

MISSIONS AND  
MODERN HISTORY

A Study of the Missionary Aspects of Some  
Great Movements of the Nineteenth Century

By  
ROBERT E. SPEER

*Secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian  
Church in the United States of America.*

In two volumes

VOL. I

1904

---

III

THE RELIGION OF THE BAB

IT is a difficult task to form a just judgment of contemporaneous events. Time is required in the study of history to supply perspective, to reveal relationships and to disclose the real dimensions alike of movements and of men. It is not surprising, accordingly, that the movement to be discussed in this chapter is practically unknown, and that though it has shaped the lives of thousands and been sobered by many martyrdoms it has found no place as yet in our interest. Perhaps within the past three years, however, many who had never heard of the religion of the Bab in Persia, have at least been made aware of the existence of such a faith somewhere in the world, by reports of its spread in our own land, and have come thus, because it interested a few hundred of our own people, to take an interest in a movement which had already shaken a whole nation, and was slowly undermining there one branch of the most bitter and fanatical foe which Christianity confronts. Babism should be familiar to us because it is the chief concern in the lives of increasing multitudes in Persia. It is one of the most remarkable movements of our day, beside, because its object, however concealed and even unrecognized by Babis themselves, is "nothing less than the

complete overthrow of Islam and the abrogation of its ordinances.”<sup>1</sup> The external attacks on Islam, both Sunni and Shiah, have as yet accomplished but a little part of what they desire. Babism is a convulsive upheaval from within the Shiah wing of the faith.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Browne, *The Episode of the Bab*, p. 187.

<sup>2</sup> The Rev. P. Z. Easton, formerly of Tabriz, takes a less unfavourable view of the Bab and his religion than is set forth in this chapter. He kindly writes in comment:

"All that is essential in Babism is old. Browne says that 'Persia is, and always has been, a very hotbed of systems from the time of Manes and Mazdak in the old Sassanian days, down to the present age, which has brought into being the Babis and the Sheikhs' (*A Year Among the Persians*, p. 122). We may go still further back to the Avesta and to those pre-Zoroastrian sages, out of which the Yashts are formed. Outside of a certain admixture of Occidental science and philanthropy, introduced largely for foreign consumption and in order to give an up to date stamp or colouring to the movement, there is scarcely anything that distinguishes Babism from its predecessors. The subject is one that is inextricably interwoven with the whole course of Persian history in all its departments, political, religious, social and philosophical. The materials are exceedingly rich and abundant, and time has pronounced its verdict again and again in the most unmistakable manner. So deep a hold have the ideas, which lie at the foundation of Babism and similar sects, taken of the minds and hearts of the people, that it may be said that as every American is a possible president, so every Persian is a possible murshid. For every sect that comes out to the light of day and makes its appearance on the page of history, there are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of embryo sects, of whose existence no one knows outside of a very limited circle."

He adds that Babism is not content with the overthrow of Islam:

"More than this. It is to be classed with the Assassins which Von Hammer calls 'the union of impostors and dupes which, under the mask of a more austere creed and severer morals, undermined all religion and morality' (Von Hammer, *History of the Assassins*, p. 2). 'To believe nothing and to dare all, was, in two words, the sum of this system, which annihilated every principle of religion and morality, and had no other object than to execute ambitious designs with suitable ministers, who, daring all and honouring nothing, since they consider everything a cheat and nothing forbidden, are the best tools of an infernal policy. A system, which, with no other aim than the gratification of an insatiable lust of dominion, instead of seeking the highest of human objects, precipitates itself into the abyss, and mangling itself, is buried amidst the ruins of thrones and altars, the horrors of anarchy, the wreck of national happiness, and the universal execration of mankind, (*Ibid*, pp. 36, 37).

“At length, with fiendish laugh, like that which broke  
From Iblis at the Fall of Man, he spoke;  
‘Yes, ye vile race, for hell's amusement given,  
Too mean for earth, yet claiming kin with heaven:  
God's images, forsooth! such Gods as he,  
Whom India serves, the monkey deity;  
Ye creatures of a breath, proud things of clay,  
To whom if Lucifer, as grandams say,  
Refused, though at the forfeit of heaven's light,  
To bend in worship, Lucifer was light!  
Soon shall I plant this foot upon the neck  
Of your foul race, and without fear or check,  
Luxuriating in hate, avenge my shame,  
My deep-felt, long-nurst loathing of man's name.  
Soon at the head of myriads, blind and fierce,  
As hooded falcons, through the universe,  
I'll sweep my darkening, desolating way,  
Weak man my instrument, curst man my prey!"

— Mokanna's soliloquy in *Lalla Rookh*.

[page 122]

Mirza Ali Mohammed, later called the Bab, the founder of this religion, was born at Shiraz, in southern Persia, on October 9, 1820. He was a Sayid, or descendant of Mohammed. His father, who was a grocer, died while his son was yet a lad, and the boy was placed

[page 123]

under the care of an uncle, and at the age of fifteen was sent to Bushire, to help in his uncle's business, and subsequently he engaged in business alone. "He was noted for godliness, devoutness, virtue and piety," says one of the Babi books, "and was regarded in the sight of men as so characterized."<sup>3</sup> An earlier book, however, is not content with this temperate statement, but deals in more remarkable evidences of his exceptional character. Thus the *Tarikh-I-Jadid* or *New History*, states:

"At the moment of his birth he exclaimed 'The kingdom is God's!' And in his boyhood they sent him to be taught his lessons by Sheikh Alid, an accomplished scholar and a godly man, who was one of the disciples of Sheikh Ahmad of Ahsa, and subsequently became an ardent believer in His Holiness. Amongst other anecdotes of the Bab's boyhood which he used to relate, one was as follows: The first day that they brought him to me at school, I wrote down the alphabet for him to learn, as is customary with children. After a while I went out on business. On my return I heard, as I approached the room, some one reading the Koran in a sweet and plaintive voice. Filled with astonishment, I entered the room and inquired who had been reading the Koran. The other children answered, pointing to His Holiness, 'He was.' 'Have you read the Koran' I asked. He was silent. 'It is best for you to read Persian books,' said I, putting the Hakku'l-Yakin before him, 'read from this.' At whatever page I opened it I saw that he could read it easily. 'You have read Persian,' I said. 'Come read some Arabic, that will be better.' So saying, I placed before him the Sharh-i-amthila. When I began to explain the meaning of the Bismi'llah to the pupils in the customary manner, he asked, 'Why does the word Rahman in-

[page 124]

---

"Its tone (Wady Mirza Jani's History) towards *all* beyond the pale of the church, and more especially towards the Shah of Persia, and his Government, was irreconcilably hostile, (*Tarikh I Jadid*, xxviii)."

With reference to the alleged wonders in connection with Babism, Mr. Easton says:

"Persian flattery, Persian imagination and Persian falsehood easily account for the wonders mentioned. I was present one day at the Foreign Agent's office in Tabriz, when some farashes, who had been sent to bring certain individuals, came back and reported that a mob of 500 people had resisted them. I looked into the matter and found that the 500 were five."

Of this last view of Mr. Easton's, Dr. George W. Holmes, who knows Babism as well as any man, says — "This view is, I believe a correct one, except that it takes no account of the personality of Beha Ullah. What Luther, Cromwell, Washington or Lincoln were to the cause each of these men represented, the person of Beha Ullah is to the religion which bears his name.

"With regard to the alleged wonders, it must be borne in mind that the Persians of to-day are ready to believe the most incredible reports of miraculous performances by dead or living saints, and it is really to the credit of Behaism that it has so few alleged miracles to offer, when it would be so easy to impose a much larger number on the credulity of its votaries."

<sup>3</sup> Browne, *The Episode of the Bab*, p. 2.

clude both believers and infidels, while the word Rahim applies only to believers?’ I replied, ‘Wise men have a rule to the effect that extension of form implies extension of meaning, and Rahman contains one letter more than Rahim.’ He answered, ‘Either their rule is a mistake or else that tradition which you refer to Ali is a lie.’ ‘What tradition?’ I asked. ‘The tradition,’ replied he, ‘which declares that King of Holiness to have said — “The meanings of all the Sacred Books are in the Koran, and the meanings of the whole Suratu’l Fatiha are in the Bismi’llah, and the whole meaning of the Bismi’llah is in the initial letter B, and the meaning of the B is in the point under the B, and the point is inexplicable.”’ On hearing him reason thus subtilly, I was speechless with amazement, and led him back to his home. His venerable grandmother came to the door. I said to her, ‘I cannot undertake the instruction of this young gentleman,’ and told her all that had passed. Addressing him, she said, ‘Will you not cease to speak after this fashion? What business have you with such matters? Go and learn your lessons.’ ‘Very well,’ he answered, and came and began to learn his lessons like the other boys. He even began with the alphabet, though I urged him not to do so. One day I saw him talking in a whisper to the boy who sat next him, but when I would have listened, he was silent. Then I pretended to pay no heed to what he was saying, though in reality I listened attentively, and I heard him say to the other boy, ‘I am so light that, if I liked, I could fly up beyond the Throne (*i.e.*, the throne of God, situated above the highest heaven); would you like me to go?’ So saying, he made a movement from the ground. As he said, ‘Would you like me to go?’ and made this movement, I smiled in wonder and bewilderment, and as I did so, he suddenly ceased speaking. So likewise, before he had begun to practice writing, I observed that every day he used to bring with him a pen-case, and engage in writing something. I thought to myself, ‘He sees the other boys writing, and wishing to write too, draws lines like them and scribbles on the paper.’ For several days he continued to act thus, until one day I took the paper from him to see what he was doing. On glancing at it I saw that he had actually written something. Wondering how, without having practiced he could write, I proceeded to examine what he had written, and found it to be a dissertation on the mystery and knowledge of the Divine Unity, written in the finest and most eloquent style, and so profound that the keenest intellect would fail to penetrate its whole meaning. . . . Thus even in his childhood signs of the Bab’s holiness, majesty and lofty rank were apparent, so that for instance, as a boy he used to predict of pregnant women whether they would bring forth a male or a female infant, besides foretelling many chance occurrences, such as earthquakes and the ruin of certain places as they actually took place.”<sup>4</sup>

It is not strange that such a youth as this was unable to remain contented in business, and before he was twenty-three he journeyed

[page 125]

from Bushire to Kerbela, one of the great shrines of the Persian Mohammedans, and studied there under Haji Sayid Kazim, one of the great teachers of the Sheikhe sect, and the immediate and only successor to its founder Sheikh Ahmad. To understand the origin of the Babi movement, its growth and its significance, it is necessary to recall here the religious situation in Persia out of which Babism sprang, and to which it ministers.

The Persian Mohammedans are Shiahs, while the rest of the Mohammedan world belongs to the orthodox party called the Sunnis. The enmity between the two sections of the Moslem world is implacable. It arose with the murder of Ali, the fourth caliph, and his two sons, the Shiahs holding that the supreme authority in Islam belongs to Ali and his descendants, and denying the legitimacy of the succession of caliphs recognized by the Sunnis, and, of course, denying the title of the Sultan as head of the Moslem Church. But in another direction the chief point of difference is found — the Shiah doctrine of the Imam,

---

<sup>4</sup> Browne, *The New History of the Bab*, pp. 263ff.

“The Imam is the successor of the Prophet, adorned with all the qualities which he possessed.”<sup>5</sup> Ali was the first Imam, and there have been, according to the Imamites, eleven successors. “They are believed to be immaculate, infallible and perfect guides to men. . . . As mediums between God and man, they hold a far higher position than the prophets, for ‘the grace of God without their intervention reaches to no created being.’”<sup>6</sup> The Isma’ilians are the other sect of the Shiah, who differ from the Imamites as to the number but not the character of the Imams, and both sects agree that “there never could be a time when there should be no Imam. ‘The earth is never without a living Imam though concealed.’ ‘He who dies without knowing the Imam, or who is not his disciple, dies ignorant.’”<sup>7</sup>

The last of the Imams according to the orthodox Shiah, was Abul Kazim (Al-Mahdi), who disappeared just one thousand years ago. The Shiah believe that in due time he will reappear, that Jesus Himself will be his forerunner, that wrong and wretchedness will then be destroyed, and the Shiah millennium introduced. In the meantime the Imam Mahdi is “invisible and inaccessible to the great mass of his followers.” At first, intercourse between the unseen Imam and

[page 126]

his people was maintained through a few select intermediaries called Babs or “Gates.” This period lasting sixty-nine years, is called the “Lesser Occultation.” When the last, the fourth of these Gates, came to die, he was entreated to nominate a successor, as the earlier Gates had done, but refused, saying, “God hath a purpose which He will accomplish.” The dreaded catastrophe had come, and intercourse with the Imam was cut off. The dark centuries which followed have been called the “Greater Occultation.” The orthodox Shiah still sit in this darkness. How hopeless it is, in the absence of any Gate to God, one of the great Babi books, the *Beyan*, declares: “For God hath associated refuge in Himself with refuge in His Apostle, and refuge in His Apostle with refuge in His Imams, and refuge in the Imams with refuge in the Gates of the Imams. For refuge in the Apostle is the same as refuge with God, and refuge in the Imams the same as refuge in the Apostle, and refuge in the Gates is identical with refuge in the Imams.”

Devout souls could not be content to sit in such darkness without great longings of heart after fellowship with the living but unseen guide. And his visit to Kerbela brought Mirza Ali Mohammed, a young man of spiritual earnestness and aspiration himself into contact with one of the strongest impulses the Shiah had yet felt towards a rediscovery of the hidden Imam, and communion with him by some new gate of access. This impulse sprang from Sheikh Ahmad of Ahsa, one of whose scholars was Mirza Ali’s teacher, whose testimony to the strange character of his pupil has been quoted, and to whose immediate successor Mirza Ali came to study at Kerbela. Sheikh Ahmad had himself nominated Haji Sayid Kazim as his successor. The doctrines of the Sheikhies, as Ahmad’s followers were called, differed from those of orthodox Shiahism. The latter holds that the essential principles, or the “Supports” of religion are five, (1) Belief in the Unity of God, (2) Belief in the Justice of God, (3) Belief in the Prophethood, (4) Belief in the Imamate, (5) Belief in the Resurrection. Of these the Sheikhies accepted the first, third and fourth, and added to these three what they called the “Fourth Support,” viz., “That there must always be amongst the Shiah some one perfect man, capable of serving as a channel of grace between the absent Imam and his Church.” The Sheikhies were at first and are now

[page 127]

---

<sup>5</sup> Sell, *The Faith of Islam*, p. 78.

<sup>6</sup> Sell, *The Bab and the Babis*, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.

viewed with suspicion by the orthodox Shiah, although there must be many thousands of them scattered through Persia.<sup>8</sup>

Into this school of thought the young inquirer from Bushire came, and learned in it that there ought to be somewhere the "Fourth Support" of faithful hearts, the Gate of God. In a measure, doubtless, Sheikh Ahmad and Haji Sayid Kazim met this want in their disciples; but when the latter came to die he named no successor, declaring that the time was near when the promised Support would come, the "Master of the Dispensation," asserting that he would be a youth, and that he would not be versed in the learning of men, and as the end drew near he would say, "I see him as the rising sun," "The time of my sojourn in the world has come to an end, and this is my last journey. Why are ye grieved and troubled because of my death? Do ye not then desire that I should go and the True One should appear?"<sup>9</sup>

Mirza Ali Mohammed did not study long under the Sheikhie leader at Kerbela, and had returned to Shiraz before his death. There one of his former fellow-students named Mollah Hosayn, who had been greatly troubled after Sayid Kazim's death, came to visit him. "As I approached the door," said he, "I desired inwardly to tarry there some days. So I knocked at the door. Before he had opened it or seen me, I heard his voice exclaiming, 'Is it you, Mollah Hosayn?'" As the friends sat together and talked over the last words of their revered teacher and the general expectation of the Sheikhies, Mirza Ali Mohammed suddenly astonished his companion by declaring himself to be the promised guide, the way for men to intercourse with Imam Mahdi, the unseen. Mollah Hosayn was incredulous, but as day after day they talked together, Hosayn's faith grew, until at last he says, "I looked up and saw him sitting in a most dignified and majestic attitude, the left hand laid on the left knee, and the right hand over it; and even as I looked, he began to utter most wondrous verses containing answers to every thought which passed through my mind, until seventy or eighty verses had been revealed." Then Hosayn rose to flee in terror, but Mirza Ali restrained him, persuaded his mind, won his heart, and then sent him out, the first missionary of the new faith. The "Proof," the

[page 128]

"True One," the "Son of Truth," the "Illuminated One had come. The date of the Manifestation and of the first disciple's conversion was May 23, 1844, almost exactly 1,000 years after the end of the Lesser Occultation.

The new teaching at once spread over Persia. The Sheikhies were split by it, one faction going over bodily to Mirza Ali Mohammed, the New Gate or Bab, the religion thence deriving its name. Orthodox Shiah who believed that the Bab's teaching was a fulfillment of the Koran, mystics to whom the character of the new religion was quite congenial, Persian pantheists, of whom there are legion, some rejoicing in the destruction of morality, which pantheism involves, and men and women who believed the time had come for some reforms which Babism rendered possible, also embraced the new faith; and undoubtedly here and there some hearts must have turned to it in the hope that at last the irrepressible thirst of the human soul was to be satisfied; for what Mirza Ali Mohammed "intended by the term Bab," as the Babi writings say, "was this, that he was the channel of grace from some great Person still behind the veil of glory, who was the possessor of countless and boundless perfections, by whose will he moved, and to the hand of whose love he clung."<sup>10</sup> As the new religion spread it aroused the bitter opposition of the

---

<sup>8</sup> Browne, *The Episode of the Bab*, p. 243f.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 239.

<sup>10</sup> Browne, *The Episode of the Bab*, p. 3.

ecclesiastics of the established Church, and the alarm of the Government. Just what the attitude of Babism was towards the Church and State will be seen presently. It is enough to say now that the Church had every reason for desiring to suppress it, and the State theoretically no ground for fear, but practically not a little, if Babism as it later developed, should prevail.<sup>11</sup> The authority of the Mollahs

[page 129]

was sufficient, even though Church and State are separate in Persia, to control the action of the civil authorities, and these, on their side were terrified as all Moslem governments ever will be, at any evidence of free thought or liberal movement among the people. The Babis began at once, accordingly, to feel the enmity of the established order, and were driven in some places to organization for self-defence. Ultimately defeated they would accept the pledged word of the government troops only to be butchered mercilessly when they had given up their arms. Prince Mahdi Kuli Mirza gave assurances of safety to some Babis against whom he was arrayed, and on their surrender smeared 300 of them with naphtha and burned them alive.<sup>12</sup> In 1850 and 1851 the Babis say "more than four thousand of their number were slain, and a great multitude of women and children left without protector or helper, distracted and confounded, were trodden down and destroyed."<sup>13</sup> During the war in Mazandaran, 1,500 Babis were slain. In 1850 seven martyrs were publicly beheaded in Teheran, among them the Bab's uncle. They died with the utmost firmness, refusing to save their lives by any compromise, crying to the people who reviled them on their way to execution, "O people, it is for your awakening and your enlightenment that we have foregone life, warmth, wife and child, and have shut our eyes to the world and its citizens, that perchance ye may be warned and may escape from uncertainty and error, that ye may fall to making inquiry, that ye may recognize the Truth as it is, and that ye may no longer be veiled therefrom." Haji Mollah Isma'il when entreated to recant, drew himself up and said,

---

<sup>11</sup> With reference to the relation of Babism to the State, the Rev. P. Z. Easton says that he believes it to be equally subversive of State and Church. "Babis follow in the footsteps of their predecessors. The first blood was shed by Babis, — Mollah Mohammed Taki, Kurratu'l-Ayn's uncle, assassinated by Babis in 1848. The haughty tone in letter to Nasr-ed-Din on his accession to the throne broke out in open rebellion. Beha claimed the allegiance of all sovereigns, and placed himself outside of law by assassinating his enemies. His semi-captivity explains why he has not done more of this. As teachers and preachers of assassination, the Babis richly deserve all they have suffered. All past history goes to show that these pantheistic sects are far more merciless and sanguinary than orthodox Moslems." I think this is too severe.

The late Dr. Shedd, of Urumia, in a paper on Babism, read at the Hamadan Conference, in 1894, speaking of the doctrine of the *Beyan*, said:

"There is the strongest assurance given of the ultimate triumph of the new faith. The empires of the future are to be Babi. Church and State are combined, and there is no place for unbelievers, but they are not placed under the hard condition imposed by Islam upon subject races. The central provinces, of the Utopia that floated before the Bab's mind, are in Persia, and each province is given a peculiar place and name. It is a scheme that might satisfy the aspirations of socialism. There is a community of brotherly love; dignity combined with courtesy; leisure with labour; the cultivation of all useful arts and the prohibition of all that is useless; elevation of woman; general elementary education; provision for the poor; strict prohibition of mendicancy and tramps; children to be treated with gentleness, animals with kindness; no persecution for conscience' sake. Such are the leading features of the *Beyan*."

"Behaism," says Dr. Holmes, "certainly does contemplate an earthly dominion which shall eventually subvert all existing governments."

<sup>12</sup> Sell, *The Bab and the Babis*, p. 22, quoting Mirza Kazim Beg.

<sup>13</sup> Browne, *The Episode of the Bab*, p. 47f.

“O zephyr! Say from me to Isma’il destined for sacrifice,  
To return alive from the street of the Friend is not the condition of love.”<sup>14</sup>

In 1852 an attempt on the Shah’s life made by some Babis was followed by terrible punishments. Twenty-eight victims were tortured and slain. Tow steeped in oil was inserted between their fingers and behind their shoulder blades, leaving portions hanging down which were lighted, and in this condition the unhappy wretches were led, as long as they could walk, through the principal streets of the capital. Some were sawn asunder. “Children and women with lighted candles stuck into the wounds were driven along by whips, and as they went along they sang, ‘We come from God, to Him we return.’ When the children expired, as many of them did, the executioners threw the corpses beneath the feet of their fathers. Life was offered if they would recant. An executioner told one father that if he did not recant, his two sons, the elder of whom was fourteen years old, should be slain upon his breast. The father, lying down, said that he was ready, and the elder boy claimed by right of birth to be the first to have his throat cut. At last night fell on a mass of shapeless flesh, and the dogs of the suburbs came in troops to the place.”<sup>15</sup>

As might have been expected persecutions like these did not extinguish the flame of devotion to the Bab and his doctrine. They but intensified it. “To interfere with matters of the conscience,” says the Babi account of these days, “is simply to give them greater currency and strength; the more you strive to extinguish the more will the flame be kindled, more especially in matters of faith and religion, which spread and acquire influence so soon as blood is shed, and strongly affect men’s hearts.”<sup>16</sup>

And as Babism spread outwardly, so during these years of trial it developed its significance and claim. The Bab claimed at first to be simply the Gate to the hidden Imam. His earlier works looked forward to the “appearance of that Person,” and the Babis themselves, or the great majority of them, now say that he made no claim to the highest forms of revelation at that time. But soon he moved beyond this, and at Tabriz at his examination advanced the claim of Mahdihood.<sup>17</sup> The assembled doctors demanded proof.

---

<sup>14</sup> Browne, *The Episode of the Bab*, p. 213.

<sup>15</sup> Gobineau, *Les Religions et les Philosophies dans l’Asie Centrale*, quoted in Sell, *The Bab and the Babis*, p. 31. “It is well,” says Dr. Holmes, “while giving the Babi martyrs all the credit they deserve for their constancy in persecution, to remember that their claims to so far surpass Christianity in this respect, are without foundation; that not only when, like Behaism, Christianity was young and full of enthusiasm, it vastly outdid all that the Behais have claimed to do in furnishing martyrs for their faith, but that now, when, if the doctrines of Behaism are true, Christianity ought to be dying or dead, a mere relic of an obsolete phase of Behaism, it has utterly distanced Babism and repeated its earlier performance, in the hecatombs it has offered up in sacrifice for its faith. Instance Madagascar, Armenia, and China. The Behais are constantly boasting of their martyrdoms as a proof of their superiority to present day Christians.”

<sup>16</sup> Browne, *The Episode of the Bab*, p. 33.

<sup>17</sup> According to the Babi view deity is transferable, or it may be imparted gradually or even withdrawn from its one time possessor (*New History*, p. 336f.; *Intro.*, p. xxiii). “Persia never lacks for an incarnation or two. One of these, of the Ali-Allahi sect, arrived in Tabriz some years ago, and made an appointment to visit me at three o’clock in the afternoon. My samovar was set to boiling, and I awaited his arrival. But he failed to keep his engagement because the governor-general, the Amir-i-Nizam, heard of his presence in the city, and this God fled, forgetting to send word that he



“Without hesitation he recited texts saying, ‘This is the permanent and most mighty proof.’ They criticised his grammar. He adduced arguments from the Koran, setting forth therefrom instances of similar infractions of the rules of grammar. So the Assembly broke up.”<sup>18</sup> This type of evidence the Bab declared to be quite sufficient to accredit him. As he himself wrote in the Beyan, “If any one should reflect on the appearance of this Tree (*i.e.*, the Bab, who repeatedly calls himself the ‘Tree of Truth’) he will without doubt admit the loftiness of God’s religion. For in one from whose life only twenty-four years had passed, who was devoid of those sciences wherein all are learned, who now recites verses after such fashion without thought or hesitation, who in the course of five hours writes a thousand verses of supplication without pause of the pen, who produces commentaries and learned treatises of so high a degree of wisdom and understanding of the Divine Unity that doctors and philosophers confess their inability to comprehend those passages, there is no doubt that all this is from God.”<sup>19</sup> But before he came to his end the Bab had gone even beyond this. He became an incarnation<sup>20</sup> of the Primal Will, as

[page 132]

Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Mohammed had done in the Bab’s view. This Primal Will is a sort of intermediary between Man and God. “It can be known by man and It knows God; indeed in one sense It is identical with God, wherefore it is said in a tradition, ‘Whosoever visiteth Hosayn in his tomb is as one who hath visited God on His throne.’ So likewise the Bab said, ‘O Ali! None hath known God save I and thou; and none hath known me save God and thou; and none hath known thee save God and I.’”<sup>21</sup>

The Bab did not escape or seek to escape from the lot of suffering which had fallen to his people. He was imprisoned and carried from place to place until on July 9, 1850, he was executed at Tabriz. The accounts of his friends are touched with unnecessary miracle. All the accounts have an Oriental tinge of hyperbole. Mirza Kazim Beg, who did not believe in him, draws a noble picture. “The Bab kept perfectly silent. His pale and beautiful face surrounded by a black beard, his white and delicate hands, his figure and distinguished manner, everything in his person and in his dress aroused the sympathy and compassion of the spectators.”<sup>22</sup> The bodies of the Bab and Agha Mohammed Ali, who died with him, were cast out of the city to be devoured by dogs, but friends got possession of them, wrapped them in white silk, placed them in one coffin, and sent them to Teheran.<sup>23</sup> So the Manifestation of God passed away willing to die, as he might have willed not to die, as his followers declared, leaving behind him the memory of a good life, even an unbeliever like Mirza Kazim Beg admitting, “He had some characteristics truly great and noble, and was a man of firm and settled convictions. His moral character was high, and he aimed in his preaching to bring all his countrymen into a community, united by intellectual and moral ties. He spoke with much earnestness on the necessity for a religious and social reform in

---

could not fulfill his engagement” {*Missionary Review of the World*, Feb., 1904, Art. “Babism: A Failure,” by the Rev. S. G. Wilson}.

<sup>18</sup> Browne, *The Episode of the Bab*, p. 20.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 219.

<sup>20</sup> The pantheistic conception of the Incarnation is different from the Christian idea of the God-man. The Bahai idea is that God is incarnate in the world all the time, but at the periods of the “Major Manifestation,” most of all, which wax and wane in cycles of not less than a thousand years, giving place to the “minor manifestation,” then the “occultations “ minor and major, etc.

<sup>21</sup> Browne, *The New History of the Bab*, p. 331.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Sell, *The Bab and the Babis*, p. 23.

<sup>23</sup> Browne, *A Year Among the Persians*, p. 64.

Persia, the cessation of religious persecution and the amelioration of the lot of women. It is said that much of what he preached on these points had an esoteric meaning, known only to his disciples; but whether this is the case or not, the veneration they felt for him was profound, and there can be no doubt

[page 133]

that the teaching of the Bab was in favour of reform.”<sup>24</sup> A Western writer goes even further and says: “His wonderful life needs no comment. If ever a life spoke for itself, it is the Bab’s, with its simplicity, integrity and unswerving devotion to the Truth that was born in him. Though we of the West may not appreciate many details of his teaching, and though we may fail to be attracted by a faith in which the niceties of language, the mysteries of numbers and the like play so important a part, yet none of us can help admiring the life of the founder of this religion, for in it there is neither flaw nor blemish. He felt the Truth in him, and in the proclamation of that Truth, he moved neither hand nor foot to spare himself, but unflinchingly submitted to all manner of injustice and persecution, and finally, to an ignominious death. That he should have attracted thousands to his cause is perhaps not a matter of such great surprise in a country like Persia, where all are naturally disposed towards religious speculation, and ever ready to examine a ‘new thing’; but his influence penetrated deeper than their curiosity and their minds, it reached their hearts and inspired them with a spirit of self-sacrifice, renunciation and devotion as remarkable and as admirable as his own.”<sup>25</sup> Among friends and foes alike the Bab has been generally acknowledged to have been a man of unselfish life, upright and true.<sup>26</sup> It is fortunate that so many of the great religious leaders have erred in speculative opinion rather than in personal character or moral doctrine.

[page 134]

Babism did not die with the Bab. It entered upon new development. After the Bab’s death, Bagdad became the headquarters of the movement, and the head of the community was Mirza Yahya, who had been fourth in order in the organization of the new faith, but was now first through the death of the two who stood between him and the Bab. Mirza Yahya is better known by the title Subh-i-Ezel, or “Dawn of Eternity.” In 1853 an elder half-brother of his, named Beha, joined the community in Bagdad. Beha recognized the supremacy of Subh-i-Ezel, who preserved a comparative seclusion of life, leaving the work of direction and correspondence to Beha. The Persian Government objecting to the continuance of the Babi propaganda at Bagdad, so near the Persian borders, the Turkish

---

<sup>24</sup> *Journal Asiatique*, Sixieme Série, tome viii, p. 384, quoted in Sell, *The Bab and the Babis*, p. 27.

<sup>25</sup> Professor Ross, of University College, London, in *North American Review*, April, 1901, Vol. 72, No. 4, pp. 614f.

<sup>26</sup> “An amazing statement!” comments Mr. Easton. “Babism is a form of pantheism, and like all other Persian pantheistic sects, is fundamentally atheistic, anarchistic and immoral. This fact, however, is carefully concealed not only from the outside world, but from the multitudes of disciples, ‘under the mask,’ as Von Hammer says, ‘of a more austere creed, and severer morals.’ In the case of the Assassins seventy years elapsed before the true character of the sect was known. The true doctrine is known only to the adepts, among whom the Bab himself must be classed. The Bab planned to exclude all unbelievers from five of the chief provinces of Persia, and, save in the case of merchants and others following a useful profession, from all lands in which the Babi faith prevailed (*New History* p. xxvi). It was during his life that the doctrine of the community of women was broached at the Badasht Conference. That he was a weak man is shown by the way in which he allowed himself to be eclipsed by Mirza Moli Ali of Mazandaran. In his death he compares unfavorably, as regards courage, with Babek, who, ‘when his hands and feet were struck off, by order of the caliph, laughed, and smilingly sealed with his blood the criminal gaiety of his tenets’” (Von Hammer, *History of the Assassins*, p. 27).

Government removed the exiles first to Constantinople, and then in 1864 to Adrianople. Here there was a rupture between the brothers, Beha usurping the place of leadership which by direct assignment of the Bab and by long recognition during fourteen years had belonged to Subh-i-Ezel. Because of the dissensions which at once developed between the factions of the brothers, and also because of the detection of fresh attempts at propagandism, the Turkish Government separated the parties, and removed Beha to Acre and Subh-i-Ezel to Famagusta in Cyprus, sending, however, some Behais as Beha's faction have come to be called, with Subh-i-Ezel, and some Ezelis, or followers of the latter, to Acre. This schism has never been healed. The great majority of the Babis, however, nineteen-twentieths probably, are followers of Beha.

Beha not only gained the support of the Babis as a whole. He also advanced beyond the Bab in his claims, and completely interpreted away much of the supposed glory of the Bab. The writings of the sect indicate this process.<sup>27</sup> *The New History* is full of the Bab and declarations of his greatness. The later book, *A Travel-*

---

<sup>27</sup> In his paper on "Babism — Its Doctrines and Relations to Mission Work," read at the Hamadan Conference in 1894 and published in *The Missionary Review of the World*, December, 1894, the late Dr. Shedd writes of the Babi books:

"The writings of the Bab are said to number more than a hundred treatises, including many thousand stanzas of poetry.

"The books that specially claim attention are:

"1. *Ziyaret Name*, written before he claimed to be the Bab. It gives instructions as to the mode of worship at the shrines. Besides this, it is the expression of an ardent enthusiast who pours out his longings for the Imam Mahdi. 'Where are the days of your empire that I may struggle for you? Where are the days of your glory that I may obtain the blessing of seeing your face? Where are the days of your Kingdom that I may take revenge for you on your enemies? Where are the days of your manifestation that I may be free from all except thee (absorbed in thee)?' etc. The young man soon believes that he has the special favour and fellowship of the Imams.

"2. A commentary or treatise on the Sura of the Koran called Joseph, written in Shiraz. In this Ali Mohammed declares himself to be inspired, to be the Bab. He does not renounce Islam, but claims that a true knowledge of Islam must come through the Bab. He says that God has placed within his grasp the kingdoms of heaven and earth. He presents himself as a prophet, and appeals to the book he is writing as proof of prophetic inspiration, that he is able to write hour after hour, composing the most exalted verses by the thousand and on the most exalted themes, the Divine being and attributes. He also directs his followers to rules of life very different from Moslem practice. Divorce and smoking are forbidden. The food of Jews and Christians is counted pure, etc.

"3. *The Beyan* or *Exposition* written in Maku. It is the ultimate doctrine of the Bab. His title now is Nukhta U'la, first point, or Nukhta i Beyan, point of revelation or exposition. A positive system of doctrine and precept is set forth. The doctrine of God is explained at length. The essence of God has existed from all eternity in unapproachable glory and purity. No one has known it as it should be known. No one has praised it as it should be praised. From it has proceeded creation, which has no beginning and which shall have no end that we can express. Eternal in duration, the creation is subordinate in causation, is the emanation of the Divine Essence. As the Divine Essence is beyond our knowledge, the primal will has incarnated itself from time to time to suit the understanding of mankind. These incarnations are the prophets, an unknown number in the past, and it speaks now through the Nukhta — *i.e.*, the Bab, and will speak again through 'him whom God shall manifest.' The primal will is like the sun, which rises and sets, but is in reality the same sun, not a different sun to-day from the sun of yesterday. So each prophet is a new day or manifestation of the same essence, the undivided unit of being. The evidence of a prophet is not miracles so much as the efficiency of his words. 'When God wishes to create anything. He says "Be" and it is. The word of a prophet has the same quality: what he says comes to pass. Mohammed said, "Make a pilgrimage to Mecca," and each year brings thousands flocking thither. He said "Fast in Ramazan," and millions obey him year by year. The word of the Nukhta is as powerful to change and construction as the word of Mohammed.'

"The doctrine that no revelation is final is strongly enforced. One great mistake of Christians and Moslems, it is alleged, has been this, that there is no more to follow. Each prophet is fitted to

---

reveal the primal will for a time, to be followed by another with a fuller utterance. In the childhood of the race, all truth was taught by parables and figures. Good is shown to be pleasant and evil, bitter in their results by comparisons. Good men after death are to enter beautiful gardens with all possible delights. The wicked are to enter the torments of consuming fire. But the world has now reached a stage when the true meaning of paradise and hell can be disclosed. Paradise is the joy of belief in the manifestation of God and attaining the perfection of one's being. The perfection of a thing is its paradise. Hell is unbelief and the state of imperfection which it imposes.

“The doctrine as to the future life is obscure and transcendental. The worship of God is to be freed from all hope of reward. Perfection will follow, but how this perfection is reached, whether by stages of transmigration or by absorption in the primal good or in some other way, is not made plain. It is certain that the Bab and his followers had no fear of death. They went to martyrdom singing and exulting, but it is hard to see what it was sustained them in such trials. It was allegiance to the Bab, but just what hopes did he offer them that gave them exultation in death? It was not the hope of the Christian martyr nor the Paradise of Islam, but rather a pantheistic disregard of life.

“In the *Beyan*, the prophecy is prevalent of another to follow the Bab, called ‘Him whom God shall manifest.’ The ordinances and precepts of the new faith all have reference to this coming personage, and prayers are offered that he may not suffer as the Bab suffered. There is a humility and self-renunciation displayed, which reminds one of John the Baptist as the forerunner of Christ.

“The whole round of religious duties is changed to suit a new calendar. A cabalistic power is given to the Arabic letters somewhat after the teaching of Sheikh Ahmad. The chapters of the *Beyan* are in groups of nineteen, and this is made the sacred number. Alif stands for one. The Arabic name for one is Vahid. The numerical values of the letters in Vahid make the sum nineteen, and several other formulas are worked out to the same result. The number 1 denotes the uncreated and unknowable essence of God, and this one added to the sum of the letter of Hayz (the living) gives the sacred number 19. Multiply 19 by 19 and 361 is the result, which again equals the Arabic formula for all things plus the initial one. The Bab is the point, the initial one, and eighteen of his followers are made apostles to complete the sacred number. The year has nineteen months of nineteen days each, with four days thrown in, just before the vernal equinox, as feast days. Chronology and religion are readjusted on this plan. . . .

“4. Another work is ascribed to the Bab called the *Seven Proofs*, afterwards enlarged by Beha and called *Ikan* or ‘Assurance.’ It is the only book of the Babis which they have printed. The copies are brought from India, not for public sale, but kept in the hands of leading men to be given to inquirers as may be safe for a proscribed religion. Mr. Browne has given the line of argument as follows. After stating the doctrines of God as to His essence, of His Creation, and of the prophets or manifestations of the primal will, a passage is quoted from the Koran in which Mohammed says: ‘As to the prophets, I (am they),’ — that is, Mohammed was the same in essence as the preceding incarnations of the primal will.

“In each manifestation, word was given of the following one. The Jews were told to expect a Messiah, but when He came as Jesus, they rejected Him, because they had all imagined His coming in a different way. So the followers of Christ were told to expect His return; yet when he returned as Mohammed, they failed to recognize him, and are to this day expecting His coming. So the Mohammedans are expecting the coming of Imam Mahdi, yet when he has come, they refuse to recognize him, because the manner of his coming does not correspond with their own vain imaginings of how he ought to come.

“Then he says to the Moslems: ‘You blame the Jews because they did not accept Christ as the promised Messiah. You also condemn the Christians because they did not recognize Mohammed as the promised comforter or paraclete,’ although Christ had clearly said, ‘One shall come after Me whose name is Ahmad.’”

(These words are based on the promise of Christ as to the Comforter, the Paraclete. For this word the Moslems would substitute Periklutos, which corresponds in meaning with Ahmad or Mohammed, *i.e.*, praised, lauded.)

“The prodigies expected at the return of the promised one are explained figuratively. By the sun, for example, is meant the primal will manifesting itself in the prophet of the age; by the moon and stars are meant his companions and the teachers of his religion. The end of the world is the manifestation when the cycle is completed, and the sun shall be darkened and the stars shall fall from heaven — that is, the last manifestation is abrogated, the last sacred book is closed, the priests

[page 135]

ler's Narrative which Browne has issued, as *The Episode of the Bab* sets the Bab in the background, and exalts Beha to the first place. "It was then (*i.e.*, at first) supposed," says the later book, "that he (*i.e.*, the Bab) claimed to be the medium of grace from His Highness, the Lord of the Age (upon him be peace); but after-

[page 136]

wards it became known and evident that his meaning was the Gatehood of another city, and the mediumship of the graces of another person whose qualities and attributes were contained in his books and treatises."<sup>28</sup> Until Beha arose the Babis undoubtedly did regard the Bab as the medium of grace from His Highness, "the Lord of the

---

or mollahs who expounded this book fall from their high places, because the new revelation is given. This is the meaning of the verse in the Koran, 'when the sun shall be folded up and the stars shall fall,' and of similar passages.

"Now the Moslems blame the Jews and Christians, yet act in precisely the same way themselves, urging as a reason for not accepting the new manifestation that the expected signs of the Imam's coming have not appeared.

"Then follows an argument to prove that the claims of the Bab are as strong as those of Mohammed as to style of composition and power and excellence of doctrine. The line of reasoning is very strong and convincing in the view of the Babis, and its cogency is felt by the Moslems. Few of the latter are ready to meet a Babi missionary in fair discussion. The same line of argument adopted is used in dealing with Jews, Christians or Zoroastrians. The new faith is broad enough to include Zoroaster among the prophets, for his words were words of power to his followers.

"After the death of the Bab in 1850, there are no extant writings of importance, till 1865 the announcement of Beha was made claiming to be the one whom God shall manifest. He had expanded the *Seven Proofs* into the *Ikan* before this, but there is no positive proof of it. After this, he became a very voluminous writer of epistles to his followers in Persia. He became in their eyes and claimed to be, the incarnation of the Deity, the Lord of the attributes or centre of the revelation of the Divine Essence, perfect in humanity, the One whom God shall manifest, Christ and the Paraclete returned, God the Father in short, the fullness of God manifest in the flesh. He also identified himself with previous prophets, especially with the Bab, that he himself suffered in Tabriz, and his spirit returned to the supreme associate.

"Besides these epistles to his followers, he addressed to kings and rulers various documents. His appeal to the Shah of Persia in behalf of toleration for his followers is a well-reasoned and cogent plea. He sent letters to the Grand Vizier of the Sultan, to the Pope, to Napoleon III, to the Emperor of Russia, and to Queen Victoria. For some reason, he was displeased with the Emperor of Germany, and ventured to predict that dire calamities will fall upon the capital beyond the Rhine.

"The only systematic work is called *The Most Holy Tablet*. This prescribes more fully the rules of the new religion, but adds no new doctrine to the system of Bab. The times of prayers and of fasts and feasts are given, places of worship are to have no images or pictures, the dead are to be buried with much ceremonial pomp, pilgrimages are few, very elaborate rules for inheritance are laid down, slavery forbidden, the civilization of the West enjoined in many particulars, the kings of the earth are exhorted. The claim is made that the treatise is not one of scientific production, it is beyond the power of science, the revelation of God Himself, and hence, above all criticism.

"For one whose pretensions are so superlative, the performance is very meagre. There is no transcendent excellence apparent to mark the advance of revelation. Possibly if the Son of God had not appeared in Jesus Christ, and become the Alpha and Omega of human hopes and salvation, such a system might become another 'Light of Asia,' but since Christ has come, the same yesterday, to-day and forever, there can be no comparison between Babism and Christianity."

<sup>28</sup> Browne, *The Episode of the Bab*, p. 7.

[page 137]

Age (upon him be peace),” but the very grounds on which they believed this made them ready to receive and acknowledge the claims of Beha to succeed and supersede the Bab, who now came to be called His Highness the Evangelist, and to be regarded as sustaining to Beha the relation of John the Baptist to Christ. And both by and

[page 138]

for Beha more has been claimed than was ever claimed for the Bab. Mr. Kheiralla in his recent book, declares it to be his purpose to prove “that the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, has appeared in the human form as Beha Ullah, and established His Kingdom upon earth.”<sup>29</sup> And Mr. Phelps speaks with a smaller measure of definiteness but in a note characteristically Behaistic: “It was necessary for the Essence Itself of God to become manifest, and this It did through the person of Beha Ullah. This is not saying that Beha Ullah was not a man like other men; for all manifestations are men like other men; but he was also, and as a man, the crowning glory of a period, in whom the perfect Divine Image was reflected.

“Now that Beha Ullah, the man, is no more, the drop has become the ocean. That which was manifested is withdrawn to God, the pure Essence — to that which is both Spirit and its Source.

“‘All religions,’ says Abbas Effendi, ‘are written symbolically. This is the only way in which Truth can be written to withstand time and its changes. Languages change, the meaning of words is lost; for these are but the expressions of periods. Symbols never change, since they are the expression of men’s spirit. The realities encased in them are handed down as long as the symbols are preserved. These realities, the spirit reawakens.’”<sup>30</sup>

It is difficult to conceive of a man living in these times and sus-

[page 139]

taining the weight of such claims in his behalf, but all who saw Beha Ullah during his life agree that he bore himself with dignity and commanded respect. Mr. Browne who visited him at Acre in 1890, says of that experience: “The face of him on whom I gazed I can never forget, though I cannot describe it. Those piercing eyes seemed to read one’s very soul; power and authority sat on that ample brow; while the deep lines on the forehead and face implied an age which the jet black hair and beard flowing down in indistinguishable luxuriance almost to the waist, seemed to belie. No need to ask in whose presence I stood, as I bowed myself before one who is the object of a devotion and love which kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain! A mild, dignified voice bade me be seated, and then continued: ‘Praise be to God that thou hast attained.’ Thou hast come to see a prisoner and exile. . . . We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations; yet they deem us a stirrer up of strife and sedition worthy of bondage and banishment. . . . That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled — what harm is there in this? Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars, shall pass away ; and the ‘Most Great Peace’ shall come. . . . Do not you in Europe need this also? Is not this that which Christ foretold? Yet do we see your kings and rulers lavishing their treasures more freely on means for the destruction of the human race than on that which would conduce to the happiness of

---

<sup>29</sup> Kheiralla, *Beha Ullah, the Glory of God*.

<sup>30</sup> Phelps, *Abbas Effendi*, p. 149f.

mankind. . . . These strifes and this bloodshed and discord must cease, and all men be as one kindred and one family. . . . Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind.”<sup>31</sup>

It is hard to believe that such a personage should indulge in the claims Mr. Kheiralla makes for him, and that are both made and acknowledged by thousands of the faithful, who regard him, as Professor Ross says, “as God Almighty Himself,” or it would be hard to believe this if it were not for the fact that Behaism specifically de-

[page 140]

nies the personality of God. Mr. Phelps in his book, which he tells us was submitted to Abbas Effendi and approved by him, unequivocally sets forth this position. God is an essence, not a person. The terms of Beha’s letter to the Shah of Persia must be interpreted thus, even though he seems to speak of God as distinct from himself in the sharpest language: “That Real King is in Himself sufficient unto Himself and independent of all; neither doth any advantage accrue to Him from the love of contingent beings, nor doth any hurt befall Him from their hatred. All earthly places appear through Him, and unto Him return, and God singly and alone abideth in His own place, which is both above space and time, mention and utterance, sign, description and definition, height and depth. And none knoweth this save Him and whosoever hath knowledge of the Book. There is no God but Him, the Mighty, the Bountiful.”<sup>32</sup>

Such recognition of the separate personality of God, one of the great truths of Islam, is only apparent and is buried in Babi thought under indefinite, mystical forms.<sup>33</sup> “Thus Kumeyl ibn Ziyad, one of Ali’s chosen disciples, once demanded of his Master, behind whom he was seated on a dromedary, ‘What is Truth?’” This story is cited in the Bab’s *Seven Proofs* and is made much of by the Babis. “‘What hast thou to do with the Truth?’ answered Ali, ‘for verily it is one of God’s mysteries and a jewel out of His treasure house.’ Then said Kumeyl when Ali had spoken for some time after this fashion, ‘O my Master, am I not worthy to share thy secret?’ ‘Yes,’ answered Ali, ‘but the matter is a great one.’ ‘O my Master,’ said Kumeyl, ‘dost thou desire those who beg at the door of thy bounty to be turned away?’ ‘Nay, verily!’ answered Ali, ‘I will answer the call of such as are troubled, and will sprinkle upon thee somewhat of the overflowing fullness of the station of the

[page 141]

Truth. Receive it from me according to thy capacity and conceal it from such as are unworthy to share it. O Kumeyl, the Truth is the revelation of the splendours of Divine Majesty without a sign.’ ‘O my Master,’ said Kumeyl, ‘I understand not thy meaning. Explain it to me further.’ ‘The effacement of the conjectured and the learning of the known,’ answered Ali. ‘Explain more fully,’ demanded Kumeyl. ‘The rending of the veil

---

<sup>31</sup> Browne, *The Episode of the Bab*, p. xxxixf. But see for a more matter of fact representation the account of Dr. Jessup’s interview reprinted, with the kind permission of *The Outlook*, on pp. 174-180 of this volume.

<sup>32</sup> Browne, *The Episode of the Bab*, p. 115f.

<sup>33</sup> “The Behai conception of the Supreme Being is not a personality, but an Essence, an all-pervading Force or Power, frequently referred to as Love, or Truth, or Life. ‘God,’ says Alphas Effendi, ‘is pure essence and cannot be said to be anywhere or in any place.’ God is infinite, and, as terms are finite, the nature of God cannot be expressed in terms. But as man must form and express a conception of God in some way, he calls God ‘Love,’ or ‘Truth,’ because these are the highest things he knows. Life is eternal; so man, to express God’s infinity, says that God is ‘Life.’ But these things in themselves are not God, God is the source of all things that are made, and all things that are, are mirrors reflecting His Glory” (Phelps, *Abbas Effendi*, p. 114).

by the triumph of the mystery,' answered Ali. 'O my beloved Master,' rejoined Kumeyl, 'tell me more.' 'The attraction of the Divine Unity through the nature of the apprehension of its oneness,' added Ali. 'Tell me more clearly,' repeated Kumeyl. Then said Ali, 'A light shining forth from the Morning of Eternity and irradiating the temples of the Unity.'<sup>34</sup> The story ends here, and I suspect Kumeyl gave it up at this point. And it is impossible to read the Babi books without feeling this atmosphere of Oriental imagery and speculation, and without becoming conscious of the vapours of the old Sufi pantheism which for centuries has tinged the thoughts of the Mohammedans of Persia, to such an extent that one historian declares that "the whole country has been so undermined by this insidious heresy that it can almost be said that Persia throughout its extent contains no real Moslem."<sup>35</sup> The Bab had little external connection with the Sufis or mystics,<sup>36</sup> but this doctrine of the Primal Will manifested in chosen men is practically the same as the Primal element of the Sufi, a divine emanation, from

[page 142]

which proceeds all manifestation of the divine essence.<sup>37</sup> It is in this atmosphere that the Bab and Beha have conceived their relations to God, and not in terms of our Western conception of personality, and save when Babism is being presented apologetically in the West, it falls back into its setting in the indefinite mystical dreamings and out-reachings of the Persian mind.

"Though with sword in hand my Darling stand, with intent to slay, though I sinless be,  
If it pleases him, this tyrant's whim, I am well content with his tyranny.  
The country of 'I' and 'We' forsake; thy home in annihilation make.  
Since fearing not this step to take, thou shalt gain the highest felicity."

That bit of Sufi poetry is by one of the most famous characters of Babism, Kurratu'l Ayn, a woman of whom we shall say more presently. It is as truly Sufi as this outcropping Sufiism in the sceptic Omar Khayam:

"There was a Door to which I found no Key;  
There was a Veil past which I could not see;  
Some little talk awhile of *Me* and *Thee*

---

<sup>34</sup> Browne, *The New History*, p. 329.

<sup>35</sup> Haines, *Islam as a Missionary Religion*, p. 76.

<sup>36</sup> "Sufiism," says Browne, "by reason of that quietism, eclecticism and latitudinarianism which are amongst its most characteristic features, is the very antithesis, in many ways, to such definite doctrines as the Manichaeism, the Isma'ili and others, and would be more justly described as an indefinite immobility than as a definite movement. This point is often overlooked and even scholars — especially such as have never visited the East — often speak of such sects as the Isma'ilis or the Babis of to-day as though they were akin to the Sufis, whereas a great hostility usually exists between them, the natural antagonism between dogmatism and eclecticism. The Babis in particular equal their Shiite foes in their hatred of the Sufis, whose point of view is quite incompatible with the exclusive claims of a positive and dogmatic creed" (Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, p. 422f.).

One of the last things that can be said about Babism, however, in the form which it has taken under Abbas Eftendi, its present head, is that it is a "positive and dogmatic creed." Mr. Phelps' authorized representation of it (Phelps, *Abbas Effendi*) makes it a loose mystical eclecticism. An "indefinite mobility" would be an apt description.

<sup>37</sup> Sell, *The Bah and the Babis*, p. 36.



There seem'd — and then no more of *Thee* and *Me*?.”

It was this mystical answer of Babism and later of Behaism to the craving of the human soul for some intercourse with God, the unseen God, which undoubtedly accounts for some of its power. “Its principles,” as the Babis claimed, “are the withdrawal of veils, the verification of signs, the education of souls, the reformation of characters, the purification of hearts, and illumination with the gleams of enlightenment.”<sup>38</sup> And it lays especial emphasis on spiritual discernment, on freedom from “slavishly following literalist devices,”<sup>39</sup> and on the unfailing presence in the world of “silent manifestations of the Spirit, intrinsically not less perfect than the speaking manifestations whom we call prophets.”<sup>40</sup> “The gales of the All-glorious passed by me,” said Beha to the King of Persia, “and taught me the knowledge of what hath been. . . . This is a leaf which the breezes of the Will of thy Lord the Mighty, the Extolled, have stirred,”<sup>41</sup>

[page 143]

While this esoteric pantheism of Babism has been one secret of its strength, its accompaniment, an absolutely unlimited allegorizing, is to our Western minds one of its weaknesses. The Mohammedan doctors at once objected to its method of dealing with the Koran, and to its metaphORIZING away the prodigies and signs which were to usher in the advent of the Imam Mahdi.<sup>42</sup> “The Mohammedan doctrines of the examination of the dead in the graves, the Resurrection, Sirat, Heaven, Hell, are all treated allegorically” by the Babis.<sup>43</sup> And the Babis are difficult people to discuss religion with because words may or may not mean to them what they mean to others. “These people,” writes one of the missionaries in Persia, “find grist in whatever comes to their mill, being the extremest of literalists when it suits their purpose, and outdoing the father of the allegorists when that method suits their purpose better.”<sup>44</sup> It is doubtless this mystical, allegorical character of Babism that attracts a certain type of mind in America, in the main, probably, the same type which follows after spiritualism, esoteric Buddhism, Swamis from India, theosophy, and other movements which play around the edges of the occult and the magical, and help to dull the edge of present realities with the things that are neither present nor real.

But Babism in Persia under the Bab and under Beha embraced real and practical elements, and was full of worthy teaching. “As for those who commit sin and cling to the world, they are assuredly not of the people of Beha.”<sup>45</sup> “What is well pleasing is that the cities of men’s hearts which are under the dominion of the hosts of selfishness and lust, should be subdued by the sword of the Word, of Wisdom and of Exhortation. Every one, then, who desireth ‘victory’ must first subdue the city of his own heart with the sword of spiritual truth and of the Word, and must protect it from remembering aught beside God.”<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Browne, *The Episode of the Bab*, p. 156.

<sup>39</sup> Browne, *The New History*, p. 236.

<sup>40</sup> Browne, *A Year Among the Persians*, p. 327.

<sup>41</sup> Browne, *The Episode of the Bab*, p. 395.

<sup>42</sup> Browne, *The Episode of the Bab*, p. 25.

<sup>43</sup> Sell, *The Bab and the Babis*, p. 42.

<sup>44</sup> “I had a very interesting visit from some of the Babis of this place (Ilkachee), who spoke very freely of their faith and seemed very firm in it. They quote Scripture, but spiritualize everything that does not suit their tenets, and so finally make language mean anything and nothing” (From a letter from Miss Grettie Y. Holliday, Tabriz, Persia).

<sup>45</sup> Browne, *The Episode of the Bab*, p. 70.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 114f.

“No stranger must find his way into the city of the heart, so that the Incomparable Friend (*i.e.*, God) may come into

[page 144]

His own place — that is, the effulgence of His names and authority, not His essence, for that Peerless King hath been and will be holy for everlasting above ascent or descent.”<sup>47</sup> “O saints of God,” cried Beha, “at the end of our discourse we enjoin on you once again chastity, faithfulness, godliness, sincerity and purity. Lay aside the evil and adopt the good. Regard the horizon of uprightness and be quiet, severed and free from what is beside this. There is no strength and no power save in God.”<sup>48</sup> Among the injunctions of the new religion as set forth by the Bab and Beha, were purity of life, freedom of conscience, cessation of religious warfare, friendship and intercourse between races and religions, the abdication of that curse of Mohammedan lands, mendicancy; “the most hateful of mankind before God,” it is declared, “is he who sits and begs; take hold of the robe of means, relying on God, the Cause of causes;” enemies were to be forgiven and evil not to be met with evil; rulers were to be obeyed, and the laws observed; confession of sin to fellow men was prohibited. All must learn some trade or follow some occupation, and pilgrimages were no longer necessary. Opium and wine are forbidden, the injunction of the Koran against the use of wine being notoriously disregarded in Moslem lands. The Bab even forbade the use of tobacco, but Beha has released the pressure here. Surely these are worthy precepts, and the religion that can lead men to practice them, if Babism can do this, will render a useful service to those men who embrace it.

And the Babi movement is distinctly a sign of life and progress. Such a superb personal devotion as has been displayed by their followers towards both the Bab and Beha is itself a worthy thing which we should expect to uplift character and accomplish good. In this devotion they have cheerfully met death in the most terrible forms. Even if there have been those who turned back, as in the case of thirty-one who decided that it was not their duty to avoid saving their lives by renunciation when the Seven Martyrs died in Teheran in 1850,<sup>49</sup> there have yet been thousands who gave to their faith the good testimony of martyrs’ deaths. If it is a beautiful thing to die for one’s country, it is not less beautiful to die for one’s friend and one’s faith;

[page 145]

and it must be admitted and without reluctance, that at least by their death the Babis of Persia have borne witness in support of the contention of that historian of this religion who declares “that the fundamental intentions and ideas of their sect were things spiritual, and such as are connected with pure hearts; that their true and essential principles were to reform the morals and to beautify the conduct of the human race.”<sup>50</sup>

On the other hand, the zeal of Babism turned almost immediately to the use of the weapons of its persecutors. It was unlike the early Christian Church in the Roman Empire in this, though not unlike the early Christian Church in some other lands. Not content with defending itself in open battle when assailed, it resorted to the tactics of assassination and torture.<sup>51</sup> And when later the two factions of the Babis arose, some of the Ezelis who were

---

<sup>47</sup> Sell, *The Bab and the Babis*, pp. 45f.

<sup>48</sup> Browne, *The Episode of the Bab*, p. 81.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

<sup>50</sup> Browne, *The Episode of the Bab*, p. 66.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 36, 181, 198.

sent to Acre with Beha from Adrianople were murdered by Beha's followers, and Beha "regarded the event with some complaisance," while his son, the present head of the religion, interceded for the murderers. When summoned to court to testify in the case, Beha was asked who and what he was, and replied, "I will begin by telling you who I am not. I am not a camel-driver (alluding to Mohammed), nor am I the son of a carpenter (alluding to Christ). This is as much as I can tell you to-day. If you will now let me retire, I will tell you to-morrow who I am." "Upon this promise," says Mr. Oliphant, "he was let go; but the morrow never came. With an enormous bribe, he had in the interval purchased an exemption from all further attendance at court."<sup>52</sup> And some call the man who did this the Everlasting Father. How long will they be able to save his moral teaching if bribery is divine, and assassination allowable? And we must press questions like these against such claims of Deity, even in the face of Mr. Browne's defence: "The idea of secret assassination is so repugnant to us and so incompatible with our notions of virtue and moral rectitude, that we naturally shrink from imputing it without the clearest evidence to a man or a body of men of whose character and qualities we have otherwise formed a high opinion. But in

[page 146]

Asia where human life is held cheap and religious fervour runs high, a different standard of morality prevails in this matter; and we must beware of being unduly influenced in our judgment by our own sentiments."<sup>53</sup>

The moral possibility of combining with a religion like Babism elements of evil like assassination may be laid to the Oriental character or it might not improperly be charged in part to the influence of Mohammedanism. The Prophet was his own moral law, and the life and rights of men were trifles in the way of his purposes. The historic and racial relationship of Babism to Islam brought the same idea into the new religion. Mr. Brown reports a Babi Sayid in Shiraz to have said in answer to some remark of his about the bloodshed caused by Mohammed and his followers, "Surely you cannot pretend to deny that a prophet, who is an incarnation of the Universal Intelligence, has as much right to remove any one whom he perceives to be an enemy to religion and a danger to the welfare of mankind, as a surgeon has to amputate a gangrened limb!" To charge the burden of such views on Babism and the Bab would be, however, as wrong as to charge the Inquisition upon Christianity and Christ. And although Babism does show in this and much else, the powerful influence of Islam, it represents, as has been already pointed out, — and herein lies a part of its significance to the missionary movement, — a radical departure from the old faith. The ecclesiastics in Persia acted on a sure instinct when they denounced it, and urged the State to annihilate it, for in simple terms it was, as Sell says, "a religious revolt against orthodox Islam, so far as that is represented by the Shiah sect."<sup>54</sup> It was even more hostile to the Sunni system. "It was probably in the Holy City itself," Professor Ross says, that the Bab on his one pilgrimage thither, "once and for all freed himself from the Prophet's Faith, and conceived the thought of 'ruining this faith, in order to establish in its place something altogether differing from it.'"<sup>55</sup> In *The New History*, however, the Bab is said to have gone to Mecca to proclaim his religion there. At any rate, on returning to

---

<sup>52</sup> Oliphant, *Haiifa*, pp. 209, 210. This story is contradicted in Phelps, *Abbas Effendi*, p. 75f.

<sup>53</sup> Browne, *The Episode of the Bab*, p. 373. This would be just enough in the case of a man but we cannot tolerate iniquity in God or in one claiming to be God and we cannot conceive of God incarnate subject to the limitations of racial moral ideal.

<sup>54</sup> Sell, *The Bab and the Babis*, p. 50.

<sup>55</sup> *North American Review*, April, 1901, p. 600.

Shiraz, he made an alteration in the Azan, or call to prayer used by the Moslem world, inserting the words "I bear witness that Ali Mohammed His Servant is the remnant of God," and the Muezzin so uttered the call from the mosque near the Bab's house and was arrested, punished and expelled from the city on this account.<sup>56</sup> This one presumptuous blasphemy, as it seemed to faithful Moslems, illustrates how radical the breach was.

The new religion cut across the whole field of Mohammedan opinion and practice. Moslem law makes the pilgrimage obligatory. He who denies that this is an obvious duty enjoined by the Koran, which says, "The pilgrimage to the temple is a service due to God from those who are able to journey thither,"<sup>57</sup> is considered to be an infidel.<sup>58</sup> Babism abrogated the pilgrimage. The Moslems regard the Koran as absolutely inviolate, and final, divinely inspired without human admixture. "Mohammed's idea was that it should be a complete and final code of directions in every matter for all mankind."<sup>59</sup> The Bab produced a new Koran, and as he claimed a better one. At first he merely asserted that his Koran was as good as Mohammed's. "Then the Lord of the world thus revealed: 'That Word is by the tongue of Mohammed the Apostle of God, and this is my Word by the tongue of the Person of the Seven Letters, the Gate of God.'" But soon he advanced beyond this. When under arrest at Shiraz, the governor suggested that he should demonstrate that his doctrines were superior to those of Mohammed. The Bab answered, "Take my Koran, compare it with that of your prophet, and you will be convinced that my religion is the preferable one."<sup>60</sup> The Bab, furthermore, flatly contradicted the Mohammedan idea, advanced by Mohammed himself, that Islam was a final revelation. "They are to remember," he said, "that no revelation is final, but only represents the measure of truth which the state of human progress has rendered mankind capable of receiving." The world comes to revelation in other words, rather than revelation to the world. The Mollahs truly denounced this as departure from orthodox opinion: "This person, without regarding the fact that he is at variance with the Perspicuous

Religion, is a meddler with custom and creed, and a troubler of kings and emperors. Therefore to eradicate, subdue, repress, and repel this sect is one of the requirements of the Well-established Path (*i.e.*, the religion of Islam), and indeed the chief of obligations."<sup>61</sup> And again they exclaim, "What an evidently false assertion is this! By God, this is a thing to break the back! O people, extinguish this fire and forget these words! Alas! woe to our Faith, woe to our Law!"<sup>62</sup>

One very practical evidence of the difference between the new religion and the old was at once presented in its attitude towards the place and rights of woman. Islam made a fatal mistake in this matter. It condemned one-half of society, and the half on which most depends in the shaping of a nation's character, to lives worse than simple slavery because of necessity so full of the conditions which develop what is basest in life and pollute it at its

---

<sup>56</sup> Browne, *The New History*, p. 200f.

<sup>57</sup> *Sura* iii, 91.

<sup>58</sup> Sell, *The Faith of Islam* p. 223.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>60</sup> Sell, *The Bab and the Babis*, p. 15.

<sup>61</sup> Browne, *The Episode of the Bab*, p. 106.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

springs. "Even those of us who have spent long years in this country," writes an experienced and temperate missionary in Persia, "are constantly receiving new and shocking revelations of the corruption, indecency and insecurity of their family life."<sup>63</sup> Travellers or other apologists for Islam who gloss over its degradation of woman, simply do not know what they are talking about. As against all this, the Bab and Beha "enjoined the disuse of the veil, the abolition of divorce, polygamy and concubinage, in other words, of the harem; and greater liberty of action for the female sex."<sup>64</sup> The Koran allowed both polygamy and concubinage and practically unlimited divorce. Babism provided that if quarrels arose between husband and wife, he was not at once to divorce her, but to wait a year in the hope of reconciliation. This aspect of the religion naturally made powerful appeal to women, and Mirza Kazim Beg attributes its extraordinary spread to the zeal of women among others in its propagation.<sup>65</sup> The

[page 149]

most famous of these was Kurratu'l-Ayn, or Lustre of the Eye, some of whose verses have been already quoted as illustrating the Sufi mysticism in Babism. She was a daughter of a learned mollah of Kazvin, and was early converted to Babism. For a while she lived at Kerbela, and gave addresses to the Sheikhs. This displeased the governor, and she removed to Bagdad, then to Kermanshah and Hamadan. Some Babis disapproved of a woman's preaching, but the Bab supported her, and called her "Her Excellency the Pure." She moved from place to place exerting everywhere a great influence by her eloquence, her wisdom, and her high character. As the Babis say, "She discussed and disputed with the doctors and sages, and loosed her tongue to establish her doctrine. Such fame did she acquire that most people who were scholars or sages sought to hear her speak, and were eager to become acquainted with her powers of speculation and deduction. She had a brain full of tumultuous ideas, and thoughts vehement and restless. . . . In short, in elocution she was the calamity of the age, and in ratiocination the trouble of the world."<sup>66</sup> She was executed at last in Teheran in the persecution which followed the attempt upon the life of the Shah. As Mr. Browne says, "The appearance of such a woman as Kurratu'l-Ayn is in any country and any age a rare phenomenon, but in such a country as Persia it is a prodigy — nay, almost a miracle. Alike in virtue of her marvellous beauty, her rare intellectual gifts, her fervid eloquence, her fearless devotion and her glorious martyrdom, she stands forth incomparable and immortal amidst her countrywomen. Had the Babi religion no other claim to greatness, this was sufficient — that it produced a heroine like Kurratu'l-Ayn."<sup>67</sup> Kurratu'l-Ayn had had an unfortunate marriage experience of her own, and she preached to a nation of women who had drunk from the same cup. I heard a missionary once explain to a curious group of Moslem women in a Persian village, the teaching of Christianity, and the customs of Christians regarding women. They listened with wonder, and exclaimed together, "That is the religion for us, may we be its sacrifice!" The Babi women missionaries had this deep longing

---

<sup>63</sup> Miss Holliday of Tabriz, in *Woman's Work for Woman*, August, 1901, p.221.

<sup>64</sup> Curzon, *Persia*, Vol. I, p. 502.

<sup>65</sup> On the Doctrine of Babism as to the position of woman, Mr. Easton comments, too adversely I think: "The ordinances of the religion of the Kaim (*i.e.*, the Bab) are the ordinances of unity; all goods are his goods; all men are his servants; and all women his handmaidens, whom he giveth to whomsoever he pleaseth." "A tradition . . . that His Holiness will change wives and husbands" (*The New History*, p. 358). Kurratu'l-Ayn was not a model woman. Gifted but vile. Not free from suspicion in the case of the assassination of her uncle. Belongs to the same order of women as Aspasia, Catherine II, and Madame De Pompadour."

<sup>66</sup> Browne, *The Episode of the Bab*, p. 31.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 309.

and discontent to appeal to. "Her speeches," says Mirza Kazim, speaking of Kurratu' l-Ayn, "stigmatized that gross tyranny which for so many centuries had imprisoned liberty. She preached not, as some have said, to abolish the laws of modesty, but to sustain the cause of liberty. The eloquent words which fell from her mouth captivated the hearts of her hearers, who became enthusiastic in her praise;" and who, it may be added, turned to a religion which could do for women what it had done for her. At the same time it must be admitted that there is a touch of oriental luxury of admiration in some of these estimates of Kurratu' l-Ayn, who in important moral characteristics did not rise above the level of her time and place. And in its results Babism has not exalted woman.<sup>68</sup>

The Babis attacked the motives exalted in the Koran. "So worship God," wrote the Bab, "that if the recompense of thy worship of Him were to be the fire,<sup>69</sup> no alteration in thy worship of Him

would be produced. If you worship from fear, that is unworthy of the threshold of the holiness of God, nor will you be accounted a believer; so also if your gaze is on Paradise, and if you worship in hope of that; for then, you have made God's creation a partner with

---

<sup>68</sup> "Let us pass to the test question of how Babism treats women. It is not great praise to say that in this there is an advance on Mohammedanism, though it is far behind Christianity. I have seen no evidence that Babi doctrine teaches communism of wives. Incidents leading to this conclusion may doubtless be credited to the sinners among the Babis. Babism forbids temporary marriage and concubinage and polygamy, which are allowed by Shiah. It allows bigamy, however.

"Beha had two wives at one time, by each of which he had children. When Abbas' mother died, he again joined a 'partner' to his remaining wife, thus being a bigamist twice over. The 'branches' (brothers) who are now quarrelling are from different mothers. Marriage among Behais is on a low Oriental plane. Divorce is allowed at the option of the husband, even for frivolous causes, such as a quarrel. The parties are recommended not to marry inside of a year, that, if possible, their hearts may be reconciled. The dowry of the divorced wife is a mere pittance of nineteen miscals of gold (about \$50) in the city, and nineteen miscals of silver {\$2) in villages. If the husband leaves home and neglects to send word or means of support to his wife for one year, she is free to marry another man. Early marriages are discountenanced.

"Women are secluded in the harems and from the society of men, as among ordinary Moslems. The historic case of Kurratu' l-Ayn, of Kazvin, is a solitary exception. She has had no successors. Even she ordinarily delivered her lectures from behind a screen, and only occasionally let her veil fall aside in the presence of men when carried away by her enthusiasm. Behais do not seem to approve of her conduct. Several Behai families with whom I am acquainted are allowing their daughters to grow up without learning to read, though the fathers are teachers and are educating their sons" (*Missionary Review of the World*, February, 1904, Art. "Babism: A Failure," by the Rev. S. G. Wilson).

<sup>69</sup> "The phraseology, the symbols and the pantheistic conceptions of the Sufis are constantly cropping out in Bahai literature as well as in their conversation," says Dr. Holmes. "This teaching of the Báb is an expression of a familiar sentiment of the Sufis. Thus Altar quotes Rabi'a al-Adawiyya as praying, 'O God! If I worship Thee for fear of Hell, send me to Hell; and if I worship Thee in hopes of Paradise, withhold Paradise from me; but if I worship Thee for Thine own sake, then withhold not from me the Divine Beauty' (Browne, *Literary History of Persia*, p. 426).

"There is also the familiar story of Al-Hallaj, (or was it Al-Ghazzali?) who went about with a pitcher of water and a torch, and when asked what he intended doing said, 'I am going to quench Hell fire, and burn up Heaven.'

"The Behais disclaim all affiliation with the Sufis, and yet theirs is but a modified form of the same pantheistic creed."

Him.” This was far removed from the sensual eschatology of the Prophet of seven wives. And most bitterly of all, the Babis attacked the ecclesiastics of the established religion. They denounced them for their self-interest, their injustice, their greed for gain, their bartering of religion for gold and silver, their pride and love of human glory, accused them of being devoid of the very rudiments of wisdom, knowing no method but conjecture and imagination, full of irrational belief, absurd traditions and the grossest ignorance.<sup>70</sup> They charged them with being responsible for the stagnation and decay of Persia, of preventing the introduction of railways, of opposing the study of Western sciences, and speculating in food supplies in times of famine, and letting people starve that their grain might await a higher market price. “Shame on the people of Persia for their lack of spirit!” they exclaimed. “By God, they have not a spark of patriotic or manly feeling; they have grown habituated to cowardice, falsehood and flattery; they acquiesce in tyranny and oppression, and relinquishing the position of free agents, have become mere passive instruments in the hands of the clergy.” While these clergy “think themselves entitled to set their feet on the necks of all mankind. They become dead men’s heirs, consumers of endowments, and collectors of tithes and ‘thirds.’ And usurp the station of ‘the One, the Dominant,’ ‘to whom belongeth dominion.’” Well says Hafiz:

“These preachers who, when in their pulpits, of virtue  
make such a display,  
Behave, I assure you, in private in quite a dissimilar way,

[page 152]

That they put any faith in the judgment they preach  
one can scarcely believe.  
When Him who shall judge them they daily attempt to  
outwit and deceive.”

“O people of the earth,” said the Bab, “give thanks to God, for verily we have delivered you from the doctors of doubt.”<sup>71</sup>

Not content with thus pillorying the ecclesiastics of Islam, the Babis, upon the death of the Bab, cursed the people of Islam, too,<sup>72</sup> and even prior to the Bab’s murder had renounced Mohammed himself. The Seven Martyrs of Teheran “received an offer of pardon, on condition of reciting the Kelema or creed, that Mohammed is the Prophet of God. It was rejected, and these missionaries,” says Lady Shiel, “died stedfast in their faith.”<sup>73</sup>

The time for such a revolt from Islam as this had fully come. It was demanded by the sterility and immobility of the old faith. Men erroneously credit to Mohammedanism the science and philosophy which the Saracens kept alive during the dark ages of Europe; but as G. H. Lewes says, “All the Philosophy and Science of the Mohammedans was Greek, Jewish and Persian.”<sup>74</sup> For four centuries the contest between the movements of life and thought and the rigidity and stolid conservatism of Islam was waged, and the “great effort to bring it into accordance with the main stream of human thought, to introduce into it some

---

<sup>70</sup> Browne, *The New History*, pp. 76, 77, 175.

<sup>71</sup> Browne, *The New History*, pp. 76, 77, 175, 181ff.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 307.

<sup>73</sup> *Life and Manners in Persia*, pp. 180, 181.

<sup>74</sup> *History of Philosophy*, Vol. II, p, 34.

element of progress utterly failed. The lesson is plain. . . . Revolution not reform is the only hope.”<sup>75</sup> And while in a sense Babism was a reform, in a truer sense it was a revolution. It deliberately denied the fundamental principle of the finality of Islam. In doing this it made way for progress, for liberty, for life; but it also affronted the dominant faith from which it sprang. Innovation in the Moslem view “is worse than a mistake. It is a crime, a sin. This completeness, this finality of his system of religion and polity is the very pride and glory of a true Moslem. To look for an increase of light in the knowledge of his relation to God and the unseen world, in the laws which regulate Islam on earth, is

[page 153]

to admit that Mohammed’s revelation was incomplete, and that admission no Moslem will make.”<sup>76</sup> This seemed to the Shiah ecclesiastics a sufficient answer to make to the Babis. “This person’s disagreement with the most luminous law,” said the doctors of Ispahan, “is clearer than the sun, therefore the best possible thing is to put in practice the sentence of the law.”<sup>77</sup> There was no room in Islam for a man with a forward gaze. The golden age was past, and life was to be chained to it forever. Babism broke with the past.

This attitude of Babism is of course the very foundation assumption of Christian missions in a Moslem land, or in any land. Among Mohammedans, to be sure, Christianity calls men back from their Prophet six centuries to Christ, but it does this only to point out that Christ’s religion is totally different from theirs, and superior to theirs in that while it has historic antecedents, it is a religion of life, of human movement under a Divine Spirit, of hope and perpetual advancement. Babism has rendered the real service of dealing a powerful blow at the bondage of orthodox Mohammedan opinion in Persia.

It has rendered another great service in its plea for toleration and liberty of conscience. It professes to deny the unity of Church and State, which is another fundamental Mohammedan conviction, but a conviction nevertheless, which is ineffective in Persia. In matter of fact, however, the Persian Government, though independent of the Moslem Church, is powerfully influenced by it, and the Bab, though in reality a religious teacher, was killed by the State. The experience which the Babis gained of the evil of State support of religion doubtless sharpened their original opinions on the question of religious toleration.

The Babi movement was not a political movement. It certainly did aim at the reformation of abuses, but this was by the improvement of individual character. If the Bab felt himself “appointed of heaven to regenerate his country,” it was not by political means that he felt called to do it, but by the inward working of a great spirit of quickening and transformation. His followers were enjoined to obey their rulers and submit to the laws. “The persecution of the Government very early drove the adherents of the new creed into an attitude of rebellion; and in the exasperation produced by the struggle

[page 154]

and by the ferocious brutality with which the rights of conquest were exercised by the victors, it was not surprising if fanatical hands were found ready to strike the sovereign down,” and to destroy those who, the Babis felt, were but tools in the hands of the ecclesiastics. But Beha himself denied all responsibility for the attempt upon the Shah’s life, and although the movement might have become political if it had triumphed or may yet

---

<sup>75</sup> Sell, *The Faith of Islam*, p. 186.

<sup>76</sup> Sell, *The Faith of Islam*, p. 24.

<sup>77</sup> Browne, *The Episode of the Bab*, p. 12.



become so if it controls the majority in Persia, we may accept as sincere, under existing conditions and while they last, the disavowals of its leaders and believe “that with things material they had absolutely no concern.” It is further indication of their feelings, though not to be taken wholly without qualification, that the Babis exculpate the Shah himself from blame for their persecutions, and acknowledge just treatment from many officials, but accuse chiefly those governors and ministers who through fanaticism or fear lent themselves to execute the will of the Church.<sup>78</sup>

The very fact that it had no political designs and concerned itself only with “things connected with pure hearts,” and yet suffered so from persecution led, as has been said, to a peculiar emphasis on the rights of men to religious liberty. The Babis point out to their persecutors that the best way to make a movement harmless is to let it alone. “Up to the present moment,” they said, “of movements pertaining to religion many have appeared in the countries of Europe but non-interference and absence of bigotry having deprived them of importance, in a little while they became effaced and dispelled.”<sup>79</sup> “Interference is not destruction, but edification when thou regardest the truth, which will not, thereby become quenched and forgotten, but rather stimulated and advertised.”<sup>80</sup> But apart from this, Beha constantly declared that men had a right to be free in conscience and belief. “A just government,” he said, “can find no excuse and possesses no pretext for further persecuting this sect except a claim to the right of interference in thought and conscience, which are the private possessions of the heart and soul.”<sup>81</sup> And he appeals to the example of Great Britain and her progress, points out that the times are changed, and that principles and institutions have under-

[page 155]

gone alteration, and that “government should no longer persecute this one or that one or disturb itself about the ideas and consciences of its subjects and people. All are the subjects of the King, and are under the shadow of the royal protection.” This was very different from the old Mohammedan spirit. “Him who changes his religion,” says the Moslem Tradition as declared by Imams Malik, Shafa’i and Hanbal, “kill.” “From its first appearance,” wrote Mirza Kazim Beg in 1866, “the teaching of the Bab has been distinguished from all other reforms which have hitherto been produced in Persia or the East generally, by a well marked aspiration towards truth and towards liberty of conscience.”

Even though the views of Babism have not been accepted in Persia, it is certainly true that their dissemination has influenced the Persian character, already much more tolerant than the Turkish, and has made a wider preaching of Christianity through the country increasingly practicable. “Everywhere in our field,” writes a missionary from Tabriz, “the Moslems seem in a restless state of mind, and are seeking for some remedy in a religious change. The sect of Babis are making large gains in the rural districts. All their leaders are enlightened men intellectually at least. I hope they may prepare the way for religious freedom in Persia.”<sup>82</sup> Where the Babis prevail there is a spirit of hospitality and toleration towards Christians unless they are forced to cover over these natural feelings in order to avoid the enmity and escape the suspicion of their Moslem neighbours.<sup>83</sup> “Consort with

---

<sup>78</sup> Browne, *The New History*, p. 189; *The Episode of the Bab*, p. xlv.

<sup>79</sup> Browne, *Ihe Episode of the Bab*, p. 49.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>82</sup> Letter from the Rev. J. N. Wright, D.D., June 24, 1901.

<sup>83</sup> “We fear the Babis will get hold of some of our young men. Many of the Jews in Teheran have become Babis, and some of our Moslem friends we believe to be such — but as they allow the

people of all religions with spirituality and fragrance,” Beha bade his followers. “Beware lest the zeal of ignorance possesses you amongst mankind. All originated from God and return-

[page 156]

eth unto Him; verily He is the Source of Creation and the Goal of the worlds.”<sup>84</sup> And in their dealings with others in propagating their faith, the Babis were forbidden to use violence. “Show forth that which ye have; if it be accepted the object is attained; if not, interference is vain; leave him to himself, while advancing towards God, the Protecting, the Self-subsistent.”<sup>85</sup>

The question which the knowledge of this movement first suggests to us, namely, Has not a religion so full of good teaching, so hopeful in its rupture with Islam, done much to prepare the way for Christianity? may then be answered by saying, “Yes, it has done a great deal. It has weakened the foundations in Persia of the most intolerant and immobile faith which has ever held the wills of men. It has preached freedom of conscience and brotherly charity, and the effect of this preaching has been real even upon those who have not accepted the religion which produced it. It has spoken a word for woman, and so hinted at least of what is to be found in greater fullness in Christianity. It has held up higher moral standards than Islam’s. It has shown that Persians are ready to die for a religious faith whose essential character is spiritual even though mystical, and which does not draw men by the promise of spoils and sensuality here, or visions of bright-eyed houris in the paradise beyond. Some would add that it has introduced and made room for larger and freer conceptions of God, conceptions dangerous and untrue often, but in advance of the mechanical, dominant Deity of Islam, who “is the only Agent, the only Force, the only Act existing throughout the universe, and leaves to all beings else, matter or spirit, instinct or intelligence, physical or moral, nothing but pure unconditional passiveness, alike in movement or in quiescence, in action or in capacity.”<sup>86</sup> But to this Dr. Holmes replies, “I would not be prepared to admit that pantheism gives room for a larger conception of God than even the narrowest monotheistic faith. Islam has been saturated with these pantheistic conceptions, at least in Persia, for ages, but it has wrought no regeneration in the life, either of individuals or of the nation. But the presence in the midst of the Persians of a Deliverer, who claims divine power with which to carry into ultimate

[page 157]

execution a scheme of reform so largely based on the principles of the Gospel of Christ, — an idea such as this, whether or not its premises are true, must have an enormous quickening power, and cannot fail to stir men’s minds to action for a time, in spite of an

---

denial of their faith, one cannot believe them. It is difficult to make any impression on them. Perhaps the greatest advantage to be expected from them is in their demand for religious toleration” (Letter from the Rev. J. L. Potter, D.D., of Teheran, Sept. 9, 1901).

“I do think that the Babis are doing a work in preparing the people for religious inquiry and their existence testifies to a longing after God and a deep dissatisfaction with Islam. Their history, full of error though it may be, is extremely touching to me, and in this last false Christ, though he may be produced by Satan, we see ‘imitation is the sincerest flattery,’ and the enemy has tried his best to present a suffering Christ, such a counterfeit as can only be detected when compared with the genuine coin” (Letter from Miss Grettie Y. Holliday of Tabriz, January II, 1902).

<sup>84</sup> Browne, *The Episode of the Bab*, p. 151f.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, p. 153.

<sup>86</sup> Palgrave, *Arabia*, I, p. 309.

utterly false conception of God, a conception, I believe, far more hurtful in itself than that of the Koran.”

Babism has refused to acknowledge that humanity’s one end is to be bound in the chains of the Arabian institutions and ideas of the seventh century. It has taught that God, — albeit He is not the Christian God and the Babis do not call Him Father — has a mind towards men, and has not left and will not leave Himself without a witness among them. The Rev. James W. Hawkes of Hamadan, has called attention to the fact that only Moslems and Jews have attached themselves to Babism. None of the members of the Syrian or Gregorian Churches in Persia have done so, for the reason, he feels, that Babism has had nothing to offer even to these decayed Christian Churches. Their members have already, even in their present degeneracy, as much spiritual freedom as Babism offers, and as has proved so attractive to those bound under the burden of Islam and Judaism. Mr. Hawkes states that his observation leads him to regard the strength of Babism as lying in its offer of some freedom coupled with its compromise with old forms which the believer can maintain though disbelieving in them, and thus save himself from annoyance or persecution.

It should be added that Babism has rendered a service which scarcely needed to be rendered, but which is not without its use. It has shown once more that Mohammedanism is utterly unadaptive. Hinduism absorbs the movements that grow up in hostility to it or revolt against it. Christian doctrine has embraced school after school of thought that has arisen; but Islam is unbending, incapable of expanse. Behaism teaches to-day what all the centuries have taught since Mohammed arose, that there is death for man in Islam but not life, and that all who believe in a living world must work and pray for the release from the throats of all Moslems of the stiffened clutch of the hands of the dead Prophet, “the great Arabian.”

But not all has been said when we have pointed out the service rendered to Christian missions by the religion of the Bab and Beha. There is a balance on the other side. For Babism is not so much a

[page 158]

preparation for Christianity as a supersession of it. It knows of Christ and supplants Him. It has weighed His claims and seeks to advance stronger ones.<sup>87</sup>

Of course the Bab himself knew as much of the Christian Scriptures and the Christian religion as he would learn from the Koran, and although that information is very unsatisfactory, it is considerable. But he knew more than this. At Shiraz he had opportunities for intercourse with Jews, and “through Protestant missionary translations he became acquainted with the Gospels.”<sup>88</sup> And the influence of his acquaintance with Christianity is evident both in his own words and in what is related of his life. Thus he is reported to have healed a child with a diseased head by drawing a handkerchief over it.<sup>89</sup> He was transfigured before his followers, although a muleteer who was along observed

---

<sup>87</sup> See the paper by Dr. Geo. W. Holmes, formerly of Persia, printed on pp. 169-174.

<sup>88</sup> *North American Review*, April, 1901, p. 608.

“Garabed has been able to be out in the villages and small towns most of the time and has had some good work. He has met with Babis who at first welcomed him gladly but when he preached, refused to have anything more to do with him. ‘We supposed you were come to build us up, but you tear us down; we have no use for you and your Gospel.’ Babism is spreading rapidly; they work like beavers both day and night and boast of their zeal and sacrifice. I think the elements which give it strength are all stolen from Christianity” (Letter from Miss Grettie Y. Holliday of Tabriz, March 7, 1902).

<sup>89</sup> Browne, *The New History*, p. 221.

nothing.<sup>90</sup> He anticipated martyrdom “that all may know the extent of my patience, and contentment and self-sacrifice in the way of God.”<sup>91</sup> And he said to his companion in death, “Verily Mohammed Ali shall be with us in Paradise.” It was said of him by his disciples that the prophecy of the signs which should mark the appearance of the Imam Mahdi were fulfilled in him — “In him shall be the perfection of Moses, the preciousness of Jesus and the patience of Job,”<sup>92</sup> and again of those who would not seek the truth in the Bab,

“The physician of Love hath the healing breath of  
Christ, and is prone to heal,  
But how can He undertake the cure of a pain  
Which thou dost not feel.”<sup>93</sup>

[page 159]

And not only did the Babis know of Christianity, but they got their doctrine by a long inheritance from the early Christian heresies. “I trace their doctrines back,” says Dr. Holmes lately of Hamadan, who knows the actual views of the Persian Behais as well as any man, “through the Druses, the Ansairiyeh or Nusairiyeh, and the Assassins to the Hakemites (the followers of the Fatimite Caliph of Egypt, Hakem B’amr Ullah), to the Isma’ilis, and thence back to the Gnostics, Neo-Platonists, etc.”<sup>94</sup> And Mirza Kazim Beg says of the Bab in summing up his reflections, “We neither consider him as an adventurer nor a fanatic, but an eminently moral man, a dreamer brought up in the school of the Sheikhs, and possessing some touch of Christianity.” It is possible, too, as Haines suggests, that the Sufi influences which shaped Babism run back to some contact with Christianity.<sup>95</sup> The idea of the Primal Will intermediate between God and man, which the Babis got from the Sufis, the Sufis in their turn had got from the Gnostic notion of the aeons emanating from the Incomprehensible and Ineffable God.

---

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>92</sup> Browne, *The Episode of the Bab*, p. 259.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>94</sup> Browne suggests the heredity of some of the Bab’s ideas and also their occultation in the latest development of the faith:

“These ultra Shiite sects, then, which we have now to consider, and which under the leadership of Sinbadh the Magian, al-Muqunna, ‘the Veiled Prophet of Khurasan,’ Babak, and others, caused such a commotion in Persia during this period, do but reassert, like the later Isma’ilis, Batinis, Carmathians, Assassins, and Hurufis, the same essential doctrines of Anthropomorphism, Incarnation, Re-incarnation or ‘Return,’ and Metempsychosis; which doctrines appear to be endemic in Persia, and always ready to become epidemic under a suitable stimulus. In our own days they appeared again in the Babi movement, of which especially in its earlier form (A.D. 1844- 1852) they constituted the essential kernel; though in later time, under the guidance of Beha Ullah (A.D. 1892) and now of his son ‘Abbas Effendi, The Most Great Branch’ (who appears to be regarded by his followers as a ‘Return’ of Jesus Christ, and is so considered by the now fairly numerous adherents of this doctrine in America) they have been relegated to a subordinate, or at least a less conspicuous position. The resemblance between these numerous sects, whose history can be clearly traced through the last eleven centuries and a half, is most remarkable and extends even to minute details of terminology, and to the choice of particular colours (especially red and white) as badges. Thus the early Babis like the Mubayyida of the period now under discussion, wore white apparel, while they imitated the Muhammira in their fondness for red by their choice of ink of that colour in transcribing their books” (Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, p. 311f.).

<sup>95</sup> Haines, *Islam as a Missionary Religion*, p. 75.

But the relations of Babism to Christianity go far beyond this. The new religion claims to include and supersede the old.<sup>96</sup> Accord-

[page 160]

---

<sup>96</sup> “One summer morning last year, at Lake Hopatcong, N. J., one of the children returned to the cottage exclaiming, ‘O papa, there is a man here who wants to see you, he has a religion from Persia.’ I accordingly went over to the man’s place of business, and found a German, who actually professed to be a Babi. His knowledge of the Persian religion was not extensive, but his enthusiasm was abundant, and he declared that though the religion was so new, they already had thirty million followers! Last winter while I was in Kazvin, the Babis received a letter from the United States, telling of the success of their missionary operations in America; at which they rejoiced greatly.

“Last week one of this sect requested permission to call and talk with us on their religion. We sent around for him to come and see us, thinking to get acquainted, and make an appointment for the discussion. Thereupon a young man came and from 5 until 10 o’clock P.M., talked a stream of parables and figurative illustrations in exposition of their religion. It takes in all the ‘124,000 prophets,’ accepts equally the sacred books of the Jews, Christians, Moslems and the Bab. When properly understood they all agree. The sun sets and it rises again. It is the same sun — Moses set and Christ rose — Christ set and Mohammedan rose — Mohammedan set and the Bab rose. They are all one, though they appear in a different garb. The rose-bush goes to sleep in the autumn; we gather the rose leaves, and preserve somewhat of their fragrance; but in the spring the bush revives and we have a fresh rose. When we fail to see that it is the same rose, it is because we do not understand aright. On one occasion a Babi opened his discussion with the question: ‘Who understood the Old Testament better, the Jews, or the Christians?’ To which I replied the Christians, for we understand the spiritual meaning of the Old Testament. The next question was: ‘Who then understand the New Testament better, the Christians or the Moslems?’ He was quite put out because I would by no means admit that, by parity of reason, the Moslems, because of their later book had the advantage of us.

“The young man, only an artisan (maker of glazed tiles), was so full of talk, that we could hardly get a chance to say anything. We, however, insisted that in the later book there was an absolute contradiction of the death of Jesus, which is one of the central doctrines of Christianity, but he would not admit that there was such a verse in the Koran. He said he was only an ordinary workman, and requested permission to bring one of their leaders to see us and talk with us, so we set a time.

“On the day appointed the young man and the leader came, but more than an hour late, for which they apologized. This shortened the time for the allotted conference, and it was mutually agreed that each side should have half the time. We had thought out a line of discussion. They usually begin with a series of examples to show that the language of Scripture is figurative, and thus to firmly establish a foundation upon which to base their free use of this means to explain away anything that seems to be against their views. They commonly claim that it takes a whole series of meetings to show the correctness of their faith.

“On this occasion, we asked their leader to kindly explain to us their interpretation of certain passages relating to the second coming of Christ, which according to their position must have been fulfilled by the coming of Mohammed, *e.g.*, I Thess. 4:14-17. He forthwith launched out in a long talk to show how the Jews understood their Old Testament. Once or twice we tried to call him back to the point before us, but he only approached it near enough to say that clouds, according to figurative usage, mean darkness and obscurity. Finding it impossible to bring him to a definite and concise statement of their interpretation of this one first passage proposed, we gave up the attempt, and let him run on his own way for half an hour. Then we asked him to please state briefly what benefits and blessings his religion offers over and above what we already enjoy in Christianity and how such benefits and blessings are to be obtained. These questions seemed to take him somewhat by surprise, and after some irrelevant remarks about the Jews, he wanted to know what benefit we had in religion that the Jews do not have? He did once come near enough to the point to say, that the benefits of their religion can only be understood by those who have accepted it. His time being up we claimed ours” (Letter from the Rev. J. L. Potter, D.D., of Teheran, Sept., 1901).

ing to the Behais there have been seven manifestations of the Primal Will, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Christ, Mohammed and Beha, and each manifestation has revealed more of the godhead than his predecessor, Beha, revealing the Father Himself, being the supreme and final one, the mystery of God referred to in Revelation 10:7. In this the Behais, have gone beyond the original teaching of the Bab, and in reality have made out of Babism a new religion, the first and absolute requirement of which is faith in Beha as God.

[page 161]

As his followers say “Beha is Christ returned again.”<sup>97</sup> “Christ returns to you as Beha with angels, with clouds, with the sound of trumpets. His angels are His messengers, the clouds are the doubts which prevent your recognizing Him; the sound of the trumpets is the sound of the proclamation which you now hear.”<sup>98</sup>

This allegorical interpretation of the signs which were to accompany Christ’s return, betrays the whole Behai method, and illustrates the difficulty met in endeavouring to present historical Christianity to them. Every manifestation of God, such as Beha claimed to be, is the final authority in interpreting the texts of the Koran, the Babi books and the Scriptures relating to himself. “He therefore,” says

[page 162]

Dr. Holmes, “has only to disclose a given text as referring to himself, and then to give its exegesis. This is often directly at variance with its apparent meaning, but this only displays more clearly the divine insight of their teacher, that he is able to recognize and appreciate words no one else can understand.” And the Rev. J. L. Potter, D.D., of Teheran, writes of some recent experiences in the city of Kazvin, “At one time there seemed a bright prospect of reaching the Babis, but the expectation was not realized. They seem in some respects to present a more hopeful field for mission labour than the Moslems, because of their ready acceptance of the Scriptures and certain Christian doctrines rejected by the Mohammedans. On the other hand, however, their fanciful interpretation of plain Scripture declarations renders it very difficult to make any impression on them by proof texts from the Bible whose authority they readily admit. They reply, ‘Yes, but we must break open the word and extract its meaning.’ Their hospitality, zeal, and earnestness in the propagation of their belief are worthy of praise and emulation; but their easy dissimulation of their faith, even to openly cursing the Babis, and the unreliability of their promises, are discouraging.”

---

<sup>97</sup> As its followers have learned more of Christianity and Western thought, they have modified its statements increasingly and borrowed more and more of Christian tone and statement. The development of Beha’s thought is doubtless due not a little to the influence of Christianity (*Public Opinion*, February 21, 1901; Browne, *The Episode of the Bab*, p. xxxvi). Cf. *The New History* and *The Traveller’s Narrative*, the latter written under the influence of Beha, the former before his time. The latter gives the Bab a far less important place, is free from the miracles and extravagances of the former, and shows the pruning and adaptation which development rendered inevitable.

<sup>98</sup> Browne, *A Year Among the Persians*, p. 38. “What the Behais believe about the future life is a puzzle. I have asked several men who have known the Behai manifestations, and who have read their revelations, and one said: ‘In the last analysis they reject the future life.’ Another said: ‘They believe in the transmigration of souls.’ A fervent Behai of the old school said: ‘We believe in a future state so unthinkably ecstatic that if its joys were now revealed to men they would commit suicide to hasten their entrance into it.’ The subject remains obscure to European investigators. After twenty years of questioning them, I believe they have no definite teachings on the subject. Some believe in a future paradise, others in ‘rijat,’ or return, to earth as men. Certain it is, however, that they reject the doctrine of the resurrection of the body and of the judgment” (*Missionary Review of the World*, February, 1 904, Art. “Babism: A Failure,” by the Rev. S. G. Wilson).

This wide-spread dissembling of their faith among Babis is intelligible, but its influences are disastrous. It was the easiest way to escape from unrelenting persecution. So Beha issued a dispensation allowing it. In consequence it is often impossible to discover who are Behais in Persia.<sup>99</sup> Yet this legality of deception is not new. It was an old Shiah doctrine, and it has eaten into the very vitals of the Persian people. "With such phrases as 'I compromise,' 'I agree,' which have now become universal technicalities, do they defame God and man, trampling under foot the rights of their fellows, and shutting their eyes to equity and justice."<sup>100</sup> The Shiah system of religious reservation and compromise, or "takia," furnished the

[page 163]

atmosphere in which Babism has had to live, and it is not strange that it has been affected by it from the beginning,<sup>101</sup> however nobly many tempted men and women rose above it. Indeed the Babis relate that a third man was to have been slain with the Bab and Mohammed Ali, but recanted in accordance with a command of the Bab, "the object of this command being the preservation of the words and writings of the Bab." Later, two years after this deliverance, Sayid Hosayn, whose opinion had never changed, met a martyr's death in Teheran. The Bab's character has suffered under this idea of the legality of deception and falsehood. And indeed there could be no more fatal point than this in the collapse of a religion. Truth, absolute truth, is the first thing, and that Babism has surrendered. There are fewer martyrdoms now because there are more liars. A system of justified compromise and deceit cannot be a satisfactory preparation for Christianity, though it is better than Shiah Mohammedanism, which has the vice of legal compromise minus the virtues of Babism. These aspects of Babism are of course suppressed in the American version.

This radical defect and the essential claim of Behaism to supersede Christianity constitute vital difficulties in the way of the conversion of the Babis to Christianity. At the same time the movement represents a real advance over Shiahism, and an approach to Christianity. "They seem to correspond," writes one of the missionaries, "to the Brahma Samaj of India, in trying to hold on to their old faith while drawing largely on the Bible for their teachings. At the same time it makes one sad to see them approach so near the truth in

---

<sup>99</sup> "The month which I passed in Akka," says Mr. Phelps, "was the Mohammedan fast of Ramazan, which, as all other Mohammedan observances, was scrupulously kept by Abbas Effendi and his followers, for the sake of peace, and to avoid the reputation of social innovation" (Phelps, *Abbas Effendi*, p. 101).

Mr. Phelps says that the Behais in Acre confine their small school to boys. "Girls are excluded by Mohammedan custom" (*Ibid*, p. 110). These easy adaptations to conditions condemned in principle but adopted "for the sake of peace" is thoroughly characteristic. Indeed it is probably this soft compliance with anything and the absence of the robustness of definite truth and solid principle which make Babism attractive to many moral softlings in the West.

<sup>100</sup> Browne, *The New History*, p. 10.

<sup>101</sup> A missionary writes from a city in Persia, "I have had somewhat more opportunity to visit and receive Mussulmans in the city than for some years past. With one man of wealth who is related to mollahs I have exchanged four visits. He has long known the Gospel, and was greatly impressed with one of our missionaries he met years ago on a Black Sea steamer. He says he believes in Protestantism as the best religion, and that half the city would profess it were there liberty. (Here use the salt cellar.) He also desired me to write to our mujtahids or theological authorities, to get a legal decision, that it was lawful for him to be a Christian, without professing the faith publicly, 'for that will mean to us,' he said, 'confiscation of my property and death.' How far does Christianity allow takia?"

many respects, and yet miss it.”<sup>102</sup> And another missionary who travels constantly over the country says:

[page 164]

“Babis are found everywhere. They are zealous in propagating their faith and are increasing in numbers. In Miandub, they enjoy considerable freedom and are now asking permission from the Government to build for themselves a house for worship. Because of the strength of Babism, there is unusual freedom for preaching the Gospel in Miandub. Our evangelists could preach openly in the bazaars without molestation. The Babis told our evangelists that they were grateful to us for spreading the Gospel among Mohammedans for it aided their cause. They said that the preaching of the Gospel to Mohammedans resulted in making Babis of them and that it was through the reading of our Scriptures that they themselves became Babis. That is, Babism is the result of the influence of Christianity on Islam. I think there is a measure of truth in this. It is Christianity breaking down Islam. But it is too long a step from Islam to Christianity so they come part way and accept Babism. I am not hopeless concerning the Babis. They misinterpret Scripture and are self-conceited, telling us that we do not understand our own Scriptures. But they are out of the rut of Islam and there is some hope of their moving in the right direction. It is no longer unlawful for them to search our Scriptures and they are reading them though it be only to seek proofs for their preconceptions.”

It will be interesting to watch the future of the Babi movement. Before Beha died at Acre in 1892, he said, “Whosoever lays claim to a matter [*i.e.*, a mission) ere one thousand full years have passed, verily he is a lying impostor.” Upon his death his eldest son, Abbas Effendi, became the spiritual head of the Behais, and he is now regarded by the vast majority of the Behais, in spite of his father’s words, with the same veneration accorded to his father. He did not succeed without rivalry to his father’s place, and one of his brothers withdrew into retirement, unable to approve of his course. Mr. Phelps in his book, *Abbas Effendi*, presents a different view. He says that Beha had chosen Abbas Effendi as his successor and that there is no fraternal disagreement. It was this Abbas Effendi regarding whom Mrs. Hearst, of California, after visiting him declared her faith in writing, “I believe with all my heart and soul that he is the Master, and I hope that all who call themselves be-

[page 165]

lievers will concede to him all the greatness, all the glory, for surely he is the Son of God.”<sup>103</sup> The other faction of Babis, represented for a time here in America, by Mr. Kheiralla, holds that Beha Ullah is the only one who should be worshipped. There are now, accordingly, various factions, the largest by far being followers of Abbas Effendi, “Our

---

<sup>102</sup> “At Assadabad,” writes Miss Annie Montgomery of Hamadan, regarding a missionary tour to Kermanshah, “it seemed as if not any women except those of the household, were coming near us; so I started out to look for my hearers. I had not gone far when a woman came running after me and saying, ‘Do you not know that one of your people is living here? And she rushed out and insisted on my going into her house. Her husband and several women came in, and I found she was a woman who had heard the Gospel. I had an hour of reading and prayer with them, though in spite of their profession of being Christians I fear they are all Behais.’ This incident is proof of much that has been said. Babism had made these people friendly to Christianity, and given them a feeling of kinship to it.

<sup>103</sup> New York *Sun*, quoted in *Public Opinion*, February 21, 1901.



Lord,” as Mr. Arthur P. Dodge, the founder of the New England Magazine, and a Behai convert, calls him.<sup>104</sup>

---

<sup>104</sup> In reply to a recent request for information as to the progress and character of Behaism in America, Mr. Dodge writes telling where meetings were at the time held in New York City, and saying in addition:

“First, permit me to say, Babism was so-called after the holy personage known as The Bab (signifying Gate or Door), who came as the forerunner of the Greatest Manifestation of God ever given to the world, in like manner as came John the Baptist to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus Christ. The Bab appeared and began his work of announcing the coming of Him whom God shall manifest, in 1844. In 1852, this great and bold manifestation of God was first proclaimed in the personage of Beha Ullah (Glory be to him!) the mission of the Bab having terminated, hence Behaism. The whole grand work is in fulfillment of prophecy in both the Old Testament and the New, and the Revelation of Jesus Christ, and now is The Day of The Father, while the preceding Day or Cycle was The Day of the Son (Jesus Christ, Glory be unto Him!). The seals upon the Holy Books, referred to in Daniel, have now been removed and all is being made clear. The Spiritual Kingdom has literally been established on earth, and now is the time when man is to be known by his works. Our believers hold to the Positive Reality of actual Christianity, and we pray God that we are sincere when we declare that we are striving to live the LIFE! Our aim is to love and serve God in Spirit and in Truth, and we know that we cannot do so unless we love and serve our fellow man. We believe that the glad tidings must be and always should have been given ‘without money and without price,’ as commanded by Jesus Christ.”

This is a good illustration of the way such religions are metamorphosed in America.

Behaism has already begun to hold its Summer Conferences in America. At the same time, it is not Persian Behaism, but rather a sort of easy interest in all religions and a feeling of geniality to all, ignoring the inconvenient teachings of the Bab and Beha and their followers. The prospectus of the Green Acre Conferences held at Eliot, Maine, in July and August, 1903, was as follows:

“Believing that the Revelation of the Beha Ullah of Persia is the announcement of this great Day — the beginning of the Golden Age foretold by all seers, sung by poets — and finding that it provides a platform on which the Jew, the Christian (both Catholic and Protestant), the Mohammedan, as well as members of all other great religious bodies can stand together in love and harmony, each holding the form which best nourishes his individual life, an opportunity will be given to all who desire to study its message.”

Dr. Potter gives an interesting account of the way stories of American acceptance of Babism are reported in Persia:

“The Behais are at work in the United States and reports of their efforts are circulated in Persia. They announce that an ‘American Princess’ has accepted their faith, and can show the copy of an American paper with the picture of a lady and her declaration of belief. Her photograph is also shown here. They have also the photograph of a large group of their followers in front of a residence, said to be in Chicago. What they say of their work in Cincinnati may be of interest, so I translate part of the report which has come into my hands:

“My spirit thy sacrifice. I wrote you an account of my arrival in Cincinnati; please God, it reached you.

“Now I humbly submit that to-day is the seventh day since my arrival in this city. In these days, by night and by day, we have been busy in meeting friends and converts. When we saw the spirit of inquiry and devotion beyond description in the friends, we determined to remain here some weeks, and the friends gave notice to outside souls, that they might be drawn (to the faith).

“This plan was accepted with completeness of devotion and some, whose houses were in distant sections, left their houses and took quarters in Laconda, which is the residence of this humble servant, that they might be present all the time to hear the new doctrine. They also rented a large place and hired furniture and held meetings every night; and by the action of the deliberative assembly, which I established for them, other matters were, by the grace of God, regulated and settled; that all the congregations which should be gathered in other cities might receive the desired writings and messages.

[page 166]

That Babism will run a brief course and amount to little in America goes without saying, even in the metamorphosed form which it wears here. What makes it attractive to Americans is probably the loose eclecticism which it seems to have assumed in Abbas Effendi's hands. The prevalent dislike of objective constraints, of exactness in truth, of the meaning of Christ's words, "I came to set men at variance," and the soft indiscriminateness of so many minds, coupled with a reaction against the historic, scientific spirit account for much of its currency here. "Another characteristic of Behaism," says Mr. Phelps in his defence of Abbas Effendi and his system, "as refreshing and

[page 167]

attractive as it is striking to the mind accustomed to the dogmatic narrowness of the modern Christian Church, is its marvellous spirit of liberality. It recognizes every other religion as equally divine in origin with itself. It professes only to renew the message formerly given by the Divine Messengers who founded those religions, and which has been more or less forgotten by men. If revelations have differed it has only been in degree, determined in the several cases by the differing capacities of men in different stages of human development to receive them. No man is asked to desert his own faith; but only to look back to its fountain-head and discern, through the mists and accumulations of time, the true spirit of its founders."<sup>105</sup>

Again Mr. Phelps says:

"The characteristic of Abbas Effendi, regarded as a religious leader, which is at once the most striking, the most attractive, the most impressive, is his generous and tolerant liberality. It is disappointing to find that narrowness and intolerance have already shown themselves in the teachings of some of his followers — a perversion and degradation of true religion which is seen to be an almost inevitable tendency of human nature in all ages of the world, and which most religions have suffered in the hands of their adherents. The chief glory of Behaism is that its true spirit, as exemplified in its Great Apostle, is utterly free from it.

---

"But a telegram from Port Said arrived, that according to the blessed command, I must go to New York and the intention of remaining here was changed to that of journeying. At once I notified the friends that I must depart. On hearing this, they were much affected, but since it was the blessed command, they heartily accepted it. This humble servant promised to send them always the new messages and the deliverances, translated.

"One of the converts, Mr. Tasun, a learned and eloquent man well informed in the customary history and sciences, and formerly a salaried officer of the Government, in order to receive instruction, gave up his office and went to Chicago for a time, and having gained some acquaintance with the new doctrine, is now teaching history, etc., in one of the churches to a congregation of about three hundred."

"This gentleman is reported as having introduced the Persian missionary as an Oriental philosopher, who desired to converse with them, wherefore they all rose and saluted him, and he spoke to them for an hour and a half. All present manifested their pleasure, delight, desire and progress, and requested that meetings be appointed that they might acquire further information of these wonderful matters and new doctrines.

"As the missionary was under the necessity of leaving Cincinnati, he referred them to the gentleman above mentioned, who has some of the new books and teachings, and to whom additional matters are to be sent."

<sup>105</sup> Phelps, *Abbas Effendi*, p. xxxvii.

“I shall state at length his attitude in this respect in a subsequent chapter, here merely mentioning two incidents, illustrating it, which were related to me in Akka.

“One was that of a gentleman who wrote to Abbas Effendi to this effect: That he recognized him as a man of great spiritual force, and who, in urging upon men the observance of the Law of Love, was doing much in the service of humanity; that he desired to work with him and for him; but that also he (Abbas Efifendi) had said some things with which he did not agree, and that he himself had some spiritual light, which he did not wish to surrender.

“Abbas Effendi replied that he welcomed him as a co-worker; that he asked him to give up nothing; that he approved of his continuing to adhere to any religious faith with which he might be associated, and that the one thing necessary was to love God above all things and seek Him.

“The other case was that of a lady who was visiting Abbas Effendi in Akka. She had accepted him as her religious teacher, and desired to assist in spreading his teachings. When about to return to her home, she told him that her associations were all in the orthodox Christian Church, and that her friends would be repelled by the idea of a new religion. He advised her to return as a Christian, to remain in the Christian Church, and to teach what she had learned as the true teaching of Christ.”<sup>106</sup>

[page 168]

The novelty of this will soon be over, and the people who did not have sufficient discernment to discover the truth that will satisfy them in Christianity, will not find it in Beha Ullah or Abbas Effendi. What the religion of the Bab, in this form or that, may accomplish in Persia and for Persia, cannot be foreseen.

The question of more vital importance for us is, whether a great movement betraying a deep hunger in human hearts for the fellowship of a living, loving God, a movement embracing a million of our fellow men groping blindfold about the great altar stairs of heaven, shall be allowed to spend itself and disappear, or drop back to the level of life from which it sprang without receiving its answer from those who know that in Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word, the only begotten Son of the Father, there is life for all who are standing with the Bab, at the Gate.

---

### Supplement to Chapter III

#### The Religion of the Bab

##### I

Dr. George W. Holmes, who was for more than twenty years one of the most successful and trusted missionaries in Persia and who is one of the best authorities on Babism has kindly answered the following questions:

1. “Has Christianity anything to do with the origin of the Babi movement?”

---

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 95-97.

Christianity has much to do with it. Persia never accepted Islam from conviction, and educated Persians are, as a rule, quite indifferent to its claims upon their consciences, however ready they may be to yield to its claims as a political and social system. But the horde of mollahs and hereditary sayids are interested in keeping the faith pure and orthodox, and all attempts within the fold to soften the asperities of the orthodox faith have always been met by them with bitter opposition and there is now a reaction towards Christianity on the part of many who feel the need of a God less unapproachable than the God of Islam, one less exacting in points of ceremonial, and having more of human sympathy. Sufiism is too impersonal, Christianity makes too great demands upon the will and affections in working righteousness. But the need of a God manifest in the flesh is satisfied in Beha, who, claiming to be the Divine Essence, present in all preceding manifestations, now becomes the culmination of the progressive series by appearing Himself in Person, thus fulfilling all things written in the Law and the Prophets concerning the Messiah and His Kingdom and appearing as the God Man, the revealer of God to man and the mediator between man and the great abstraction whom Mohammedans are taught to adore and to obey, but whom they are not expected to love. And so it is that whenever a Mahdi arises in Mohammedan lands, he finds multitudes ready to welcome his message and to receive him as their deliverer. And so it is natural that in order to meet the need which all feel who have turned in disgust from the dry husks of Islam, the coming one should assume the garb and arrogate to himself the claims of and profess to dispense the blessings which pertain only to the Son of God. The whole Behai movement is in fact, whatever may have been in the mind of its originator the Bab, a counterfeit of the Messiahship of Christ. At least this is the side of it that is turned towards both Christians and Jews. The system

[page 170]

has a facet for each of the world religions, appealing with the Moslem to the Koran, with the Hindoo to the Vedas, with the Chinese to Confucius, etc. But the appeal is in fact to the original autographs, whenever there is anything found in any of these religious writings that fails to sustain or that antagonizes Beha's claims. It is the true Torah and Injil, the true Koran and Zend Avesta and Vedas that so unequivocally indorse Beha. Some things appear in them now which seem to oppose his claims, but these are either spurious additions, or by proper interpretation are shown to sustain Beha even more strongly than the passages which are less obscurely worded. All that relates to the second coming of Christ in the Old Testament or the New, is boldly appropriated to himself by Beha and everything in our Scriptures relating to God is boldly applied to himself. The Behais charge upon the Christians the same spiritual blindness in their refusal to recognize and accept Beha as God as that which prevented the Jews from recognizing their Messiah when He came to them. So they charge upon the Moslem the same folly in their rejection of Beha as that which possessed Jews and Christians together in refusing to see in Mohammed the prophet like unto Moses whom the great lawgiver had so long ago foretold. They discover a very plausible analogy between their relations to the Christians now, and that of the early Christians to the Jews. As the failure of the Jews to see the Messiah then was due to spiritual blindness, and was to be overcome by yielding submission to the Holy Spirit, who would then lead them into all truth, so now, submission to the spirit of Beha is essential for one who would attain to a knowledge of the truth in him. Without faith it is impossible to please God. All that is taught in the New Testament about the fruits of the Spirit, about the necessity of the new birth, etc., is made prominent in their teachings also. The failure of the many attempts to reconcile Christianity with pagan cults by gnostic pretenders in the past, could in no wise deter Beha Ullah from making the attempt anew with the help of a cement of Islamic theology, for it is probable that in common with most Orientals, he knows nothing of the history either of nations or religions, except such meagre and distorted statements as could be obtained from Mohammedan authorities. Kheiralla with the aid of his American coadjutor, has worked into his book many western opinions, but he probably obtained most of these in America. He had abundant opportunity, however, of learning of

the teachings of the Gnostics as Mohammedan writings abound in denunciations and refutations of the doctrines of the Manichaeans.

2. "What effect will the movement have in influencing Persians in their attitude towards Christianity?"

It will bring a few nearer to Christ. By far the greater number of its adherents will be brought into more active antagonism to Christianity than before. As Moslems it was possible for them to recognize grave defects in their religion as compared with Christianity. In Beha these defects are in their eyes remedied and they have, as they believe, secured all that was revealed to the Christian not only, but have gone far in advance and have that in hand for which the Church of Christ has watched and waited so long unsatisfied, the second coming of the Lord. To the Behai as to the early Christian, the Lord is at hand, for though Beha has "withdrawn his presence," it is only for a short time when the fullness of the blessing will come in the establishment of the Kingdom of God on the earth. His witnesses go out into the world speaking that they do know and testifying that they have seen, and their message and their testimony is received as gladly, they claim, as was that of the apostles by the people to whom they went. Though they have no resurrection other than a re-birth into the present world, and no heaven where there is no sin, the message comes to them in some sense as glad tidings, and they are zealous to go forth and make it known to the world. For they find relief from the burdensome exactions both of Islam and Judaism, and have not to meet the Christian demand for personal holiness, and

[page 171]

as they are taught to believe that Christianity is but an inferior stage of development of their own faith which has had its day and been abrogated, the Behai can see no philosophical reason for giving up his new-found faith and yielding obedience to Christ.

But even Christ made not so unqualified a demand for the surrender to Himself of the will of His followers as Beha, for Christ offers testimony to His claims which does not suppress, but rather appeals to the reason, whereas Beha demands a blind faith, which independently of all testimony, accepts him as God. Christ says, "If any man will do His (the Father's) will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God or whether I speak of Myself." Beha says, "If any man will do my will, he shall know of the doctrine." Christ's appeal is to the Father in His witness of the Word and the witness of the Spirit. Beha's appeal is wholly to his own word, and to his own arbitrary and forced interpretations of the Word of God, which interpretations as he states, find their sanction solely in his own authority. Being God (an assumption so far offering no proof but his own word) he is the author of the Scriptures and therefore their infallible interpreter. It follows that whatever interpretation he chooses to give to any text is law and gospel to his fellow men, though it contradict the meaning of the simplest passages. Therefore whenever he makes the claim that a given prophecy relates to himself, there is no further room for argument. When he says that a given text has not a literal but a figurative interpretation (as for instance, that Jesus raised Lazarus and others from the dead), no man may question that deliverance, for he who inspired the writing is he who has given its meaning. He then offers all the Old and New Testament writings and equally the Koran, the Vedas and all other religious books as proofs of his claims. The neophyte sees that the conclusion is irresistible, not recognizing that the major premise on which it rests is a mere assumption. He has committed his will and reason as well to the keeping of his master, and must necessarily accept with full assurance of faith all his master's teachings. Should he question in the slightest degree any of these conclusions, he is told that he is yet in darkness and that without faith no one can enter into the light. There must be absolute surrender of the will or no enlargement of the understanding. This is plainly the livery of heaven. The Behais talk as glibly of the gifts and grace of the Spirit, and as beautifully as any Christian saint could do. It is all counterfeit but a counterfeit which deceives the ones who put it forth as well as those who accept it, and is

one very difficult to expose among a people deficient in the logical faculty and having the critical sense almost wholly undeveloped.

Though there is an outward semblance of fellowship for Christians on the part of Behais, there can be little doubt from the intolerance they show to those who recant, that should they gain power enough they would be as ready to persecute Christians as was Mohammed to put to death the Jews of Medina. Nevertheless I believe that Behaism is destined to prove a solvent for Islam which will eventually assist materially in breaking down the resistance of that stubborn and unyielding system of error, itself then perishing also in the ruin it has helped to bring about. Indirectly it will thus hasten the triumph of the Cross of Christ, though only as the wrath of man is made to serve God's purposes.

3. "What should be its effect on our apologetic statements of Christianity to Mohammedans, Behais, etc.?"

They must be re-stated. The traditional methods of exegesis as employed by many of our helpers, simply play into the hands of the Behais. Though he had probably encountered only the less well informed of Christian converts in Syria and Persia, I think it was not entirely an idle boast of one of the Behai missionaries at Hamadan when he told me that he had overthrown every Christian controversialist whom he had yet encountered. It is true that he later said the

[page 172]

same thing about me, but if so, he had to make new breaches in the wall before he gained entrance. If we are at liberty to interpret the Scriptures literally when it suits the convenience of our argument to do so, or figuratively at will, regardless of context or of historic setting or perspective, then we are compelled to allow them the same liberty: and they can easily discount us in such a contest, since they know nothing of history and care less, and they have a facility in basing a fanciful interpretation on the numerical value of a letter or a name, or on an assumed grammatical relation of the different parts of a sentence, to which a western expert in exegesis could never hope to attain.

The missionary who is called upon to make apologetic statements of Christianity to Behais must make sure that he himself knows what Christianity is. He must have seen with his own eyes, and have heard with his own ears Him of whom he speaks. This is equally true in all Christian work. But in this kind of controversy it is necessary that one should see, not alone for one's self but for one's antagonist also, if he is to be convinced. The other has not my faith which makes all too clear to me that which is all mist to him. One must see with the other's eyes as well as his own, or he cannot detect and expose the fallacies which have entangled him. When the reciprocal vision is exercised one will often find also that what he had thought to be a rock in his own foundation is just what the other had seen it to be, a mere bank of sand. Much of the current allegorical and figurative interpretations of prophecy are as beautiful and in such a discussion as unsubstantial as the rainbow. The undoubted value to the Christian of such interpretations as aids to faith and for edification rests on another basis.

We must go down deeper than this if we expect to carry conviction to the hearts of those we wish to lead in the way of life. If I teach that the will must be absolutely surrendered to Christ before one can expect to attain to the knowledge of the truth, that if one wills to do His will he shall know of the doctrine, I must be prepared to show at the same time why the Behai should not apply the same principle to himself in his relation to him whom he supposes to be greater than Christ. This takes us back to the ultimate principles of evidence, to the psychological constitution of the human understanding, and the recognition of its needs which we find in the Bible. Does the Bible represent God as demanding of us a blind faith in His Word, unsupported by adequate evidence? Or does it represent Him as offering such evidence and constantly appealing to our reason to

differentiate between the true and the false? Does Christ demand faith in His own unsupported Word or does He repeatedly appeal to the witnesses of the Father, of the Word, and of His own works? — the witness of the Father as it seems to me not in His audible words, which were not heard by the multitude, but in the witness of His spirit in the heart of each one who was willing to recognize His voice there, telling them that the Christ recognized by their understanding answered perfectly to the highest and holiest image of God which the Spirit had imprinted on their hearts, fulfilling their most perfect conceptions of what God ought to be and holding up Him whom they saw in life as a companion picture to their inward vision of Him. If I teach that Christianity consists in a body of doctrine, I must then be prepared to show, not alone to my own satisfaction but to that of my hearer, wherein it is so immeasurably superior to the body of doctrine which he has accepted that it must instantly claim his allegiance. Possibly I may not succeed at once in convincing him that it is not his own creed that I am offering him, that it is not a part of, and included in his own more comprehensive declaration of faith.

If I teach that the Christian religion does not consist of dogma, but in allegiance to a Divine Person, I see him smile for his religion consists wholly in allegiance to a Divine Person spelled with a larger P. How shall I differentiate the True from the false? Easily enough for the satisfaction of my own heart

[page 173]

and my own understanding, but how shall I see what it really is that he sees and is deceived by, and how shall I clear away the mists which prevent his seeing with my vision? Surely nothing but the illumination of the Holy Spirit can enable him to see, but am I prepared to be used of the Spirit for that purpose? If so I must not only pray but labour to see true myself, so that I may see true for him also.

The character of Christ is too marvellous a thing, too great in its quality and its complexity for any single generation or age to see it in its entirety. This proposition no Christian could think of questioning nor that all the ages past and future could not know Him perfectly. He can only be studied in detail, and what our fathers saw, though it helps us also to see, does not help us in the same degree as it did them. For we necessarily see Him from a somewhat different angle. We should take account of this and remember that however much we may be able to enter by reason of heredity or environment or sympathy into our fathers' vision of God, we cannot accept their own point of view, and if we say we see just as they did, we are probably deceiving ourselves as well as others. For no two persons ever yet saw exactly the same mountain or the same grain of sand. No two have seen just the same Christ. To each believer is given the new name known only to himself and to Christ, and each one sustains a different relation to Him from every other individual.

We are still less likely to make unbelievers see just as our fathers saw, since, if they are also Orientals, they are subjects of a different heredity and environment, which necessarily affect to some extent their visual field. Let us recognize this and let us make a worthy effort to discover the point of view of those we would teach, so that, when we talk with them of something we have both seen with the eyes of the understanding, we may make sure that we have both seen approximately the same thing, and that we are not each talking of a wholly different thing, supposing it to be the same. Do not many of our controversies arise from similar causes? How then are we to see our faith as it is, to get down to the foundation principles, to divest it of the things that are not essential to its integrity, but which may be accretions which obscure the clearness of its definition and mar its symmetry? I cannot answer the question but I am quite certain we shall not accomplish it unless we recognize the need, and make an honest effort to provide for it. For myself I have found some help in reverting to first principles, and in following them out, observing how Christ in His personality and in His teachings seems to fit in with and satisfy the nature of things, as no other human being has ever done. Surely the Christian who has once entered into vital personal relations of fellowship with his Lord, requires for himself no other evidence,

sometimes feels indeed as though other evidence were an offence to his understanding. This will doubtless in the long run prove the most convincing also to others, through the influence of the life in Christ lived before the world, but another line of argument is also needed in apologetics. One great difficulty in dealing with the Behais is that whatever we say of Christ that commends itself to them, they immediately transfer to Beha so that we are in a sense placed in the attitude of ourselves indirectly glorifying him. May God give us all His wisdom that we may be able to confound the wisdom of this world with all its sophistries! But no statement of Christian doctrines can avail to draw any one to Christ so long as there is no sense of sin in the soul and this touches the weak spot in the experience of so many Orientals, converts and others. With Mohammedans and Jews alike sin is thought of rather as a violation of the ceremonial law than as an attitude of antagonism towards God, and in this respect Oriental Christians till their hearts have been touched by the Spirit of God, are not essentially different from the others. There can never be any evolution of Christian doctrine, nor any evolution of the natural man, which will do away with the necessity of repentance for, and re-

[page 174]

puddiation of sin as an essential condition of salvation, and it should be our aim, no less than it has been the aim of the fathers, though it may be by different lines of approach, to awaken in the heart a sense of the sinfulness of sin and the need of a Saviour.

---

## II

### THE BABITES<sup>107</sup>

BY HENRY HARRIS JESSUP, D.D.

*From the Outlook, June 22, 1901*

In the summer of 1897 an aged Persian Sheikh came to the American Press in Beirut, bringing a large sheet of pasteboard on which he wished a map to be mounted. On one side it was glazed with black varnish, and had inscribed on it in elegant Persian script in gold letters the Arabic words "Ya Beha el Abha," "O Glory of the most Glorious," the Babite motto. Our clerk, perceiving this, asked the Sheikh for the card, and said he would mount the map on a new and better one.

That Beha motto now hangs in my study. The old Sheikh said, in explanation of his scheme of mounting a map on the face of this beautiful motto, "I have had this hanging on the wall of my room and prayed to it for twelve years, and found it to be vanity and worthless. I now prefer to read the Bible."

Ever since the first Babite reform movement in Persia in 1845, the Christian world has hoped that some of its liberal tenets might lead the Persian people to Christianity. But thus far the hope has not been realized. Those who read the Bible seem to prefer to find an occult inner double meaning in the simplest language, and construct for themselves a kind of mystic religious philosophy in which the Persians delight.

According to the best authorities, Babism arose as follows:

Mirza Ali Mohammed appeared in Shiraz in 1845, a pupil of Sheikh Ahmed Zein ed Din, who taught a mixture of Sufiism, mystic philosophy, and Moslem Shiite law, and said

---

<sup>107</sup> I have preserved Dr. Jessup's spelling of proper names in this article.



that the absent Mahdi, now in a spiritual world called Jabalka and Jabersa, would soon appear, and that he was the Bab or Door of the Mahdi. He then made up a system composed of Moslem, Nusairiyeh, Jewish, and heathen doctrines; and then claimed to be Bab ed Din, and afterwards the Nukta or Centre and Creator of truth, and then that he was Deity personified; then that he was the prophet Mohammed, and produced a new book called the Beyan, which is the Babite Bible, in twenty thousand verses, Arabic and Persian. Complaint was made of its bad grammar and that this is a sign of imperfection. He explained the ungrammatical Arabic by the fact that the words and letters rebelled and sinned in a previous world, then transmigrated to this world, and, as a punishment for sin in a previous existence, were put under grammatical rules; but he in mercy forgave all sinners, even to the letters of the alphabet, and released them, and now they can go as they please!

He was followed by tens of thousands. In 1849 he was killed, with multitudes of his followers. Among his followers was a beautiful and eloquent woman named Selma, who divorced her husband and followed Ali Mohammed

[page 175]

the Bab, who styled her Kurret el Ain (light or refreshment to the eye). Ali Mohammed raised an army to fight the Persian troops, but was caught and strangled.

Before Ali Mohammed's death he said his successor would be a young disciple named Yahya. This Mirza Yahya succeeded him, taking the title of "Subh Azel" — morning of eternity.

The Bab made the month nineteen days, answering to the nineteen members of the sacred hierarchy of which the Bab is the chief.

Subh Azel was the fourth in the hierarchy, and on the death of the Bab Ali Mohammed, and the two others above him on the list, he became chief of the sect by regular promotion. Upon the outbreak of persecution against them, Subh Azel and his older brother Mirza Hassen Ali, who was styled Beha Allah, fled to Baghdad and remained from 1853 to 1864, then to Adrianople. Beha had persuaded Subh Azel to retire and conceal himself from human gaze, saying to the people that he was present but invisible. Beha then claimed the succession, and two hostile parties arose, Azelites and Behaites. They were both then exiled (1864) to Adrianople, where plots and poisoning among the two parties, and anonymous letters sent to the Sultan charging each other with political conspiracies, led the Sultan to exile (in 1866) Subh Azel to Famagusta in Cyprus, and Beha Allah to Acre. Four of the Azelites were sent with Beha, and their leader claimed that Beha was instrumental in having all of them assassinated in Acre.

Subh Azel died before 1880, and Beha in 1892.

Beha left three sons — Abbas Effendi, now sixty; Mohammed Ali, now forty-five; and Bedea, now aged thirty-five. Mohammed Ali claims that the father Beha appointed him spiritual head and Abbas secular head, but Abbas has usurped both. They are now divided, the two younger brothers being in a bitter lawsuit with Abbas, who has all the prestige of holding the funds, and the reputation among his followers of being a re-incarnation of Christ.

To understand Babism, we should remember the sources from which it was derived. Jemal ed Din, the Afghani, says that its author borrowed from Hinduism, Pantheism, Sufiism, and the doctrines of Nusairiyeh. The Nusairiyeh of northern Syria believe in one God, self-existent and eternal. This God manifested himself seven times in human form, from Abel to Ali, son of Abi Talib, which last manifestation was the most perfect.

At each of these manifestations the Diety made use of two other persons, the first created out of the light of his essence and by himself, and the second created by the first.

The Diety is called the Maana — the meaning or reality of all things; the second, the Ism — name or veil, because by it the Maana conceals its glory, while, by it, it reveals itself to men. The third, the Bab — Door, because through it is the entrance to the knowledge of the two former.

The following table shows the seven trinities of the Nusairiyeh:

	Maana.	Ism.	Bab.
1.	Abel	Adam	Gabriel
2.	Seth	Noah	Yayeel
3.	Joseph	Jacob	Ham ibn Cush
4.	Joshua	Moses	Daw
5.	Asaph	Solomon	Abdullad ibn Simaan
6.	Simon (Cephas)	Jesus	Rozabah
7.	Ali	Mohammed	Salman el Farisee

After Ali, the Diety manifested himself in the Imams, in some of them totally and in others partially, but Ali is the eternal Maana, the divine essence, and the

[page 176]

three are inseparable trinity. Now add to this the mystic teaching of the Mohammedan system of Sufiism or Tusow-wof.

Pure Sufiism teaches that only God exists. He is in all things and all things are in Him. All visible and invisible things are in emanation from Him and are not really distinct from Him. Religions are matters of indifference. There is no difference between good and evil, for all is reduced to Unity, and God is the real author of the acts of men. Man is not free in his action. By death the soul returns to the bosom of Divinity, and the great object of life is absorption into the divine nature.

Bear in mind also the doctrine of the Persian or Shiah Moslems, that Ali was the first legitimate Imam, or Caliph of Mohammed, and that he existed before Adam, and that the twelfth Imam, Mohammed Abdal Kasim, was the Mahdi, and that he is now concealed in some secret place and will appear again on earth. Add to this the highly imaginative and mystic character of the Persian mind, its fondness for poetry and religious extravagance, and you have a preparation for the appearance of a man who had the intellect, strong will, and abhorrence of sham to make him a leader among his fellows.

Abbas Effendi, the oldest son of Beha, is now living in Haifa, with about seventy or eighty of his Persian followers, who are called Behaites. Nothing is heard of Subh Azel or his followers.

Some years since, Dr. Ibrahim Kheirulla, an educated Syrian of great mental acumen, conceived the idea of introducing Beha-Babism into the United States. He declared Beha to be the Messiah returned to earth and Abbas to be his reincarnation. He visited Abbas, and from time to time, as his accredited agent and promoter, has brought his disciples, chiefly American women, to visit Abbas, and some of them at least have bowed down and worshipped him as the Messiah.

A cousin to Dr. Kheirulla who is clerk of the American Press in Beirut has given me the following statement:

“The Doctor, after the death of his first wife in Egypt in 1882, married first a Coptic widow in El Fayum, whom he abandoned, and then married a Greek girl whom he also abandoned, and who was still living in 1897 in Cairo. He was at the World’s Parliament in Chicago, and tried to promote several mechanical inventions, as a rubber boot, envelopes, buttons, etc. At one time he was worth three thousand pounds. He then obtained the degree of Doctor, and taught mental philosophy. He then helped a Greek priest, Jebara, in publishing a book on the unity of Islam and Christianity, which fell flat and had no influence on the public mind. He then opened a medical clinic to cure nervous diseases by the laying on of hands and reading from Psalm 29:7, the words, ‘The voice of the Lord divideth the flames of fire,’ etc., etc. Then he went to Chicago and tried trade, and then teaching, and preaching, and pretty much everything else. He is a smart talker, full of plausible argument, and can make white appear black. Of late he has had little to do with religion. It can be said to his credit that, after receiving aid in the Beirut College, he paid back the money advanced to him.”

Up to last summer he had the confidence of Abbas Effendi and represented him in the United States. The *Egyptian Gazette* of November, 1900, states that Dr. Kheirulla on his last visit to Haifa differed with Abbas, claiming that Beha Allah only was the true divinity, and Abbas is simply a teacher. Dr. and Mrs. Goetzinger, on the other hand, maintain that Abbas must be worshipped with divine homage, as he is the true Christ. Some of the American Babites now follow Dr. Kheirulla and some Dr. Goetzinger, but the latter has the official credentials, and thus the house is divided against itself.

In Baghdad in 1860 the Babite house was divided into Behaites and Azelites. In Haifa it is divided between Abbas Effendi and his two brothers Mohammed and Bedea. In America it is between Dr. Kheirulla and Dr. Goetzinger.

[page 177]

The *Egyptian Gazette* states that Dr. Goetzinger expected two hundred pilgrims from America to visit and worship Abbas during the present season.

On a recent visit to Haifa I called on Abbas Effendi and had a half-hour’s conversation with him. My companion was Chaplain Wells, of Tennessee, recently from the Philippines, who had met at Port Said an American lady on her way to Haifa to visit Abbas Effendi. We met her at the hotel and had a four hours’ conversation with her. She seemed fascinated or hypnotized by the Effendi. She had been converted four years ago under Mr. Moody’s preaching in New York, attended the Brick Church for a time, and in some way heard of Abbas Effendi as being an eminently holy man. Said she: “I feel in his presence, as I did in Mr. Moody’s presence, that he is a very holy man and brings me nearer to God than any other person.” She said that she was his guest, and that every morning he expounds the New Testament in Arabic. “His two daughters, who know English, take notes and then translate them to me.” We asked her if there were not scores of godly, learned ministers in America who could explain the New Testament in English without needing an interpreter. She said yes, but seemed to have a hazy idea that there was something different in Abbas. While we were conversing in the hotel parlour a tall man passed the door, clad in a long robe, and she whispered to us, “There goes that bad man Bedea Effendi, brother of Abbas, who wants to kill him. He is a spy.”

I went out and addressed the man in Arabic, and he told me he was a younger brother of Abbas, and he had a room at this hotel. I sent word by this good lady to Abbas Effendi, and he appointed nine o’clock the next morning for an interview. Chaplain Wells went with me. The Effendi has two houses in Haifa, one for his family, in which the American lady pilgrims are entertained, and one down town, where he receives only men. Here his Persian followers meet him. They bow in worship when they meet him on the street or when they hear his voice. On Friday he prays with the Moslems in the mosque, as he is still reputed a good Mohammedan of the Shiite sect.

We entered a large reception-room, at one end of which was a long divan covered, as usual in Syria, with a white cloth. In a moment he came in and saluted us cordially with the usual Arabic compliments, and then sat down on the end of the divan next to the wall and invited us to sit next to him.

Beha Allah, the father of Abbas, used to wear a veil in the street and live secluded from the gaze of men, living in an atmosphere of mystery which greatly impressed his devout Persian followers. But Abbas Effendi, on succeeding his father, threw off this reserve, and is a man among men. He has been in Beirut often, and has a reputation of being a great scholar in Persian, Turkish, and Arabic, writing with equal ease and eloquence in all. He visits his friends in Haifa, and is a man of great affability and courtesy — traits which characterize many of the Mohammedan and Druze Sheikhs and Effendis whom I know in Beirut, Sidon, Damascus, and Mount Lebanon. After another round of salutations, I introduced myself and Chaplain Wells, and told him that, although a resident of Syria for forty-five years, I had never visited Haifa before, and, having heard and read much of his father and himself, I was glad to meet him.

He asked my profession. I told him I was an American missionary, and was connected with the American Press and Publishing House in Beirut.

“Yes,” said he, “I know your Press and your books. I have been in Beirut, and knew Dr. van Dyke, who was a most genial, learned, and eloquent man, and I highly esteemed him.”

I said his greatest work was the translation of the Bible into Arabic. He at once rejoined: “Very true. It is the best translation from the original made into any Eastern language. It is far superior to the Turkish and the Persian versions. The Persian especially is very defective. Nothing is more difficult than to translate the Bible from its original tongues. The translator

[page 178]

must fully understand the genius of both languages and grasp the inner spiritual meaning. For instance, Jesus the Christ said, ‘I am the bread which came down from heaven.’ Now, He did not mean that He was literally bread, but bread signifies grace and blessing; *i.e.*, I came down from heaven as grace and blessing to men’s souls. But if you translate that into Persian literally, as bread, it would not be understood. The same difficulty exists,” he continued, “in translating the Koran into another language.”

I said that I quite agreed with him, as the English translations of the Koran are in a great part dry and vapid, but that there is a difference between translating a text and explaining it. A translator must be faithful to the text itself.

He then said that hundreds had tried to translate the Koran from Arabic into Persian, including the great Zamakhshari, and all had utterly failed.

I remarked that it was a great comfort that the Bible was so well translated into Arabic, and had been so widely distributed, and that since 1865, when Dr. van Dyke completed the translation of the whole Bible, our Press had issued more than six hundred thousand copies, and this year would issue from thirty thousand to fifty thousand copies.

I then remarked that the Mohammedans object to our use of the term “Son of God,” and asked him if he regarded Christ as the Son of God.

He said: “Yes, I do; I believe in the Trinity. But the Trinity is a doctrine above human comprehension, and yet it can be understood.”

He then asked me: “Did Christ understand the Trine personality of the Deity, *i.e.*, the Trinity?”

I said, “Most certainly.”

“Then,” said he, “it is understandable, yet *we* cannot understand it.” I replied, “There are many things in nature which we believe and yet cannot understand.” I told him the story of the old man who overheard a young man exclaim to a crowd of his companions, “I will never believe what I cannot understand.” The old man said to him, “Do you see those animals in the field — the cattle eating grass, and it turns into hair on their backs; sheep eating the same grass, and it turns into wool; and swine eating it, and it becomes bristles on their backs; do you believe this?” The youth said, “Yes.” “Do you understand it?” “No.” “Then,” said the old man, “never say you will not believe what you do not understand.”

The Effendi remarked; “Yes, that is like a similar remark made once by a Persian to the famous Zamakhshari, ‘I cannot understand this doctrine of God’s Unity and Eternity, and I will not believe it.’ Zamakhshari replied, ‘Do you understand the watery secretions of your own body?’ ‘No.’ ‘But you believe they exist? Then say no more you will not believe what you do not understand.’” I then explained to the Effendi our view of salvation by faith in Christ; that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life, and that, being justified by faith, we have peace with God; that Christ has paid the ransom, and now God can be just, and yet the justifier of them who believe. “And does your Excellency believe this?” He replied promptly, “Yes.” “And do you accept the Christ as your Saviour?” He said, “Yes.” “And do you believe that Jesus the Christ will come again and judge the world?” He said, “Yes.”

I then drew a little nearer to him and said: “My dear friend, I am more than sixty-eight years of age, and you are almost as old, and soon we shall stand together before the judgment seat of Christ. Now I want to ask you a very plain question. I have seen in an American paper (the *Literary Digest*), a statement that an American woman, evidently of sincere character, had stated that she came to Haifa and visited you, and that when she entered your room she felt that she was in the very presence of the Son of God, the Christ, and that she held out her arms, crying, ‘My Lord, my Lord,’ and rushed to you, kneeling at your

[page 179]

blessed feet, sobbing like a child. Now, I could not believe this, and thought it a newspaper invention. I wish to ask you whether this is true. Can it be right for the creature to accept the worship due only to the Creator?”

He smiled and seemed somewhat disturbed, and said, “What is this sudden change of subject? Where were we? — discoursing on the high themes of the Trinity and redemption and divine mysteries, and now you suddenly open an entirely different subject. This is entirely different; let us keep to theological themes.”

I replied: “It is a change of subject, but I am seriously anxious to know whether that statement is true.”

He then said very calmly, “I am only the poorest and humblest of servants.”

I saw that he was not disposed to answer such a point-blank question and seemed much embarrassed, and glanced towards an attendant or disciple, a young Persian, who sat in a chair facing us.

So I took up another question. I said: “The Christ promised to send the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete. Now, the Mohammedans claim that Mohammed is the Paraclete. We claim and believe that He is the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity.”

“Yes,” said he, “I know that you believe that. That is your doctrine; but that is a very profound subject and very important.”

I saw from his manner that he was getting weary of talking, and told him who my companion was — the Rev. Captain Wells, a United States chaplain from the Philippines, who was a strong temperance advocate, and had made a report to President McKinley

urging the prohibition of the use of liquor in the United States army. He expressed his approval of the total abstinence principle and his gratification that there is a temperance reading-room in Beirut.

I then alluded to the *Episode of the Bab* written by Prof E. G. Browne, of Cambridge, and asked him if he knew Professor Browne and his book? He replied: "Professor Browne has not comprehended our views. He heard us and then heard our enemies (the Subh Azelites), and wrote down the views of all. How can he get the truth? Now, supposing that a man wanted to learn about the Jews, and you are, we will suppose, an anti-Semite. He asks you about the Jews and writes down your views. Then he asks a Rabbi and takes down his views, and prints both. How can he get at the real truth? So with Professor Browne. He sees us through the eyes of our enemies."

I then invited the Effendi to let me know when he came to Beirut, that I might call on him. He replied: "When I come to Beirut, I shall do myself the honour of calling upon you."

And then we took our leave, with the usual profuse Arabic salutations.

Now, what can one say in brief of such a man? Whether intentionally on his part or not, he is now acting what seems to be a double part — a Moslem in the mosque, a Christ, or at least a Christian mystic, at his own house. He prays with the Moslems, "There is no God but God," and expounds the Gospels as an incarnation of the Son of God. His dislike of Professor Browne comes from the fact that Professor Browne visited Subh el Azel in Cyprus and obtained from him documents which reflect seriously upon Beha Allah, and charge him with assassination and other crimes.

His declarations of belief in the Trinity and redemption through the Christ must be interpreted in the light of Sufiist pantheism and of his belief in a succession of incarnations, of which his followers regard him as the last and greatest.

It is difficult to regard without indignation the Babite proselytism now being carried on in the United States. One American woman who passed through Beirut recently, en route for the Abbas Effendi shrine, stated that she was at first an agnostic and found that a failure; then she tried Theosophy, and found that too thin; then she tried Christian Science and obtained a diploma authorizing her

[page 180]

to heal the sick and raise the dead, and found that a sham, and now was on her way to see what Abbas Effendi had to offer!

Surely that woman has found out what it is to feed on ashes.

At the military barracks in Beirut is a tower clock with an eastern face keeping eastern time, in which it is always twelve o'clock at sunset, and a western face keeping European time. Abbas Effendi seems to the people of Syria to have these two faces — the eastern for the Moslems and the Turkish Government by which he is kept in exile from Persia; and the western for the pilgrims who come from New York and Chicago.

On Mount Carmel are certain round stones, geodes of flint, hollow and lined with crystals of quartz. The people call them Elijah's watermelons. They look smooth and round and melon-like on the outside, but inside are nothing but crystals, which would tax the digestion of a tougher man than even the stalwart Tishbite. These pilgrims are attracted by the rumour of spiritual fruits in Haifa just under the Carmel of Elijah, but they may find to their sorrow that there is no more true nourishment in them than in Elijah's watermelons.

In the paper already quoted on pp. 134-138 the late Dr. Shedd wrote of the relation of Babism to Christianity:

“It remains to inquire what is the relation of Babism to the missionary work. “When the Bab passed through Urumia in 1850 on the way to his execution, the missionaries watched the excitement with great interest. The crowds of people were ready to receive him as the long expected Imam, even the water in which he bathed was regarded as holy water. Since then, the missionaries have ever had a strong desire to utilize the movement, but have found the Babis so satisfied or mystified with their own fanciful ideas, and so urgent in their argument for a fuller revelation to suit the present age, that they felt no need of Christ. Our colporteurs have kept in touch with the different sects in all parts of the country and reported the Babis. The congenial field for Babism is not among the rough Turkish race of the north and west of Persia, but among the gentler Persian race of the south and east. The missionaries come from Ispahan and beyond. Two of them have been at Urumia for several weeks previous to this date. They have great assurance, and are ready to discuss with Jews, Christians and Moslems, always with great caution lest they be betrayed to their enemies. Their arguments are from the Pentateuch, and especially from Daniel and Revelation for Jews and Christians, and from the Koran for Moslems. The Jews are not always proof against the infection. Some are said to believe, others are turned away from the true teachings of the Scriptures. In other places, especially in the darker regions where our colporteurs seldom penetrate, the Jews are much affected. Last year, two of the colporteurs wrote from such places: ‘We must hasten to enlighten these Jews, or they will all fall in the snare.’ Babism offers the Jew a system non-persecuting, suiting his unitarian view of God, and nearer his hopes of an earthly Messiah and kingdom than Christianity. The Christian faith alone has the resources to meet the sophistries of the Babis. The argument of the Moslem is the sword, not reasoning from the Koran and traditions, I have heard of no case of a Christian’s conversion to Babism or of a

[page 181]

Babi’s conversion to Christianity.<sup>108</sup> Is it because the chasm of the two faiths is impassible, or because the affinities have not yet been fully established? What shall be the attitude we take? Shall we consider the new creed, now accepted by many thousands of Persians, as for us or against us in the conflict with Islam?

“On the favourable side, we may mention:

“1. It is a most radical reform that revolutionizes the established religion of Persia, and thus breaks down the barriers of intolerance and comes into sympathy with Christianity.

“2. In practical duties, compared with Islam, it has a very liberal aspect. It is a protest against the hard legalism and Pharisaism of the mollahs. It exposes their intolerance and corruptions and scandalous vices, and teaches sincerity and gentleness, and thus is breaking down the civil and social system of the prevailing faith, and in so far is an ally of Christianity.

“3. The adherents of the Bab claim a friendship and kinship with Christians on these common grounds. The following extract from Mr. Browne’s record expresses this feeling in

---

<sup>108</sup> “I have not heard of a Babi’s conversion to Christ,” comments Dr. Holmes. “At the time Dr. Shedd was reading this paper, one of our most consecrated and efficient helpers, was almost within earshot. He was a convert from Behaism, and there are various others who have likewise renounced Beha for Christ. But the rest of the statement holds good. I do not know of a single original Christian in Persia who has been converted to Behaism. Some Behais who made a profession of Christianity turned back to Beha, but none of whom we were at any time fully satisfied that their profession of faith in Christ was sincere.”

stronger terms, perhaps, than usual. ‘Yes,’ said the Babi, ‘we are much nearer to you in sympathy than the Mohammedans. To them, you are unclean and accursed; if they associate with you, it is only by overcoming their religious prejudices. But we are taught to regard all good men as clean and pure, whatever their religion. With you Christians especially, we have sympathy. Has it not struck you how similar were the life and death of our founder (whom we indeed believe to have been Christ Himself returned to earth) and the Founder of your faith? Both were wise even in their childhood, beyond the comprehension of those around them; both were pure and blameless in their lives; both at last were done to death by a fanatical priesthood and a Government alarmed at the love and devotion which they inspired in their disciples.’ This is very fairly spoken, but one is at a loss to know how far such language comes from the hope of winning converts. Mr. Browne is one much in love with Oriental mysticism, and one whom the Babis hoped to win over to their belief.

“Beyond the points just mentioned, I cannot see that Christians and Babis can have much in common.

*“The Unfavourable Relations to Mission Work.*

“1. The movement arose entirely outside of Christian influence. It is an outgrowth of Persian Mohammedanism, of the sect of the Sheikhis, without a single doctrine derived from the New Testament. The face of Babism is not towards Christianity, but towards the pantheism of the East. It turns away from the God of Islam, who is an absolute monarch far removed from man and his needs. The Bab brings God near, but not through Christ by way of reconciliation, not by regarding God as a loving Father, who through the Son and Spirit is bringing us into fellowship with Himself. The Bab brings God near through pantheism. The universal spirit is manifested in all men. By self-renunciation and abstraction a man may escape the illusion of plurality and attain to the unity and blessedness of true being and say, ‘I am God.’ Christ said this, and so the Bab and Beha and so many others yet to come. This misty pantheism is harder for the

[page 182]

missionary to deal with than the fatalistic unitarian conception of God presented by Islam.

“2. The doctrine of manifestations renders the Babis insensible to Christian influence. They accept Christ most fully, and no one can go beyond them in praise of His Divine nature; but His mission has ended. The inconsistency of applying the same prediction to the Holy Spirit, to Mohammed, and to Beha is overcome by saying that the signs apply equally to all successive manifestations. The argument from the unapproachable personality of Christ is met by the statement that Beha is also a man of perfection, and that Christ showed indications of His weakness in His outcry in Gethsemane and on the Cross. The Cross of Christ is made of none effect. The phenomenon of the Bab and Beha eclipses the Sun of Righteousness.

“This doctrine, taken with the fact that a new faith has a charm which for the time satisfies the religious need, renders the Babis difficult to reach. Through the darkness of pantheism they cannot see the need of a Saviour. The Moslems often feel a need and confess that their system has proved a failure, but the Babis are in the zeal and assurance of a new religion. They study the New Testament not as disciples to learn, but as partisans who will fortify their theory. All previous Scriptures are valuable to them only in so far as they testify to the new faith.

“3. Their basis of morals is quite far from our faith, perhaps farther removed than the doctrine of Islam. It has been truly said of Islam ‘Mohammedan law is based on the theory that right and wrong depend on legal enactment. Moral acts have no inherent moral character. An act is right because God has commanded it, and wrong because He has forbidden it. God may abrogate or change His laws so that what was wrong may become



right. So it is impossible to discuss the moral character of the prophet, because it is sufficient answer to any criticism to say that God commanded or expressly permitted those acts which in other men would be wrong. Thus God's moral nature is not known. There is no comprehension that God is a moral being doing what is right because it is right, that He could not be just and justify the sinner without an atonement made by the incarnation, sufferings and death of Christ. Sin is not regarded as itself corruption, nor is there any need of regeneration and sanctification by the Holy Spirit before the soul can know the joy of the beatific vision.' This statement applies with increased emphasis to the Babis. There is no clear distinction between good and evil, no perception of sin, they wander in the fog.

"4. The Babist freedom runs to license, and hence as a reform leaves men worse rather than better. Mr. Browne found himself in the meshes of the opium habit in Kirman by yielding too freely to the influence of his Babi friends. The poetess Kurratu'l-Ain praises opium, though Beha afterwards forbade it. There is undoubtedly a generous fellowship in the Babi community, but there is no moral principle. . . . There are no high and strong characters developed to lead the world in true reform, no high motives to virtue are developed. The seeds of its own destruction are in the system, and the best arguments against this as other errors will soon be its fruits,"<sup>109</sup>

---

<sup>109</sup> *Missionary Review of the World*, December, 1894, pp. 901-903.