era when the religions of Palestine, India, Greece, and Rome hardened into a definite shape. Buddha rejected the Brahmans’ ritual and their caste-distinctions, but retained asceticism, as a means of reaching self-perfection. He also adopted the ancient

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doctrine of Metempsychosis, which Brahmanism had built upon the spirit-worship current in pre-Aryan India. It holds that the soul migrates into some other nascent form of life after the dissolution of its physical clothing. Upon this belief he grafted a conception of *Karma*, which is daily receiving corroboration from science. A man’s Karma is the accumulated result of a long chain of causes and effects produced by deeds perpetrated during his present and previous existences. An evil action may lie dormant during many rebirths, and at any moment may resume its place in the train of causation which determines an individual’s future. This doctrine was no novelty. We find Iahve “visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children” (Exodus xxxiv. 7). A Hebrew prophet, whose career synchronised with Buddha’s, quotes — with disapproval, however — a proverb current in his day, “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge” (Ezekiel xviii. 2). Æschylus made Predestination the theme of his noblest tragedy, and it is still an article of Calvinistic faith. But religion takes much of its colouring

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from physical environment. Buddha lived in a tropical climate, among populations saturated with malaria, and groaning under irresponsible tyranny. He followed the later Shástras in maintaining an attitude of agnosticism; and his Karma differs from the fatalism of more strenuous creeds in that it is not an expression of supernatural Will, but the work of Nature's obscure and inexorable laws. He was, therefore, a pessimist, who aimed at attaining *Nirvana*, or release from the necessity of undergoing a series of re-births into this world of shadows and suffering, by absorption into the Absolute Reality. The Buddhistic formula, *Om mani padmi om*, may be freely translated, "the dewdrop glides into a sunlit sea." The means inculcated was suppression of every instinct which attaches man to a transitory existence. But asceticism is beyond the reach of the average temperament; and an attempt to practise it is apt to generate hypocrisy or spiritual pride. Buddha's ideal was apparently an esoteric ring of Nirvana-seekers, who should propagate the truth by precept and example. His followers were more intent on working out their own salvation than on performing social

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duties. They deprived the world of guidance, despised its innocent pleasures, and were moved to no sympathy by its sorrows. Monasticism, therefore, became a parasitic growth, which absorbed the noblest elements of the community in which it took root.

[Fate or Free-will?]

Denizens of "a land where nature either drowns or burns, a desert and a swamp by turns," may resign themselves to floating down the stream of time, the puppets of pitiless fate. Not so the Aryan, who owes a rich inheritance to his ancestors' prolonged struggle with niggardly Nature. He grappled boldly with that eternal enigma. Fate or Free-will; and solved it in favour of human agency. "Sow desire," said a Hindu philosopher, "and reap action; sow action and reap habit; sow habit and reap character; sow character and reap destiny." Although biology forces us to admit that a man's career is, to some extent, fore-ordained by his inheritance, we feel instinctively the truth of this weighty saying. It is not always possible to control our thoughts, but we ought to prevent them from materialising into harmful action. A crime is a living thing which rises up to confront its doer at every

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phase of his existence. In the complicated nexus of human relations it is as a stone cast into water which forms a series of concentric and widening rings. Western communities keep the fatalism which is part and parcel of their Asiatic creed in a water-tight compartment of the brain. On Sundays they hearken devoutly to the Sermon on the Mount, and break all its precepts during the rest of the week. Their vile maxims, "Business is business," and "Honesty is the best policy," ignore the patent fact that love must sweeten all relations between man and man. Fatalism, in short, is a dogma which paralyses human effort; and Buddhism is rather a science than a religion. In India it encountered the ruin which awaits Utopias and premature movements by succumbing to a recrudescence of Brahmanism in the ninth century of our era.

[Mysticism in Ancient Greece and Rome.]

The religions of Greece and Rome were profoundly influenced by Indian philosophy and their evolution followed the normal track, by cementing a close alliance between religious and secular

authority. But ancient Hellas was a congeries of city-states, kept in internecine warfare by the law of struggle. In the absence

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of a spiritual guide privileged to speak *ex cathedrâ*, sects grew and multiplied. A people so subtle and brilliant as the contemporaries of Pericles were prone to speculation. They adopted the Indian doctrine of the soul's immortality, and it led to a mental orientation which is now termed "Otherworldliness." Men's eyes are ever fixed on a life beyond the grave; they believe that eternal happiness or misery is the recompense for conduct during this existence. Such an atmosphere is favourable to mysticism, and Hellas was honeycombed with secret societies which assembled at intervals in order to excite a devotional spirit by means of suggestion and sympathy. The gods were honoured by purification, sacrifice, hymns, dancing, and dramatic performances. Symbols were carried in procession, typifying some deity's birth, and suffering, death and resurrection. All the concomitants of mysticism were in full operation during the brief days of Greece's glory, and in her decadence they degenerated into debauchery. A similar evolution was seen in the religion of Rome. After the murder of Julius Caesar it became an imperial creed; the objects of worship being Rome and

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the dynasty which thence ruled the world. With the decline of the central power, heresy grew apace, and a flood of debased mysticism set in. Isis, Osiris, and Mithra, with a host of other deities imported from Asia, superseded the positive cult of Rome and Caesar. Religions are subject to the law of struggle; and that survives which proves itself the fittest, i.e. is most completely in accord with developing culture. In the general chaos Christianity secured a comparatively easy triumph, because its mysticism is more fervid than that of any other creed.

[The Coming of Islâm.]

It encountered a dangerous rival in Mohammedanism, which originated in Arabia during the seventh century of our era. That peninsula was the habitat of Semitic tribes which worshipped Nature-powers in a concrete form. In one of these communities of idolators Mohammed was born (570 A.D.), the posthumous son of a bankrupt merchant, and a sufferer during boyhood from epileptic fits. By dint of solitary meditation he built up a system of monotheistic theology on foundations laid by Christianity, Judaism, and indigenous superstitions. Its keynote is Islam, the infinitive of an Arabic verb signifying "to commit

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entirely" which, in a theological sense, means "turning to one God in prayer and sacrifice to the exclusion of all other objects of worship." Mohammed displayed the Bedouin's sensuality and revengefulness in a marked degree; but it is impossible to follow his amazing career without arriving at a conviction that he was indeed a Prophet, "privileged to reveal austere and sublime truths, the full purport of which was probably unknown to himself."

[Defects of Islamic Theology.]

Kings and prophets are apt to "compound for sins they are inclined to by damning those they have no mind to," and every organised religion reflects its founder's idiosyncrasy. Mohammed abhorred

strong drink; his faithful followers are free from the curse of intoxication. His sexual instinct was highly developed: women, therefore, are given an inferior status in Islamic theology and jurisprudence; they are regarded as instruments of pleasure in this world and the next. But the children of mothers who are uneducated and deprived of civic rights, start in life with a handicap which no exotic culture can remove. Mohammed was a fatalist. If God be omnipotent, if He fore-ordain our minutest actions

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from all eternity, we have neither will-power nor responsibility of our own. So in hot and pestilential climates the soul's climbing instinct is paralysed by the incubus of Fate. Mohammed's political views were those of the tribal era, during which absolute rule was a condition of success in the fierce struggle for life. His successors, the Khalifs, were accountable for their deeds to God alone. Subjects owed them passive obedience: the public revenue was their privy purse, to be spent in gratifying royal caprices; fear of assassination was the only check on tyranny. But where independence of thought and action is reckoned high-treason, human types which possess it are ruthlessly eliminated, and the race loses its most vital constituents. Blood-feuds, the capture of women, and brigandage kept Bedouin tribes at war to the knife. Islam, therefore, is a highly militant creed, to be propagated by fire and sword. Mysticism presupposes a divine alliance; "God with us!" is a battle-cry which leads to victory. Within a century of Mohammed's death, Islam had conquered Hither Asia and Northern Africa, had gained a foothold in Spain, and

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was steadily advancing northwards. But for a crushing defeat administered to the Khalif's host by Charles Martel near Tours (732 A.D.) every city in Europe would now re-echo the Muezzin's call to prayer. Islam, however, has been restricted to the "Hot-Belt," lying within thirty degrees on either side of the Equator. Its two hundred million adherents inhabit a region which stretches from Morocco to Malaysia, and is daily extending southwards in Africa. During five eventful centuries they have added little or nothing to the world's knowledge. They are stimulated to feats of heroism by the behests of a heaven-born leader, but sink into apathy when the crisis which calls for effort has passed.

[Sufism.]

Persia had attained unequalled prosperity under the Sassanide dynasty, which ousted the Parthians in 218 A.D. Her religion was nominally that of Zoroaster, but an alliance between Church and State had degraded his refined dualism into a mixture of magic, totemism and spirit-worship. A creed so debased could not withstand the fierce impact of Islam. The last Sassanide emperor lost his throne after the battle of Nahavend (631 A.D.),

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and Persia afterwards became the seat of the Khalifat. It was also Iran, the Aryan land *par excellence*, and Aryans of the higher type are mystics; they feel a vague longing for union with the Source of Wisdom, power and beauty which is seen mirrored, as in a glass darkly, by natural phenomena. Like all organised religions Islam began in mystical revelation, only to end in a clearly defined system of belief. The Koran and its thick crust of authoritative tradition convey positive impressions of God and the future state. No scope is given to speculation, or a search for the hidden meaning of the universe. But Buddhism and Pantheism had penetrated Írán long before the Mohammedan conquest; and the

ferment which they produced led the intellectual classes to rise in revolt against the stern discipline of Islam. In 815 A.D. a native of Khorassan named Abu Sayyid ibn Abi-l-Chair gathered round him a band of pantheists, who embraced monasticism in defiance of Mohammed's well known-dictum — "There is no monkery in Islam."

[Etymology of Şufi.]

The appellation assumed by the new sect has sorely puzzled philologists. Some of them

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derive Şufi from the Greek word *sophia*; others from *suf*, which primarily means "wool" in Persian, on the ground that brethren wore garb of that material. A more convincing clue to the problem is given at page 51 of Havell's *Ideals of Indian Art*. He tells us that the Sanskrit word *úrná* (wool) was applied to an eye-shaped mark on the forehead of sacred images, connoting spiritual consciousness and soul-vision, as distinguished from physical sight and intellectual perception. In the familiar seated statues of Gautama this mystic token became a pearl or other jewel. Now the divine light by which he rose to Buddha-hood, or transcendent wisdom, was conceived as converging from innumerable worlds to the centre of his forehead, which science believes to be the seat of Higher Consciousness. These rays resembled lightning, which is depicted in Indian Art as a series of thin, wavy lines; and never in the zigzag fashion universal throughout the West. Instantaneous photography has proved that the eastern practice is based on accurate observation of nature. But a number of such thin converging lines would suggest a tuft of wool,

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each hair connoting one ray of cosmic light. Inasmuch as Şufism is the offspring of Buddha's gospel, it was natural that Abi-l-Chair's followers should adopt its highly esoteric symbolism.

[Tenets of Şufism.]

Şufis found in solitary contemplation that peace of mind which dread of divine wrath can never bestow. Their tenets were inspired by Indo-Greek philosophy, which grasped the undoubted fact that there are degrees in the state of higher consciousness, and they agree with modern science in regarding life as a condition of growing or "becoming." The "*Murid*" or learner must sit at the feet of a teacher (*Ustád*) under whose guidance he begins to tread the upward path. By painful and sustained effort he attains three degrees of holiness in succession. In the first he conforms to Islamic Law, from love and not from fear of hell or hope of heaven. In the second he follows the road (*Ráh*) by means of asceticism, solitary vigils, and deep study of Şufistic theology. By concentrating his whole attention on the Absolute, he is plunged into a State of Ecstasy (*Hál*) which may become permanent and is then an Abode (*Maqám*). In the

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third degree he attains certainty (*Haqíqat*); the transcendental object of his efforts becomes subjective: the Şufi is God; for him religion is needless. A deeper analysis of his experiences reveals the existence of seven stages through which the devotee has to pass, namely: Worship, Love, Seclusion, Knowledge, Ecstasy, Truth, and Absorption in the Infinite — *fana* answering to *Nirvána* in

Brahminical and Buddhistic theology. The Şufi's ideal being personal holiness quite apart from ethical conduct, he is incapable of altruism, and recalcitrant to all the duties of citizenship.

[Şufism in Persian Poetry.]

Şufism captivated the keen and subtle intellect of a race which is more highly endowed than any in Asia, but has suffered more than any from despotism and intolerance. Professor E. Granville Browne's fascinating book, *A Year amongst the Persians*, describes the Şufi's mysticism as "indeed the eternal cry of the human soul for rest, the insatiable longing of a being wherein infinite ideals are fettered and cramped by a miserable actuality. ... It is in essence an enunciation more or less eloquent of the aspiration of the soul to cease altogether from self and be at one with God." All the great poets of

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Írán were Şufis. Jelál-ed-Din Rumi, Háfez, and Sádi dwell on the charms of women, wine, and song, but their most luscious melodies are pregnant with cryptic meaning. Omar Kháyýám belonged to the brotherhood; witness his quatrain: —

At the Muezzin's cry and Minster's bell
Men kneel in hope of Heaven or fear of Hell;
But he who knows our sacred mysteries
Sows love-seeds in his heart — and all is well.

I need scarcely add that these verses will not be found in Edward FitzGerald's anthology of Persian Epicureanism, which responds to the craving for sensual enjoyment of our disillusioned age. In 1499 a Şufi named Ismail, with a long ancestry of devotees behind him, succeeded in ejecting the gross Uzbeks and Turkomans who had conquered Írán; and he founded a national creed. Its followers are contemptuously styled "Shias" or sectaries by orthodox "Sunnis," who hold firmly to the letter of the Koran and tradition. Persian Shias are inclined to read allegory into the sacred books, but such is the corrupting influence of power that Şufism, as an official religion, has degenerated into the merest hair-splitting.

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The difference between Shia and Sunni is mainly one of ritual; and among the middle-classes Şufism means free thought.

[Medieval Mysticism.]

Mysticism was a vast dynamic force throughout the Middle Ages. It inspired the Crusades, which I have always regarded as an instinctive effort on the part of Christendom to hurl back the encroaching tide of Islam. From that wellspring issued Romanesque and Gothic architecture, the art of primitive painters, the symbolism that pervades early literature. Every manifestation of mediaeval genius was inspired by the self-same thought — to serve and adore the Dispenser of good gifts by displaying them reflected in the souls of His creatures. Mysticism endowed Europe with cathedrals which are a standing proof that faith can do much more than "move mountains"; it taught men how to fashion paper, and multiply writing ten thousand-fold. Self-devotion, self-sacrifice, and brotherly love are hall-marks of the higher mysticism. It is a significant fact that mediaeval artists sought neither fame

nor profit from their incomparable work. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries a series of able Popes, installed in the

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seat of Roman empire, pursued the chimera of universal dominion over men's souls. Yet in the so-called Age of Faith there were mystics who remembered their Master's warning, "My kingdom is not of this world." St. Francis of Assisi burned with love of God and all His creatures: his writings abound in sweet and simple allegory. S.S. Catherine of Siena and Teresa of Castile were equally inspired with all-embracing affection.

[The Reformation.]

In the sixteenth century, Christendom was convulsed by a spiritual earthquake. We speak of *the* Reformation, forgetting that it was the resultant of spiritual force which had vainly sought an outlet for seven hundred years. A vast revival had occurred under the stimulus given by Charlemagne and his henchman Alcuin. King Alfred had mitigated the gross barbarism of Saxon England. Renan reminds us that "The eleventh century witnessed a revival of philosophy, poetry, and architecture which has few parallels in history. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries developed its fruitful germs; the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries saw its decadence" (*Révue des Deux Mondes*, XL, 203). But learning was then the privilege

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of Churchmen, and manuscripts fetched their weight in silver. Great thoughts were stifled at birth by the combined force of religious and civil tyranny. The flickering rays of light died out, and a pall of obscurantism again overspread Europe. Sustained progress became possible when ideas received a lasting embodiment and wide diffusion through the Press. It is more than a coincidence that the Reformation should have begun in the generation which perfected the art of printing. Most of its leaders were mystics, but in their hands the lamp of divine wisdom was darkened by the shadows of theology. The Reformation, therefore, degenerated into a struggle for secular power which deluged Europe with blood, and has warped its political growth. During the absurdly overrated Age of Louis XIV despotism reached a pitch to which we can find few parallels. Yet its darkest days were also those of Quietism, which aimed at complete absorption in the love and contemplation of God. One school of adepts, building on Pauline mysticism, held that Divine Grace was all in all; that when it had descended on the soul, all prayer and good works were needless.

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Another, represented by Fénelon, Archbishop of Cambrai, repudiated the anti-social tendencies of sterile contemplation, and sought to reveal the Higher Consciousness to all mankind. The eighteenth-century revival which roused Anglicanism from its profound slumber, was the work of mystics. Vital religion is, indeed, impossible without the enthusiasm which spiritual forces generate; and the lamp of devotion has been handed down to us by a true Apostolical Succession.

[Gospels of Chaitanya Deva, and Tulsi Dása]

Every phase of the European Reformation has been placed in the clearest light by modern research, but the fact is not so generally known that it was heralded by a similar movement in India. A

recrudescence of sacerdotalism had ousted the purer creed of Buddha, mainly by appealing to the sensual elements in its own cosmogony. Nature has overweighted our race with the sexual instinct: it was called into play by wily Brahmans, whose worship of Nature-powers degenerated into the wildest orgies, but won countless adherents to their standard. Chaitanya Deva (1486-1534) was a reformer of the hideous abuses of Brahmanism. He adored Vishnu, the Preserving

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Influence of the Hindu triad, whose seventh incarnation was Krishna, the hero of the *Mahábhárata*, whom Brahmans had transformed into a species of Don Juan. From the turbid current of sexual passion Chaitanya distilled a mystical love which has its counterpart in every Aryan creed. His disciples were exhorted to lavish the same affection on Krishna as he had received from Rádhá, the most amorous of his many sweethearts. Chaitanya's greatest discovery was the power of association. He invented the prayer-meeting, and his Sankirtan — a procession with songs and music — was the forerunner of our Salvation Army. Chaitanites are multiplying rapidly in the Gangetic Delta: they will either be absorbed by Brahmanism or supplant it. The truce to fanaticism called by Akbar the Great encouraged a poet and reformer named Tulsi Dása (1532-1623) to point a surer path to salvation. Like Chaitanya, he was a devotee of Vishnu, but he saw the mortal dangers which lurk in an apotheosis of animal instincts. Tulsi Dása adored the Preserver incarnate in Ráma, and rehandled Valmiki's *Rámáyána* in the faint rays of Christian light which had

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penetrated Hindustan in that age of transition. Gautama, the Buddha, had proclaimed the Brotherhood of Man: Tulsi Dása deduced from that doctrine the Fatherhood of God. The Preserver, having sojourned awhile on this earth, can understand human infirmities, and is ever ready to save his sinful creatures who call upon him. The duty of leading others into the fold is imposed on all believers. Tulsi Dása was neither an iconoclast nor yet the founder of a sect: his gospel is truly Catholic. He had bosom friends in the greatest men of Akbar's spacious days. His elegy on Akbar's illustrious Finance-Minister, Todar Mall, was unconsciously plagiarised in Sir Henry Wotton's well-known *Character of a Happy Life*, which begins, "Lord of himself though not of lands, And having nothing yet hath all." It runs thus: —

Lord of four small villages, yet a mighty monarch whose kingdom was himself.
In an evil age Todar's sun hath set.
The burden of Ráma's love, great though it was, he bore unto the end:
The burden of this life was too heavy for him, and so he laid it down.
Todar hath gone to the dwelling-place of the Lord;
Therefore doth Tulsi restrain his grief;
But 'tis hard to have without his spotless friend.

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The poet had loved and lost. It was the death of an only son that sent him forth from home as a wandering devotee. He could sympathise with the myriads whose humble lives were spent in the bosom of Nature. His version of the *Rámáyána* is far better known throughout the United Provinces and Bihar than is our Bible in rural England. Unlike their fellow-countrymen in Bengal, the people of Hindustan proper are not swayed by relentless Fate, or by Káli, the fell goddess of Destruction, or by the sensuous imagery of Rádhá-worship. Their prayers rise to One who knows and loves His meanest

adorer: while Ráma reigns all must be well. A profound difference of ideal accounts for the sinister phase which political agitation has assumed in Bengal and the Márátha country as contrasted with the peace which broods over Upper India.

[Bábism.]

Belief ranks with desire as a mainspring of human action: it is as necessary to the soul as food to the body. A man may have no religion, but he always has a god. Agnosticism was an intellectual fashion in the last generation: it is out of date in the Renaissance

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of the aesthetic instinct which began some decades ago and daily gathers strength. Quietism and Otherworldliness antagonise with the spirit of fraternity which was born during the French Reign of Terror, even as flowers draw sustenance from corrupting matter. The time was ripe for a more effectual Reformation: and again light shone from the East. In 1844 there arose at Shiráz a merchant named Mirza ‘Ali Mohammed, known to his disciples as the Báb, or Gate (of Heaven). Like all prophets he claimed to be the harbinger of One whom God would shortly make manifest to declare His Will. The Báb was a novelty in Persia — a Şufi bent on teaching all men without distinction immortal truths which had hitherto been the heritage of an esoteric sect. The Ulema, or clergy, fought him tooth and nail: at their instigation he was cast into prison at Tabriz, and publicly shot there in July, 1850. It is said that twenty thousand Bábis cheerfully surrendered property, freedom, and life itself rather than recant their faith.

[Developed by Baha ’Ullah.]

Amongst them was Mirza Hussein ‘Ali Baha ’Ullah, born at Teheran of an illustrious family in 1817. He was attracted by the

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beauty of the Báb’s revelation, and devoted his vast intellectual gifts to propagating it. At the Ulema’s bidding Shah Mohammed imprisoned Baha ’Ullah, confiscated his fortune, and finally compelled him to take refuge at Bagdad. After spending two years (like Mohammed and Zoroaster) plunged in deep meditation “far from the madding crowd’s ignoble strife,” Baha ’Ullah declared himself the Manifestation of God to a handful of disciples; and his Gospel spread like wildfire among the citizens of Bagdad. From the exigencies of its geographical position the Turkish Government has always been more tolerant of heresies than that of Persia. The Sultan was content to summon Baha ’Ullah to Constantinople: but the Prophet publicly announced his divine mission before quitting Bagdad. After sojourning for four months in the Turkish capital, Baha ’Ullah migrated to Adrianople, where his creed had made considerable progress: so great, indeed, that the Porte was induced in 1857 to banish him to Acre, a decayed sea-port on the Syrian coast, dreaded on account of its pestilential climate. There most of his doctrinal treatises were written — the *Kitábi ul Iqan, ul*

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Akdas, and *Ul Ahd*, besides innumerable letters; and there he peacefully passed away on May 29th, 1892.

[Tenets of Baháism.]

Bahá 'Ullah built a far nobler edifice on a foundation of Şufism. His seeker after truth is led through seven stages by a passionate longing for union with the Beloved, and for realisation of the Higher Consciousness. They are: —

- (1) The Valley of Search. Like the hart he pants for refreshing grace, and is vouchsafed flashes of insight which encourage him to persevere in painful effort;
- (2) The Valley of Love Divine. His yearnings are gratified by more copious streams of grace;
- (3) The Kingdom of Knowledge. He becomes more capable still of discerning the truth;
- (4) The Kingdom of Divine Unity. He grasps the idea of universal harmony, and is guided to a deeper insight into sacred mysteries;

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- (5) The City of Divine Riches. He is plunged in ecstasy by the still imperfect revelations he receives;
- (6) The State of Spiritual Wonder. His experiences multiply, bringing discoveries which fill him with amazement;
- (7) Absorption. Entirely divested of self, he realises the Divine Essence. This goal does not imply a merging of his personality into the Absolute; it is a stepping-stone to higher states of consciousness of which we can form no conception.

[Its Divergence from Şufism.]

Man differs from animals, said Plato, in always aiming at some goal. Our intrinsic value is largely determined by the ideals we cherish, and the same test applies to religion. Its conceptions of God are of paramount importance. Now the mind's functions are perceptive, emotional, and conative or volitional. A fact is grasped by the senses: feelings regarding it are excited, and reason strives to draw useful deductions from the knowledge

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thus acquired. But our senses can assimilate only a minute fraction of the universal rhythm. Our emotions are apt to escape from the will's control, and reason's light is obscured by superstition. Theology is, therefore, an incomparable builder of Utopias. The God of Monotheism is an omnipotent, eternal, omnipresent Being; separated by fathomless abysses from His creatures, yet fraught with human passions, and taking human shape in order to work miracles, utter prophecies, and divulge doctrines, acceptance of which gives the key to happiness in this world and the next. He inspires the "Quaking Terror" of St. Ignatius rather than the love of St. John the Divine and mystic. Pantheism, on the other hand, vulgarises the conception of Godhead by diffusing it too widely. Mysticism of the quietist type grovels before an unattainable Absolute. In its view material phenomena, and therefore all knowledge, are subjective delusions. The quietist seeks to abolish human nature rather than improve it, to sap the world's foundations instead of building a better one. He would revert to the status of "a protoplasm wholly absorbed in the blessed contemplation of an

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unutterable Reality." The agnostic turns heartsick from sterile and irritating controversies. For him the existence of God is an open question, but one of no practical importance, because all knowledge of the

supernatural is denied to man. Baha 'Ullah is a personal God, succouring all who love and worship him.

[Its Idealism.]

The Ideal and the Instinct are springs of human action, but there is an essential difference between them. The first is never satisfied; the second ceases on fruition as a motive force. The idealist's aim in life is to leave the world better than he found it. He judges civilisation, not by the marvels it has achieved, but by its flagrant sins of omission, knowing its results to be as remote from an attainable goal as was the Parthenon in Athens' golden prime from the citizens' humble dwellings below. The idealist is not hostile to improvements in the "scaffolding of life," but regards them as means to an end, namely, Freedom for the soul from the trammels of selfish propensity. Baha 'Ullah's writings are pregnant with idealism. He followed Buddhists and Şufis in recognising the duty of soul-culture, but

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eschewed their asceticism and self-absorption. Baha 'Ullah's religion is one of joy, of work, and social service: it condemns the parasitism which is concomitant of most organised creeds.

[Its salient Tendencies.]

Bahaism will not increase the multitude of sects whose conflict once deluged Christendom with blood and is now discrediting the cause of true religion. It is eclectic, embodying bedrock principles held in common by every creed; it is a purifying force, and frees the gold of truth from quartzite masses of superstition. Bahaism has no priesthood, for sacerdotalism engenders the spirit of caste and a struggle for mastery between secular and spiritual powers. It lays no stress on metaphysical dogma or ritual which is their material clothing. Women are nearer the Spirit of Life than men; when they attain the Higher Consciousness it confers a sort of consecration on them. Both sexes are teachers and scholars, according to the degree of soul-culture which each individual has attained. Bahaism recommends monogamy; its ideal is a wedded pair combining the intellectual and emotional attributes of either sex for their own advancement and that of the race. Warfare and commercialism are hideous

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survivals of the "forest-dwelling" era. Baha 'Ullah wrote: —

Ye are all leaves of the same tree, and drops of one ocean. We desire only the good of the world and the happiness of nations; that they may become one in faith, and all men may live together as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men may be strengthened; that diversities of religion may cease, and difference of race be annulled; mankind becoming one kindred and one family. Let not a man glory in that he loves his country, let him rather take pride in this — that he loves his kind.

[Baha 'Ullah's Successor—'Abdu'l-Baha.]

The dying Prophet enjoined his followers to seek spiritual help from his eldest son, 'Abdul Baha, who was born on May 23rd, 1844 — the very day on which Baha 'Ullah's mission began. Upon him was laid the solemn duties of propagating the new Revelation, and serving as a bond of union between believers. The ex-Sultan of Turkey had spies everywhere; they carried false versions of Bahaism to

Yildiz Palace, and 'Abdul Baha was thrown into durance vile. In 1908 he was released and took up his abode at Haifa, which nestles under the shadow of Mount Carmel. The air seemed to be saturated with religion during 'Abdul Baha's sojourn at the little Syrian port. He received enquirers, who flocked thither from every land, with the sweet courtesy

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which is the heritage of his race, resolved their doubts, and encouraged them to persevere in the upward path. Quite recently he paid a visit to London, where his personality gave zest to the gospel of soul-culture. He afterwards sojourned for several weeks in Paris, which has always been a breeding-ground of great ideas.

[Will Bahaism Live?]

It remains to enquire whether Bahaism is likely to fulfil its Prophet's aspirations. In other words, is the soil ready for the sower? For otherwise germs deposited therein will perish, or lie dormant until more favourable conditions return. Everything in this Universe is periodic. The rhythmical movements of heavenly bodies, with their linked phenomena of season, tide, and the heart's systole and diastole, seem to react on that marvellous and all-conquering entity, the human brain. Civilisation is due to the interplay of cerebral forces generated by the eternal conflict of East and West, which assumes an acute phase at intervals of approximately five hundred years. There is reason for believing that one of these recurrent crises began with the victories wrested from Russia

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by Japan. Glancing down the long vista of history we find periods of construction and transition alternating with each other. Current conceptions of religious, civil, and economic policy slowly crystallise into an imposing edifice. They are absorbed in childhood by the average individual, and influence his actions throughout life in a degree varying with his idiosyncrasy. Old Hesiod pointed out that each of us belongs to one of three categories — those who think for themselves, who think as others think, and who never think at all. The great mass of mankind may be ranged in the second and third orders. To them the artificial environment in which they have been born seems as immutable as the firmament: they blindly accept the principles and superstitions upon which it rests, stagger through life under a load of ancestral prejudice, and are refractory to all innovation. Those who think for themselves are an infinitesimal minority; it is doubtful whether they exceed one per mille in the most advanced community. Yet their ill-requited effort is the one force which raises civilisation to a higher plane. Ideas flash upon the brain of this *élite*, which group themselves

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round a definite Ideal. Man is man only in action. At first their activity is mainly destructive. They handle prevalent conceptions objectively, by the light of science, and speedily undermine the foundations of popular belief. There follows a period of transition, during which the earth is strewn with shattered idols. But man's aesthetic instinct, which is in touch with hidden sources of harmony, slowly brings comparative order out of the chaos of unrest. Another age of construction begins; and it endures until mankind again outgrows its limitations.

[Volcanic Condition of the World: Domestic Unrest.]

The whole world has entered on one of these cataclysmic phases. No organised religion appeases the soul's craving for light, and the assumption common to all of them which makes mundane existence the dark vestibule of heaven or hell, is daily losing ground. Idealists perceive that the energy now expended by pious folk in securing "a title clear to mansions in the sky," might render this life a very paradise were it used to improve the mitigated barbarism which does duty for civilisation. For the archaic Struggle for Life bids fair to supersede the right Law of Mutual Help. Politics is a battle,

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a profession, or a pastime. In the economic sphere war to the knife rages between capital and labour, between the plutocracy and the masses who have been robbed of their heritage by class-made laws. On one side is ranged a small group possessing untold wealth, yet rejecting the ethics of feudalism which, with all its shortcomings, was apt to regard power as a trust for the public good. On the other stand dense phalanxes gripped by poverty, yet squandering their meagre wages in coarse enjoyment. No section of society is free from selfishness, parasitism, and the spirit of caste. Idealists deplore the resulting waste of youth and health, of beauty and natural resources; the universal Mammon-worship, the degradation of art and prostitution of science for purposes of lucre; the myriad frauds of commercialism, whose motto seems to be "Every man for himself and woe betide the hindmost!"

[And International Anarchy.]

And while civil war is brewing within the body politic, earth-hunger and economic rivalries have turned Europe into an armed camp. The Powers are watching each other like beasts of prey, and yearly waste on armaments a sum which, properly applied, would

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fill Europe with noble and happy lives. For the morality of emperors and kings is that of the tribal era. Wherever they retain a shred of power it is employed for dynastic aggrandisement; and the devotion which they inspire as symbols of national unity is invoked for purposes of organised brigandage. Thanks to the prevailing ignorance, democracies which have eliminated dynastic rule by a process of slow and relentless pressure remain, like their former masters, in the "forest-dwelling" stage. Collective hysteria is a recognised social disease: communities are apt to "see red," and fly at each other's throats at the bidding of their commercialised newspapers. The boasted Comity of Nations and International law itself, have become empty phrases; nor are treaties worth the paper on which they are written. For law is ineffective without "sanction": there must be a reserve of physical force for the purpose of compelling obedience to its behests. But no European Power is strong or disinterested enough to play the thankless part of policeman; while mutual jealousies forbid concerted action against nations which outrage the civilised conscience.

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As I have pointed out, the morality of men in association is that of the average individual, and always falls far short of attainable ideals. Nations are children of a larger growth; they crave for prestige, are highly sensitive of insults, real or supposed, are incapable of gratitude, and prone to settle disputes by the barbarous arbitrament of warfare. Recent acts of aggression have indeed shocked the nascent sense of human brotherhood, but we are painfully reminded that civilisation has been reared on a crust of animal instincts whose uprush may overwhelm its precarious fabric. Thirty years ago a great French writer remarked that Asia was the cradle of the human race, and Africa would be its grave: his

vaticination may yet be realised. I need scarcely add that 'Abdul Baha stands aghast at the recrudescence of degrading passions. He advocates a universal language, and would supersede war by international arbitration. In point of fact, his teachings pave the way for a cosmopolitanism which respects the growth of social organisms but links them in bonds of brotherhood. In an epistle to some friends in Lancashire and Cheshire he wrote: —

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We hope that the spirituality of these precepts may move the East and West to clasp their hands round each other's necks like two longing and affectionate lovers, so that this Pavilion of the world's Unity may shelter its four corners, and make its five Continents one, the different nations as one nation, conflicting religions as one religion, remote fatherlands as a single home, different languages as one mother-tongue.

[Idealism Is Abroad. The Soil Ready for the Sower.]

While materialists are hastening to exploit or enjoy undeterred by qualms of social remorse or dread of a future reckoning, there is an ever-increasing band of idealists who expect the advent of an age of Truth and Justice. A Renaissance has begun, replete with movements aiming at the regeneration of our race. Men and women are plunging into "isms" of every kind, and following generous chimeras with the same self-devotion as their ancestors gave to propagating a creed. Conditions throughout the world resemble those which prevailed at the births of Christ, of Gautama, and Mohammed. A Teacher is eagerly looked for who shall focus the mass of unco-ordinated effort and voice the aspirations of an unquiet age. The gospel of 'Abdul Baha is, therefore, making extraordinary progress. It appeals with equal force to Christians, Moslems, and to Jews; to Hindus, Buddhists,

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Shintoists, Taoists, and Parsis. Persia, Syria, and Egypt are full of the leaven of Bahaism; from every European country enquirers and proselytes are flocking to its standard. The United States of America is a specially favourable culture-ground for the beneficent microbe of brotherhood. Its citizens stand at the parting of the ways: their civilisation will either usher in a millennium or re-plunge the world into utter barbarism. It has generated commercialism on an unprecedented scale, and therefore suppressed the aesthetic instinct. The Dollar reigns without a rival; and everything is reduced to the money standard. Women are infected with selfishness, snobbery, and parasitism; gigantic trusts grind labour's face and fleece the consumer; "graft" seeks dishonest gain for the performance of public functions; political and even judicial corruption have reached a pitch to which it would be hard to find a parallel. But the Puritan soul has risen in revolt against gross materialism and predatory wealth; Bahaism may come in the Great Republic with a rush which nothing can resist. Much will depend on the personal equation; for Kings and Prophets are prone

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to become megalomaniacs under the corrupting influence of adulation. National interests are sacrificed to a monarch's caprice, and overweening self-confidence reacts injuriously on a teacher's revelation. I doubt not that 'Abdul Baha will avoid the pitfalls dug by his disciples, especially those of the more emotional sex, and that his influence for good will prove incalculable.

[Summary.]

To sum up: — Idealism is the noblest efflorescence of every religious belief held by scions of the Aryan stock. It is a manifestation of aesthetic instinct, which craves for union with the Source of life, light, and love. Beyond this material universe there is an ocean whose waters sparkle in the human soul, a realm impenetrable by the cold, clear light of intellectual and objective research. It is a fact of the highest significance that Lord Kelvin found himself “absolutely forced by science to admit and believe in creative and directive power as an influence other than that of physical, dynamical and electrical forces.” This Kingdom has been entered by a brotherhood of Idealists whose self-devotion breathes new life into dying creeds.

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Chaitanya, Tulsi Dása, SS. Thomas of Assisi, Catherine, and Teresa, the saintly Fénelon, and many other ardent seekers for holiness seem to clasp hands although centuries have elapsed since they taught and suffered. 'Abdul Baha is an idealist; but his tenets harmonise with the spirit of fraternity which is generating a Social Renaissance throughout the world. His followers differ from Hindus, Buddhists, Şufis, and Quietists in rejecting asceticism, whether it be carried on in isolation or communities. They practise intensive culture of the soul, as a means of extending knowledge of the truth to a world whose toil and suffering they share. Bahaim is individualistic; for it frees spiritual growth from the shackles of mythology, dogma, and ritual. It is cosmopolitan, holding that *tout ce qu'il y a de grand et de pur dans toutes les races doit s'Unir dans une même flamme, qui éclaire, échauffe et purifie la nuit du monde.*

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APPENDIX

ADDRESS DELIVERED BY 'ABDUL BAHA AT AN ASSEMBLY OF FRIENDS HELD IN PARIS, NOVEMBER, 1911.

I AM deeply grateful to our Lady President for her kind expressions, and I thank God for bringing me to Paris, and into the midst of an assemblage so spiritually minded! If we consider the atmosphere which surrounds us to-day, we cannot but feel the presence of the Spirit. It may be likened to the ocean, and yourselves to waves. Though they defy computation, they all belong to one ocean; though they differ in outward form, they all obey the impulse given by one force. Prophets and manifestations of the Divine Will are sent into the world in order to educate mankind, to place human Unity in the clearest light, to teach us that individual waves are powerless, and all authority is immanent in the ocean which generates them.

The Scriptures tell us that Jerusalem shall come down from heaven. As our President has remarked, this glorious city is not built of stones, or mortar, or clay; its binding force is Divine Teachings, which have been communicated to mankind by the power of the Spirit. But those teachings had passed into oblivion; no trace remained of the Heavenly Jerusalem. When its ruin was consummated, lo, Baha 'Ullah

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appeared in the East — the East which was once the seat of material power, but is now the chosen abode of the Spirit!

Man is not man because he has a body: he is man in that he possesses a soul. Its perishable clothing assimilates him to the animals; the soul distinguishes him from them.

Just as the sun lights up our earth, so doth the Spirit illumine the body. It makes us celestial, gives us insight into the reality of things, unfolds all science to our understanding, and offers us life eternal. The Spirit links mankind in bonds of brotherhood, reuniting the East and West, changing a human world into a world divine. Those who have received the Spirit give light to their fellow-men.

Ye who are spiritually minded should, therefore, receive the teachings of Baha 'Ullah with joy. But they are not concerned with things of the Spirit alone. Baha 'Ullah was a seeker after Truth, which is the cause of all spiritual manifestations. It cannot be grasped by the senses; but is revealed to our hidden faculties. Although the body is capable of feeling and understanding, it is commanded by the Spirit alone.

The Spirit's action is twofold. In the first place it uses instruments and tools: sees with the eye, hears with the ear, speaks with the tongue. Though our senses belong to the body, their virtue comes from the Spirit. Secondly, it operates without the aid of instruments. As in dreamland it conjures up an immaterial world, in which we see without eyes, hear without ears, and move without feet.

Again, the human body may be compared to a

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crystal, and the Spirit to light. The crystal is merely transparent: it is endowed with beauty and splendour by light. Light has no need of the crystal in order to display its radiance, but without light the crystal remains invisible. So the Spirit has vitality apart from the body, to which it gives life. The Spirit can maintain its power and grandeur in a mutilated frame, but the body suffers annihilation when the Spirit leaves it. We now see that man is man by virtue of the Spirit alone, which is one of the divine benefits, and a manifestation of the Sun of Truth.

If the human soul be breathed on by the Holy Spirit it enters on eternal life, searches for heavenly light, illumines the world with its divine qualities. Let us, therefore, strive to act in conformity with the teachings of Baha 'Ullah. Let us aim at attaining higher spirituality day by day. Let us serve the cause of human unity; treating all men as brothers and equals. Let us spread Divine mercy far and wide, and display God's love to all the inhabitants of the Earth, in order that spiritual faculties may blaze forth in all their glory, and our perishable bodies retain no vestige of power over us. Then shall the Spirit indeed rule the world, and fashion it into a harmonious whole. Then disputes and differences shall no longer sever heart from heart. The New Jerusalem shall be builded, men shall become citizens of one kingdom; each receiving a bounteous portion of heavenly Grace.

Once more I bless God for bringing me into this assembly, and I thank you, my brethren and sisters,

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for your spiritual sentiments, I beseech Him constantly to increase their power, and strengthen the prevailing unity. For this age of ours is destined to become great and divine. The prophecies of Scripture will be realised, the signs predicted by Christ will make their appearance. Ours will be in sooth an epoch of Truth and Justice. Yes, a time is at hand when this material world shall become an echo of a world divine. This is our hope; through God's grace we are now a brotherhood, stirred by this holy desire!

I beseech Him to give you life through the inspiration of His Holy Spirit; that you may live in Unity; that your hearts may be filled with His love, and His name may be ever on your lips; that your

actions may be spiritual, your emotions in harmony with those of dwellers in the Heavenly Kingdom; that human light, which is a reflection of God Himself, may shine with clear effulgence.

O God, generous and merciful, shed on this assemblage the glory of Thy power; lavish Thy gifts upon us all; yield us Thy mighty help; bring forth our latent spirituality; show us the upward path!

O Creator, we are poor indeed; bestow on us the riches of Thy Kingdom. We are humble, glorify us; we are homeless, gather us into Thy fold; we are seekers, guide us by Thy boundless favour; we are dumb, grant unto us the power of eloquent speech; we are weak, vouchsafe to us Thy strength! O Creator who pardonest, forgive us our trespasses; Thou who art all-wise, teach us Heavenly Wisdom!

“Mr. Clarmont P. Skrine, British Resident of Madras States, received us graciously, at the British Residency in Trivandrum. He has known much about the Baha’i Teachings and met many Baha’is during his visits to Iran. We learned from him that the late F. H. Skrine of London, who wrote a book about the Baha’i Faith nearly thirty years ago, was his father. The Resident told us his father had been very interested in the Cause.

[THE INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF MARTHA L. ROOT, Baha’i World VII, 96]

Living in Trivandrum is the British Resident of the Madras States, Mr. Clarmont P. Skrine, and Mr. Isfandiar Bakhtiyári of Karachi and I had the pleasure of meeting him; he is a friend of the Maharaja. He told us that his father, the late F. H. Skrine, had written a book about the Baha’i Faith nearly thirty years ago. His father had been in the Administrative Department of Civil Service in Bengal for many years, but after returning to London in 1897, he had heard of the Baha’i Teachings and had made a deep study of them. [Root, *Baha’i Faith and Eastern Scholars*, 689]