

know as the two preparatory Gates of God.

And when Seyyid Kazim had departed this life, Mohammed Hoseyn began to teach in Shiraz, and said, "Such a one must surely appear, and these shall be his tokens"; whereupon his Holiness the Point, who sometimes came to hear him, stood forth and said, "See whether these tokens be not in me." And that one word was enough for Mohammed Hoseyn, who was the first to believe, and was the "Most Mighty Letter of the Book." [1] One by one, disciples were added until the "Letters" were completed, thus making what is called the First Unity. The last to enter the band was "His Holiness the Sacred." Next to them was a second company, less highly honoured but equally devout and faithful, among whom appears a woman called by the chronicler "the much-wronged Tahira." Almost all these were subsequently martyred,

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enduring their afflictions with a constancy not surpassed by the followers of any religion.

After the "promulgation of the Matter" and the "affirmation of the Letters" the Lord, as a devout Mussulman, set out for Mecca, sending his disciples forth in all directions to preach the new gospel. Immediately the persecutions began; for all the Mohammedan fanaticism not only of Persia but of the surrounding countries was stirred against the missionaries. One of the "Unity," starting for Turkey, was seized and cast into prison at Baghdad, and shortly afterwards was poisoned. Another, bearing a book of the Báb's called "The Best of Stories," set forth for Tehran. The Báb himself, returning to Shiraz from his pilgrimage, was arrested by Hoseyn the Governor of the city, and grievously maltreated. Such was the virulence of his enemies, that they even violated the sacred peace of Ramadan, and, on the very night on which Mohammed received his first revelation, [2] on which the Prophet forbade all tumults, they fell upon the house of the Báb and despoiled it. Fortunately Hoseyn was held for a time in check by the governor of Ispahan, who saved the Lord from his foes, requested the gifts of his books that he might study them, and even offered him riches, which the Lord refused to take.

Thenceforward, for many months, the story is one of journeyings, imprisonments, scourgings, and preachings; of the conversions of enemies, and of tormentors turned into believers by the sight of the consistency of the sufferers. Thus, to take but one example, a man named Mohammed Beg, sent to escort the Lord to prison at Maku, "on the way thither became sincerely attached to him, and spoke often afterwards thereof." In Shihrik, which is called the Grievous Mountain, the Báb was thrown into a house without windows, and not allowed a lamp. Shortly afterwards the Crown Prince [3] arrived at Shihrik, summoned

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the Lord into his presence, "entreated him shamefully," and then ordered him to receive chastisement. What this meant is plainly hinted by the name given to the chapter in which the Báb described it: "The Place of the Blow." [4]

From scourgings the transition was soon made to slayings. A murder having been committed, suspicion fell on the sect, many members of which were arrested and put to the torture. At length the murderer came and confessed saying, "I slew the man, what have you to do with these others?" None the less, some of the saints were still detained, and, with the connivance of the chief official of the first martyr, Salih the Arab, is remembered in the sect like that of St. Steven amongst the Christians.

It was not always that the believers submitted with patience. When armed bodies of men were sent against them, they sometimes drew the sword, and indeed won a number of victories. After one of these battles a truce was made; the King's troops swore on the Koran to observe it, and the saints laid down their arms, whereupon they were at once massacred. No faith was to be kept with heretics; indeed, as the Shah himself said, these men, though Mohammedans, and though many of them had been more than once to Mecca, were treated worse than infidels.

The final scene is described with almost tiresome prolixity by the author of the *Tarikh-i-jadid*, or *New History*, which was written more than thirty years after the event. The "Holy Point" was seized and carried to Tabriz. There, after cruel interrogations and torments, he was thrown into prison for the last time. The merchant Aka Mohammed Ali desired to share his martyrdom. The Báb replied, "Let all have regard to their own safety, for it is better that the bond of friends should continue than that all should perish" : nevertheless he cried in a loud voice, "Verily, Mohammed Ali shall be with us in Paradise."

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When the time came, the Lord and his followers were led out to die. Aka Mohammed Ali's kinsmen said to him, "Recant, and say you are not of them" but he replied, "If you love me, bind me opposite to the Lord." Then they were bound, and hung up. Ali was killed at the first volley; but, by what was supposed to be a miracle, the Lord was not hurt; the bullets did not strike him, but severed the rope by which he hung. Seeing this, the Mussulman soldiers refused to fire; a Christian regiment was brought up, three bullets struck him, "and that holy spirit, escaping from its gentle frame, ascended to the Supreme Horizon."^[5] This was on July 8, 1850, six years and a few weeks after the first Manifestation of the Báb.

The list of martyrdoms is by no means complete: it would indeed take a Bábí Foxe [? -J.W.] to enumerate them all. It is said that the King desired to save "the much wronged Tahira"; but the Queen-mother and the Prime Minister dragged her from prison and "compassed her martyrdom in different manners according to different accounts" : the truth is known only to the executioners and to those who urged them to the work. The tale of the next few months is one of killings, lootings, exiles, chains, and imprisonments : so many captives were brought to Shiraz that the city could scarcely hold them. "It is strange," says the successor of the Báb, "that a man's chief foes were those of his own household." All this robbery and wickedness, he adds, was done for the wealth

of a few transitory days; "but the life of the world is naught in comparison with the Hereafter, and the decision resteth with God the Lord of the Worlds." The persecution culminated in a frightful massacre in the year 1852, in which nearly all of the still surviving apostles of the new faith perished.

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Mirza Ali Mohammed had already nominated as his successor a lad of twenty, whom he named Subh-i-Ezel, the Morning of Eternity, Subh-i-Ezel escaped from the massacre of 1852, and fled to Baghdad, beyond the reach of the Persian Government. Here, along with his half-brother Behaullah, he lived in comparative peace; but ten years later, apparently in consequence of representations from the Shah, they were transferred by the Turks to Adrianople: and now the schisms set in which seem to be the inevitable fate of all religions after a few years. Behaullah, who had for some time been working to supplant his brother, now broke out into open opposition. Subh-i-Ezel was a recluse and a visionary; Behaullah a man of action. The split became violent; and the Turks, fearing trouble, packed off the Beha party to Acre, the Subh party to Cyprus.

The result was that the whole community, throughout the nearer East, was sundered. Beha proclaimed himself the true Manifestation of God, and called upon all the faithful, including Subh, to obey him; and when Subh refused, branded him as the First Letter of Denial. What was still more astonishing, Beha began gradually to undermine the authority of the Báb himself, announcing that he was not the true Manifestation, but merely the harbinger of the perfect theophany of which Baha was the embodiment. He stuck at nothing to attain his ends. One by one the followers of Subh-i-Ezel, some of whom had been personal attendants of the Báb, disappeared—in certain cases by assassination, and the "Letters of the Living," as they were called, were soon reduced to Subh himself and one other. Nay, Beha tampered with the Sacred Word itself: the doctrines of the Báb were speedily no longer recognisable in the form which Beha gave to them. Whatever we may think of his conduct, he was a practical man. He cut out the mysticism, expunged the metaphysics; made overtures to the Shah, and let it be known that the Bábis were to conform their life not to an impossible transcendental system, but to the ordinary standards of mankind. History

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was quietly falsified; the accounts of the earlier movement were altered so as to confirm with what Beha desired his followers to believe.

Now, as Professor Browne says, if we once admit Beha's right to assume this position of supremacy at all, there can be no doubt he acted wisely. The doctrine of the Báb might suit certain Persians, but totally unfitted it for mankind in general, and must be altered if Bábism was to be a world-religion. The books in which they were written were not even in Persian, but in bad Arabic, full of grammatical errors, repetitions and unknown words. The sense, when disinterred from this farrago, was found to be unintelligible; there was a worse than Pythagorean theory of numbers, in which 19 was chosen as the basis

of all calculations; there was strange play made with the divine names and attributes; there were doxologies and poetical rhapsodies so wild that none could follow them. There was much dogma and little precept; and what precept there was was childish-as the command that after two hundred and two years the books should be copied afresh and the old destroyed, or elaborate rules, which could not be kept, as to the burial of the dead. Moreover, the Báb had discouraged travel and the learning of foreign languages, had ordered the destruction of books of science and philosophy, and had, by the narrowness of his ideas, made it all but impossible for Bábis to live peacefully with the adherents of other religions. His kingdom, in fact, emphatically not of this world: it was noble, subtle, and lofty in aspiration, but it is certain that few, when the first enthusiasm had worn away, would be able to live in it. Beha gradually accommodated it to mundane minds. He employed scribes to write his new revelations, and their books were intelligible and comparatively concise; in fact but for the fortunate survival of the work of Mirza Jani, which was written in 1951, immediately after the Báb's death, the true history of the "Point" would be unknown; and that work, when Professor Browne wrote, existed in but a single

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manuscript.[6] The New History (Tarikh-i-Jadid) dated c. 1874, represents one long step in the transformation of Bábism into Behaism; the Travellers Narrative, written by Beha's son in 1886, represents yet a further step. In this the Báb is reduced from the "Point" or the "Mahdi" to a somewhat inferior John the Baptist; the real founder of the religion, whose words are quoted with reverence, is Behaullah.[7]

After the death of Beha in 1892 there was another schism, his two eldest sons, Abbas Effendi and Mirza Mohammed Ali, disputing the succession. The elder maintained that the Manifestation was continuous, and had passed directly from his father to him; and he has this to say for himself that Beha had announced him as his heir. The younger, however, refused to acknowledge any authority in the heirship, and apparently, so far as doctrine was concerned, he was right: for, though the Báb had preached that the Imam-Mahdi, or he who is manifested, must appear at intervals, yet he himself did not arise until exactly a thousand years after his predecessor,

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and certainly had not contemplated a series of rapidly repeated manifestations. Moreover, he had urged his followers, if ever anyone should claim to be the Imam, to subject him to immediate tests: and these tests Mohammed Ali maintained that his brother signally failed to pass. The strife, as usually is the case when brothers fall out, was exceedingly bitter; but it ended in the victory of Abbas. Despite all these quarrels, the religion continued to gain ground, and, it is has some adherents even in America and France.

Footnotes

[1] An allusion to a mystical Book which the Báb had already written, containing the substance of his doctrines. These doctrines are extraordinarily obscure-according to Professor Browne they are more intangible than those of the Kabbala or of Spinoza. Yet this is no obstacle to the success of an Eastern Religion; as Brahmanism, Buddhism, and Manichaeism are sufficient to prove.

[2] This is called the "Night of Worth" in Mohammadean countries, and is as sacred as Good Friday in ours.

[3] Afterwards the Shah Nouredin, famous for his visit to England in 1873.

[4] Such seems to be the meaning of this obscure title.

[5] It is typical of the way in which legends grow that the "New History" asserts that the Christian Volley also failed at first to touch the Blessed Figure; and the author indulges in a lengthy digression saying that the kings of England, if the bolts fail to fall, always respite a condemned murderer. He might almost have foreseen the famous case of Lee, the Babbacombe murderer. The earlier history, by Mirza Jani, says the second volley was fatal.

[6] This manuscript was found in Tehran by the famous Count de Gobineau about 1856, and deposited in the Bibliothèque Nationale. Strictly there are two MSS, but one contains only a third of the book.

[7] As an example of the obscurity of the early Bábi writings, I give here a few lines from a letter of the "much-wronged Tahira" as translated by Browne in The New History, p. 438:

"The heart of the Za was gladdened, and the letter Fa rejoiced, and the bosom of the Ta was elated, for that she saw the signs from the red leaf arising.

"God the True hath willed to see the Tree cast down on the dusty earth in the most great abasement, and from all, in all, by all cut off; His then is the command, and his the decision, universally, partially, particularly, all-consuming."

The Za (Zahra, the Bright), Fa (Fatima, the daughter of Mohammed, who, in Bábi belief, was reincarnated in Tahira the much-wronged herself: the "signs of the red leaf" are the letter she is answering. Thus she simply means she had been glad to receive her correspondent's communications.

The "Tree," again, is Tahira, the Pure: and "cast down on the dusty earth" refers to her imprisonment and sufferings before her martyrdom.

If we imagine a style like this employed to express the mystical dogmas of the Báb, we shall have some idea of the difficulties which students of his work have to encounter.

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