

In a short time the movement began to assume such proportions that the Persian Government, urged on by the priesthood, saw fit to intervene; the Bab was imprisoned, and a fierce persecution of his followers began throughout Persia. In some places the Babists, organizing for defence, offered a determined resistance to large bodies of troops sent against them. They even captured and held several towns and strongholds in the more distant provinces, and the movement began to take on a distinctly political and revolutionary character. In 1850 the Bab was removed to Tabriz, where, after a further period of imprisonment, he was sentenced to death, with two of his principal followers. One of those recanted at the last moment under torture, but the execution of Ali Mohammed and his faithful disciple was marked by a striking incident which his followers have not failed to turn to account ever since.

This nineteenth century martyrdom was carried out near the great gate of the city by a firing party of Persian regulars. The victims

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were suspended from the walls of the town and a volley was fired at short range. When the smoke had cleared away the Bab was found lying uninjured at the foot of the wall, the bullets which riddled his companion's body having only served to cut the ropes that held him bound. The cry of "Miracle!" was raised by the populace, and had the "Báb" kept his presence of mind there can be no doubt that the population of Tabriz, and his executioners as well, would have flocked to his standard. Stunned by his fall, however, he did not grasp the opportunity which his extraordinary escape afforded him. A soldier, stepping forward, dealt him a blow across the head with a sword. The spell of what appeared for the moment a direct intervention of Providence was broken, and the executioners finished their task.

After the death of the "Bab," and the execution or martyrdom of his principal disciples, most of his followers fled to Turkish territory, while those who remained exercised the rites of the "Behai" in secret. Schisms and dissensions broke out among the elders of the faith. Rival members of the "Bab's" family claimed to be

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his rightful successor, each one declaring himself to be the only "Gate" through which the faithful might hope to pass on their road to "the higher life."

One claimant is now established at the ancient town of Acre in Syria, where he is visited by hundreds of pilgrims every year. He goes by the name of Abdul Baha Abbas Effendi, and is reported to be a man of considerable intelligence and learning.

Not the least curious and remarkable development of the Babist movement is the successful propaganda their teachers have made abroad, notably in England and the United States, The mystical and flowery writings of the Bab have been translated into several European languages, and within recent years have had a

success comparable to Madame Blavatsky's celebrated crusade in favor of Buddhist beliefs. Babist teachers, picturesquely robed in the garb of the Orient, have travelled all over Europe and the United States, and a number of wealthy and influential converts have rewarded their efforts. The teachings of the Babist faith and the writings of the "Master" appear to be based on the

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broad principles of morality which are shared in common by the great religions of the world. These are dressed in a mystical language, which leaves a wide scope for the interpretations of the faithful. Unlike the Mohammedan religion, the "Behai" give to women a prominent place in their councils, and a number of prophetesses are to be found among the saints and martyrs of the new creed.

In Persia to-day, although the Babists are regarded with much suspicion by the authorities, there has been no active persecution on the part of the Government for some years. They are said still to possess a very large secret following among all classes, including a few of the higher Persian officials, and prominent members of the new Parliament. The power exerted by a great secret society whose members are further bound together by a common religious belief is certainly to be reckoned with, and the development of Babism will be followed with interest by students of Middle Eastern affairs.

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