Babism

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GREAT RELIGIONS
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MIRZA ALI MOHAMMED

Mirza Ali Mohammed, founder of the Mohammedan sect in Persia, whose doctrines have been denominated Babism, was born in Shiraz about 1824. Of his family, education, early occupation, call to found a new sect, subsequent career, and death at the hands of a fanatical mob in Tabriz in 1850, Professor Ross has given graphic details in the accompanying essay on Babism.

When Mirza Ali Mohammed undertook to institute a new religion, he drew freely upon Mohammedan, Christian, Jewish, and Parsi doctrines, and assumed the name first of Bab-ed-Din (Gate of the Faith), then of Nokteh (the Point), and later, simply that of Bab (Gate). Since his death he has been designated as the first Bab, to distinguish him from followers who assumed the same appellation.

He claimed to be not merely a prophet, but a personal manifestation of the Deity; not merely the recipient of a new divine revelation, but the focus in which all preceding dispensations would converge. All individual existence he regarded as emanating from the Superior Deity, by whom it will ultimately be reabsorbed.

He attached special importance to the number 7, as indicating the attributes displayed in the act of creation, and to the number 19 (in addition to the reasons stated by Professor Ross), which he claimed mystically expresses the name of the Deity Himself, and is the sum of the prophets among whom the last incarnation of the divine nature is to be distributed. It is interesting to

note that he recognized the equality of the sexes to the extent of providing that at least one of the nineteen prophets must always be a woman.

His creed conserved the highest type of morality, forbade concubinage and polygamy, relieved women of the custom of veiling the face, discountenanced asceticism, prohibited mendicancy, and taught hospitality, charity, generous living, and abstinence from intoxicating liquors and drugs.

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Babism was introduced into the United States in 1893, its followers here taking the name of Bahaists, from Baha Ullah, a successor of the first Bab. According to the Federal census report on Religious Bodies (2 vols., Washington, 1910), covering the year 1906, the sect had twenty-four organizations distributed in thirteen States and the District of Columbia, with a total membership of 1,280, of which women represented about two -thirds. There is no regular minister, the conduct of meetings being open to any one competent to lead. Every one is welcome to the meetings, where the Revealed Words is studied and explained, and no one is permitted to receive any pay for teaching or lecturing on the doctrines of the sect. In the United States one may be a Bahaist while retaining active membership in another religious body. It is demanded that Bahaists fully and sincerely accept the doctrines promulgated by the founder, "setting aside man-made creeds and interpretations, forms, and ceremonies," for "as men see God aright, they will see Him alike." Herein lies the unity which "is to bring the religious world together under one great Tent of Peace."

Early in 1912, Abdul Baha, leader of the sect since the death of Baha Ullah, his father, in 1892, came to the United States to promote the spread of the Babist or Bahaist doctrines.

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BABISM

THE general reader's knowledge of Persia and things Persian is usually limited to the bare facts that the country is ruled by a Shah, and that in times past it has produced one or two poets. Some know that Mohammedanism is there the prevalent religion; but beyond such knowledge few have penetrated. Considering, then, the limitations of our general knowledge on the subject of Persia, it is a matter of small wonder that a religious movement in that country, however great its magnitude, and however far-reaching its consequences, should escape the attention of the Western world.

In the present article we have to deal with no mere religious reformation, but with the foundation and rise, in the middle of the nineteenth century, of a new faith. In its early history, as we shall see, it has much in common with Christianity, as also in the matter of doctrine, emphasizing, as it does, the brotherhood of man, and aspiring to a universal reign of peace, love, freedom, and unity of belief.

In tracing the origin and rise of any religion whatsoever, it is, where possible, fitting to examine

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the religion or religions which have been in vogue at its birth; for these have, of necessity, always served as a starting-point for a new dispensation. Thus, for example, for the proper understanding of Mohammedanism, it is Judaism (not of the Torah, but of the Talmud), Christianity (chiefly of the Apocryphal Gospels) and Sabaeanism which we must study. In the case of Babism, we must examine Mohammedanism from the Shiite standpoint, and beyond this a movement known as Shaykhism, which, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, grew out of the Shiite faith. In order, however, fully to appreciate the exact position of Shaykhism, and in its turn of Babism, in their relation to Islam, it will be fitting to explain, in as few words as possible, the main points of divergence between Shiism, the state religion of Persia, and Sunnism, or orthodox Mohammedanism, as practised in Turkey, Egypt, India, and elsewhere. The divergences in teaching which divide these two factions are more sharply indicated than those which separate Protestants from Roman Catholics, and their mutual hostility is also greater. The principal difference, as is well known, lies in the recognition, or otherwise, of all the early successors of Mohammed as vicars of God on earth. The Sunnis recognize the claims of the first four Caliphs, Abu Bakr, Omar, Othman, and Ali, while the Shiites maintain that Ali and his descendants were the only lawful successors. The Omayyad Caliphs and their successors, the Abbassids, are

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duly cursed by the Shiites, not merely as usurpers, but even more vehemently for having put to death or persecuted as many as they could of the house of Ali. Thus there arose two rival dynasties — the Caliphs of the Sunni faction and the Imams of the Shiite; the former claiming both temporal and spiritual power over the Sunni church, while the Imams are reverenced as saints, and even worshipped by the Shiites. According to the orthodox Shiites, there were twelve Imams, of whom eleven lived and died on earth; whereas the twelfth, who is known as the Imam Mahdi, disappeared and remains hidden until such time as he shall reappear and inaugurate the millennium. The person of this Imam was, from the first, enveloped in mystery. According to Shiite belief, he disappeared from the eyes of men in the year 940 A.D., and retired to the mysterious city of Jabulka, where he still lives. At first, he continued to communicate with the faithful through the medium of certain chosen persons, who were known by the name of Bab or Gate. Of these Babs, there were four in succession, and the period during which they acted as the temporary guides of the faithful is known as the “Lesser Occultation.” On the death of the fourth Bab, this apostolic succession came to an abrupt end, and thus began the period known as the “Greater Occultation.”

In the course of centuries, many various sects and schools had grown out of the Shiite creed, and among these was Shaykhism, which originat-

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ed early in the nineteenth century in the teaching of a certain Ahmed Ahsai. Space will not permit us to enter into the details of his teaching. Suffice it to say that it was characterized, first, by a veneration for the Imams which in intensity surpassed that of the most devout Shiites; and, secondly, by a doctrine known as that of the "Fourth Support," which maintained that there must always be among the Shiites some "perfect man," capable of serving as a channel of grace between the Hidden Imam and his church. Shaykh Ahmed was succeeded at his death by Hajji Sayyid Kazim, who held largely attended conferences at Kerbela, the principal place of veneration and object of pilgrimage of the Shiites. Now, among those who attended the lectures of Sayyid Kazim was a young man of Shiraz, named Mirza Ali Mohammad, who, though very reserved in manner, attracted the attention of his teacher by his earnestness and grave demeanor. Born of a good family, he had apparently enjoyed the advantages of a distinguished education; he showed a great predilection for the occult sciences, the philosophic theory of numbers, and the like. He, furthermore, had opportunities of intercourse with the Jews of Shiraz, and through Protestant missionary translations he became acquainted with the Gospels. He was strikingly handsome, and his charms of speech and manner were, it appears from all accounts, irresistible. At the age of twenty-two he married; and by his marriage had one son, who

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died in infancy. He was at this period settled in business at Bushire; and, from that port of the Persian Gulf, he went to Kerbela and attended, as we have said, the conferences of Sayyid Kazim, Here he remained for a few months, and then departed as suddenly as he had come, returning to Shiraz. Not long after this, Sayyid Kazim died, without, however, nominating a successor; and this fact, as will be seen, is of the utmost importance in the history of the Bab.

Shortly after Sayyid Kazim's death, a certain Mulla Husayn of Bushrawayh, who had attended the Sayyid's lectures at the same time as Mirza Ali Mohammad, came to Shiraz, and, as was only natural, took that opportunity of visiting his former fellow-student. The two at once fell to talking of the death of their lamented teacher, and referred to the strange words he had spoken as death was approaching: "Do you not desire that I should go, so that the truth may become manifest?" though he gave no hint of the manner in which the truth should be revealed. At this point in the conversation, Mirza Ali Mohammad, to the utter amazement of his friend, suddenly declared that he himself was the promised guide, the new intermediary between the Hidden Imam and the faithful; in short, that he was the Bab, or "Gate," through which men might communicate with the Imam Mahdi. Mulla Husayn, though at first inclined to doubt, soon came to believe in the truth of this declaration with a faith that thenceforth

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remained unshaken. This manifestation and conversion of the first disciple took

place on May 23, 1844, almost exactly one thousand years after the “Lesser Occultation.” Mulla Husayn at once began to spread the “good news” among the followers of Sayyid Kazim, many of whom immediately set out for Shiraz, so that very soon was gathered round the Bab a devoted band of believers, which included, besides the followers of Sayyid Kazim, others who were attracted by the new faith. The various kinds of persons who were thus attracted may be summed up as follows: The Shaykhis.
Shiites, who believed that the Bab’s teaching was the fulfilling of the Koran.
Men who saw in it a hope of national reform.
Sufis and mystics.To these four classes we may add to-day:
Those to whom the life and teaching of the Bab and Beha appeal in a general way; and among these must be numbered those Western converts who do not fall under the next head.
Those who regard Babism as a fulfilment of Christianity.
At this period the Bab had already written several works, and these were now eagerly perused by his disciples, who, from time to time, were also “privileged to listen to the words of the master himself, as he depicted in vivid language the worldliness and immorality of the Mullas, or Mohammedan clergy, and the injustice and rapacity of

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the civil authorities,” and the like. He further prophesied that better days were at hand. At this time, however, he did not openly attack Islam. Thus do we find Mirza Ali Mohammad in the first stage of his mission, setting forth claims to be the Bab, or channel of grace between the Imam Mahdi and his church, and inveighing against the corruptions of the clergy and the government, by whom he naturally came to be regarded with suspicion and dislike. Not long after his manifestation, when his fame had already spread throughout the country, he set out to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca. It was probably in the Holy City itself that he, 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.” He returned from Mecca in August, 1845, possessed of more definite aims and ideals with regard to his own mission. Meanwhile, the clergy and the government had determined that the movement was dangerous, and that it bade fair to become more so. Active measures must, therefore, be taken for its suppression, while this was yet an easy matter. Several of the Bab’s disciples were, accordingly, seized in Shiraz, and, having been bastinadoed, they were warned to desist from preaching. On landing in Bushire, the Bab was arrested and brought to Shiraz, where he underwent an examination by the clergy in the presence of the governor of that town. He was pronounced

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a heretic, and ordered to remain in his house until further orders. No very strict watch was, however, kept over him, and, like St. Paul before him, he was visited by and conferred with the faithful.

In the spring of 1846 he escaped to Ispahan, where he remained under the protection of the governor of that town. In the following year this governor died, and his successor in office immediately sent the Bab in the direction of Teheran under an armed escort. The Shah's ministers, however, deeming that the Bab's presence in the capital might prove dangerous, gave orders that he should be taken off to the distant frontier-fortress of Maku, where he composed a great number of works and was in constant correspondence with his followers. In order to put a stop to this correspondence and to set him in closer confinement, the Bab was removed to Chihrik, whence not long after he was summoned to Tabriz, to undergo examination by some of the leading clergy in the presence of the Crown Prince (afterwards Shah Nasir-ud-Din). This examination was, of course, a pure farce and the verdict a foregone conclusion. His inquisitors hoped to catch him tripping, but their victim drove them to exasperation by the attitude of dignified silence which he adopted towards their bullying questions. Finally, they ordered him to be beaten and sent back to Chihrik, where he was now subjected to such close confinement that he was only able to communicate with his followers by means of the most peculiar devices: scraps of paper were,

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for example, concealed among sweetmeats or wrapped in waterproof and sunk in milk.

While he was confined in Chihrik his teaching underwent some development, for he now declared himself to be not merely the Gate leading to the Imam Mahdi, but to be the point of revelation, the Imam himself. What he had hitherto preached in parables only he would now openly proclaim. He declared that his mission was not final, and spoke of one yet greater than himself who should come after, and should be "He whom God shall manifest." He laid great stress on this point, and expressed an urgent desire that men should receive the next manifestation better than they had received this one. He further added: "They are to remember that no revelation is final, but only represents the measure of truth which the state of human progress has rendered mankind capable of receiving."

We cannot, within the space of an article, enter into the question of the philosophic theory of numbers which played so important a part in Babi tenets. It must, however, be mentioned that the number 19, from a variety of causes, is held in especial esteem among them. Thus, the year, in the Bab's reformed calendar, was composed of nineteen months of nineteen days each, and so forth. And thus, too, he elected among his followers eighteen chosen disciples, whom he called the "Letters of the Living," of whom he, the nineteenth, was the "Point of Unity" which completed the sacred

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number. There was a sort of apostolic succession among these "Letters," so that when one died some other Babi was appointed to his place. The Bab composed about a dozen works in all, the most important of which was the Bayan,

a work containing a precise statement of all the doctrines taught by him during the final stage of his mission. It was, in fact, the Babi Bible.

Leaving the Bab for a while in the prison of Chihrik, we must turn to consider the fortunes and misfortunes of his now numerous followers. Of the eighteen chosen "Letters," three fill a most conspicuous place in the early history of the Babi movement: namely, Mulla Husayn of Bushrawayh, who, as we have seen, was the first convert to the new faith; Mohammad Ali of Balfarush; and a woman named Kurrat ul-Ayn, or "Coolth o' the Eyn." To no one does Babism owe more for its spread throughout Persia than to Mulla Husayn, who, during the Bab's confinement in prison, travelled the whole country over carrying the new gospel: visiting, in turn, Ispahan, where he met with much success; Kashan, with like result; Teheran, whence he was expelled; Nishapur, where he made numberless converts, and Meshed, where he was seized by the Shah's uncle. He managed, however, to escape to Nishapur, whence he set out westward with an ever-increasing band of followers.

This was in 1848, a year as eventful almost in Persia as it was in the states of Europe. The

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clergy were becoming more and more fearful of the growth of the Babi movement, and bitterness on both sides was rapidly increasing; and it must be admitted that the Babis, in the excess of their zeal, did not hesitate to employ the most insulting language towards the orthodox Shiites. Hostilities seemed inevitable, and the Mullas were apparently on the point of striking the first blow, when, suddenly, in September, 1848, Mohammad Shah died; and, the minds of the Mullas being filled with thoughts of succession and possible political revolts, the Babis were for a moment forgotten. Mulla Husayn, profiting by this temporary preoccupation of the Mullas, saw fit to proceed into Mazanderan and effect a junction of his followers with those of Mulla Mohammad Ali of Balfarush, who had, in the mean time, been actively and successfully carrying on the propaganda of the new faith in that province. We must now pass to the summer of 1849, when we find Mulla Husayn and his followers shut up within the rude earthworks and palisades of a spot known as Shaykh Tabarsi, on the slopes of the Elburz Mountains, bidding defiance to the Shah's troops. For eight long months did this gallant band of Babis, brought up for the most part, it must be remembered, to peaceful pursuits, hold the royal army at bay. At length, their brave leader, Mulla Husayn, having been killed, and their provisions exhausted, they surrendered conditionally to their besiegers, who promised them life and liberty. But the royalist officers put them

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all to the sword. Soon after this brutal suppression of the revolt in Mazanderan, a similar scene was enacted at Zanjan, in the northwest of Persia; the same story is repeated of bravery, starvation, and death. While the siege of Zanjan was still in progress, another Babi rising took place in the south of Persia, and the government, being thoroughly alarmed, determined to strike

at the root of the matter, and to put the Bab to death.

We left the Bab in prison at Chihrik. He was now, once more, brought to Tabriz and tried by judges who were bent on his condemnation. The proceedings were as farcical and undignified as those to which he had been subjected on a former occasion. In spite of all their threats, he persistently maintained that he was the Imam Mahdi. His judges objected to his claims, on the ground that the Imam, whose return they awaited, would come as a mighty conqueror, to slay and subdue infidels and establish Islam throughout the world. To this the Bab replied: "In this manner have the prophets always been doubted. The Jews were expecting the promised Messiah when Jesus appeared in their midst; and yet they rejected and slew him, because they fancied the Messiah must come as a great conqueror and king, to re-establish the faith of Moses, and give it currency throughout the world."

The Bab and his followers, no doubt, knew as well as his judges that his sentence was predetermined; it cannot, however, be doubted that the

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authorities entertained some hopes of making the Bab recant by means of threats or promises. At length, finding these of no avail, they passed the fatal sentence, and the Bab was led back to prison, to spend his last night in company with two faithful disciples, who were condemned to die with him.

On the morning of July 9, 1850, Mirza Ali Mohammad the Bab, Aka Mohammad Ali, and Sayyid Husayn of Yezd were dragged through the crowded streets and bazaars of Tabriz. This pitiful procession lasted many hours, in the course of which Sayyid Husayn fell to the ground from exhaustion and pain. He was then told that, should he now recant, he might have his pardon. Thereupon — whether in a moment of weakness, or, as the Babis declare, at the command of the Bab himself, in order that he might convey a last message from the master to the faithful — he bought his pardon at the price of renunciation of the cause, and escaped to Teheran, where two years later he suffered martyrdom.

On the arrival of the two prisoners at the spot appointed for their execution, they were suspended, by means of ropes passed under their armpits, to staples set in a wall. As the order was given to fire the first volley, the Bab was heard to say to his companion: "Verily, thou art with me in Paradise!" But when the smoke of the volley, which had temporarily hidden the two victims, cleared away, it was discovered that while the body of Aka Mohammad Ali hung lifeless from the staples, riddled with bullets, the Bab had disappeared, and

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the ends of the cords which had supported him were alone visible, the cords having been severed by bullets just above where the victim's arms had been. Here seemed to be a miracle indeed. The crowd began to murmur their expression of amazement and were prepared to believe anything. Had the Bab managed at this moment to get away to some place of concealment, he would immediately have added to his following the whole population of Tabriz, and soon after the whole

of Persia. The destinies of the house of Kajar, nay, of Islam itself, hung in the balance against the new faith. Unfortunately, however, for his cause, the Bab had no time to realize this; he was as much surprised as the people, and, instead of attempting to hide, he ran by a first impulse to the neighboring guardhouse, where he was soon discovered. Even now, for a few moments, the people were still ready to believe in a miracle; no one dared approach him, for was not his person inviolate? The situation was, however, saved, as situations so often are saved, by the action of a headstrong fool. A soldier, catching sight of the Bab, rushed in upon him and dealt him a blow with his sword; and, so soon as the people saw blood flowing from the wound thus inflicted on the unresisting victim, their doubts and fears were at an end, and the Bab's death was soon accomplished. Thus died the great prophet-martyr of the nineteenth century, at the age of twenty-seven, having, during a period of six brief years, of which three were spent in

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confinement, attracted to his person and won for his faith thousands of devoted men and women throughout the length and breadth of Persia, and having laid the foundations of a new religion destined to become a formidable rival to Islam.

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.

Our sketch of the Bab's life has, of necessity,

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been brief, but enough has, perhaps, been told of his career to suggest to all readers a comparison with the life of Christ. Those whose curiosity or sympathy may lead them to study the Bab's life in full detail will certainly not fail to notice in many places the striking similarity which these two lives offer.

In returning to our narrative, we find the last, and by no means the least, striking of the coincidences referred to. For the Bab, too, had his Joseph of Arimathaea. The bodies of the two victims were thrown outside the city walls,

to be devoured by dogs and jackals, and a guard was set over them to insure against their being buried. But, by night, a certain wealthy Babi, named Sulayman Khan, came with a few armed companions, and offered the guards the choice of gold or the sword. The guards accepted the gold, and allowed Sulayman Khan to carry off the body of the Bab, which, after he had wrapped it in fine silk, he secretly conveyed to Teheran.

If the Persian government imagined that, by putting to death the Bab, they would put a stop to the religious movement of which he was the head, they were greatly mistaken. The fortitude displayed by the Bab at his execution served only as a stimulant to the devotion and courage of his followers; and thus the government, in ordering the death of this innocent man, defeated their own ends and gave fresh impetus to the movement they hoped to quell, and doubtless added thousands of

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converts to the “new religion.” The year 1850 witnessed the spilling of much Babi blood. The tragic story of Shaykh Tabarsi was re-enacted in two different quarters of Persia, and in Teheran seven Babis were “martyred” in cold blood at the instigation of the prime-minister. Persecutions went on steadily throughout the country, and the Babis were obliged to maintain the utmost secrecy, being continually in danger of their lives.

In August, 1852, an event occurred which cannot be regarded as other than a blot in the Babi annals. Three young and overzealous Babis, mastered by an uncontrollable desire for vengeance on the monarch who had permitted the execution of their beloved master, made an unsuccessful attempt on the life of Shah Nâsir-ud-Din. This act not only resulted in the deaths of the would-be assassins, but led to the adoption, on the part of the government, of the most rigorous system of inquisition, persecution, and torture of their coreligionists. Vigorous search was instituted by the police in all parts of Persia to discover Babis, and in Teheran some forty of them were surprised in the house of Sulayman Khan, of whom we have already spoken. Most of them, after bravely enduring ghastly tortures, were put to a cruel death; so appalling were the modes of torture to which these brave men and women patiently submitted that we refrain from describing them. Among the five or six who were spared was Baha Ullah, of whom we shall have occasion to speak presently. Among the

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martyrs were Sulayman Khan, Sayyid Husayn of Yezd, who, since he had, at any rate in appearance, renounced his master two years previously, had been eager for martyrdom, and Kurrat ul-Ayn, who is one of the most remarkable figures in Babi history. We regret that, owing to the exigencies of space, we are unable here to describe the career of this truly great woman, whose life and death would call forth our unbounded admiration, to whatever age or country she had belonged. Our wonder and our admiration must increase a hundredfold when we remember that she lived in a country where for centuries women had been kept in the background of the harem, and where they lose honor by appearing in public.

She was a woman of distinguished parentage, remarkable alike for her beauty and her learning. Perhaps it was the Bab's aim to ameliorate the position of women in Persia that first aroused her interest in his faith; however this may be, she soon became, and continued till her tragic and noble death, one of the most devoted and active of the Bab's disciples, and was reckoned, as we have seen, among the eighteen "Letters."

Though it cannot be maintained that these would-be assassins of the Shah were the first to give a political color to the movement, it is certain that their action not merely embittered the ill-feeling of the government and the clergy towards the Babis, but also furnished a plausible excuse for the adoption of even stronger measures than had hitherto

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been employed to destroy the sect, root and branch. Thus, in spite of the utmost secrecy which the Babis preserved among themselves, they could never feel secure from one day to another within the Shah's realms. It was on this account that their leaders now deemed it wise to fly the country, and betake themselves to a voluntary exile in Turkish territory; and Bagdad now became the heart and centre of the Babi movement.

At this time the head of the community and chief "Letter of the Unity" was a certain Mirza Yahya, better known by the appellation of Subh-i-Ezel, or the "Dawn of Eternity."

Owing to the continued persecutions of Babis in Persia, the little colony of exiles in Bagdad was constantly receiving additions to its numbers. In order to protect themselves effectually against the Persian government, they enrolled themselves as Turkish subjects; while their exemplary behavior was rewarded by kind treatment at the hands of the Ottoman authorities.

In 1864, at the instigation of the Persian government, which objected to their proximity to the frontier, they were removed first to Constantinople and shortly afterwards to Adrianople. It was in this town that an important schism occurred in the Babi community, which has never since healed.

During the first fourteen years of exile — that is, from 1850 to 1864 — Subh-i-Ezel was the nominal head of the Babis and vicegerent of the Bab. That he received this office from the Bab himself seems,

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from documentary and other evidence, to be beyond dispute. He laid no claim to prophetic rank.

Early in 1853 an elder half-brother of his, named Beha, fled from Persia and joined the community in Bagdad, having, as we have said, come very near to martyrdom in the Teheran massacre which followed the attempt on the Shah's life. Subh-i-Ezel, while at Bagdad, led a life of comparative seclusion, and trusted to Beha the business of interviewing disciples and corresponding with the Babis in Persia. At this time, Beha certainly admitted the supremacy of

Subh-i-Ezel, and claimed no superiority over his coreligionists; but certain passages in a work called the Ikan, which he wrote while at Bagdad, leave room for the supposition that he already contemplated the idea of putting forward that claim which not long after forever divided the Babis into two rival factions, the Ezelis and the Behais. What were his actual thoughts and ambitions with regard to himself it is impossible to say; we only know that, in 1866-67, while he was living with his exiled comrades in Adrianople, Beha announced that he was "He whom God shall manifest," so often alluded to by the Bab in his writings.

Now, had Subh-i-Ezel been disposed to accept this claim of Beha, it is not improbable that his example would have been followed by the whole community. Subh-i-Ezel, however, absolutely denied Beha's claim, arguing that "He whom God shall manifest" could not be expected until the

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religion founded by the Bab, with its attendant laws and institutions, had obtained currency at least among some of the nations of the earth. It was inconceivable that one revelation should be so quickly eclipsed by another. He found many Babis who concurred in his views, and were willing to remain faithful to him as the legitimate head of the Babi Church. The majority of the Babis, however, accepted the manifestation of Beha, and, in the course of time, their numbers have steadily increased, while the following of Subh-i-Ezel is constantly diminishing. In fact, to-day it is a comparatively rare occurrence to meet with an Ezeli, and one which never came within the experience of the present writer while travelling in Persia or central Asia.

The dissensions between the rival factions grew so fierce that, in 1868, the Turkish government, fearing lest this rupture might lead to public disorders, determined to separate the rival claimants to supremacy. They, therefore, sent Subh-i-Ezel to Famagusta, in Cyprus, and Beha to Acre, which two localities have ever since remained the headquarters of the Ezelis and Behais respectively.*

It will not be necessary in this place to enter into the question of the merits of Beha's claims or Subh-i-Ezel's position. The matter has been fully set forth by Mr. E. G. Browne in his various works * A few Behais were sent to Cyprus and a few Ezelis to Acre. The latter were murdered soon after their arrival by some Behais, but probably without the knowledge of Beha.

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on the Babi movement, especially in the New History. Only a very small proportion of the Babis to-day belong to the Ezeli faction; so it is Acre which now becomes and remains the chief centre of interest in the subsequent history of this religion.

It would, in reality, be more accurate to speak of the vast Babi community which looks to Acre for guidance as Behais rather than as Babis; for, in many respects, their beliefs bear a relation to the teaching of the Bab very

similar to that of Christianity to the Old Testament; for the revelation of Beha practically abrogated that of the Bab. But it may be maintained that Beha's teaching was even more revolutionary than that of Christ; for, whereas Christ came to fulfil the law, and whereas the Old Testament came to be embodied in the Christian Scriptures, Beha has given his followers a new Bible which has rendered superfluous the Bayan.

The written works of Beha are numerous, and an authorized edition of them has been lithographed in Bombay in three volumes. Of these, the Kitab-i-Akdas is, in many respects, the most interesting, and it has the best claim to be regarded as the Behai Bible. Beha also wrote a very large number of smaller treatises and letters of exhortation and encouragement, which are known among the faithful as "alwah" (singular, "lawh"), or tablets. All these alwah emanating from Beha were and are carefully treasured up and diligently copied.

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They were usually addressed to some prominent member of a local community, and, to be the recipient of one of them, however brief, was considered a very high honor.

From the date of Beha's arrival in Acre, his writings begin to assume a very different tone and character from those which pervade the Ikan above referred to. Seeing that the Kitab-i-Akdas* is not only the most important of Beha's writings, but that it contains a resume of all his teaching, it is fitting in this place to present the reader with a brief account of some of its contents.

The book begins with instructions as to religious observances. Prayers are to be said three times a day. The worshipper is to turn his face towards "the Most Holy Region," by which Acre is apparently intended. All congregational prayer is abolished, except in the case of the burial service. The Babi year, which, as we have said, contains nineteen months of nineteen days each, begins on the Persian New Year's day. The year contains 366 days in all, five intercalary days being added. Fasting from sunrise to sunset is ordained during the last month of the year.

Mendicity is prohibited in the following terms: "The most hateful of mankind before God is he * This book was at one time difficult to obtain, as it only existed in manuscript. It has, however, been since lithographed in Bombay, and is therefore fairly accessible. It is composed in Arabic. For the following summary of contents I am indebted to an article by Mr. E. G. Browne, without whose admirable writings we should know very little of Babism in its late developments.

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who sits and begs; take hold of the robe of means, relying on God, the Cause of causes." The use of knives and forks in eating, instead of the hands, is enjoined. Cleanliness is insisted on.

Marriage is enjoined on all. Wives who for a period of nine months have had no

news of their husbands are permitted to marry again, but if they are patient it is better, “since God loves those who are patient.” If quarrels arise between a man and his wife, he is not to divorce her at once, but must wait for a whole year, so that, perhaps, he may become reconciled to her. The kings of the earth are exhorted to adopt and spread the new faith. Wine and opium are forbidden. The sacred books are to be read regularly, but never so long as to cause weariness. Enemies are to be forgiven, nor must evil be met with evil.

In conclusion, we must quote a very remarkable passage* with regard to future manifestations, which is noteworthy in regard to the position assumed by his son, Abbas Efendi, to-day: “Whosoever lays claim to a matter (i.e., a mission), ere one thousand full years have passed, verily he is a lying impostor.”

Beha died in 1892, at the age of seventy-seven, in Acre, which town he had never been permitted to leave. He was here visited by the faithful, who regarded Acre as an object of pilgrimage, and also by inquirers. He was regarded by the faithful as God Almighty himself, and the respect and rev- * To be found on pp. 13 and 14 of the lithographed edition.

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erence they paid him were unbounded. He had four sons, of whom the two eldest were Abbas Efendi and Aga Mohammad Ali.

On the death of Beha, Abbas Efendi, as the eldest son, became the spiritual head of the Behais; though it appears that his claims to this position were not admitted by all, for he found, at the first, a rival in the person of a certain Aga Mirza Jan, of Kashan, who had been the amanuensis of Beha. This rivalry did not however, have any appreciable effect on the position of Abbas Efendi, who receives, at any rate from the vast majority of the Behais of to-day, a veneration equal to that accorded to his father.

Aga Mohammad Ali, since his father’s death, has lived a life of retirement and seclusion. It is known that he was unable to approve the course adopted by his brother, Abbas Efendi; but he has always strenuously avoided an open quarrel with him, and has refused to give written answers to the large number of Babis who were anxious to know his views. His main object has been to avoid any further division in the Babi Church.

In conclusion, a few words must be said in regard to the whereabouts and condition of the Babis at the present day. It is impossible to obtain reliable statistics as to their actual numbers, but one million is probably near the mark. The majority inhabit the large towns of Persia, such as Teheran, Ispahan, Yezd, and Kerman. Persecutions are nowadays of rare occurrence, though the Babis

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can never feel really secure within Persian territory, partly on account of the political stigma which attaches to their name, and partly on account of the

suspicion with which they are regarded by the Mullas. Three years ago, Teheran alone was said to contain upward of ten thousand Babis, and no doubt their numbers have greatly increased in the interval. It is hard to say precisely what degree of caution they consider requisite, or to what extent they are known as Babis to the authorities and the populace in general. Certain it is that many distinguished persons are known by all to belong to this sect, and that they are on this account put to no apparent inconvenience. The Babis are law-abiding citizens, and ply their business on an equal footing with Mussulmans. No Babi, however, who is known to be such, is allowed to enter a mosque. They have no places of worship of their own, but hold their meetings, generally after sundown, in the houses of various members of the community. The present writer has attended many of these gatherings, and has always come away deeply impressed by the simplicity, earnestness, and courtesy of the Babis. At these meetings, a practical example of the Babi principle of equality is to be seen. Here we find, side by side, a learned doctor, an officer, a merchant, and a servant, sitting, as the Persians say, “on four knees,” intent on discussing the latest news of the Babis in other parts of the world; listening to the recitation of a poem by some Babi poet, or hearing

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the contents of the latest lawh from Acre. During the reading of these letters the strictest silence prevails, and pipes and cigarettes are for the time discarded. In Turkish and Russian territory the position of the Babis is one of comparative immunity. Askabad, in Transcaspia, is a very important centre, and it is there, perhaps, that the followers of Beha enjoy the greatest freedom.

Finally, we must mention the recent spread of this religious movement in non-Mohammedan countries, which is practically confined to the United States of America. From the latest information, it would appear that no less than three thousand Americans now subscribe to the new faith. The propaganda first began in 1893, at the World’s Congress of Religions in Chicago, when a certain Babi, named Ibrahim Kheirallah, who had come to the United States on business, gave a course of fifteen lectures on Mohammedanism and the various movements which had grown out of it. In the course of these “lessons,” he continually referred to the teachings of the Bab, and in a short time he is said to have secured over one hundred “believers.” He next proceeded to New York City, where he published his lectures. Such were the beginnings of Babism in the United States.

Of the subsequent history of the movement in America it is at present hard to speak. At all events, it seems that here, too, the division between Abbas Efendi and Aga Mohammad Ali has been at work, and that the first Babi missionary, Kheiral-

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lah, belongs to the party of the latter. The followers of Abbas Efendi, who believe him in all sincerity and devotedness of faith to be the incarnation of

God, are known as the Sabitis, or the “Firm,” while those who deny his claims have received from their opponents the name of Nakizis, or “Adversaries.” The principal Babi centres in the United States are as follows: Chicago, about one thousand; Kenosha, Wis., from four hundred to five hundred; New York City, about four hundred; Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia; Wilmington and Bellevue, Del.; Newark, Fanwood, and Hoboken, N. J.; Brooklyn and Ithaca, N. Y.; Detroit, Mich.; Boston, Cincinnati, San Francisco, and Denver.

Babism, though still, as it were, in its infancy, is said to count to-day over one million adherents, and the possibilities of its future success are infinite, for, in spite of internal schisms and external disabilities, there is no falling off either in the number of fresh converts or in the religious fervor of believers.E. DENISON ROSS.

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