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BABISM AND THE BABITAS

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BABISM AND THE BABITES *

BY REV . HENRY HARRIS JESSUP, D.D. , BEIRUT, SYRIA

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 Sheik Ahmed Zein ed Din, who taught a mixture of Sufism , mystic philosophy, and Moslem Shiite law, and said 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 , Nasairiyeh, Jewish, and heathen doctrines, and then claimed to be Bab ed Din, and afterward the Nukta or Center 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 sinner's, even to the letters of the alphabet, and released them , and now they can go as they please !

Mirza was followed by tens of thousands, among others by a beautiful and eloquent woman named Selma, who divorced her husband and followed Ali Mohammed 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 in 1849, and multitudes of his

followers were killed .

Before Ali Mohammed's death he said his successor would be a young disciple named Yahya. This Mirzah 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 Hasseian Ali, who was styled Beha Allah, fled to Bagdad, 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

* Condensed from The Outlook .

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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 Beba in 1892 .

Beha left three sons-Abbas Effendi, now sixty ; Mohammed Ali, now forty-six ; and Bedea, now aged thirty-six, 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 reincarnation of Christ.

The Sources of Babism

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, Sufism , and the doctrines of the Nasairiyeh. The Nasairiyeh 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 Deity made use of two persons, the first created out of the light of his essence and by himself, and the second created by the first. The Deity 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 Nasairiyeh :

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

After Ali , the Deity manifested itself in the Imams, in some of them totally and in others partially, but Ali is the eternal Maana, the divine essence, and the three are an inseparable trinity,

Now add to this the mystic teaching of the Mohammedan system of Sufism or Tusowwof. Pure Sufism teaches that only God exists. He is in all things and all things are in him . All visible and invisible things are an 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 Calif 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

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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.

Babism in America

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 worshiped him as the Messiah .

A cousin of 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 Fayûm , 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, but tons, 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 xxix : 7 the words, "The voice of the Lord divideth the flames of fire," etc. Then he went to Chicago and tried trade, and then teaching and preaching, and pretty much every thing 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 .

The Egyptian Gazette of November, 1900, states that Dr. Kheirulla on his last visit to Haifa differed with Abbas Effendi, claiming that Beha Allah only was the true divinity, and Abbas is simply a teacher. Dr. and Mrs. Goetzing, on the other hand, maintain that Abbas must be worshiped with divine homage, as he is the true Christ. In Bagdad, 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. Goetzing. 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. The Effendi has two houses in Haifa, one for his family, in which 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
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then sat down on the end of the divan next to the wall and invited us to sit next to him . He has a reputation of being a great scholar in Persian, Turkish, and Arabic, writing with equal ease and eloquence in all. After another round of salutations, I introduced myself and Chaplain Wells, and told him that altho 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 Dyck, 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, and added that it was a great comfort that the Bible was so well translated and had been so widely distributed, and that since 1865 , when Dr. van Dyck 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 , for Christ understood it.”

I replied, “ There are many things in nature which we believe and yet can not 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 can not 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 can not 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 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 Savior ? ” He said , “ Yes.” “ And do you believe that Jesus the Christ

will come again and judge the world ?” He said, “ Yes. ”

I took up another question, and 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. ”

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I saw from his manner that he was getting weary of talking, and so

we soon took our leave.

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, and 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 declarations of belief in the Trinity and redemption through the Christ must be interpreted in the light of Sufist 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 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 .

A VISIT TO THE PROPHET OF PERSIA *

BY PHILIP SIDERSKY AND REV . S. K. BRAUN

You are doubtless well aware of the spread of Babism, whose followers claim that the Redeemer prophesied is now alive in Persia . Hundreds have been converted to Abbas Effendi, who is claimed to be the Messiah in the flesh now in Persia, and whose strongholds in this country are at Washington and Baltimore. Hearing that " Merza Abdul Fazel," the Persian Prophet, as he is called by his followers, was in Washington, we went to see him , and had a personal interview with him .

In the fashionable quarter of the capital we rang the bell. A lady came, leading a blind man, and asked us if we desired to see the prophet. She reached into a little case in the corner of the hallway, unlocked the door, and ushered us into the presence of the ambassador of the Persian Messiah, to whom she introduced us . We found him sipping his tea, his pipe at hand. He arose and invitingly extended his hand in greeting, bidding us to take a seat. His interpreter bowed, explaining that he was at our service.

Clad in Oriental costume, turban on his head, the prophet began immediately to speak of his mission, declaring with enthusiasm , " This is your day of joy, happy children of Israel, the manifestation of the Light of the World. Belhi Ulla ' is of great interest to you, for to gather you he has come. As Jesus came to scatter you, so he comes to gather you . Now I come to bring the glad tidings, and all who will accept and believe in the Messiah, who is now in the flesh in Persia, their names shall be placed on record, even in the Lord's Book of Life . The prophecies of the old prophets are, indeed, fulfilled ; he is gathering his people." Then he began to prove his assertions from the Scriptures, Old and

New Testaments, and showed himself well acquainted with the Scriptures.

• Condensed from The Voice of Israel.

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We asked him , “ Do you mean that Jesus is the Lord and He is now in Persia for the second time in the flesh ? ”

“ Oh yes, ” the prophet replied, “ for he is here now to gather unto himself those who shall reign with him in glory. ”

We replied : “ Do not the Scriptures say that when Jesus shall appear, He shall come in great power and glory, with a host of angels, and His saints shall be with Him , all eyes shall behold Him , and every tongue confess Him ? ”

Yes, ” replied the prophet, “ and so you may see him in Persia . ”

“ But how would we know him if we saw him ? ”

Then he read in Deuteronomy xviii : 18, where it tells how the Messiah might be known.

We said, “ But it is written that when Christ shall appear, the Jews will be gathered to Jerusalem, and behold Him and say, This is our God, ' and He will say, ' This is My people . ” ”

Ab, yes, ” the prophet replied, “ but you do not expect all this will happen in one day or year. A thousand years is as a day with the Lord. See how long it took Israel to go from Egypt into the promised land, when they might have gone in twelve days. Even so now. They must first believe in Him whom God has sent. ”

We replied, “ The Scriptures declare that Israel shall go to Jerusalem in an unconverted state, and thus shall be converted by beholding Him for whom they waited . ”

• That is true , ” the prophet replied, “ but those who accept him now are the elect, whose reward and glory will be so much greater. All Israel shall become his people, and the nations shall be allied to them and become their servants. But the Jews who accept and believe in the Messiah who is now in Persia, their glory will supersede all the rest. ”

He further said that he (Merza Abdul Fazel) had been a fanatic Mohammedan, an enemy to both Jew and Christian, but since he saw the Messiah in Persia and became converted, and received a revelation , he began to preach and teach this great revelation of this great Messiah in the flesh . He loves all , and has been influential, he claims, in converting many here in America and the Eastern lands. He claims that about thirty thousand Jews in Persia, Assyria, Australia , and Russia have become his followers. He declares that he has seen him of whom Moses and the prophets wrote, and had the revelation that this is indeed the Messiah who shall come and unify all sects and issues, for there shall be but one religion. All shall be combined in Jesus and Mohammed - one the prophet of the West, and the other the East.

We were not very long conversing with the prophet, when intelligent looking ladies, singly and in pairs, began to come in , and fairly drank in his words as he was speaking to us . No one was at the door to answer

the bell or knock ; but his visitors know how to come in, having a key or knowing where to find it. The prophet claims a following of about ten thousand in the United States, and declares that in Persia , Arabia , and Russia he has a following of about thirty thousand Jews.

The days when all ought to be careful are at hand. False prophets are about us, saying, “ Here is Christ.” Be not deceived , nor go after them , said Jesus. Search the Scriptures, let no man deceive you . Read carefully the thirteenth chapter of Mark, and see how the Word of God is fulfilled . Mark xiii : 21 , 22— “ And if any man shall say to you , Lo, here

is Christ, or, Lo, He is there, believe him not ; for false Christs and false prophets shall rise and all show signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect.”

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